

NARRATIVE NORMATIVITY: FOUR ROUTES TO REDEMPTION

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Abstract

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. 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.