I. Why Narrative?

A. Purposes of Narrative Inquiry

Examples of dubious policy narratives are not hard to find. Front groups, like the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity, use AstroTurf campaigns and lobbying to advocate for “clean coal” on behalf of industrial polluters. In another type of dubiety, the mission of the Institute for Historical Review, positioning itself with an academically-sounding name, is to deny the Holocaust. Narrative analysts such as Jones and McBeth (2010), and Jones and Raedelli (2015) aim to assess the validity of competing narratives using conventional social science epistemology. Their approach might enable us to assess sentences that contain claims such as this one from the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA): “There is no currently accepted medical use for marijuana in the United States” (DEA 2016, 3; see Chapter 6 for further consideration of this peculiar stance). While the so-called “narrative policy framework” may generate more epistemological controversies than it settles, one must applaud attempts by them and the many collaborators using their framework to differentiate between the bogus and the authentic.
1. Situating my Approach

In his early book on narrative policy analysis, Roe (1994) owns the accusation from some literary theorists that he is neopositivist, though this would not be self-evident if he had not said so himself in the preface. He also claims affinity with both structuralism and poststructuralism. His approach is to take ambiguous and complex policy issues and, through the lens of literary theory, find out what kind of text (or what reading of that text) one arrives at. “Stories commonly used in describing and analyzing policy issues are a force in themselves, and must be considered explicitly in assessing policy options.” (Roe 1994, 2). Roe thus ascribes agency to stories, and further notes that some of these stories resist change even when data contradict them. This is because sets of assumptions for decision making are underwritten by these same stories, lending stability in a policy context marked by uncertainty, complexity, and polarization. In such a context, truth and tractability cannot be established by conventional means.

Roe’s literary categories are stories, nonstories (such as circular arguments that have no beginning, middle, or end) and counterstories that are juxtaposed against the dominant narrative. By comparing stories, on the one hand, with counterstories and nonstories on the other hand, a metanarrative is discovered or constructed by the analyst. If it all works out, a new and better policy narrative is arrived at that can rearticulate the decision-making assumptions and can transcend paralysis and polarization – but “no guarantees” he adds (2).

Lejano, Ingram, and Ingram (2013), too, borrow from literary theory, but in a quite different way. They deploy literature-analytic concepts to analyze narratives. These categories include: plurivocity to assess the change in the story over time; emplotment to track the sequence of events or causal arguments that lead to solutions;
characterization to identify the actors (who could be heroes, villains, victims, or tricksters) who drive the plot; alterity to focus on outsiders and identities, and to distinguish the like-minded from those who are not; breach and gap to signal a narrative’s sense of what the problem is; and context to situate the narrative’s substance in a societal condition (Lejano, Ingram, and Ingram 2018). The anthropological effect of using such an approach is that groups or subcultures can be heard, and their stories better understood. Lejano, Ingram, and Ingram (2013) have used this approach to informative effect in their book on environmental networks and narrative coherence within such networks. Environmental narratives were able to transcend boundaries between local groups and outside experts, raising the possibility that narratives function as a sort of glue that binds a network of associations together. Even in the face of government inaction with respect to public policy, the power of narrative in these networks helped change actual agricultural practices of farmers in the region. Ingram, Ingram and Lejano (2015) described a “narrative network” that brought non-human actants into the picture – to the effect of integrating institutional arrangements into environmental matters of concern. “We posit that narratives are essential in catalyzing and sustaining environmental networks, and enabling them to exert influence” (3). A narrative network is “a mutually constitutive group of actors (human and non-human) and ideas. By mutually constituting, we mean that a narrative . . . is what organizes people and gives the group structure; and, it is in the assemblage of actors that we find a community of narrators that allows the emergence of the narrative” (4). What this suggests to me is that the narrative is itself the coalition’s cohering edifice. This allows a narrative network to transcend potential geographic, economic, and cultural divides.
With an aim to separate truth from falsehood, Jones and McBeth (2010) take a neopositivist approach that also deploys literary categories such as setting/context, plot, characters (who fix problems, cause problems, or are victims), and moral of the story (policy solutions). Their approach appreciates the importance of narrative in shaping beliefs and actions. They demand that policy narratives be clear enough to be wrong, or at least testable in terms of structure and content, in a research program that subjects the narrative to rational analysis. Their literary categories are used to assess the minimal acceptable qualities of a narrative. The narrative is then categorized by criteria such as partisanship/ideology, or the influence of groups on individuals. This approach has carved out a considerable niche in the public policy literature by deploying mainstream, Popperian notions of hypothesis testing within the still-emerging study of policy narratives. Their innocent assumption that there are facts that exist apart from a narrative will take this approach only so far (recall Poovey 1998), but so far it has been an exceedingly rich vein of inquiry. Jones and McBeth (2010) consciously integrate policy solutions – which they refer to as the moral of the story – into their approach, which assures a close integration of narrative with public policy concerns.

While Roe (1994), Lejano, Ingram, and Ingram (2013) and Jones, Shanahan, and McBeth (2014) have borrowed literary categories to salutary effect, not all scholars can make the literary approach work. Sometimes narrative policy analysis is asked to do too little. Literary approaches sometimes can seem more interested in monitoring policy narratives for their faithfulness to literary categories than their policy implications. Too many manuscripts have crossed my desk that stop too soon; they point out that policy proposals are analyzable using literary categories and leave it at that. These authors lay out their criteria – beginning-middle-end, character, plot, chronology, and so on – and
show how policy proposals, legislative debates, court rulings, etc. can be interpreted using such criteria. The important point, though, is not whether policy proposals are constituted by or analyzable via such literary devices (of course they are), but how the narrative functions in a political contest with other narratives, usually with the aim of being enacted into public policy. It is apparently easy to lose sight of the political in narrative policy analysis.

Literary categories, when first introduced by Roe (1994), revealed public policy proposals to be story-like accounts. And the use of literary categories enables analysts to explore the varying perspectives on a policy matter, and to gain a focused and comparative interpretation of what is at stake between and among the varying perspectives. This advantage cannot be disregarded, and today most scholars no longer resist the interpretive link between policy proposals and narratives. But sometimes narrative policy analysis is asked to do too much, as when Lejano and Dodge (2017) attempt to distinguish narrative from ideology in the climate-change debate. A more parsimonious, traditional Gramscian account of the political and media power of the climate-change denial phenomenon would note that such propaganda is funded by wealthy oil barons and the fossil fuel industry. Close adherence to literary categories is sometimes beside the point. Nations have banned spray deodorants out of concern for the depletion of the ozone layer. The search for a “character” in the policy narrative that successfully drove this policy change seems a distraction.

