

NARRATIVE: MODE OF DISCOURSE OR PARADIGM?

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This essay critically analyzes the recent work of Walter Fisher on the "narrative paradigm." While Fisher's work has undeniable value, the implications of it have not been completely considered. This essay proposes three limitations on the narrative paradigm. First, Fisher's definition of narrative is too broad, encompassing nearly all discourse. Using Fisher's example of The Fate of the Earth, a case is built for the claim that a more limited definition of narrative is needed. Second, the view that there is an independent standard of narrative rationality that can be distinguished from the "rational world paradigm" is considered and rejected. Finally, the claim that the proper role of the expert in the public sphere is that of story teller is also considered and rejected.

IN a series of important essays Walter R. Fisher has proposed an "alternative view" (Fisher, 1984, p. 2; also see Bormann, 1985) to the discursive definition of rationality that is found in the so-called "rational world paradigm." This new "metaparadigm" (Fisher, 1985a, p. 347) "does not negate traditional rationality," which Fisher admits is "relevant in specialized fields," (Fisher, 1984, p. 10) but instead proposes an alternative to it. That alternative is narrative.

Fisher developed the narrative paradigm in response to crises that he sees in both epistemology and axiology. In his view, our theories of argument are no longer adequate to serve our needs (Fisher, 1984, p. 2) and "no science of values has appeared or seems likely to do so . . ." (Fisher, 1984, p. 5). The answer to these twin crises, according to Fisher, is to develop an alternative conception of rationality. He focuses on narration, because it is a human universal, found in all cultures and eras. "Any ethic whether social, political, legal, or otherwise, involves narrative" (Fisher, 1984, p. 3). From the ubiquitous character of narrative, Fisher concludes that "humans are essentially storytellers" (1984, p. 7) and suggests the term "homo narrans" as a master-metaphor for defining humanity.

By shifting away from a view of rationality as defined by traditional logic, Fisher believes that the "quest for the good life" (1984, p. 18) may be facilitated. This occurs because "narrative rationality . . . is inimical to elitist politics" (Fisher, 1984, p. 9). Moreover, there is no need for a new theory of logic or a science of values, because all people have an "inherent awareness of narrative probability, what constitutes a coherent story, and . . . [a knowledge of] narrative fidelity, whether the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives" (Fisher, 1984, p. 8). Thus "all persons have the capacity to be rational in the narrative paradigm" (Fisher, 1984, p. 10). The ultimate aim of the narrative paradigm is to provide an alternative to technical reason (Bormann, 1985), a means of recreating *phronesis* or practical wisdom (Fisher, 1985a, p. 350).

A considerable quantity of scholarship points to the importance of narrative in human communication. White has referred to narrative as a "metacode, a human universal" (1980, p. 6) and any number of other scholars have noted the importance of narrative to culture. A considerable quantity of scholarship in communication backs up this view. For example, McGee and Nelson have argued that "when the

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case requires the moral and political resources of cultural commitments, there must be narration" (1985, p. 150). Farrell (1985) has applied the narrative paradigm to conversation and natural discourse. Although Hyde (1985) has applied the narrative paradigm to the doctor-patient relation, he also has suggested that the paradigm may possess a theoretical inability to account for certain practical problems relating to the doctor-patient relation. Fisher and Filloy (1982) have noted that literature (which certainly encompasses many narratives) often possesses an argumentative dimension. Bennett (1978) has argued that storytelling is a crucial component in criminal trials and Bennett and Edelman (1985), while noting the value of applying strict tests of evidence and reasoning to stories (p. 162), have applied the paradigm to political discourse. The narrative paradigm even has been applied to the world of academic debate (Hollihan, Riley, & Baaske, 1985). The wealth of research on narrative would seem to support the conclusion of Lucaites and Condit that there is a "growing belief that narrative represents a universal medium of human consciousness" (1985, p. 90).

While this research is impressive, there are still a number of questions concerning narrative that deserve consideration. For example, issues such as the degree to which narrative rationality and traditional tests of logic differ and the relationship between narrative as a mode of discourse and narrative as a paradigm have not been fully defined. There has been surprisingly little critical analysis of the narrative paradigm (see Lucaites & Condit, 1985, and Bennett & Edelman, 1985). My purpose in this essay, then, is to confront some of the remaining questions regarding the narrative paradigm. I will focus on three areas: the relationship between narrative as a mode of discourse and as a paradigm, the proper standards for evaluating narrative rationality, and the role of the expert within the narrative paradigm. My goal is not to deny the importance of narrative to human society or the value of the narrative paradigm for explicating discourse. Rather, it is to consider possible limitations on the scope of the paradigm and to ask whether we may have been premature in concluding that narrative rationality offers a useful paradigmatic alternative to "traditional rationality."

