



Narrative normativity

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Narrative Normativity: Four Routes to Redemption

Craig Bourne & Emily Caddick Bourne

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The relationship between falls and subsequent redemptions impacts on theories of narrative explanation, that is, of how narratives furnish an understanding of the events they represent. We explore this impact by first situating redemption within a taxonomy of ‘narrative connections’. The force of narrative connections comes from their encouraging us to look at series of events in terms of normativity (though not necessarily morality) – whether this is the *right* way for things to go, and whether things *ought* to go that way (given what has happened so far). This has implications for theories of narrative explanation. It means they must depart to some extent from theories of what the explanation of *actual* events consists in. For this reason, narrative connections, such as redemption, are troubling for accounts of narrative explanation which simply *extend* a theory of the explanation of actual events. This is most notable in the influential causal account of narrative explanation, which says we can understand the events which take place in a narrative by identifying their causes.

We consider four ways in which a causal model of narrative explanation could try to cope with the role redemption plays in understanding certain narratives. The first is that cases of redemption involve a causal chain mediated by a character’s normative responses. The second is that redemption involves a more-or-less hidden agent who mediates the causal chain even if the characters do not. The third builds on an account of poetic justice offered by Gregory Currie.¹ It says that the causal laws involved in redemption are normative. The fourth, our preferred approach, is that resources which we propose using to understand series of events which have been labelled ‘quasi-miraculous’ can also be used to understand narrative connections.

¹ Gregory Currie, “Narrative Representation of Causes,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64 (2006).

Narrative Connections

We use the term ‘narrative connections’ to mean links of appropriateness or salience between events in a narrative. A rough distinction can be made between what we will call ‘classic’ and ‘subversive’ cases. Classic cases are those associated with a sense of things going as they should, or as can be expected (even if it is only with hindsight that we have this expectation). ‘Subversive’ cases go against this, and defy the sense of things proceeding in a ‘proper’ manner. Either way, the response which narrative connections provoke in readers, listeners or viewers relies on their making us think about the events of the narrative in normative terms.

As examples of classic cases, associated with a sense of events being *as they should*, we suggest the following narrative connections:

- Poetic justice, where a character gets their due apparently by happy accident. The connection imputed between events in the narrative might, for example, be that an earlier transgression makes a later downfall *deserved*, or that a character’s behaviour makes them *worthy of* what happens to them.
- Foreshadowing, where an earlier event *derives significance from* a later one. The later event makes the earlier one meaningful, and with this in place, the earlier event gives us reason to expect the later one.
- Deliverance, where a character’s desperation *calls for* their having the opportunity of the only remaining way out of their predicament.
- Tragedy – at least on some interpretations. If a particular tragedy suggests that a way of behaving *guarantees* or *makes inevitable* an outcome, it is concerned with what ought to happen in the sense of what *must* happen. If we take it that the way of behaving also *justifies* or *merits* the outcome, we are also concerned with what ought to happen in a narrower sense, perhaps closer to the moral one, where even if it is not *impossible* for events to unfold differently, it is somehow suboptimal.

As examples of subversive cases, we would suggest these narrative connections:

- Irony, where (for example) a character's downfall happens *despite* earlier events which make it *undeserved*.
- Uncanniness, where things somehow *do not sit well* together.
- Absurdity, where events *give no meaning to* each other or themselves. This could be described as a 'limiting case' of narrative connection. We have said that the force of narrative connections comes from their encouraging us to look at a series of events in normative terms, asking whether or not things *ought* to go this way. Absurdity exploits the same tendency to ask such questions, but does so by frustrating it.

What all the subversive cases have in common is a sense of incongruity. Some instances of subversive narrative connections rely on the possibility of classic narrative connections. Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (1997), for example, involves a number of subversive connections, one of which is a subversion of the classic connection of deliverance. The famous 'rewind' scene facilitates a change to a new series of fictional events which takes away the character's opportunity of a way out of the situation. (We give a fuller account of this scene elsewhere.²)

Our lists are not intended to be exhaustive – neither of the various narrative connections there are, nor of the nature of those connections we have included. They are intended just to be suggestive of a framework in which we might place redemption. In the case of redemption, the normative salience between the events is that the redemptive event somehow *addresses the burden created by* an earlier fall. So, we suggest, this belongs with the classic cases. There is a sense of a right match between events.

Narrative Understanding

² Craig Bourne & Emily Caddick Bourne, *Time in Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), chapter 6.

