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Introduction

My aim in this paper is to explore whether narratives can be portrayed as informal arguments. The paper comprises a part of a larger investigation into the meaning, uses and misuses of narratives and narrative research in the social sciences. Narrative research is rapidly becoming a trend to be reckoned with in e.g. educational research. It is, however, highly controversial and much of the discussion is polarized into "for and against" camps. Both its prevalence and controversial character suggest that it is vital to identify both advantages and shortcomings of the narrative approach, such that its place, possibilities and limitations in social scientific research may be appraised.

Argumentation theory covers a huge field with a wide range of topics and perspectives. The same holds true for narrative theory. To bring the two together, or rather, to place the concept of narrative within argumentation theory and apply it to various topics, is a venture that requires great caution. I will now briefly delineate the concepts of argument and narrative; they will be further elaborated throughout the paper. According to Wesley Salmon (1984) an *argument* is a group of statements standing in relation to each other. Among the basic terms are conclusion, premise, (causal) inference and evidence. *Argumentation*, on the other hand, is a complex, interdisciplinary phenomenon – a social, intellectual, linguistic activity – that encompasses the use of arguments as one of its elements (van Eemeren, Grootendorst & Kruiger 1987). In this paper I shall focus on arguments, thus leaving out a number of elements found in the wider argumentation field that admittedly might have been pertinent to the present topic. Concerning arguments, different views emphasize different functions and different properties, and presumably the relation between premises and conclusions may also be construed in different ways. I mention this relation specifically because I believe that the nature of this relation is a core issue in deciding whether narratives can be construed as arguments or not. Whereas some theorists focus primarily on the status of the conclusion (e.g. Hempel 1965), others argue that it is the relation between premises and conclusion that should be the main focus (e.g. Biro & Siegel 1992, Salmon 1984). I shall return to this issue. Regarding narratives, there exists an enormous body of literature. Despite this, the notion remains fairly elusive. It seems that there exists no generally agreed-upon view of narratives, but rather a set of overlapping meanings from which advocates of narrative may choose the meanings that best suit their intentions. Narrative theory denotes an interdisciplinary field, where we find e.g. literary theory, culture theory, history, education and psychology. Within these domains, narratives are discussed as a way of making sense of life, a phenomenon, a method and a result (product) of this method (e.g. Carr 1991, Carter 1993, Ricoeur 1984, Taylor 2000).

This paper takes its point of departure in an article by Matthew Keefer (1996). His article is a critique of Deanna Kuhn's study of informal argumentation (Kuhn 1991), which he claims is based on a theoretical, scientific model that only partly captures the nature of informal arguments. He uses narratives to exemplify what he terms practical and/or rhetorical arguments, which he proposes as an alternative model. I shall inquire into whether narratives

can do the job he wants them to do. Next, I shall discuss Keefer's claim that the narrative itself is evidence for the belief in question. This is where the relation between premises and conclusion becomes very important. Some narrativists deny that they can be "detached" from each other and independently evaluated, and Keefer seems to embrace this view. But first, the "landscape" for the present analysis will be outlined.

A Tentative Conceptual Landscape

As already mentioned, the source of inspiration for this paper is Matthew Keefer's critique of Deanna Kuhn's book. To get as clear a picture as possible of the place of narratives in this debate, some introductory comments are necessary.

In her book *The skills of argument* Deanna Kuhn describes and discusses the results of an empirical study of informal arguments, in the shape of people's everyday, real-world thinking (Kuhn 1991). For Kuhn, the use of arguments is central to our thinking ability. Her research was designed to show the subjects' abilities to weigh and evaluate evidence, to separate evidence from theory (view), to generate alternative theories or explanations, to envision conditions that would falsify their own theories etc. In her own judgment her results were not very encouraging; very roughly her conclusion is that many people perform poorly on her reasoning tasks. They tend to reason *with* rather than *about* their theories and thus do not or are not able to contemplate whether these theories are true, in contrast to simply knowing or believing them. On the other hand, she reports that people have a high degree of confidence concerning their own theories.