I

The narrative approach to the study of human communication has been defended as a paradigm, because of the universal character of narrative. In fact, Fisher has argued that "there is no genre, including technical communication, that is not an episode in the story of life" (1985a, p. 347). One reason that narrative has such importance is that it encompasses nearly all discourse. According to Fisher, "by 'narration', I refer to a theory of symbolic actions—words, and/or deeds—that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them" (1984, p. 2; also see Farrell, 1985, p. 121; Frentz, 1985, p. 14). Clearly, this definition is so all-inclusive that almost no discourse is excluded. It is hard to imagine a type of communication that does not possess sequence or meaning.

The problem here is that narrative has been defined so broadly that the term loses much of its explanatory power. At one level, Fisher is clearly correct in labelling his work on narrative as a metaparadigm. His definition of narrative subsumes all other forms of human communication; it is tautologically true. Yet if all forms of discourse are narrative, it is hard to see how the paradigm could aid the critic in describing or evaluating a particular work.

It is worth noting, in this regard, that many students of narrative prefer a more limited definition of the term. Danto writes, "it is by no means exclusively through narrative sentences that we describe events and objects with reference to other events and objects" (1982, p. 21). Mink makes a similar point: "Narrative is a primary cognitive instrument—an instrument rivaled, in fact, only by theory and by metaphor as irreducible ways of making the flux of experience comprehensible" (1978, p. 131). And even White, who refers to narrative as a "metacode," admits that "historians do not *have* to report their truths about the real world in narrative forms; they may choose other, non-narrative, even anti-narrative, modes of representation" (1980, p. 6). For these theorists, a narrative is essentially a chronological account of an event or process, in other words a fictional or factual story. Ricoeur argues that "it is this irreducible chronological factor which narrativises the plot itself" (1981, p. 285). Chatman adds, "narrative is basically a kind of text organization" (1981, p. 117; also see Mink, 1978, p. 132; White, 1980, p. 6; Scholes, 1981, p. 205).

Fisher might respond to such limited definitions of narrative by arguing that all discourse implies narration or at least participates in an on-going societal narrative. Thus, while a particular work lacks a plot, that work still draws upon the stories of the society and functions as an episode in the life of the society. While this view has appeal, it is problematic. A discursive political speech in which an advocate cites a wealth of statistical and expert evidence favoring increased support for mass transit is different in important ways from a speech that cites no such traditional evidence, but instead tells a story about a ride on a subway. The discursive speech relies primarily on the capacity of the audience to evaluate the evidence and reasoning favoring increased support for mass transit rationally. The story, by contrast, relies on audience interest in the development of the plot and the capacity of the audience to identify with the characters to produce persuasion. While both works might support the same position, their form would differ markedly and they would appeal to the audience in different ways.

At this point a more developed example may be useful. A pamphlet on the Soviet system produced by a conservative organization such as the Committee on the Present Danger might describe the Soviet Union as a brutal totalitarian power that has killed tens of millions of its own people. Such a work would rely on evidence drawn from authorities, shared social knowledge about Soviet history, and common American values to produce persuasion. In his novel *Darkness at Noon*, Arthur Koestler develops the same thesis as in the hypothetical conservative pamphlet. Koestler, however, does not rely on authoritative or other forms of evidence. Rather, in the development of the plot and characterization, Koestler leads the audience to recognize the horrors of the Soviet system. His novel shows us the way the system treated individual people and allows us to draw a more general conclusion about the nature of the Soviet Union. The hypothetical pamphlet and Koestler's novel defend essentially the same position, but do so in very different ways. A treatment of them that did not recognize these formal and strategic differences would miss the mark.