Philosophical theories of narrative explanation seek to provide an account of how narratives furnish *understanding* of their events – just as a theory of explanation in general seeks to provide an account of what sort of information we need in order to acquire understanding. Any complete theory of narrative understanding must incorporate the kind of understanding gained by experiencing events as standing in narrative connections. As we shall see, this raises the possibility that narrative understanding cannot be fully accommodated in terms of the notion of explanation more generally.

Various models of what explanations are, and how they produce understanding, have been developed in epistemology and the philosophy of science. The task is to give an account of what it is to explain an event. Following Peter Lipton, a useful starting point takes explanations to be suitable answers to *why-questions*.³ I can explain the train's late arrival if I can answer the question 'Why was the train late?' Explanations of different aspects of events can be construed as answers to why-questions which use different contrasts to isolate features of the event. The question 'Why was Juliet nominated for the prize for children's literature?' could mean many things. It may mean 'Why was she nominated for that prize rather than for the adult literature prize?', in which case the explanation concerns the basis for classifying Juliet's work as children's literature. Or it may mean 'Why was Juliet nominated for the prize when Ben was not?', in which case the explanation should compare Juliet's work with Ben's.

The next step in developing a theory of explanation is to specify which features of the world we must pick out in order to properly answer why-questions. But even before we reach that stage, we can articulate something important about the sort of understanding of story-events which is afforded by narrative connections. When explaining events which take place in the actual world, there are restrictions on when normative notions can be used to give accurate answers to why-questions. When *agency* is involved in a process, the normative notions which agents utilised in making decisions may be used in explaining the consequences of that process. 'Because he deserved it' may be an appropriate answer to the question 'Why did you hit him?', or to the question 'Why was he

³ Peter Lipton, *Inference to the Best Explanation*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2004).

convicted?’ But it is not an appropriate answer to the question ‘Why did he have an accident?’ This is not to deny that the accident could be connected to his bad deeds – perhaps he fell when running to escape the scene of his crime. But the fact that what happens to the person is *bad* for him cannot, in this case, be explained in terms of the badness of the crime he committed. Notions like his ‘desert’ or ‘his due’ are not genuine explanations of why he had an accident. Without agency, the very fact that it is a *bad* thing which happens to the person who has behaved badly is merely coincidental.

The point can be summarised by saying that correct explanations of actual chains of events invoke normative concepts only when those chains involve agency. This is an assumption about how the actual world works: there are no normative forces which are detached from agents’ wills. For example, there is no such thing as ‘cosmic justice’ (even if one sometimes wishes there were). Normativity is not built into the structure of the world, but is something agents impose by the way they judge one another’s actions and the way they act in response.

We endorse this assumption about the actual world. But what matters here is not so much whether it is *correct*, but simply that many of us do *make* such an assumption when we offer explanations of events. It is because the assumption is made that narrative explanation is apparently significantly different from the explanations we normally offer and accept.⁴

Narrative connections such as redemption threaten accounts of narrative understanding which simply extend a theory of the explanation of actual events. We shall focus on the causal account of narrative understanding, which says that we can understand the events which take place in a narrative by identifying their causes.⁵ It makes use of the idea that explanations provide information about the

⁴ There is another assumption in the example we have used. This is that the ‘accident’ really *was* an accident – that it was not mediated by an agent, human or supernatural, who brought it about as a punishment. The idea of an overriding agency which ‘steers’ the course of events based on its normative judgements will be discussed in more detail later.

⁵ See Noël Carroll, “On the Narrative Connection,” in *New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective*, ed. Willie van Peer and Seymour Chatman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

causal histories of events. For example, in trying to explain a patient's symptoms, we aim to discover what causes those symptoms. If we can identify an underlying illness, we can further explain that illness by looking for the causes of the patient's contracting it. When we ask why Juliet was nominated for the prize rather than Ben, we need an answer which identifies a difference between the causal chain which led to Juliet's nomination and the causal chain which led to Ben not being included on the list.⁶ This might be that some judges enjoyed reading Juliet's book and didn't enjoy reading Ben's so much. Or that they acquired specific memories of the content of Juliet's work, whilst Ben's did not create such memories. Or that Ben's entry went missing in the post.