As I understand Keefer, he thinks that Kuhn has committed some sort of category mistake. Her research design leads her to treat people's general accounts as scientific hypotheses and as a result of this, legitimate forms of *practical argument* are inappropriately subsumed under a scientific model. Keefer disputes that people have "theories" (1996, 48). Kuhn's subjects, he says, did not hold their views as *theories*, but as *narratives*. So they reason practically, whereas Kuhn treats their reasoning as theoretical and comes to consider practical arguments as failed theoretical justifications. Keefer concludes that one cannot investigate the practical solely in terms of the theoretical and then draw conclusions pertaining to the general nature of informal arguments.

Now I do not wish to discuss the quality of people's reasoning skills, nor do I wish to take sides in this debate. Rather, I wish to focus on the (possible) role of narratives, which means that the conceptual landscape indicated above must be somewhat elaborated if we are to see what is at stake here.

To begin with, it should be noted that we have at least two distinctions that may or may not run parallel; namely formal – informal arguments and theoretical – practical arguments. In addition we may have a set of distinctions between formal and informal reasoning on the one hand and theoretical and practical reasoning on the other. Neither Kuhn nor Keefer distinguishes explicitly between arguments and reasoning, but rather uses the terms interchangeably. Keefer also employs the terms theoretical and practical knowledge. It is surely not clear that arguments and reasoning are the same kind of thing, but nor is it clear what might hinge on upholding an explicit distinction between them in the present context. I shall simply side step this particular difficulty.

Let us first look at the distinction between informal and formal arguments. This distinction is vital to assessing the possibilities for portraying narratives as informal arguments. Again, neither Kuhn nor Keefer is very clear about this distinction or what it is designed to capture. Kuhn discusses both deductive and inductive *reasoning*, and seems to equate deduction with formal *reasoning*. Such reasoning, she says, is characterized by having

a well-structured problem and a well-defined correct answer (6-7). If this can be transferred to formal *arguments*, we can arguably say that she bases the distinction on *form*, such that arguments that conform to e.g. syllogistic structure, or perhaps are capable of being so rendered, are to count as formal arguments – not at all an uncommon view. If this is the case, then informal arguments may be negatively defined as those arguments that cannot so conform. In her conclusion, however, she seems to suggest that the distinction is *content*-based, such that reasoning or thinking about real-world, complex issues that people meet in their everyday lives, is informal by definition. But surely one can reason both formally and informally about complex real-world issues, and at any rate Kuhn makes no attempt to say what it is about real-world issues that makes them susceptible to informal but not to formal arguments. In her conclusion (277) she also seems to suggest that “formal” applies to the ability to reason from information given. But this is part of her own research design, and she defines her own project as an empirical study of informal reasoning and arguments. I propose to settle, somewhat loosely, on a certain *form* as the defining characteristic of a formal argument; the precise properties both of elements and relations will, I guess, vary. For the time being, then, an informal argument is one that does not satisfy the form.

Keefer devotes a substantial part of his article to the distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge (reasoning, arguments), and the gist of his argument hinges on this distinction. However, the distinction may not be as obvious or immediately understandable as Keefer presupposes. The term “theory” is used in a variety of ways, both in science and in common sense. Keefer seems to equate theoretical and scientific knowledge. Theoretical knowledge, he says, conforms with an independent external reality and addresses such questions as “What is the underlying cause of this event?” or, ‘Does A vary reliably with B in situations of type Y?’” (1996, 38). Practical knowledge, on the other hand, does not have its truth by conformity to reality, although this does not imply that practical knowledge is exempt from claims to truth. More importantly, perhaps, practical knowledge (reasoning) is not primarily concerned with what is, but with what one can or should do. Practical knowledge is the knowledge that is inherent in bringing something to fruition. Its reality is available by and through the agent’s actions in pursuit of a value or a project of some kind. Part of his criticism of Kuhn’s study is that an agent may manifest a certain partiality for the reasons that support his values or goals, and that this partiality should not be mistaken for a failure to assume a critical stance toward those reasons.