Successful narratives in terms of policy enactment are not necessarily those that show the most fidelity to literary categories, whichever literary categories an author selects. Narrative sources of strength, dominance, and persuasiveness are political in nature, and ideology cannot therefore be bracketed out of the contest. One sensible test
for narrative efficacy in a policy discourse is the one that gets adopted. Adjustments to tactics, strategies, or to narrative substance, made in the heat of competition, are also worth observing and describing. Hence narrative inquiry that focuses on political conflict can serve to highlight narrative competition among coalitions in the policy discourse (Dodge & Lee 2015). For example, tweaking the narrative to focus on community prosperity rather than directly confronting the specific question of fracking expands the range of concerns and options (Dodge 2015). Moreover, Dodge points out, gridlock is not necessarily a fixed condition, and it is not necessarily dysfunctional, as any temporary stasis may soon become dynamic. Competing coalitions are sometimes able to reframe the matters of concern to reshape coalition boundaries, enhancing the odds of forming a winning coalition (Metze & Dodge 2016; Dodge & Metze 2017).

Coalitions can change their perspectives, these authors point out, suggesting a dynamic not of fixity but of breaking apart and re-forming in a new way. Dodge (2016) further shows that competing advocates can generate conflict by defining the substantive problems and solutions differently. They can also problematize other coalitions’ forms of knowledge, their strategies, and their legitimacy – potentially exacerbating the nastiness and divisiveness of the political contest.

2. Narrative Competition

The approach I take is to highlight the policy narrative as a major element in the field of political competition. Discourse coalitions, armed with their constitutive narratives, engage with other discourse coalitions similarly armed. While this weaponization of policy narratives engaged in political competition may seem a bit militaristic, the effect is to make narratives – not other people – the thing that is shot down or defeated. Narrative inquiry forces the analyst to “hear the other side” (Spicer
2015), to appreciate the emotional resonance of a narrative, to understand the role of
identity in subscribing to a narrative, and to sensitize inquiry to the values that are at
stake. A focus on narratives holds open the possibility that the “us vs. them” dynamic
can be mitigated by depersonalizing political conflict. The problematic question is not so
much about “them” but rather resides in “that narrative.” On cannot expect narrative
inquiry to obviate *ad hominem* attacks in political discourse, but narrative inquiry does
seek out social constructions of meaning rather than characteristics of any particular
individual. The emphasis on individual responsibility in neoliberal societies deflects
attention from culture and history and vests the individual with accomplishments,
failures, and accidents. Culpability can thus be redirected and separated from the
individual, thereby eliding the false “responsibilization” of citizens (Grey 1997; Ilcan and
Basok 2004; Shamir 2008).

By emphasizing narrative competition, policy narratives can be readily
appreciated as political phenomena in democratic societies. The contestation among
them entails a variety of survival strategies. Sticky narratives (Heath and Heath, 2007)
can be difficult to disengage from, but there may be a tipping point where a dominant
narrative loses its standing and a new narrative gains traction (Gladwell 2000; see also
Baumgartner and Jones 1993 on punctuated equilibrium). Narratives can take on
characteristics of a viral-like contagion; subsequently they may or may not succeed in a
marketing sense (Berger 2013). Counternarratives (Roe 1994) may function not only as
opposition to a dominant narrative but may also support it. Alterity is a fairly well-
known dynamic in the narrative literature (Farmer 1995; Lejano, Ingram and Ingram
2013). Gatekeepers of the dominant narrative may view new symbolic exposures as a
threat to their favored story. Some of the tactics that have been deployed are easily
recognizable authoritarian maneuvers. The imprisonment (or worse) of journalists, political protesters, or opponents who bring alter-narratives into the picture has a long history, unfortunately. Fundamentalist religious narratives rely on alter-narratives, such as secular liberalism, for energy and meaning (Crowley 2006). One implication of the alterity dynamic is that narratives may well harden, rather than soften, when exposure to other narratives takes place (Kaplan et al. 2016; Dodge and Lee 2015). To say that people assimilate information selectively is to say that the narratives already inscribed on the personages of those who identify with them serve as gatekeepers to new symbolic exposures. There are various means and mechanisms for condemning the alter-narrative, some more nefarious than others, and I have already suggested a couple. Treating dissidence as heresy or apostasy are ways that religious narratives have suppressed competition. Dominant narratives ensure their own durability through such practices. A culturally embedded narrative does not necessarily welcome new knowledge – though it may. Adaptation and cooptation may also be effective survival strategies in some contexts. Older and more institutionalized narratives have access to a broad array of gatekeeping maneuvers to ward off potential competitors.

3. The Career of a Policy Narrative

The textbook model of the public policy process – which for Anderson (1975) includes problem formation, policy formulation, adoption, implementation, and evaluation – has some conceptual and descriptive problems (Nakamura 1987). Howlett, McConnell, and Perl (2015) point out that such categories are not mutually exclusive and can have trouble accounting for the vagaries of the policy process. Yet implementation of a policy narrative enacted in the form of a statute, an executive order, or a successful ballot initiative is a momentous occasion in the career of that narrative.
Its facts, values, and meanings become institutionalized, normalized, and conventional. But this does not imply fixity or permanence. For example, prohibition of alcohol in the United States was overturned in 1933 after 12 years of dry folly. In an example already mentioned, even though the Drug Enforcement Administration still repeats a claim in its original narrative that there are no medical uses for cannabis, it has of late done very little to disrupt the state-regulated medical cannabis industry in the United States.

There may be a phase in the policy process that follows implementation – something like institutionalization. Institutionalized practices may continue to enliven the genesis narrative, or may undermine the genesis narrative through negligence, dysfunction, or purposive intent. Context determines meaning in narrative inquiry, and no one context is universal.