But the problem with using this theory of explanation as a theory of *narrative* understanding is that normativity is not built into causation unless the causal chain is mediated by an agent who makes normative judgements themselves. If grasping narrative connections between events is a way of understanding a story, it is a kind of understanding which seemingly cannot be reduced to an understanding of how the events were caused.

The case of poetic justice brings out this point well. Take the story of the murder of Mityls, raised by Aristotle in a discussion of narrative unity and tragedy. Mityls is murdered, and later the murderer is killed when a statue of Mityls falls on him. The falling of the statue on the murderer is not caused by the murder; it is a coincidence. Yet it is the murder which makes the falling of the statue a relevant part of the fiction; for, as Aristotle puts it, 'incidents like that we think to be not without a meaning'.⁷

Connecting the fall of the statue with the murder makes an important contribution to understanding the story, yet the connection we make is not a causal one. Moreover, even if we *could* trace a causal chain from the murder to the falling of the statue, grasping the causal information would not exhaust the narrative understanding we gain from associating the two events. Imagine a version where the people who erect the statue forget to secure it properly because they are so distracted by grieving for

⁶ See Lipton, *Inference to the Best Explanation*.

⁷ Aristotle, *On Poetics*, trans. Ingram Bywater, in *The Works of Aristotle Volume 11*, 2nd edition, ed. W.D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 9.1452.

the king. The existence of such a causal chain would not by itself account for the *satisfaction* we feel about the falling of the statue, given that the murder has occurred. This relies on seeing the falling of the statue as an apt or appropriate event in the narrative, and to see it as appropriate is to see a *normative* connection between the events, not just a causal one. It is through this normative connection that the pairing of events in the narrative makes *sense* to us. As David Velleman puts it: “‘Killed by the statue of his victim?’ you think: ‘Aha! Of course.’”⁸

This point is not peculiar to the case of poetic justice; the causal model is threatened by narrative connections in general. All encourage us to think of the events of the story in terms of their normative relations. If redemptive events, in light of earlier falls, help a narrative to ‘make sense’ – if the fall-and-redemption pattern works as a satisfying narrative structure – that is not because redemptive events are *caused* by earlier falls. It is because the redemptive narrative events are seen as normatively related to the falls – as responding to them or balancing them out. Indeed, that there is such a normative relation is part of what it is to call the event ‘redemptive’.

Is there any way in which causal accounts of narrative understanding can rise to the challenge of narrative connections, somehow incorporating these important contributors to narrative understanding into a causal model? We shall attempt to answer this question on behalf of causal theorists of narrative understanding, since in doing so, we hope to reveal a number of interesting options for how audiences’ engagement with redemption stories works.

Two Options for a Causal Theory of Redemption: Appealing to Agents

The challenge for causal approaches to narrative understanding is that causation is not inherently normative, yet narrative connections such as redemption make a contribution to the narrative which *is*, it seems, inherently normative. But we have already seen that it is not *impossible* for a causal explanation also to be a normative explanation. Some causal chains can be described in terms of

⁸ J. David Velleman, “Narrative Explanation,” *The Philosophical Review* 112 (2003): 21.

normative concepts: namely, those causal chains which involve normative judgements made by agents. We can explain agents' actions using normative notions precisely because those actions result from the agents *themselves* thinking about events in normative terms. So a causal account of narrative understanding may be able to accommodate a story of redemption if it can show that the relevant normative notions (such as atonement) can be subsumed within the causal chain in this way. We shall look at two versions of this proposal, before, in the next section, looking at two alternative options for understanding redemption *without* appeal to agents.

The first way of capturing the normative nature of redemption narratives in terms of causal chains involving agency is to say that the causal chain is mediated by a character's normative responses to their *own* actions. This places the focus on the characters who fall and are subsequently redeemed. For example: events within a character's life cause them to reflect on and recognise past transgressions, which causes them to feel guilt, shame or regret, which causes them to develop a desire to do something good, which causes them to do whatever act redeems them. This is a causal explanation of how the redemptive event connects to the character's fall, but one imbued with normative concepts, something which is possible because of the role the character's own normative judgements play in causing their actions. In other words, the narrative connection between the fall and the redemption is forged by the way the character herself connects those events in evaluation.

This may well capture certain redemption stories, particularly those which involve a process of 'reform' in a character. Consider *A Christmas Carol*, or films in which parents who have put work above family see the error of their ways. A recent and slightly different example which fits this proposal well is Robert Zemeckis's film *Flight* (2012), in which the character's evaluation of his own choices causes him to bring about his own redemption by accepting a punishment he could feasibly have avoided.