The reasons that support practical decisions and actions are chosen; they are not established on the basis of evidence. Furthermore, and this is a vital point, “the valuation of our practical beliefs and the ‘evidence’ in support of them do not attain the degree of logical independence that obtains between scientific hypotheses and their evidential confirmation” (43). Drawing on Perelman, Keefer suggests that our informal knowledge is justified in a manner different from scientific knowledge; in fact, he suggests that justification arises as an issue in the practical realm only when there is substantive disagreement.

The situation can now be described as follows: Kuhn thinks she has conducted a study of people’s informal, real-world, theoretical thinking, whereas Keefer thinks this informal, real-world thinking is of a practical nature. From Keefer’s point of view (although he does not say this), Kuhn may be suspected of having committed a double category mistake: taking practical arguments for theoretical and for scientific arguments – assuming that scientific arguments can be informal. Let us take a look at some examples from Kuhn’s book:

(20Nms) Well, number one, what causes kids to fail in school I think has to do with not being motivated. (*Anything else?*) And it stems from the way they are brought up at home. I think the parents have a lot to do with it (30).

(TCms) (*What could you say to show that this other person was wrong?*) Well, I could show that there are students who are failing and they're not in gangs and they have a fine home life, but they just don't seem to try for some reason (153).

(60Nfc) (*What evidence might this person give to try to show that you were wrong?*) They might say that somebody came out of prison and did not want a job. They wanted to do it the easy way ... get money fast. (*Could someone prove that you were wrong?*) Well, if they knew somebody in particular, they could say you are wrong because we wanted to give this person a job and he refused. Work is not for him (161).

(TNfc) (*How do you know that this is the cause?*) Cause sometimes when the wife is ... wants to marry him or something, she don't expect him to do things – raping, robbing – because, you know, like if a family has money problems, you have to try to find a job, or do a part-time job to get the money. (*Just to be sure I understand, can you explain exactly how this shows that this is the cause?*) Well, when he gets out [of prison], he goes ... he knows where he still lives and he knows that she is still living there, and he knocks on the door and she says "Who are you?" He'll say, "Well, I'm your husband." She will say, "Well, my husband wasn't in prison." And she's gone and left him, and she's going to say, "You're not my husband; my husband wouldn't do such a thing." And she won't want him. ... (*Is there anything further you could say to help show that what you've said is correct?*) Well, my uncle, since he knows. ... He went into prison. When he came out, his wife has two kids. And she didn't want him anymore, because he was in prison. ... (69).

These quotes are but a taste of people's reasonings as collected by Kuhn and are by no means intended to be a representative sample as far as argument quality – normatively speaking – is concerned. Kuhn (and her helpers) asked the subjects a lot of questions in order to tap into people's use of evidence, their alternative theories, ability to generate counterarguments and rebuttals as well as their deeper epistemic attitudes and beliefs, e.g. concerning certainty. The main question for the present inquiry is whether we are dealing with theoretical or practical reasoning (arguments) here.

On the face of it, even Keefer might concede that these quotes – at least the three first ones – look like examples of theoretical reasoning, given his own definition. People reason about causes, alternative causes, evidence for and against etc. A number of things need to be teased out here. To begin with, I think that Keefer attaches too much weight to Kuhn's use of the word "theory." Keefer seems to associate "theory" very closely with "science." There is some textual evidence for this, among other things his rather frequent use of the or of inclusion, for example in "The kind of knowledge that Kuhn's line of questioning tries to elicit from her subjects is theoretical or scientific knowledge" (38). But I do not think that this necessarily is how Kuhn uses "theory." First, she is interested in people's informal, real-world reasoning, not scientific reasoning. Second, the word "theory" has multiple uses, many (most) of them vague and imprecise, and it is frequently used outside of the sciences. It seems to me that Kuhn uses the word in an uncommitted, commonsensical way. She sometimes uses "explanation," and could as well have used "belief" or "view." At the same time, and here Keefer has a good point, one should make no mistake that her standards for assessing people's reasoning are taken from scientific reasoning. One can arguably infer from this that she holds that commonsensical and scientific reasoning are continuous entities, with scientists and laymen fundamentally doing the same, namely make inferences, weigh evidence etc., but presumably with the scientists being more careful and conscious and having a bigger vocabulary and methodological arsenal at their disposal.