A research approach that respects historical and cultural context as formative of narrative meaning is required. Foucault (1998) calls into question attempts to impose uniformity upon any sort of social inquiry. He criticized Paul Ree, a contemporary of Friedrich Nietzsche, because “He assumed that words had kept their meaning, that desires still pointed in a single direction, and that ideas retained their logic; and he ignored the fact that the world of speech and desires has known invasions, struggles, plundering, disguises, ploys” (Foucault 1998: 369). Foucault’s own genealogical approach is sensitive to discontinuities and reversals as well as continuities, because “to follow the complex course of descent [that is, historical lineage] is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things which continue to exist and have value for us . . .” (Foucault 1998: 374). Hence, I present policy narratives as having something like a
career or maybe a life cycle. A policy narrative performs a political function, it sometimes takes on a different job or joins a different alliance. Its career can abruptly end, or it can outlast generations of humans. I vest the public policy narrative with discursive capabilities to engage in political contestation, to form alliances, to structure coalitions, and maybe ultimately to die on the vine without having been enacted into law. What, then, are the constitutive elements of a policy narrative?

B. Narrative and its Component Parts

Sign (Saussure 1983; Barthes 1972) is composed of two parts, the signifier and the signified. The signifier might be, say, the word baseball, in which case the signified would be the round, white, seamed, spherical object we are imagining. Words such as baseball do not refer to material objects; they refer to mental pictures of those physical objects. We can talk about a baseball without actually having a baseball in hand. This feature of the signified is especially important when it comes time to talk about lions and tigers and bears. Language only requires the concept of a lion or tiger or bear or baseball and not their physical presence. There is, then, a gap between the word and the object. This gap is helpful because I don’t have to be in the presence of a bear to talk about bears, and I don’t have to carry around a backpack of objects I want to talk about that day. A word points to the concept, not the object, says Saussure (1983).

Baseball the sign becomes baseball the signifier when the term refers to a game played with mitts, bats, home plate and bases. In the rules of the game, a batter gets three strikes before s/he is declared out. Baseball’s well-known rule, “three strikes and you’re out” became the ideographic public policy metaphor that aimed to send repeat felons to prison for life in the United States back in the 1980’s. Language allows such
jumping of contexts; metaphors do this on a regular basis. Language does not require denotative precision; language is promiscuous in allowing connotative suggestion. Barthes’ (1972) famous example involves the rose. The word “rose” as a signifier evokes an image of a velvety flower. A rose may be just a rose but gather a dozen red roses into a bouquet, add some baby’s breath, and passion enters the picture. A dozen roses signifies...something other than 12 plants. Biologists retain denotative power in their language by naming things using specialized words. The scientific word for rose is rosa, with local species given names like rosa gallica or rosa arcicularis. Phrasing the name of the plant in a Latin-sounding way may remove some of the romance from the rose, but for plant biologists denotative power is preserved. Policy scholars are not as lucky as biologists in that connotation is all but omnipresent in public policy discourse, and many concepts lack materiality altogether (for example public will, ideology, or political attitude). Even a formal, precisely written policy goal is subject to interpretation (Yanow 1996). And as political winds shift, the once-stable formal goals can themselves change.

Understanding signs and their meanings is a group effort. We learn words as we grow up and are socialized into a community. We come to shared understandings and arrive at shared meanings with others in our cultural sub-group. Participants in local groups must learn the practices of the group – a child could be learning the ways of the family, or a neophyte scientist could be learning to interpret what is seen in an electron microscope. Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations (2009) makes clear that philosophers are not in a position to over-rule local understandings of truth. This privilege belongs to, say, the practicing scientists – or any epistemic community – whose practices and conventions lead to justified belief within their relevant communities. Local social formations have their own understandings, meanings,
practices, and truth standards. There is no purchase in casting condescending aspersions on local groups by telling them how they should be conducting themselves on matters of truth. Who claims to be the all-knowing God who would speak from such a heightened perch? People have different kinds of expertise as well as different perspectives, typically nurtured in the context of groups they were socialized into. Interpretation of facts depends on expertise and perspective, but it is more complicated than that. The dictionary may tell us that a fact is a thing that is indisputably true, but the dictionary contains not truth, but conventional word-shaped objects – and fact happens to be one of them. The more varying perspectives on the facts there are, the more competing narratives there are, and the more important is narrative policy inquiry.

1. Linguistic Categories Rather than Literary Categories

From semiotics, the most reducible meaning-unit is the sign (Saussure 1983). More complex (and also more useful) connotative symbolizations include ideograph and narrative (Miller 2012). Signs and ideographs are woven together into policy narratives to connote various meanings, feelings, values and conceptualizations. Can narrative inquiry evaluate these sorts of meaning-units?

The first challenge in studying units of meaning is their lack of fixity. They cannot be treated like the static categories that a formal theory would typically presuppose. Meanings are in flux as history moves and as perspective changes. Meaning has a dynamic pliability; it can be altered by connotations and by context, yet it can be stabilized within narratives. Meaning units such as sign, ideograph and narrative evolve over time, varying with society’s evolving understanding of social reality.
As noted above, Saussure (1983), with later help from Barthe (1972), conceptualized the smallest meaning-unit in language to be the sign. I also alluded to the importance of context. Outside of a context, signs are difficult to interpret. With no context, think of the term rock. It could refer to a variety of concepts. At some moment in a specific context (at a moment of measurement, for example, or during a conversation) the sign “rock” takes on specific meaning. Rock could have been a guitar-oriented musical genre, or something one does gently while singing a lullaby to a baby, or a compressed geological formation. The specific context produces a conception of the sign that is inextricably linked to the context of the user of the sign. Other meanings of rock are excluded at that point in favor of the one that is necessitated or imposed by the context. The multiplicity of prior contexts in which the sign “rock” was deployed is indicative of the multiplicity of meanings that are available when the time comes. When the time comes, it is always in a specific context.

An ideograph is both less precise and less context-dependent than a sign. With its origins in communications theory, the ideograph (McGee 1980) is a constellation of signs, associated emotions, values, and images – a bundle of connotations. These are symbolic elements that do more than gather the signified and the signifier into a minimally meaningful unit. They are complex signs that are able to evoke understanding and convey emotions, and to affirm values. “Three strikes and you’re out” evokes that resonance. There is an abundance of resonant ideographs that are bandied about in public policy discourse: drug addict; death tax; free market; welfare queen; partial birth abortion; big government. They all have powerful and suggestive symbolic connotations and have been strategically deployed in public policy discourse. Ideographs and signs can be meaningfully connected by story lines into narratives. In
public policy there are health care narratives, environmental narratives, economic narratives, poverty narratives, transportation narratives, and energy narratives. There are anti-government narratives. All of these narratives gather into their story lines symbolic material such as signs and ideographs. But more than symbolic coherence is needed for a narrative to become a dominant narrative.