There are, however, a number of situations which this model does not account for, where audiences appreciate a narrative event as redemptive without seeing it as caused by a character's condemnation of their own past behaviour. There are several ways in which this might happen. We might think that a person can be redeemed from their fall by *another* person's actions. For example, if we have

condemned somebody for a transgression and then see others we respect behaving in the same way in similar circumstances, the person we originally blamed may be redeemed – we might call this *relative redemption*. However, this notion requires further development, so we shall set it aside here.

Likewise, there may be a possibility of what we might call *substitutive redemption*, which might range from paying others' fines to more personal acts of self-sacrifice to redeem another. But this, too, would require further development (as does the related idea of penal substitution, as noted by David Lewis⁹). The normative frameworks we use to interpret the world often involve the idea that wrongdoing creates a burden which can be borne out by the offender and sometimes lifted by their acting in a way which has positive value. But the idea that this burden could somehow be transferred to a different person is much less intuitive. So we shall set that case aside also, to highlight some more straightforward cases of redemptive events which are not caused by characters' own regretful reflections on their fall.

One such case is where the redemptive act is the sort of thing the character would have done regardless of their attitudes to any past fallenness. Acts of self-sacrifice are often judged to be redemptive of flawed characters (e.g. in war stories), but the character need not choose to sacrifice themselves *because* they regret their bad behaviour in order for this to be so. Another example is found in Nicolas Winding Refn's *Only God Forgives* (2013). The lead character, Julian, is involved in drug trafficking. He is a member of a family which takes part in serious crime and which operates according to revenge culture. Julian's brother rapes and murders a young girl. A law enforcer encourages the girl's father to exact his own brutal form of punishment on Julian's brother, which leads to his death. The law enforcer then punishes the girl's father for allowing all this to happen, by cutting off his hand. Julian is expected by his family to murder his brother's killer in revenge, but spares him. Julian's mother arranges the killing of this person and puts Julian under increasing pressure to punish the law enforcer also involved in his brother's death. While waiting for the law enforcer at his house with an ally and weapons, Julian realises the law enforcer has a child. His ally

⁹ David Lewis, "Do We Believe in Penal Substitution?" *Philosophical Papers* 26 (1997).

informs him that his mother's instructions are that all must be killed. When the child returns home with her nanny, Julian shoots his ally before the ally is able to kill the child.

It is plausible to read this film as a redemption narrative. Julian is given an opportunity to show that he is not a lost cause (in this case, by acting in a way which articulates a personal code distinct from his family code). Intermittent dream-like vignettes showing Julian's hands being severed encourage interpreting his actions in light of alternative responses to fallenness, such as punishment and despair. But there is no strong indication that Julian's decision is caused by reflection on his fallenness. It is very plausible that protecting his enemy's young daughter is something he would have done *anyway*. Indeed, dispositions like this are the root of the discrepancies between his personal code and his family code which have made him an uncomfortable participant in his family's culture throughout the film. It is also plausible that had this situation not arisen, Julian would have gone on as before, in a state of uncomfortable inertia; for the film does not license us to say that his eventual actions arose from having made a decision to change. The frequent imagery of severing and binding of hands is also, we suggest, indicative of the truncated role of agency, and expanded role of circumstance, in determining Julian's deeds. All this supports a view of Julian's redemption as facilitated by his being given an opportunity, rather than by his having brought something about. The redemptive aspect of the film lies not in the path that Julian's normative reflections have taken but in the apparent intervention of a situation which is *suited* to his life going in one direction rather than another.

This is not to say that Julian does not reflect at all; rather, the point is that reflection on his fallenness is not what *causes* him to do the things which allow him redemption. So a causal account of narrative understanding which tries to capture normativity by building the character's own reflection into the causal chain does not accommodate all cases of redemption.

A natural next step for a causal account of narrative understanding of redemption is to look to the choices of another agent, *distinct* from the characters, to intervene with opportunities for characters to live in good rather than bad ways. This would allow us to maintain the view that when we judge a narrative to be one of redemption, we implicitly posit agency guiding the course of events precisely because of the normative significance it places on them. For even when redemptive events are not

caused by the reflections of a character on past fallenness, what makes them redemptive is that they are 'given' to the character by this directing agent precisely as an opportunity for the character to get out of their fallen state.