It is not self-evident why Keefer thinks that reasonings such as the above are examples of practical rather than theoretical reasoning. Practical reasoning, he says, is concerned with what people can or should *do*, whereas Kuhn's subjects are asked to reason about what *is* and how they know this. Keefer's reason for construing their arguments as practical may be content-related, meaning that the subjects try to explain why someone (not themselves) *chooses to act* in a certain way. I shall leave this particular problem for the moment, and just observe that for the sake of the argument I will accept Keefer's view.

Keefer's discussion of practical reasoning and arguments centres on the agent; the agent's values, projects and experiences and actions in pursuing his values and bringing his projects to fruition. Reasons are offered as justifications for acting as we did, rather than as evidence for beliefs. It is not clear that Kuhn's subjects reason like this, although some may approach it because they employ personal experiences in their deliberations. Perhaps one of Keefer's concerns is that the subjects are forced into reasoning in ways they are not used to? In some sense I think that Kuhn's line of questioning does force the subjects into articulating and otherwise dealing with their everyday theories (broadly understood) in unusual ways. We know from social psychology that as long as our social interactions run (relatively) smoothly and/or are satisfactorily facilitated, we do not have or perhaps do not even need a high degree of precision in our views, normatively correct inference strategies or procedures for weighing evidence (e.g. Nisbett & Ross 1980). We can get around well without worrying about the truth or evidentiary status of our beliefs. This is not to suggest that the truth and tenability of our beliefs never matter in our everyday lives. However that may be, this socio-pragmatic element is lost to Kuhn, who effectively ignores all social context and focuses instead on the "internal" quality of the arguments themselves.

Can Narratives be Arguments?

It is now time to bring narratives into the picture. Kuhn discusses narratives in terms of pseudo-evidence; to her they signify an amassing of detail that has no bearing on the truth of the theory in question. For Keefer, a narrative is an informal, practical, rhetorical argument. He has been inspired here both by Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre, and claims that practical arguments are a kind of transition type argument that articulates how people came to hold the values they do. Such arguments, thus, fix on the nature of the transition from A to B, and can be used to articulate the meaning of an important value or pursuit. Then Keefer goes on to say that, "In practical or narrative type arguments the aim is to provide a *context* wherein that action or behavior may be understood as rationally willed or intelligibly chosen" (45). It is, however, not entirely clear that such a context amounts to a transition argument.

A number of things need to be teased out and examined here. I shall begin by noting that I believe that narratives may be both "theoretical" and "practical," there is nothing in the constitution of narratives that principally bars them from one or the other domain. But the concept, I have indicated, is elusive. Both MacIntyre (1996) and Taylor (2000) use narrative in their deliberations of the "large scheme of things," such as self, life, modernity, morality. An exploration into the concept is now in order.

The literature on narratives to a large extent focuses on elements or items to be found in a narrative in its explication of what narratives are. Thus, we are told, narratives consist of events, characters, actions, characters, goals and plots. These items are connected in some way; frequently it is required that they be organized in causal sequences (e.g. Gudmundsdottir 1990). This causal sequence makes up a meaningful, coherent whole with a non-random beginning, a middle and a non-random end – that is, events and actions should follow *from* one another, not just *after* one another. This whole is created by an act of configuration,

performed by a narrator, which means the “grasping together” of all elements into a coherent whole (Ricoeur 1984). The same process is also covered by the term *emplotment*, also used by Ricoeur, since the plot is frequently seen as the point of the story. So far this account of narrative is compatible with both transition arguments and contexts, as outlined above. But the pseudo-evidence of Kuhn is not captured by this concept of narrative, despite the presence of both characters, actions and events in the more “flourishing” responses. The fourth example above is described by Kuhn as “narrative” in style. But a narrative is not just any story, how ever rich in details it may be.