Relatively discrete and particularistic, ideographs are more amenable to analytical reduction than alternative organizing devices such as a frame, an aspect, a lens, or a perspective. "An ideograph is an ordinary-language term found in political discourse. It is a high-order abstraction representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal. It warrants the use of power, excuses behavior and belief, which might otherwise be perceived as eccentric or antisocial, and guides behavior and belief into channels easily recognized by a community as acceptable and laudable" (McGee 1980, 15). Ideographs function in a policy narrative to bring connotations, associations, and imagery into the picture to reflect political commitments in a fulsome way. Ideographs function to normalize some view of the world or justify policy action or policy belief. Such normalizing entails political struggle. Favored ideas are given positive resonance and opposing ideas are given negative resonance – the function of either being to warrant the use of power. Lejano and Leong (2012, 801) seem not to fully appreciate the symbolic power of the “toilet-to-tap” ideograph when they depict it as an “unfortunate moniker.” Ideographs are not required to be rational or factually accurate. Their distinguishing feature is their powerful symbolic connotations that are capable of propelling policy narratives in which they are embedded toward dominance or enactment, or in the case of water re-use, a policy defeat.
2. Replication

Words and phrases sometimes “go viral.” The Internet facilitates such contagion. Music, the printing press, radio, the cathode ray tube, cable TV and the Internet all enable the replication of signs, with velocity and domain expanding as advancing technology increasingly enables replication. With the development of the printing press, the Gutenberg Bible went viral in the 1450’s (viral relative to a time when publishing 158 copies was a rather impressive feat of replication).

Signs are better able to survive and replicate when they join with other signs to convey emotion, to express values, or to depict concepts. The evolutionary inference here is that a sign’s survival chances increase if the sign can usefully join an ideograph – enhancing its opportunities for replication. An even better survival tactic would be to join an ideograph that usefully joins a narrative -- especially a dominant narrative. To survive, then, is to reproduce, or more generically, to replicate. Dawkins’ (1989) meme is a clear replicator. Though popular culture has taken to memes, they lack a tradition in social science scholarship. Unlike meme, sign has a long history within the field of semiotics. Historical linguistics is accustomed to the idea that language migrates, adapts to new influences, and evolves. Signs bring meaning-making into the picture in a way that memes do not. Sign is more analytically specific than meme; as a unit of analysis the sign already enjoys prominence in linguistic studies.

Barthes’ (1977) depiction of the photographic image recalls the days when reality could be trusted: “What does the photograph transmit? By definition, the scene itself, the literal reality . . . Certainly the image is not the reality but at least it is its perfect analogon and it is exactly this analogical perfection which, to common sense, defines the photograph” (p. 16). Today the photographic image cannot be uncritically trusted to
depict reality. Photoshopping, trick photography, and staged poses render even the photograph a sometimes-untrustworthy denotative image. In conditions of dubiety, one cannot be sure. But uncertainty and ambiguity are not paralyzing obstacles. We still manage to believe some versions of reality and not others.

II. Metamodern Inquiry and Public Policy Discourse

There seems to be some lingering bad feelings since the days when Thomas Kuhn (1962/2012) contextualized scientific paradigms, pointing out their historical contingency. Back then there was a cadre of fundamentalist Objective Truthers who wanted to believe that science produces objective truth and not historically contingent paradigms. The knives have mostly been put away but the feelings as well as the factions live on in many respects (e.g., Otto 2016). While continuing to appreciate the contributions of postmodern relativism, in this paper I also want to honor the secular aspirations within science and scholarship to seek out some sort of truth, regarding whatever matters of concern arise in whatever epistemic community. This is a metamodern approach, if I understand that term correctly. I understand metamodernism to be an openness to context as opposed to some universalizing philosophy. It is an openness to scientific research, reason, and rationality as well as openness to values, feelings and contingent meanings. Metamodernism is a way of mediating between, or oscillating between, modernist method and postmodern irony.

The curatorial investigative method deployed by Abramson (2018a; see also 2018b) in his investigation of the Trump-Russia investigation is suggestive of a metamodern approach. As is often the case with highly complex investigations, context is forsaken and the longer view of events is therefore not contained within. These gaps
will remain unfilled unless inquiries from multiple sources are brought into the picture. While Abramson uses the term curatorial in reference to journalistic investigations, I am including scholarly references as well. The origins of some of the cannabis policy narratives I investigate have deep histories, others are barely emergent, but a well-read curator can reveal what would otherwise remain obscure. Most investigations and reports on cannabis policy struggle to speak from a voice that is outside any particular narrative (though Caulkins, Kilmer and Kleiman (2016) represents a worthy effort in that regard). Neutrality is not my ambition, but appreciating multiple perspectives most certainly is. The significance of symbols and events that are part of the larger public discourse may not be evident based on one investigation. As with meta-analysis, a broadly meaningful picture can be painted. Policy narratives have a time line, and they adapt to learning and changed circumstances. They are not just a report on facts, but a compilation of commentary, investigations, research, symbolic communication, stereotypes, and affective clues that lead to coherence. Like other investigative and research approaches, the curatorial method, done well, generates new knowledge. Moreover, the curatorial approach can be used as a way of hearing the other side.

The point of curatorial investigation is not to generate a metanarrative that gathers in the prominent, factually accurate, overlapping, or distinguishing features of the narratives in order to integrate them into a consensus of sorts. Instead, the point is to clarify the narratives and acknowledge their diversity, their pluralism, their idiosyncrasies, and their adaptations. The fissures and schisms within and between narratives are among the richest sources of data – pointing toward the locations of change, dynamism, and political contestation.
An important precursor to metamodernism is postmodernism, in particular its clash with the modernist emphasis on method.