These examples suggest that the characteristics that both define and explain the power of narrative are largely formal. Narrative is important because people love stories. And they love stories because the plot, character development, and aesthetic quality of the language in stories make them more interesting than discursive argument. The literature on narrative cited by Fisher would seem to support this conclusion. MacIntyre, White, and others emphasize the importance of storytelling

in human culture, because they believe that stories serve important functions not generally served by other types of explanation. Through stories humans come to grips with who they are and what their role should be in society, in other words with basic problems of human existence. The story of Job may touch us in a way that a philosophical treatment of the problem of evil could not. Thus, a treatment of narrative as encompassing more than storytelling would be misleading. Without a plot and characters, the rhetoric cannot serve the functions generally fulfilled by storytelling and thus should not be considered narrative. In fact, if all rhetoric were interpreted as narrative, as Fisher's definition requires, the critic might miss the true importance of rhetoric that takes the form of a story. Stories such as Koestler's novel are important precisely because they possess very different formal characteristics from discursive rhetoric. A theory that obscures those differences is of questionable value.

A consideration of one of Fisher's examples may help make this point clear. In his first essay on narrative Fisher criticizes foreign policy experts who attacked Jonathan Schell's book *The Fate of the Earth*. He argues that these critics have used their expertise to obscure the moral importance of Schell's work (1984, pp. 11-12). Although he does not build a case for a narrative treatment of *The Fate of the Earth*, he obviously assumes that such a characterization is justified. In fact, Fisher uses the Schell example to support the need for narrative standards to evaluate public discourse: "Insofar as there is merit in these 'arguments', [of Schell's critics] it lies not in the way they foreclose dialogue, but in their narrative probability and narrative fidelity" (p. 12). Leaving open, for the moment, the question of the best standards for evaluating public argument, it is important to recognize that the rhetorical power of *The Fate of the Earth* does not, as Fisher obviously assumes, come from narrative. The book is not a story and contains no developed narrative. It possesses no plot and there are no characters. The book comes closest to narrative in two relatively brief passages when Schell describes the effects of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima (pp. 36-45) and the potential effects of a nuclear blast on New York City (pp. 47-54), but even these sections might best be labelled description as opposed to narrative. For example, in his discussion of the potential effects of a nuclear blast in New York, Schell does not tell a story about how people might be harmed or killed. He simply describes what would happen at various points in the city. If such description is labelled as narrative, then narrative loses its distinctive character. One might expect that in such a work there would be developed scenarios describing how a nuclear war could begin, or describing the last days of the inhabitants of the earth following such a war, or describing how we might make a transition to a non-nuclear society, but in fact there are no such scenarios.

There are, however, works that rely on narrative to make an argument about nuclear war. Nevil Shute's novel *On the Beach* is an obvious example of a narrative containing a strong argument about nuclear weapons. Actually, Shute's argument may be quite close to that of Schell, but while both authors argue that nuclear war could kill all humanity, Schell does this discursively, while Shute uses the story of the final days of a few survivors of the war to make his argument. More recently, the made for television film *The Day After* told a story about how a nuclear war might begin, and the results of the war, once it started. The film had an obvious ideological message. Its release was timed to coincide with the freeze campaign, and the film depicted the United States' launching the first strike.

A critic who treats both *The Day After* and *The Fate of the Earth* as narratives may obscure the significance of one or the other work. *The Day After* is clearly a narrative argument. It shows us the effects of a nuclear war on the ordinary people in and around Lawrence, Kansas. A treatment of the work as a discursive argument would miss the point of the film. There is an argument in the film, but it is an aesthetic argument that is supported by the story told in the film. By contrast, *The Fate of the Earth* is not a narrative. Schell relies primarily on two strategies, both discursive. First, he taps societal fear of nuclear war by describing the effects of a nuclear war. His descriptions of the effects of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and the hypothetical effects of a bomb on New York City are clear and powerful, but they do not tell a story, unless we consider all description to be narrative. Rather, Schell's descriptions function along with his analysis of the potential climatic effects of a nuclear war as a fear appeal. And of course fear is a very proper reaction where nuclear war is concerned. Schell's descriptions of the possible effects of the war were clearly effective in tapping the fear which was "the animating force behind a new mass movement—the freeze campaign" (Krauthammer, 1982, p. 16). They "compell[ed] us . . . to confront head on the nuclear peril in which we all find ourselves" (Erikson, 1982, p. 3).