One crucially important fact about narratives that virtually all narrativists agree about is that the emplotment or configurational act takes place in hindsight. When a narrator sets out to configure a narrative, he does so with a certain knowledge of the result, the event etc which the narrative is to lead up to (end, conclusion, closure of plot); namely that it has happened. As Paul Ricoeur puts it, the narrator begins “... from the fact that something has happened, we infer, backward through time, that the antecedent necessary condition must have occurred and we look for its traces in the present, ...” (1984,135). That is, narrators first reason backwards and then tell the story forwards again, by selecting the events and actions that they judge are important for the result.

At this point we run up against a highly controversial matter; the ontology of narratives. As I have outlined them above, narratives are *products*, configured in hindsight. This conception clearly ties in with Kuhn’s main focus, which is the meta-level where people think *about* their own thinking. This requires that one is able to have one’s own views as objects – it is a major point for Kuhn that people should be able to reason about, not just with, their theories. And one can reason about a narrative that is a product. Keefer’s position is more complicated and somewhat ambiguous, but he takes issue with Kuhn’s emphasis on having one’s views as objects. Keefer never defines narrative, nor does he say what “items” we generally find in narratives. He runs the risk, I believe, of confusing character and narrator. Characters are integral parts of the events, performers of actions related by the narratives; a narrator is the one who tells the story. The situation of the narrator, therefore, is one of superior knowledge compared with the characters. With hindsight, the narrator knows the whole story, knows the end/conclusion, can trace the connections and judge which actions led to which results etc. The character/narrator confusion that Keefer possibly is guilty of is connected to his reasons for defining the reasoning of Kuhn’s subjects as practical rather than theoretical. The subjects do reason about other (fictitious) people’s doings, and are thus the narrators and the others the characters, but Keefer sometimes writes as if the subjects are justifying their own actions, pursuing their own values and trying to bring their own projects to fruition. Keefer’s reliance on Taylor’s and MacIntyre’s conception of narrative reinforces this problem. Taylor and MacIntyre can be characterized as narrative realists; meaning that they not only view narratives as products, stories that can be told, but also insist that narratives can be lived. In fact, MacIntyre insists that narratives are lived before they are told (1996, 212). This is a topic of much debate and disagreement. Narrative realism is the view that narrative structures are *in* the material; that is, people’s experiences, lives, history itself etc. exhibit narrative features such as beginnings, middles and ends in coherent wholes. Narrative antirealism, with Ricoeur as one of its main advocates, holds that the narrative form is imposed on the material by the narrator, in the configurational act. This implied narrative realism can cause problems for Keefer’s criticism of Kuhn in a couple of ways. First, there is the general view found in MacIntyre that the story (of life, society, history) somehow is already written: “... I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’” (216). This seems to imply that all individuals can do is simply to make out the text, as it were, and conform to pre-given roles – a view that runs counter to Keefer’s own emphasis on practical arguments as

concerning people's *choices* on how to act. Second, there is the question of Kuhn's distinction between reason with and reason about. It seems that when you live a narrative you reason *with* it. When you stop to retrace connections with the benefit of hindsight and tell the story forwards again, you have momentarily stepped out of it and turn it into a product capable of being reasoned *about*. But this is not clear, since Keefer does not distinguish between narrative realism and antirealism. Third, and even more interesting, is Keefer's use of Taylor's transition arguments in his explication of the nature of practical arguments. Taylor has, among other things, the following to say about transition arguments:

It aims to establish, not that some position is correct absolutely, but rather that some position is superior to some other. ... We show one of these comparative claims to be well founded when we can show that the *move* from A to B constitutes a gain epistemically. ... The argument fixes on the nature of the transition from A to B. The nerve of the rational proof consists in showing that this transition is an error-reducing one (2000, 72).

