



# What Do We Mean by ‘That’s a Fallacious Narrative’?

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## Abstract

This paper tries to offer a descriptive account of the normative workings of evaluative fallacy charges directed to narratives. In order to do that, I first defend the continuity and mutual dependence, as based on a dynamical conception of argument, between the ‘belief conception’ and the ‘argumentative conception’ of fallacy. Then, I construe a catalogue of ‘fallacy charges’ based on both such a continuity and the variety of counterarguments explored by the theoretical framework of Argument Dialectics. And finally, I apply these ideas and distinctions in the analysis of four examples of published texts in which the charge of ‘fallacious narrative’ is issued by a discursive agent against other discursive agents’ either full-fledged narratives or narrative assumptions. The analyses confirm some of the characteristics mentioned in the catalogue as well as the argumentative nature of fallacy charges, even when the censored discourse does not exactly or explicitly contain an argument. The analyses also help understand the distinction between a rather concrete ‘linguistic’ use of the term narrative and a more abstract and elusive ‘discursive’ one, in which the difficulties of both identifying the object of censorship and the exact meaning of the fallacy charge multiply.

**Keywords** Argument dialectics · Discursive narrative · Fallacies · Linguistic narrative · Narrative argument

## 1 Introduction

Within the field of argumentation theory, the concept of fallacy has remained both central and elusive. The intricate philosophical tradition that lies behind contemporary discussions has suffered several shifts, even changes of subject, and the hope to

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build a unitary account of fallacies has lately been judged as misguided, due to the variety of ways argument may be assessed as deceptively or, in any case, undesirably wrong.

Among the few well-established distinctions commonly accepted as significant in fallacy literature, though, stands out that between a ‘belief conception’ and an ‘argumentative conception’ of fallacies (Hansen 2020). According to this distinction, it is important to notice that in most languages that use some term derived from the Latin word ‘*fallacia*’ the object to which this charge is applied in discursive exchanges might be either a belief (considered false) or an argument (considered faulty). And it so happens that—as many of us have experienced in the argumentation classroom and as our dictionaries show<sup>1</sup>—the ‘belief conception’ or meaning is more commonly extended and better understood among competent speakers of those languages than the ‘argumentative conception’, favored instead by philosophers and other academics and, hence, by fallacy literature and theory.

This is usually not regarded as a problem in academic theoretical writings. At the beginning of the paper, article or monograph, the scholar clarifies that her account refers to fallacies as faulty arguments and the ‘belief conception’ is just left behind as uninteresting or irrelevant.

Assuming that, as argumentation scholars, we are obviously mainly interested in the ‘argumentative conception’, in this paper I will, however, offer an approach that will also encompass significantly the ‘belief conception’. And I will do this for several reasons. First of all, because I think they are more entangled and related than is usually acknowledged and that a somewhat more flexible notion of fallacy, lying or moving between these two poles is usually at stake. Secondly, because, favoring a mainly descriptive approach to argumentation, one that is interested not in *prescribing* but in *exposing* the normative workings of argumentative practice (from a participant’s point of view), my aim will not be to construe a normative theory of fallacies but an account of the use of the ‘fallacy charge’ in discursive exchanges. In order to do that, I think one cannot set aside the ‘belief conception’. And, thirdly, because my focus on a somewhat dubious argumentative object, namely *narratives*, one that already compels us to go beyond a too restricted conception of argument (Tindale 2017), seems to demand as well a similarly open approach to the notion of fallacy.

My contention will be that, in most cases, an interesting, fruitful and revealing *argumentative analysis* of an occurring ‘fallacy charge’ is possible, even when the direct object of application of the term is not (or not so explicitly) an argument.

In the first part of this paper, I will suggest a way to look into cases of fallacious beliefs in terms of their argumentative qualities or possibilities and then I will propose a classification of ‘fallacy charges’ that will combine attention to both

<sup>1</sup> The Spanish *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* (DLE) only presents one meaning for ‘falacia’: 1. f. Engaño, fraude o mentira. *No lo creas, es una falacia*. [Deceit, fraud or lie. *Don’t believe it, it’s a fallacy*]. English dictionaries tend to include as second or third meaning (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fallacy>) the one favored by academics, sometimes with the note ‘in *Logic...*’ (OED, 1971, *Supplement to OED*, 1987), but still the “false or mistaken idea” is taken to reflect the most common usage and understanding of the term.

fallacious beliefs and fallacious arguments. I will only then focus on *narratives*, describing and analyzing a series of fallacy charges taken from real published text in which someone uses the expression 'fallacious narrative'. In the concluding section I will make some further comments on my findings.

## 2 The Argumentative Nature of the 'Belief Conception'

Some particular traits or issues related to well-known accounts of fallacies in philosophical literature may help us connect the belief and the argumentative conceptions. In the so-called 'epistemic approach to fallacies' (Biro and Siegel 1992; Siegel and Biro 1997), the sought-for link between good argument and correct beliefs reasonably entails a similar connection between fallacious arguments and incorrect or, at least, unjustified beliefs that may also be considered *derivatively* fallacious. Even if the problem is located, diagnosed and remedied in the argument side, the concern might be extended to the belief supposedly prompted by it.