Schell's second strategy is to treat the nuclear crisis as a moral absolute that demands action. He argues that no concern can be as important as fighting against nuclear war: "They [nuclear weapons] grew out of history, yet they threaten to end history" (1982, p. 3). Later he argues that "of all the crimes against the future, extinction is the greatest. It is murder of the future" (p. 118). He goes on to claim that we must treat the chance that the human species will be extinguished as a "certainty" (p. 219). By treating the fight against nuclear weapons as *the* moral absolute, Schell provides philosophical justification for his fear appeal. It also allows him to reject practical concerns as irrelevant. If nuclear weapons could destroy the human species, and if protection of the species is *the* absolute human value, then questions about the workability of a nuclear freeze or even a world government become extraneous. While *The Fate of the Earth* is a complicated work the entire book is dominated by these two strategies. From a critical perspective, the key point is that a treatment of *The Fate of the Earth* as a narrative would obscure the true significance of the book.

None of this denies the importance of narrative to rhetoric and argument. As *The Day After* proves, narratives can both make powerful arguments and be extremely effective works of rhetoric. Through stories, average people can put into perspective the problems of the world. Stories also may produce identification, which in many cases leads to persuasion. But all rhetoric is not a story. If we define humans as the "storytelling animal," we may obscure the fact that humans are also the "theory building animal," the "argument making animal" and so forth. This conclusion does not deny the importance of narrative, but it does suggest that a critical perspective that defines narrative too broadly may in some cases obscure, not reveal, the real importance of storytelling.

II

In this section I want to consider whether the narrative paradigm in fact provides an alternative standard for rationality that can rescue the public sphere from the clutches of technical experts. This question is important because Fisher sees one of

the main values of the paradigm as a means of escaping from a crisis in epistemology:

it [the conflict over the proper standards for testing logos] has contributed to the contemporary condition by repressing the realization of a holistic sense of self, by subverting the formulation of a humane concept of rationality and a sane praxis, by rendering personal and public decision making and action subservient to "experts" in knowledge, truth, and reality, and by elevating one class of persons and their discourse over others. (Fisher, 1985b, p. 87)

The question is whether the standards for evaluating narrative rationality solve these problems.

Initially, the most obvious way of evaluating a narrative would appear to be based on its effectiveness. This method would seem to be particularly important, since Fisher emphasizes the great influence that narrative can have on society (1984, p. 14). A close look reveals, however, that the use of an effects standard for evaluating narrative is inadequate. The problem is first that a narrative can be effective and yet false. The many accusations of blood libel against the Jewish people over a course of centuries illustrate how demonstrably false stories may be believed by large groups of people. In addition, a story may be effective, but produce horrendous societal effects. If effectiveness were the only criterion for evaluation, then Hitler's mythic rhetoric would have to be judged a successful narrative. Fisher understands these problems and explicitly rejects an effects standard for evaluating narrative. He labels works such as *Mein Kampf* as bad stories: "Although it has a formal coherence in its structure, as McGuire (1977) demonstrated, it denies the identity of significant persons and demeans others. It also lacks fidelity to the truths humanity shares in regard to reason, justice, veracity, and peaceful ways to resolve social-political differences" (1984, p. 16).

Instead of effect, Fisher isolates narrative probability, "what constitutes a coherent story" (1984, p. 8), and narrative fidelity, "whether the stories they [all humans] experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives" (1984, p. 8), as the proper means of evaluating narrative and public moral argument. At this point the question becomes whether the standards of narrative probability and fidelity are different from traditional tests of evidence and reasoning. Does the narrative paradigm solve the problems in epistemology and axiology that led to its creation? The answer, at least as it has been developed so far, is clearly no. Initially, it should be obvious that a story may ring true and be coherent, but still be false. The lone assassin theory of the assassination of President Kennedy may illustrate this point. The ongoing controversy over the assassination makes it clear that to many the story does not ring true to life or cohere together. A large number of people have found incredible a story in which a social misfit such as Oswald was able to overcome the security surrounding a presidential visit in order to find a spot for the assassination attempt, place several shots in the President and his party with speed and accuracy that would amaze a professional marksman, and then be conveniently killed before an investigation could progress significantly. Someone reading such a story easily could wonder if there was more to be discovered. Yet in one of the most detailed investigations of any story, the Warren Commission concluded that John Kennedy was killed by a lone gunman. It must be admitted that many, perhaps a majority, have found the Warren Commission story to be quite believable. The point, however, is that a reasonable evaluation of the Warren Commission story depends not so much on its coherence and plausibility, but on how closely it matches the available data

