“Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.” (Neil Gaiman, *Coraline*, misattributed to GK Chesterton)

I. Setup

* A **narrative** is a diachronic, information-rich story that contains persons, objects, and at least one event.
* **Reasoning through narrative** involves using a story to make sense of the world, settle what to do, make predictions, guide normative expectations, ground which reactive attitudes we think are appropriate in the actual world
* Narratives play a **ubiquitous** role in human reasoning. We **explain** disagreement by appealing to narrative differences. We condemn positions because they are based on **false narratives**.
* Narratives are often **unmoored** representations (either because they are do not purport to refer to the actual world, or because they are grossly oversimplified, or because are known to be literally false). It does not seem that narratives could ground good knowledge.

Task: Examine the role of our epistemic evaluation of narratives (esp false narratives), and develop an account of how narratives function in reasoning, as well as an account of when reasoning through narrative counts as *good* reasoning (and even knowledge). Apply to political narratives and conspiracy theories

II. Some Observations

GRAD STUDENT

The graduate student drew at least some of these inferences:

1. I must be courageous, strong, and wise.
2. I must not quit, even though I am weary.
3. Once I finish this dissertation, I will have my life back.

There are other inferences that the graduate student does not draw.

1. I must find armor
2. The task is to behead the dissertation.
3. If I complete the task, I get to marry a princess and become a ruler.

DORM ROOM

From this framing of the narrative, the dorm resident was primed to draw a number of conclusions:

1. I am weak and helpless, awaiting rescue
2. When my handsome, strong knight arrives, he will free me so we can go off and live a happy life.
3. My role will be to marry my rescuer and submit to his rule in our community and our marriage.

And she is not primed to draw conclusions like

1. I am being arbitrarily restrained from doing things I would otherwise enjoy
2. I have no choice in who I marry because my father promised me to whoever slays the dragon
3. My family is in harm’s way

GEORGE FLOYD

PIZZA GATE

III. The Modal Model

1. How is it that narrative can play a role in reasoning, one that leads to judgments, beliefs, and practical commitments, even though nothing in the narrative purports to be about a matter of fact?
2. How is it that narratives can be flexible and prime vastly different sets of inferences, while also stably guiding inferences within a narrative framework?
3. How is it that some instances of reasoning through narrative result in better judgments than other instances?
4. How is it that reasoning through narrative leads to predictions about the world, and normative conclusions about the way the world *should* be?
5. How (or why) is reasoning through narrative a fundamental mode of human reasoning?

**Function of narrative** in reasoning through narrative: to represent modal space across one or many domains.

Narratives are disambiguated into **narrative** **frames**.

* A narrative framework is a schematic statement containing variables or proper names.
* The frames will highlight *which* modal sentences the narrative uses, and whether they take bound variables or proper names for their items.
* Narrative frame **emerges** from the narrative, social and interpersonal understanding, and individual
* Narrative frames are not truth-evaluable until they are given an interpretation, but can be **referential** or **non-referential**

An **interpretation** is formed by substituting salient objects from the discourse in for bound variables

An agent **accepts a narrative frame** just in case they are disposed to use it in their reasoning (by filling variables of the narrative frame with objects from the discourse and drawing certain inferences that make use of those modal possibilities) for some rang of contexts C1 … Cn .

Need for an epistemology of narrative

* If the modal representation given by the interpretation is accurate, then we will can the interpretation of the narrative **correct** or **true**
* If S is disposed to draw mostly accurate conclusions by reasoning through the narrative, then we can say the narrative is **reliable**. In this case, S is defeasibly justified in her conclusions.
* We might deploy **substantive constraints** on which objects can substitute in.
* If the interpretation of the narrative is true and all the conclusions that S is disposed to draw are true*,* then her reasoning is **safe**, and constitutes **knowledge**.
* **False narrative:** An agent accepts a narrative, but the range of contexts in which they are disposed to reason through it often leads them to false conclusions.
* Reasoning through narrative is fragile. What about when narratives conflict?

IV. Conclusion: Political Disagreement and Conspiracy Theories