Some observations are in order. To begin with it should be noted that transition arguments are different from what Kuhn is probing in her subjects. She asks for evidence for a view, not for comparisons or moves from view A to view B. Hence, it is difficult to recognize or trace any transition arguments in the responses she gets. Furthermore, the confusion of character and narrator may arise again. Charles Taylor subscribes to a form of narrative realism: "This form of argument has its source in biographical narrative. We are convinced that a certain view is superior because we have *lived* a transition which we understand as error-reducing and hence as epistemic gain" (72, my emphasis). It is not clear whether this translates into a requirement of personal experience, and it is not clear how Keefer uses it but he sometimes can be read as indicating that the subjects are talking about themselves – that is, they are both characters and narrators. This is of course fully possible if the roles are kept clearly apart. But Kuhn's subjects do not in principle talk about themselves, even though some of them draw on their personal experience in exemplifying and supporting their arguments. Keefer does not explicitly tie this view to his rendering of practical arguments as concerning what people should *do*; however Taylor's practical transition arguments basically seem to have an epistemic interest. Finally, can a transition argument be rendered as a narrative? To be sure, a transition is well suited to be captured by a narrative. In fact, many narratives tell a story of how things came to be. But narratives, at least narratives understood as products, neither incorporate nor entail any comparisons between the end (presumably B) and the beginning or origins (presumably A). A narrative would relate the events that led up to B. Also, it is worth noting that any comparison of A and B seems to presuppose that A and B are capable of being held as objects, such that their relative epistemic merit can be judged.

One last issue remains to be mentioned; Keefer's suggestion that a practical argument or a narrative provides a context in which actions, intentions etc. can be rendered as rationally willed or intelligibly chosen. This, I believe, is true. A narrative can indeed provide a context of this sort, although it ought to carry no implications that all actions or intentions in fact are rational or even intelligible or based on values we find acceptable. Again, this may point to character/narrator differences and the problem arises of whether the narrator must be committed to the truth of the character's beliefs, the rationality of his actions, the acceptability of his values. Personally I think not.

Are we in a position now to say whether narratives can be (informal) arguments? Whether narratives can do the job that Keefer wants them to do? I am not sure. Keefer conceives of theoretical and practical reasoning as highly different *types* of reasoning, and he seems to lump informal, practical, rhetorical arguments and narratives together. Whatever we

think of this categorization – narratives surely traverse the boundaries and cannot be restricted to one type only. Keefer thus cannot use narratives as alternatives to informal theoretical reasoning, if that is what he wants. On the other hand, he can use narratives to relate transitions, but hardly to judge whether the end represents an epistemic gain. It is not obvious to me that Kuhn's subjects do reason in transitions, and it is by no means obvious that they have themselves been involved in what they reason about, as Taylor's narrative realism requires.

The task of judging whether narratives (here conceived as products, as told or written) can be (informal) arguments is further complicated by the fact that both conceptions are large and rather vague. Neither Kuhn nor Keefer make it very clear what they take an informal argument to be. However, I shall presuppose that even informal arguments will, in some form to some measure, contain conclusions, premises, inferences. Narratives also contain conclusions, and one might reasonably construe beginning and middle as premises since they lead up to the conclusion. However, it hardly seems likely that the premise-conclusion relation found in narratives is similar to that found in informal arguments, although this of course depends on what one takes an informal argument to be. There is at least one major reason for my skepticism. In a narrative, the conclusion is known for a fact. It exists as something that happened before we can tell a story about it. Now, if we follow Biro and Siegel (1992), premises provide reasons to accept a conclusion. They base their argumentation theory on the claim that "... it is a conceptual truth about arguments that their central ... purpose is to provide a bridge from truths or justified beliefs to as yet unknown ... truths or as yet unjustified beliefs" (92). But a narrative conclusion is not an as yet unknown truth, it is quite the contrary known for a fact. The relation of premises and conclusion in arguments is, as Kuhn points out, one of justification; it is a matter of warranting our belief in the conclusion. In narratives there is no need to warrant our belief in the conclusion, since we already know it for a fact. The problem of when reasons (evidence, premises) are good enough to warrant belief in the conclusion does therefore not arise in narratives as it does in arguments. *If* the point of arguments is to show that knowing the premises warrants knowing the conclusion, and *if* this justificatory relationship of premises to conclusion is at the heart of the very definition of an argument, *then* I conclude that narratives are not arguments, formal or informal.