A. Postmodern Relativism and Objective Truth

Let us begin this section by recalling the ontological mysteries of quantum physics as exemplar of the heart of the problem. Quantum physicists have come to understand that light is a wave when measured using a particular apparatus, but with a different measuring apparatus it is a particle (Barad 2003; Barad 2007; Wendt 2015). Can both be objective facts? It seems the ontology of light is relative to the measuring apparatus deployed by the scientist. This makes me wonder. Does objectivity have to be absolute? Is there but one Objective Reality (honoring the monistic template “one God”)? Or can reality be perspectival, or even multiple? Another, more provocative word that asks the same thing only more broadly: Can reality be relative (to perspective, paradigm, measurement apparatus, historical time period, culture, sub-culture, faction, discourse coalition, or narrative)? Philosophers and scholars have kept their distance from the word relativism, as if it were an infectious disease, a taboo, a family secret, the devil incarnate, or maybe just the haunting ghosts of Friedrich Nietzsche, Ludwig Wittgenstein or Thomas Kuhn.

1. Relativism, Perspectivism, and Pluralism

Whenever there is disagreement in public policy discourse there are likely to be 1) different goals; 2) different facts; or 3) probably both. Disagreement regarding facts and goals is the rule in public policy discourse, not the exception. This condition makes narrative inquiry especially appropriate. Like a curator, the narrative researcher tries to parse out the different narratives – in terms of concepts, values, symbols, images, and
facts – to be able to hear the other side, at a minimum, but also to identify the coalitions, the schisms, fissures, and irresolutions in the political contest. Facts, values, and aspirations are relative to the narrative one subscribes to.

But such relativism is not digestible for the Objective Truthers. Even when it is beside the point of some article or book chapter, it is fairly common in the literature to come across gratuitous slaps at “modern-day cynicism and postmodern assaults on the ‘objectivity’ of ‘truth’” (Furnier 2010, 93). This sort of defensiveness on behalf of objective truth likely entails some sort of positive affective identification. I myself am guilty of this, if guilty is the right word. Because I trust science, I am persuaded that greenhouse gases that emanate from the burning of fossil fuels contribute to climate change. I believe that chlorofluorocarbons released by spray-can deodorant were damaging the ozone layer and was happy to see such products banned.

Western epistemology tends toward objectivism. Correspondence theory (critiqued by Richard Rorty in *Mirror of Nature*) and coherentism (where a belief, to be justified, must cohere within a system of beliefs) dominate objectivist philosophy. Both approaches incline toward important matters such as denotation, explanation, and inductive reasoning. Relativism, as I understand it, resists the tendency of philosophy to impose the canonical standards of Western, analytic rationality on the truth claims of all groups, societies, and sub-cultures everywhere on the planet. This contrarian perspective is often dismissed as “anything goes” in part because Feyerabend (2010) actually said this. However, I also want to note that what Feyerabend meant by “anything goes” requires that one go back in history and consider the methodological anarchy inherent in some of the major breakthroughs in science: “[T]he invention of atomism in antiquity, the Copernican Revolution, the rise of modern atomism (kinetic
theory; dispersion theory; stereochemistry; quantum theory), the gradual emergence of
the wave theory of light, occurred only because some thinkers either decided not to be
bound by certain ‘obvious’ methodological rules, or because they unwittingly broke
them” (Feyerabend 2019, 7). “Anything goes” was more an observation than a
prescription.

2. Blaming Postmodernists

Otto (2016) perceives that postmodernism has conducted a war on science.
Attacking the humanities and journalism, he writes, “Such academics and reporters
insist that all truth is subjective or derivative of one’s political identity group, and they
confuse the process of science with the culture of scientists, thereby falsely equating
knowledge with opinion” (171). Based on no citation or evidence, Otto (2016, 173)
further asserts that “postmodernists viewed all of science as a sort of public-relations
campaign by the elite.”

Postmodern thought was indeed a secular re-evaluation of big T truth, but
absolutists such as Otto do not put it quite that way. For Otto, big T truth becomes
“every Western claim of ‘truth’” and postmodern thought is personalized;
postmodernists are sneer-worthy, anti-science people. The postmodernists who are
allegedly waging a contemporary war on science tend to be dead white males (in Otto’s
reckoning they include Nietzsche, Derrida, Lyotard, Rorty, Foucault, Lacan, Feyerabend,
and Kuhn). Yes, these intellectuals tended toward anti-essentialism, and tended to
express incredulity toward metanarratives (sometimes specifically including scientific
objectivism). Certainly, the contemporary American attack on science (as Otto describes
it) ought not to be ascribed to these so-called postmodernists. Conflating all
measurement instruments, discipline-specific methodologies, and strategies under the
name “the scientific method,” Otto fails to appreciate how objective reality varies according to how it is measured.

3. The Hawthorne Effect in Science

The importance of context in the measurement of quantum phenomena is highlighted in numerous experiments whereby measurement interacts with the object of inquiry to generate different phenomena. Readers may be familiar with the Heisenberg principle, whereby both position and velocity cannot be measured simultaneously. But a more illustrative example for our purposes is a variation on the double-split experiment. Well before the quantum revolution there was the two-slit experiment (conducted in 1801 by Thomas Young) that gave surprising results about whether light was a particle or a wave (Wendt 2015). Imagine a rectangular box like a shoe box but with three panels. The front panel has one slit where light enters. A panel inserted in the middle has two slits. The light goes through the front panel, and then through the middle panel, and displays a pattern on the back panel. If light were a particle, any overlapping pattern would appear on the back panel as doubly bright. That does not happen. The pattern on the back panel is a diffraction pattern of alternating bright and less bright bands of light, like the crests and troughs of waves. The original two-split experiment demonstrated that light was a wave and not a particle.

A century after the original double-split experiment, Planck’s constant assumed that energy does not flow continuously, as wave theory would have it, but in discrete particles or quanta. Plank’s constant was so successful in its predictions that it became “the fundamental building block of quantum physics” (Wendt 2015, 44).

Yet Young’s two-slit result, indicating that light was a wave, was not disproven. Depending on how and when it is measured, light (and electrons as well) can show up as
particles or waves. This implies interaction between the measurement apparatus and the phenomenon – or intra-action in Barad’s (2009) terms, because in her ontology the measurement apparatus is also part of the phenomenon. Niels Bohr named this wave-particle measurement curiosity the complementarity principle, though to me the disparate results seem more akin to the notion of incommensurability. As Wendt (2015, 49) put it, “So the mutual exclusion here is deeper than the merely perspectival problem in the classic case: knowledge of one precludes knowledge of the other, and to that extent they are inconsistent.” The generalizable proposition here is that truth is context dependent. Contextual is the opposite of universal in the same way relativism is the opposite of absolutism.