concerning the assassination. There is no doubt that sometimes stories are consistent, hang together, and appear to be true to life, but are also false. On the other hand, a story may not ring true, but in fact be correct. Would anyone have believed a work of political fiction that described how a peanut farmer from Georgia rose to be President of the United States, only to be succeeded by a former movie actor? Until recently, men from such backgrounds almost never attained high elective office of any kind and a story containing such a plot therefore might have seemed implausible. In other words, coherence and plausibility are not adequate standards by themselves for testing reasoning. When narrative functions as an argument it is constrained not just by standards of coherence and probability, but also by the world itself. As Mink argues, "Everyone knows that what makes a good story is different from what, if anything, makes it true" (1978, pp. 129-130; also see Scholes, 1981, p. 207). Even Fisher seems to recognize this point in some of his work. In his analysis of literature as a form of argument he admits that standards of ordinary language logic may be relevant for evaluating aesthetic arguments and suggests that proofs in literature "offer a special representation of reality somewhere between analogy and example" (Fisher and Filloy, 1982, p. 347).

What should be clear at this point is that the tests for narrative fidelity and probability do not avoid the problems with evaluating public moral argument that led Fisher to develop the narrative paradigm in the first place. In fact, these standards lead directly to traditional tests for argument and evidence. Narrative probability can be seen as the equivalent of consistency, and narrative fidelity can be treated as the equivalent of informal logic tests of evidence and reasoning. If narrative fidelity and probability are to be useful tests of public argument, they must test not merely the story, but the story in relation to the world. And as soon as the tests are extended in this manner, they become essentially equivalent to the tests of evidence and reasoning that are traditionally applied to public argument.

It should be recognized, however, that the use of tests of evidence and reasoning need not lead to positivism or elite domination of the public sphere. There is a growing movement in argumentation, "the informal logic" movement (Blair and Johnson, 1980) that emphasizes the importance of teaching real-world reasoning skills, similar to those that Fisher has identified in his works on "the logic of good reasons" (1978, 1980). The standards for evaluation developed by this movement lack the certainty of formal logic, because the world is by its very nature probabilistic (Fisher, 1985b, p. 87), but they are nonetheless useful. If Fisher's point is that there are useful standards by which ordinary people, not just experts, can evaluate everyday argument, then he is clearly correct. The problem arises when he claims that these standards should be drawn from a theory of narrative.

Another way of making this point may be to consider for a moment how one would go about testing narrative probability and fidelity. One answer would be to consider whether the story hangs together and seems reasonable to the audience, but Fisher clearly has rejected such an audience oriented effects standard. The only other alternative is to develop tests for coherence and probability, but as soon as this road is taken, the critic quickly moves to informal logic tests of evidence and reasoning. One can either test the narrative based on the audience reaction or based on criteria for comparing it to the world. The first alternative leads to an effects standard, the second to relatively traditional tests of evidence and reasoning.

One additional point needs to be made. Fisher defends his narrative approach to

public argument as an alternative means of evaluating moral claims. One of the starting points of the narrative paradigm was in the work of MacIntyre (1981) on our inability to define a justifiable standard for evaluating claims of value. Moreover, Fisher seems to argue that through stories we can distinguish between rhetoric that embraces bad values (*Mein Kampf*) and "idealistic stories" (Fisher, 1985a, p. 362) that aid us in the "quest 'for the good life' for all persons" (Fisher, 1984, p. 18). The stories of Lao-tse, Buddha, Zoroaster, Christ, and Mohammed, along with the speeches of Winston Churchill and Adlai Stevenson fit in the latter category (Fisher, 1984, p. 16).

Unfortunately, while we desperately need a new method of deciding questions of value, the narrative paradigm does not provide such a methodology. The problem is that Fisher assumes that a certain set of idealistic, traditional liberal values are true. While I heartily endorse those values, they are not shared by all people. Would a fundamentalist Christian, or Shiite Moslem, or devoted KGB agent share the same values and endorse the same idealistic stories as does Fisher? It is certainly worth noting in this regard that the interaction of the idealistic stories of Christ and Mohammed has led to considerable conflict over the last thousand years. Fisher seems to assume that there is agreement on an identifiable "good life" that all people seek when it is obvious that no such agreement exists. I agree that *Mein Kampf* "denies the identity of significant persons and demeans others," but there were millions of Germans who accepted it, denying that the Jews were "significant persons" at all. Without the establishment of a privileged standard for objectively evaluating moral questions, there is no means of escaping from relativism. The narrative paradigm establishes no such standard.