The Importance of Form

Most narrativists pay much attention to form, which is depicted as that which distinguishes narratives from other forms of representation and therefore is of great significance. For example, Louis Mink, a prominent narrative antirealist, is at pains to show that narratives are neither scientific theories nor chronicles (Mink 1978). A narrative is a meaningful, coherent whole portraying a configured sequence of events, actions, intentions etc. that leads to a closure of a plot. In and of itself this would seem to preclude not only theories and chronicles, but also e.g. syllogistic arguments and scripts. A script is a kind of generalized "recipe" for action that people may use to navigate adequately in various social contexts, and is described by Deanna Kuhn as being "narrative" in style. But scripts hardly contain plots, nor do they make up coherent wholes with non-random beginnings and ends.

One of the most important issues regarding narrative form concerns the relation of premises to conclusion; provided of course that we grant that we can speak of premises and conclusions in narratives. This issue is of importance here because Kuhn insists that evidence (premises) must be separated from theory and independently appraised, whereas Keefer insists that the narrative is itself evidence for the claim or belief in question, such that

evidence and claim/conclusion cannot (always) be separated. In discussing this problem, Ricoeur invokes W. B. Gallie's notion of "followability." To follow a story is to "... understand the successive actions, thoughts and feelings in the story inasmuch as they present a particular 'directedness'" (1984,150). The orientation in a certain direction that we find here, Ricoeur says, amounts to recognition of a teleological function in the conclusion or end. But when a narrative is configured and then told forwards again, the storyline must be followed up to the conclusion – in no way can it be deduced or predicted from the premises but must be traced through the entire sequence. It is unclear whether Ricoeur himself endorses this view, but Louis Mink (1978) certainly does and has taken it a step further. Mink strongly supports Keefer's view concerning narratives as sufficient evidence for conclusions. There can be no "detachable" conclusion in the historian's work, he claims, because the narrative as a whole supports the conclusion. The end is an integral part of the narrative order. Were this not so, we would not have a narrative but a chronicle. The relation between premises and conclusion is internal; in the sense that the two cannot be viewed or evaluated separately or independently. Mink's view of this internal relationship stems from his strong emphasis on narrative form and the importance of distinguishing narratives from chronicles. He suggests that appraisals of narratives in terms of truth or falsity require that their form is seen as representing something that can be true or false. If we e.g. conceive of the whole as a conjunction that is true if and only if each individual assertion is true, we apply the model of a chronicle, not of a narrative. The cognitive function of narrative form, Mink says, is "... not just to relate a succession of events, but depict an ensemble of different kinds of interrelationships as a single whole" (1978, 144). For this reason, we are invited to believe in the narrative as a whole, not in some part of it. In fact, we are especially invited to believe in the sequence of actions, events and intentions leading up to the end rather than in the conclusion, which we already (can) know. It emerges from this that *if* narratives can be practical, informal arguments, then Keefer seems to be correct in suggesting that the evidence in support of practical beliefs is not logically independent from those beliefs. If Mink is right, in narratives they cannot be separated at all.

But it is unclear where this preliminary conclusion takes us as far as the possible role of narratives as internal evidence for the conclusion is concerned. According to Deanna Kuhn, genuine evidence is clearly differentiated from a belief and bears on its truth or correctness. For her, this justificatory relation between premises and conclusion is at the heart of any form of argument, informal, real-world reasoning included. Keefer, as we have seen, doubts that this is the case for practical, informal reasoning. Keefer's position on justification and evidence is complex. On the one hand he sees practical reasoning as concerning what people should *do*, on the other hand he employs Taylor's notion of a transition argument, which implies comparison of views and evaluation of epistemic gain. He indicates that justification (in practical reasoning) may be at issue only in cases of substantial disagreement, and he claims that "In practical argument the starting point is reputable opinion and the goal, justified belief; whereas, in theoretical reasoning, a claim is judged by appeal to the evidence that supports it" (1996, 37-38). Evidently, justified belief is a goal in theoretical reasoning too, but the point here is that the very notion of justified belief seems to imply some sort of evidence or support, although perhaps of a different sort. Hence, again perhaps, his insistence that Kuhn is misguided in demanding that evidence must be clearly differentiated from the belief. So far we can conclude that evidence is certainly not logically independent of the belief if the two are undetachable.