Returning to the double-split experiment, a very interesting thing happens when measurement detectors are installed in the middle two-slit panel. In the presence of these detectors, the pattern on the back panel appears as would be predicted if light were a particle – doubly bright when overlapping. Does this mean that light is a particle after all? According to Wendt (2015, 46), “the correct conclusion is that as long as the electron is not being observed it behaves as if it is a wave, and as soon as it is observed it behaves as if it is a particle.” (Wendt 2015, 46).

In quantum theory jargon, one might say that the wave function collapses upon measurement or intervention. A social-science way of putting it is that the Hawthorne effect is not just for people any more.

Another point to register along these lines is that a researcher is not merely a receiver of signs, but also a producer of them, including the codes, typologies and survey questions (Biernacki 2012). This phenomenon of ‘creation by observation’ was identified formally in common situations, for example opinion polls and interviews. In addition,
the interviewee’s decision was formally shown to be intrinsically influenced by the context of the interview. The importance of such contextual contingencies extends beyond epistemology to a radical social construction of reality.

Universality and fixity are characteristic of absolutist thinking. Hard-core objectivists like Otto think facts, or objective reality can be apprehended regardless of temporal or cultural context. Yet as I have said elsewhere:

As we abandon the expectation that epistemology can cure the “eyes of the beholder” problem we can begin to acknowledge that all knowledge is perspectival and that the observer is part of that which is being studied. What is called knowledge is relative to the perspectives of those making knowledge claims. There are truths, but they are revisable truths arising from communities of knowing. These are not big T truths, universal and nomothetic, uttered from some on-high vantage point. At best, a small t truth can be negotiated with others in the community. . . . [K]nowledge is a social creation accomplished within a community of knowers (Miller 2002, 83).

So, Otto is barking up the wrong tree in blaming postmodernists for his perceived war on science. Who then is to blame?

Observably, right-wing political ideologies often refuse to accept research on gun violence or climate change as legitimate objects of secular inquiry (Frankel 2017; Delingpole 2015). Suppression of research has been encouraged by corporate and industrial interests such as fossil fuel extraction and firearms manufacturing. Pursuit of economic interests through lobbying, public relations efforts, and political campaign contributions accounts for why the federal government in the United States has interfered with climate change research, water and air quality research, and drug
violence research. In my own research, I can categorically state that the decades-long suppression of medical cannabis research cannot be blamed on the postmodernists, but on the Congress and President that approved the Controlled Substances Act of 1970 – as enforced by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA).

4. The Science Narrative

Scientific rationality in public policy discourse can be deployed as a political strategy, and quite often this is how “science” is used. “In disinterested politics, citizens present their claims as though the claims were free from selfish interests or personal investments. All that counts they say (or imply) are the facts, established by objective scientific research and presented without bias” (Tesh 2000, 100). Science has long grappled with this intractable and recurring problem in its practices, and scientific institutions have established norms and practices of collegial review, presentation of evidence, and logical argumentation. In policy discourse, however, science functions as a connotative ideograph, deployed rhetorically in policy tropes such as “science tells us,” or “we have the science on our side.” Those engaged in public policy may, with Jones and McBeth (2010), wish for a refuge from the systematic bias, advocacy, manipulation and gaming that takes place in political environments – a wish no doubt shared by the vast majority of scholars and scientists. But even seemingly objective findings are usually contestable for one methodological reason or another. The disinterested posture of scientific ideography may or may not effectively push the policy narrative along – probably not in times when science is associated with academia, political liberalism, and elite dominance from perches in the ivory tower.
Instead of wishing it were otherwise, a narrative approach inquires as to how and why science, logic and rationality are not necessarily determinative in public policy discourse (among other inquiries). Objective Truthers are not OK with this.

As Fong (2013) put it, “[D]istinctly religious features . . . have made their way into the ‘scientific’ mindset.” These features include “the fervent investment in one way of doing things rather than another, the defensive monopoly on the ‘truth,’ the castigation of nay-sayers according to a strict ‘with us or against us’ ethos.” The more religiously fundamental the science, the more funding. He adds, “We are still far from rectifying a gross imbalance in funding and focus, one that has stemmed, in my view, from an ardent desire for an increasing instrumental control over the world and ourselves. While I admittedly worry about the effects — both good and bad — of this desire, my concern [is] not with ‘abuses’ of science but with the very desire itself and what it unconsciously represses.” Put another way, science is like religion in its fundamentalist persuasions. “The form is always different, but something – constants – survives all such distortions” (Latour 2013, 19). With formulations such as constants, we can – as in religious narratives – forget mere matter. Latour (p. 23) then adds, “But make no mistake; by this account the sciences themselves, those formidable products we’re so proud of, would, if we had to judge them, too, by the yardstick of double-click communication, become exactly as dishonest and artificial as religious utterance.”

5. The Enduring Power of the Science Narrative

Now that cannabis has been legalized in varying degrees in the various American states and in Canada, regulators must try to set standards. And so regulators from Colorado to Canada are dependent on the objectivist, scientific narrative for establishing a basis or rationale for any particular regulatory step they are contemplating. For them,
science is the gold standard for regulatory justification. Science is a powerful narrative. I do not treat it as a distinct cannabis policy narrative in my forthcoming book, though many of the narratives in the cannabis discourse borrowed elements of their story lines from science or pseudo-science. Science tends not to want to be incorporated into pre-figured policy prescriptions, and manages to avoid this by being very conservative in establishing causal relations. The capacity to avoid being trapped up in political, ideological, and religious narratives is one of the science narrative’s very effective survival strategies. The idea that the scientists behind the climate change narrative are just liberal, elite intellectuals with a regulatory policy agenda stems in part from an inauthentic move on the part of the fossil fuel industry to discredit anyone who wants to call out the damage their product is doing to the commons. Theirs is not a counter-narrative. It is a manifestation of greed; its effect is to pollute the discursive commons with distortions, distractions, and lies.

But still, am I really saying that science is “just” a narrative? Science is an assertion that secular investigation into facts and logic will yield truth (or something close to truth). In my mind, secular inquiry (aka science) has mostly pulled it off. Science is the modern authority. But Objective Truthers want more; and they are annoyed that we Relativists think science is just one more narrative. Science may well be the best narrative out there, but it is still just a narrative. Objective-truthers are strangely bristly, prickly, and defensive about this. Who knew science has such emotions?