Fisher's work points to problems in epistemology and axiology that continue to trouble students of public argumentation. Although the informal logic movement and others in argumentation have presented partial answers to these problems, Fisher is quite correct to decry the danger of continued reliance on a positivistic or neo-positivistic theory of argument. Unfortunately, his alternative standard of narrative rationality as of yet brings us no closer to answering these problems. Here, I do not deny the potential of the "narrative paradigm" to help resolve the epistemological and axiological problems confronting us, but only note that the potential is as yet unfulfilled. It is possible that Fisher or another theorist could develop new tests for narrative probability and narrative fidelity that would surmount the problems identified here. However, as yet no tests have been developed that do not lead to the dangers of an effect standard or to traditional means for evaluating informal logic.

III

One final aspect of the narrative paradigm merits consideration: the role of the expert within it. As I noted earlier, Fisher has attacked expert domination of the public sphere, blaming this problem on traditional rationality which "implies some sort of hierarchical system, a community in which some persons are qualified to judge and to lead and other persons are to follow" (1984, p. 9). By contrast the narrative paradigm is opposed to such a hierarchical structuring of society (Fisher, 1984, p. 10). To support his claim about the danger of over-reliance on experts Fisher criticizes reviewers of *The Fate of the Earth* for attempting to impose their "expert" views on the public, and cites the example of Edward Teller, who,

according to Fisher, argued that the public should follow his views on the nuclear freeze because "the American public is ignorant, even of the general ideas on which they [nuclear weapons] are based" (Fisher, 1984, p. 13). Fisher's solution is for the expert to relinquish his or her privileged position and assume the role historically played by the storyteller, the role of "counselor" (Fisher, 1984, p. 13).

Although there is certainly a danger of elite domination of the public sphere, Fisher's narrative treatment of this issue both overstates the problem and fails to solve it. It should be obvious from the earlier discussion of the ordinary logic movement that "traditional rationality" need not be elitist. There are areas in which the traditional rationalist would bow to the expert. However, those areas relate not to the public sphere itself, but to instances in which data from specialized fields is relevant to the public sphere. And even Fisher admits that the views of experts must be given precedence in specialized fields of argument (1984, p. 10).

It also should be noted that the difference between the role of counselor and that of expert is quite small. It seems likely that in many cases experts are attempting to counsel the public by expressing their opinions. The Teller example cited by Fisher is instructive in this regard. Teller does indeed say that the public "is ignorant, even of the general ideas on which they are based." However, he was referring not to nuclear arms in general, but to a Ballistic Missile Defense system (BMD). And surely Teller was correct that in 1982 the public was ignorant about the potential of such a defense system. It is also interesting that Teller concludes his attack on the nuclear freeze by calling for a "more completely informed public opinion" (October 17, 1982, p. 2) about the alternatives to the freeze. It would seem that Teller may have been attempting to counsel the public to support a BMD as opposed to the nuclear freeze, rather than attempting to intimidate them with his expertise.

An analysis of the reviews of *The Fate of the Earth* cited by Fisher reveals a similar situation. Schell's reviewers did not so much attempt to close off debate on the nuclear issue as shift that debate to another area. McCracken concludes his sharp criticism of Schell by noting that "the crucial debate is not about whether to have a nuclear war, but about how best not to have one" (July 23, 1982, p. 905). And Hausknecht concludes his review by praising a book by Lord Zuckerman because it suggested practical political actions that might be taken to move us toward the goal outlined by Schell (1982, p. 284).

It also might be argued that it was Schell who was attempting to cut off debate, not his critics. Schell treats the threat of nuclear extinction as the ultimate issue (1982, pp. 168-169), characterizes deterrence theory as "deranged" (1982, p. 216), and argues that we must act immediately to solve this problem (1982, p. 226). Schell may be correct, but he is clearly trying to limit debate. His point is that we have talked enough and must act now. The conclusion to be drawn is not that Schell is unethical, but that it is unreasonable to expect experts (or anyone else for that matter) not to argue as strongly as possible for their personal position. Neither Schell nor his critics were trying to cut off debate; they were trying to persuade the people. The vast public outcry over *The Fate of the Earth* surely suggests that there was no lack of public debate. It also suggests that the distinction between expert and counselor is not as useful as Fisher seems to suggest.