It is still, however, not clear where this all leaves us concerning the twin ideas of undetachability and of narratives as a whole providing evidence for the conclusion. Can the relation of premises to conclusion – beginning and middle to end – be construed as justificatory and thus parallel to "ordinary" arguments? I am not sure. If it cannot, then

Keefer's claim that narratives provide evidence for the claim in question must be rejected. Let me briefly introduce a distinction between explanation-seeking and evidence-seeking questions. These may occasionally overlap, but for the most part should not be conflated. Offering an explanation for a fact is different from providing reasons for believing something is the case. I would like to suggest that in narratives, the relation of premises and conclusion is better construed as explanatory. Narratives generally are explanations of how something (the end) came about (e.g. Mattingly 1991, Ricoeur 1984). The explanation consists of a causal chain of events and actions leading up to, culminating in or producing, the conclusion. According to Keefer, this same causal chain also constitutes evidence for the conclusion. But in narratives, the conclusion is already known for a fact; hence, we hardly need to further warrant our belief. And should we want this kind of warrant, it is by no means obvious that we get it by adding an explanatory story. As already suggested above, we are invited to believe in the whole causal chain rather than in the conclusion. And if we should demand evidence that this particular chain of events is true, we are faced with the same problem again – only moved one level up, as it were. Should this new evidence be independent or should it not?

Conclusion

A conclusion is an ending. To understand a story, Ricoeur (1984) says, is to understand why and how the successive episodes led to the conclusion; the closure of the plot. Were this paper a narrative, the preceding thoughts would have to constitute a string of "events" from a non-random beginning to a non-random end.

Narrative theory and argumentation theory are both huge domains and to bring them together is a task that requires caution and tentative conclusions. My starting point was Matthew Keefer's critique of Deanna Kuhn's investigation into and theory of informal argumentation. Keefer asserts that people's informal reasoning is only partly captured by Kuhn's approach, which is based on a theoretical, scientific model. He thinks that Kuhn's subjects exhibit practical reasoning, and uses narratives to exemplify this. My main aim in this paper has been to investigate into whether narratives can do the job that Keefer assigns to them. That I am not sure of and it is hard to judge since Keefer does not offer an explication of what narratives are and why he thinks they can be viewed as practical arguments. Things are further complicated by his very broad conception of practical reasoning, and by the fact that it is not obvious that Kuhn's subjects exhibit such reasoning.

I have voiced some doubt concerning whether I believe narratives can be arguments or not. I surely do not think they can be formal arguments, the form of both formal arguments (e.g. syllogisms) and narratives precludes such an identification. I am less sure about informal narratives, by and large because this notion is so unclear. But while I am skeptical about narratives as arguments, I do think they can be used to portray various reasoning processes (provided, of course, that arguments and reasoning are not one and the same thing, albeit obviously closely related). However, I also believe that narratives transcend Keefer's opposition between theoretical and practical reasoning. They can be both. I think he can put narratives to some of the uses he suggests, for example to narrate transitions from A to B. But I do not think he can use them to compare A and B and not to judge any possible epistemic gain involved in the transition. I also doubt whether narratives can be said to provide evidence for their own conclusions. This is not necessarily because I agree with Kuhn that premises and conclusions must be capable of independent appraisal, but because I think the relationship of premises and conclusions in narratives is better construed as explanatory than as justificatory. One does not necessarily justify a belief or conclusion by explaining how it came to be.

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