6. Pluralism, Perspectivism, and Relativism

Whether science is a narrative, a metanarrative, or the only path to reason and truth, democratic policy discourse takes place in an environment of political pluralism.
Political contestation takes place around competing policy narratives, which are constituted by logic, concepts, and facts, but also feelings, emotions, stereotypical images, and connotations. Tables 1 and 2 indicate the cannabis policy narratives that emerged from my curatorial analysis of cannabis articles.

[Table 1 about here. Found at the end of this document, in landscape layout orientation.]

[Table 2 about there. Found at the end of this document, in landscape layout orientation.]

Narratives battle one another for dominance in any given policy discourse. And the narratives ebb and flow in terms of their influence. Nobody overtly articulates the Nativist narrative any more – except for the Kansas state representative running for re-election who was caught on video saying the African-Americans were more susceptible to the harms of marijuana because of their character flaws and genetic traits (Minton 2018). Instead, a Social Justice narrative has become influential. This narrative points out the disproportionate rate of arrest for black people for possessing cannabis, the disproportionate incarceration rate, and the crippling effect of felony convictions on one’s future employment prospects. Meanwhile the Compassionate Use narrative that accompanied the successful passage of California’s Proposition 215 in 1996 has mitigated the absolutism of the Abstention narrative. In politics, narratives compete for dominance. Some are eventually defeated, some adapt and evolve, others go dormant only to return when the political environment has shifted again.
B. Science and Free Speech.

Narrative inquiry can reveal the perspectival relativism of public policy discourse, but to leave it there would be to miss the point of metamodernism. Science is a social construction, a human creation, a set of secular enlightenment ideas put into practice. Secular inquiry prevailed over religion, medieval traditions, and superstitions. Government came on board, and financed a lot of it, giving the academy increased autonomy from the Church – which had been its home since around 1100-1200. The key to secular inquiry is not objective truth, but reasoning and discourse. Alongside the establishment of secular inquiry came government based on the rule of law. Constitutions afforded society due process and checks and balances. Values such as liberty and justice for all, not some authoritative objective truth, produced the sort of public spiritedness that shaped the society we inherited. Our institutions are not set in stone, but are changeable and we can amend them when need be (and they can be altered by dictators as well).

Those tempted to blame postmodernism or relativism for the demise of truth-seeking institutions may be able to find a more apt target, with just a little digging. Look at those giant corporations, acting in a very narrow sense of self-interest, who fund efforts to deny climate change; look at their many enablers holding powerful offices; the disregard for the commons is palpable. The dystopia we are headed toward is fueled by self-interest on the part of the powerful, accompanied by the cultural demise of a shared public spirit, a denigration of the commons, be it the air and the water or the shared public discourse.

My own research on narrative politics in public policy uses cannabis policy as exemplar for many of the discourse dynamics I study. The obstacle to science in this
case has been the FDA-NIDA-DEA interlocking directorate that makes it costly, delay-prone, and restrictive to study cannabis. One of the great boons of legalization in Canada is that cannabis research will not be so cumbersome. The boot has been lifted off the throat of secular inquiry into cannabis. In Israel, where cannabis research has long been allowed and appreciated, some of the most impressive breakthroughs in cannabinoid research have taken place, starting with the 1964 identification of THC as the active ingredient in cannabis that causes the high (Gaoni and Mechoulam 1964). So, metamodernism perhaps offers a way of eliding the objectivism-relativism dichotomy, and with a little critical theory can relocate the battleground in the science wars.

**Science and Democracy**

The cannabis policy discourse has of late been marked by openness and critical exchange in the United States, at least relative to earlier times – the 1930’s, the early 1970’s, and again in the 1980’s. Secular research on the topic of cannabis was not completely prohibited by the United States government, but it was restricted and remains so to a lesser degree. I have likened pluralistic democratic discourse to the academic norms of free inquiry and open exchange. The consequences of stifling scientific research and curbing policy discourse are, from my secular standpoint, sins against both science and democracy. As frustrating as political conflict in public policy – around both fundamental goals and basic facts – may be, narrative inquiry can make an important contribution by laying out the contours of the debate. And frustrating as it may be to participants in the policy discourse, this state of contestation has an upside: It is evidence of democratic pluralism. Moreover, narrative analysis is a way of hearing the other side, clarifying the problematic issues, and appreciating, or at least apprehending, the perspectives of those who disagree. These discursive customs are not only the norms
of democratic pluralism; they are also the norms of secular inquiry, which is to say science.

The play of narratives fits into the spirit of the Western canon in the same way that science, a free press, or any forms of secular inquiry do. These traditions are all historically contingent social constructions, but contingency does not stop practicing scientists as well as practicing journalists from pursuing their matters of concern, performing their work searching for the truth. Thanks to the Enlightenment, secular inquiry prevailed over absolutist forms of religion, medieval traditions, and superstitions; the key to secular inquiry is not the imposition of some static, authoritative “Objective Truth,” but the exercise of the conventions of intelligence, reasoning, and discourse in practice.

Alongside the historical development of secular inquiry came governmental deference to the rule of law. Constitutions afforded society due processes along with checks and balances. Values such as liberty and justice for all produced the sort of public spiritedness that shaped the society we inherited. Our institutions are not set in stone, but are changeable and we can amend them when need be. Narrative inquiry presupposes the existence of such possibilities.

C. Public Discourse as a Common Pool Resource

The cannabis debate in the United States has not always benefited from the free and open inquiry that one would presuppose in a Western liberal democracy. Its illegal status contributes to the suppression effect – dissenters attract attention to themselves and thereby become more conspicuous to law enforcement. For example, Robert Edward Forchian, known as NJWeedman, is an outspoken advocate for free speech and
cannabis rights and has run for office numerous times. He has also been arrested numerous times and had spent 447 days in jail before being acquitted of witness tampering (Shea and Everett, 2018).

Court cases provide evidence of the various ways the suppression has taken place. A New York Times editorial from 2000 stated:

The Clinton administration's three-year battle to prevent the use of marijuana as medicine as allowed under California law got a well-deserved rebuke this month. A federal judge wisely ruled that the administration could not punish doctors who recommend the benefits of marijuana to their patients. Such a policy, wrote Judge William Alsup, raises "severe First Amendment doubts."