Finally, it is important to understand that narrative modes of argument are not necessarily democratic. There is nothing inherent in storytelling that guarantees that the elites will not control a society. It is worth remembering that the two largest

totalitarian movements of the 20th century, National Socialism and communism, have relied upon stories to control people. Nazism relied upon the Aryan myth (Hatfield, 1960), while communists built a myth of a worker paradise that would be created on earth (Halle, 1965). Stories may be used to increase public participation, but they also may be used to prevent such participation or justify the oppression of a minority.

CONCLUSION

While I have been quite critical of some elements in the narrative paradigm, this in no way denies the great value of the work of Fisher and others in focusing concern on the role of narrative in public discourse. Rather, this essay should be interpreted as suggesting limitations on the narrative paradigm as currently developed, in order to make the study of narrative more productive. Two such limitations are particularly important.

First, the study of narrative should focus upon rhetoric that either explicitly tells a story or that clearly implies a story. Only rhetoric that tells a story can fulfill the functions that Fisher and others identify as being served by narrative. Through the development of the plot and identification with characters, narratives can make powerful and persuasive arguments. If the plot and characters are not present these functions cannot be fulfilled. While much rhetoric contains or refers to narrative, much does not. And if we treat discursive rhetoric as if it were a story, we will miss the point entirely. Moreover, if humans are defined as storytelling animals, we may forget that humans do many other things as well.

Second, we need not reject the so-called "rational world paradigm" in order to study narrative. Of course, Fisher is quite correct that traditional rationalism cannot explain the rhetorical power of narrative. That power comes not from argument or logic, but from narrative form. However, when an argument is developed in a narrative, that argument (but not the aesthetic or rhetorical effectiveness of the narrative) may be judged by the same informal logic standards that are applied to any discursive argument. When a president tells a story about U.S. military intervention (see Bass, 1985) the American people need to know not only whether the story is coherent and plausible, but also whether it relates a series of events accurately and is backed up by other evidence. A presidential story could be completely coherent and plausible, but lead to bad policy because it was not accurate. Thus, tests of evidence and reasoning should be applied to the arguments found in narrative, in the same way that they would be applied to any discursive argument. For example, the aesthetic quality of *The Day After* should be evaluated like any film, but the argumentative dimension of the film should be evaluated based on the same kinds of tests for evidence and reasoning that would be applied to any pro-freeze work. When a narrative serves an epistemic, as opposed to an aesthetic function, it becomes subject to the tests that apply to all argumentative works. The "rational world paradigm" (as modernized by the informal logic movement) has no application to the study of narrative as an aesthetic or persuasive device, but in the epistemic realm, it reigns supreme.

A similar point can be made in regard to the proper role played by experts in a society. Fisher is quite correct to attack experts who attempt to use their expertise to bully the public into uncritical acceptance of their views. Unfortunately, his

alternative, the role of storyteller as narrative counselor, does not avoid this problem. More importantly, the narrative approach to the problem of the proper role for the expert in the public sphere could obscure the point that on technical issues the public should listen to the experts. Edward Teller has no special right to advise the public on deterrence theory, but he does have such a right to advise the public on the technical feasibility of certain defense systems. Technical questions sometimes impinge on the public sphere and in such circumstances the public must, if it is to decide rationally, rely on people like Teller.

The conclusions outlined above do not undercut the study of narrative; if anything they re-emphasize its importance. Nor do they necessarily deny the value of approaching human communication through a more developed "narrative paradigm." It is possible that Fisher and others could develop narrative as a model for understanding communication in a manner similar to the way that Burke developed dramatism. Just as Burke showed that the dramatistic metaphor could be applied to works that were not traditionally considered drama, it may be possible to develop a narrative approach that will inform the study of discourse that does not tell a story. The criticism developed here should serve as a challenge to encourage further development of such an approach. However, despite its potential, narrative theory has not yet reached the point that it makes sense to treat narrative as a paradigm, rather than a mode of discourse. For now at least, narrative should be studied as one among many modes of argumentative proof, all of which are subject to standards of informal logic, and one among many rhetorical devices for persuading an audience.

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