One nice feature of this proposal is that it is possible to explain some other narrative connections in this way, too. For example, one way of reading the tragic connection would be to say that interpreting events as tragic involves positing Fate as a directing agent. The proposal does, though, place a significant restriction on how a story can be read. To posit an additional guiding agent in a story, distinct from the characters, is at odds with a naturalistic reading of that story. Those who think that, in the actual world, there are no such directing agents whose judgements explain the progress of events cannot use this proposal to account for any redemption story which they take to be about a world like ours. If audiences like this can interpret a sequence of events as redemptive, whilst still treating the narrative as being about such a world, then this proposal cannot fully capture narrative understanding of redemption. It seems to us that such audiences can do this. So the challenge, for a causal account of redemption as a narrative connection, is to show how apparent redemption narratives where the redemption is not mediated by human agency can be intelligible to those who do not wish to posit supernatural agency in the story.

Two Further Options for a Causal Theory of Redemption: Normativity without Agency

One option is to postulate normative laws of nature within the story to which the events of the narrative conform. On that approach, redemption need not be mediated by an agent. Rather, the causal laws of the narrative's world are responsive to normative aspects of events. When we judge the narrative to be one of redemption, we posit that the world of the narrative works in accordance with such laws.

One attraction of this proposal is that it may help to tease out what is in common between redemption and other examples of narrative connection. For it is an extension of an account of poetic justice, set out by Currie, which suggests that this narrative connection trades on an inclination we have to posit

principles of cosmic justice at work in the world of the narrative.¹⁰ For example, we may take it to be a principle of such a world that wrongdoers get a punishment which reflects their crimes. If such principles are treated as genuine laws of nature of the world of the narrative, then there *is* a causal chain linking Mity's murder to the murderer's death. Were it not for the murder, the murderer would not have received the fit punishment. The laws see to it that he gets his due.

This proposal situates narrative connections within a causal theory of explanation, whilst also allowing that there is something special about them: in perceiving narrative connections between events, we postulate causal connections which are themselves 'norm-sensitive'. Does this, like the idea of an agent behind the scenes, rule out a naturalistic reading of the story? In a sense, no. For on this approach, normative connections between events are natural (rather than supernatural) phenomena by the standards of the world of the narrative, since they are built in to the laws of nature. But in a sense, yes. By the standards of the *actual* world, the normative connections supposed here are very strange ones. If we maintain the assumption we made earlier about the actual world, then the only cases in which normative notions can help to explain the workings of this world is when agents act in the world on the basis of their normative judgements. Actual laws of nature are, in and of themselves, non-normative. So reading a redemption story as one in which events conform to normative laws of nature is reading it as a story about a world unlike ours.

The alternative proposal we would like to offer shares something with the idea of normative laws: it allows us to recognise a series of events as redemptive without locating the normativity within the judgements of an agent. But rather than building normative concepts such as redemption *into* the series of events, we shall suggest that a non-normative series of events can give the impression of normativity when it triggers a form of reasoning to which we as humans are prone.

¹⁰ Currie, "Narrative Representation of Causes".

Our starting point is David Lewis's idea of a 'quasi-miracle'.¹¹ A quasi-miracle is a particular kind of extraordinary and striking event which appears miraculous, even though the actual laws of nature make it no more improbable than are the relevant alternative outcomes. Take Lewis's example of a room of monkeys pressing keys on typewriters. There are many equally probable outcomes, because there are many sequences of characters. Some of those sequences combine the characters into what we recognise as words. Yet if a meaningful sequence were produced, many of us would think there must be something going on, in a way we would not if any of the no-more-likely meaningless sequences were produced.¹² Likewise for consecutive lottery numbers. We might pronounce it incredible if the numbers drawn are <1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6>, though really this is no more improbable than their being <19, 1, 14, 26, 35, 33>.

We offer the following diagnosis of quasi-miracles. Lewis hints at something like it when he comments that in the case of the monkeys 'the chance keystrokes happen to simulate the traces which would have been left by quite a different process',¹³ but does not elaborate further. We propose that two distinct things are run together when considering the series of events. The first is the extent to which the outcome differs from others in whether it is to be expected given the laws we take to govern the world. Here there is no discrepancy: there are alternative, thoroughly non-noteworthy outcomes which are no less unlikely. The second thing, however, is a genuine discrepancy: in the probability of the quasi-miraculous outcome with intention, compared to its probability without.¹⁴ If a person were asked to write an essay, the probability of a meaningful sequence of characters would be much higher than it is when a monkey is placed at a typewriter. Likewise, if a person were asked to think of a

¹¹ David Lewis, "Postscripts to 'Counterfactual Dependence and Time's Arrow,'" in his *Philosophical Papers Volume II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

¹² Lewis, "Postscripts", 60-61.