In 2019, a federal court agreed with Ultra Health, a nonprofit organization that wanted to set up an exhibit, that the New Mexico State Fair had violated its First Amendment rights. Ultra Health wanted to “educate visitors about where their marijuana comes from, how products are manufactured, who qualifies for medical cannabis and how to obtain a recommendation” (Jaeger 2019).

In 2018, the State of Iowa agreed to pay plaintiffs $150,000 after a federal appeals court agreed that administrators at Iowa State University rescinded approval of a student group’s license to make T-shirts that included the school’s mascot, the letters ISU, and the logo NORML (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws). The appeals court agreed that the students were being discriminated against for their pro-cannabis views (Robertson 2018).
D. Removing Obstacles to Research

Almost a year after the Drug Enforcement Administration announced it would consider granting additional licenses to cultivate cannabis for research purposes—and despite drawing 25 applicants so far—the agency has yet to greenlight a new grow operation (Joseph 2017). In a different *Scientific American* article:

For neuroscientist Chuanhai Cao, the problem with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration’s classification of marijuana as a Schedule I drug can be summed up in two words: dead mice. Cao, a researcher at the University of South Florida’s Byrd Alzheimer’s Institute, uses transgenic mice to study the effect of the marijuana component tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) on amyloid beta, the protein that forms the plaque found in the brains of Alzheimer’s patients. Timing is critical in his work—the mice, which are difficult to breed, have to be a specific age at the time of an experiment. One Cao project, designed for 12-month-old mice, was delayed three months while the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) processed the complicated paperwork that all marijuana researchers must submit under the current system. Some of the mice died while Cao waited for the approvals he needed to acquire the THC for the experiment; he ended up with too few animals that were all too old to generate useful data. “It was a disaster,” he says (Noonan 2016).

In countries where cannabis research is less suppressed, cannabis research has produced major breakthroughs. I mentioned the research of Rafael Mechoulam. He and Yehiel Gaoni identified THC as the psycho-active component in cannabis. Mechoulam was also involved in the research that identified the first endogenous endo-cannabinoid in 1992. “Right now, there are more than 110 clinical trials involving cannabis are
underway in Israel, more than any other country . . .” (Schwartz 2017). While Israel funds many of the studies, some funding also comes from sources in the United States, where conducting cannabis research is more difficult and expensive.

Navarrete-Varo (2018) reported on the research environment in Spain:

Regarding research with cannabis or derivatives, it is the 1967 law itself that establishes it: scientific use is allowed. To investigate, it is necessary to carry out clinical trials authorized by the AEMPS [Spanish Agency of Medicines and Health Products]. In this sense, apparently, there are no restrictions other than the logistic and economic ones of any clinical trial. In this regard, the Spanish health authorities (AEMPS) recognize the therapeutic benefits of cannabis (for example, for multiple sclerosis), which is why Sativex® cannabis extract has been approved since 2010.

When Canada legalized cannabis, the country began moving out of a scientific dark age, according to Siebert (2018):

As the first G-7 nation to slacken cannabis laws, Canada has bolted to the front lines of the plant’s methodical scrutiny and investigation. No longer at risk of censure or lacking access to specimens, researchers can transcend the narrow parameters of scientific study once considered acceptable, namely, clinical research, to explore social, biological, genetic and agricultural questions. From botanists to phytochemists, microbiologists to epidemiologists, scientists of all sorts are free to openly pursue a greater quantity and quality of cannabis science than ever before.
E. Is Narrative Inquiry a Science?

The way that Jones and McBeth express their aspiration for a Universal Truth is that narrative inquiry should be “clear enough to be wrong” (Jones and McBeth 2010, 331). What they are getting at is positivism. “At its core, positivism asserts that there is an objective reality that can be measured. Positivists employ systematic and transparent methodological techniques, build testable hypotheses, and tend toward statistical analysis.” In my own view, aspiring toward objective reality is a worthy pursuit; however, believing one is in possession of such a thing is a conversation-stopper.

There is much about public policy discourse that is obviously political gamesmanship. Dodge (2016) found that coalitions are sometimes inclined to problematize other coalitions’ forms of knowledge, their strategies, and their legitimacy – potentially exacerbating the nastiness and divisiveness of the political contest. Such a tactic is a self-consciously competitive move against some other coalition or coalitions. There may be conflict and divisiveness, but at the same time it is evidence that participants in the discourse are aware that their competitors have a different perspective. If this means that different coalitions are aware of the other coalitions’ narratives, the upside might be that we have some evidence of democratic discourse.
References


35


Kaplan, Jonas T., Sarah I. Gimbel and Sam Harris. 2016. “Neural correlates of maintaining one’s political beliefs in the face of counterevidence.” Scientific Reports. DOI: 10.1038/srep39589.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Legalize?</th>
<th>Main Theme</th>
<th>Evolutionary Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nativism</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Cannabis is associated with otherized, marginalized groups, “bad people.”</td>
<td>Has gone underground, but habituated practices endure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstinence</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Just say no. Especially children.</td>
<td>Receding with rise of compassionate use narrative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libertarian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Marijuana arrests a form of tyranny; sending people to prison misguided.</td>
<td>Persists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harm Reduction</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Don't make user's life worse.</td>
<td>Persists. Allied with Compassionate Use narrative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate Use</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Marijuana is effective medicine for some ailments.</td>
<td>Becoming dominant and effective in legalizing medical marijuana.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Defeating Abstinence narrative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sentencing practices unfair, unrelated to risk of the drug.</td>
<td>Has seen effectiveness in questioning Schedule I status, altering some sentencing disparities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Disproportionate percentage of black and brown people arrested, incarcerated.</td>
<td>Social Justice rooted in Fairness narrative; now superseding it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Legalize?</td>
<td>Main Theme</td>
<td>Evolutionary Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Futility</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Drug law enforcement fails to prevent underground markets.</td>
<td>Persists in background. Available for re-use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conspiracy</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Prison-industrial complex wants to keep drugs illegal to maximize profits.</td>
<td>Persists in background. Aided by prison privatization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychosis</td>
<td>Decriminalize</td>
<td>Marijuana causes psychosis and schizophrenia.</td>
<td>Highly publicized but having difficulty gaining scientific endorsement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Marijuana</td>
<td>No, but . . .</td>
<td>Like Big Tobacco, Big Marijuana will market to children. Monitor them with vigilance.</td>
<td>Concern for children may supersede Abstention narrative.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>