¹³ Lewis, "Postscripts", 60.

¹⁴ We will focus on this discrepancy in order to work through the mechanism by which the reasoning arises, but another discrepancy which may also be relevant is that between the probability of the outcome with intention and the probabilities of alternative outcomes with intention.

sequence of numbers, our expectation is that a familiar sequence like <1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6> will spring to mind.

It is easy to conflate these two quite different comparisons of probabilities and be left with the (false) impression that the quasi-miraculous outcomes are *less* likely than their alternatives in situations which do *not* involve intention. On this basis, we observe the quasi-miraculous situation and are inclined to reason that a causal chain better suited to produce the outcome – that is, one involving intention – must really be at work after all, for it seems as if *the outcome would otherwise have been different*. Yet no causal chain involving intention is apparent. Thus we are left with the impression that design somehow enters into a process which nevertheless seems to be left to chance. This coheres perfectly with the impression described by Aristotle in his discussion of poetic justice: ‘matters of chance seem most marvellous if there is an appearance of design as it were in them.’¹⁵

What we wish to generalise beyond Aristotle’s case to illuminate narrative connectedness in general is not so much the notion of design, but the associated ideas of *reasons* and *meaning*. An encounter with a quasi-miracle results in the impression of there being special reasons for events to progress in that particular way rather than some other way, even though the outcome does not really demand any such explanation. To say that a series of events in a narrative involves a narrative connection, such as redemption, is to view it in terms of reasons: we attempt to make sense of an event happening by pointing out that it is appropriate in a way others are not, for instance, that it is redemptive. Events can appear as if they are guided by such reasons even when they are not, when they are the sort of thing that intention *would* explain. For instance, in *Only God Forgives*, the timeliness of the ‘intervention’ and its suitedness to Julian’s circumstances and character is quasi-miraculous.

This account allows for cases of redemption (and other narrative connections) to be explained naturalistically and yet retain their characteristic suggestion of normativity, even when the redemptive event is not brought about by a character’s normative reflection on a fall. To characterise what is significant about narrative connections, it is enough to explain how the impression of there being

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 9.1452.

reasons for the event can arise. To see an event in a character's life as having redemptive significance is to recognise that positing an intervention which gives the character the opportunity to live a better life would offer an explanation of why events progress as they do. We can acknowledge this whilst also maintaining that, when treated as naturalistic and as unmediated by agents offering redemptive opportunities, the series of events *needs* no such special explanation.

The fact that the two stances are co-tenable explains why the impression of reasons can remain even in cases where the narrative also directs us to regard the seemingly normative character of the events as being irrelevant to why they happen. A final example, Jean-Paul Sartre's 'The Wall', brings this out. A prisoner's attempt to mislead his captors as to where his friend is hiding goes awry when, unbeknownst to him, his friend goes to the exact location he has selected. If the feeling that this ought to be down to a trick of fate or a cruel piece of design did not come so naturally to us, there would be far less impact to the thought that the captive's testimony provides neither a reason for his friend to be in the place in question, nor a reason for him not to be.

Conclusion

In providing a *naturalistic* (by the standards of the actual world) explanation of how the impression of normative structure arises in those redemption narratives which cannot adequately be accommodated by saying the normativity comes from the norms of the characters, we should not be taken as offering a straightforwardly *secular* construal of the notion of redemption. Our explanation of the appreciation of redemption would be better described as *humanistic*. It appeals to the human trait of quasi-miraculous reasoning. By its very nature, quasi-miraculous reasoning (in the cases we have discussed) does not *eliminate* non-naturalistic notions, but employs them. It involves an awareness of how interventions which we are assuming to outstrip the natural (such as god-like agency, or normativity in and of itself) *would* explain events, even if we do not believe that they *do*. And we are hopeful that, by embracing this explanation of where narrative understanding comes from, one might produce fruitful, unexpected, psychologically revealing readings of narratives which could otherwise be

missed by taking for granted, rather than being sensitive to the workings of, the appearance of normative reasons which engagement with those narratives creates.

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