The converse but related case can be identified in what John Stuart Mill called 'fallacies of simple inspection' (*A System of Logic*, 1843, V. iii.) that, according to Hansen (2020), "fit the belief conception of fallacies rather than the argument conception,"<sup>2</sup> because the fallacy charge is here applied to uninspected but widely assumed opinions: including cases, for example, of metaphysical convictions ('a priori fallacies'), or even popular sayings such as "Talk of the devil and he will appear," (V, iii, §2). These are obviously beliefs and not arguments. However, as Vega puts it, "The critical point here is not their falsity or their referential vacuity, but their dogmatic self-sufficiency, that is, the avoidance of justification or even of being subject to discussion or proof" (2013, 236). If Biro and Siegel are concerned with the dubious status of beliefs obtained by means of faulty arguments, Mill is preoccupied by the acceptance of beliefs without any argument whatsoever. So the reference to argumentation in the form of a 'faulty absence' (a guilty omission) is also there.

The obvious correlation between Biro and Siegel, on the one hand, and Mill, on the other is their *methodological* concern (Vega 2013, 231). Both approaches are connected with classical problems in the philosophy of the natural sciences and this gives them both a clearly *dynamic* ring. The objective is never a single, isolated and static item, be it a compact, propositional belief or an atomic, minimal argumentative structure, but rather the productive or unproductive, constructive or distortive role played by it in a more comprehensive *practice of inquiry*. Such a dynamic approach, constantly keeping in mind a practice that is not one of only *giving reasons* for a content, but one of "asking for, giving, recognizing, examining, assessing, criticizing, debating, conceding and responding to reasons, and in which it is typically possible to iteratively ask for, give and examine the reasons for the acceptance or rejection of the initial ones" (Olmos 2022, 7), finally blurs the significance of the distinction between the belief conception and the argumentative conception. This

<sup>2</sup> Vega also points out initially that Mill's fallacies of *simple inspection* "do not seem to involve inferences or proofs" (2013, 235).

awareness of the *dynamical aspects of justification* is, in my opinion, the best lesson we can learn from epistemological approaches and not necessarily the alleged strictures of ‘scientific argumentation’, or their insistence on the ultimate relevance of truth over other notions of correctness. It is a lesson that can be fruitfully exploited in other argumentative fields and in common everyday argument as well.

Something similar happens with another object of the charge of fallacy that Hansen (2020) says some consider out of the range of the argumentative conception, namely ‘questions’. Some recent contributions within the field of argumentation theory to the *argumentative role and nature* of questions (Hitchcock 2020; Galindo 2020) speak in favor of the assimilation of this case as well within a comprehensive theory of ‘fallacy charges.’

Mill’s *On Liberty* (1972 [1859], 88) insists on considering fallacies not as *unrecoverable errors*, but as something unavoidable within a continuous path of constant *correction*. And this means placing fallacies and fallacy charges within extended argumentative exchanges, usually presided by concrete inquisitive and justifying goals and consisting on a variety of inter-connected discursive moves, instead of isolating them as curiously defective specimens compared to flawless, equally isolated, ones. However, let me clarify that, with this, I am not necessarily favoring the kind of ‘dialectical approach to fallacies’ that, focusing on dialogical rules, would neglect the examination of the logical relations between the arguments’s constituents (Cf. Woods and Hansen 1997). The idea, instead is that such *logical* relations between contents cannot be examined but within concrete exchanges of giving and asking for reasons and measured against additional considerations and counter-considerations that only become effective (or not) in those contextualized conditions.<sup>3</sup> The widely held assumption that many of the traditionally recognized fallacy types may, in fact, appear in exchanges as non-fallacious arguments or argumentative moves, can be reinterpreted in light of these ideas.

### 3 Fallacy Charges

A ‘fallacy charge’ surely amounts to something that goes beyond the bad- or weak-argument assessment, something beyond the kind of criticism to be expected in any fallacy-free discussion. This ‘something’ has been variously identified by philosophical tradition either with a misleadingly good appearance (Hamblin 1970; Walton 1995, 2010), with deceitfulness (associated with the proponent’s manipulative intentions) or, more charitably and alternatively, with certain human (natural) biases and tendencies (Woods 2013) that account for the persistence (and even the partial benefits) of such errors.

All these ideas (about effective deception, errors and biases) might be surely both worth exploring and theoretically suggestive, but, unfortunately, they refer to characteristics of discourse that are precisely *left behind* whenever a ‘fallacy charge’ is

<sup>3</sup> Marraud’s distinction between ‘arguer dialectics’ and ‘argument dialectics’ (2015), and most especially his recent defense of the ‘contextual character of logic’ (2022), may help us understand this qualification.

actually issued. An ultimately successful misleadingly good appearance, or a shared-by-all-mankind bias, would result in an *undetected* flaw that would receive no fallacy charge. Conversely, a 'fallacy charge' implies that the prosecuted party (the one that receives the charge) should either not have fallen prey to the deception or self-deception (just as the prosecutor hasn't) or should not try to deceive others with such a *potentially misleading* move that, in fact, has not misled the actual recipient. The shame of the fallacy attains, thus, the fallacious agent as either successfully dull (for her own disgrace) or unsuccessfully mischievous.

Whenever a fallacy charge is issued in a live exchange (as opposed to the philosopher's dissection table), the error is exposed as *detectable* and even, in many cases, as *obvious* and *flagrant*, adding guilt to the perpetrator. These are usually the features that are at stake when someone says "that's a fallacy" and they denote a kind of *manifestly wrong* discursive move, argumentative strategy or belief-content that the speaker *exposes* as something that should not have taken place, usually explaining or justifying her charge in her subsequent words: i.e. giving some kind of reason for it.

With all this in mind, we can propose a map of 'fallacy charges' that combines aspects of the 'belief conception' (albeit *argumentatively* understood) with a concrete 'argumentative conception' based on the theoretical framework of Marraud's Argument Dialectics (AD) (Marraud 2020a, Leal and Marraud 2022, Olmos 2021), using AD's classification of counter-arguments (Marraud 2020b) and its way of focusing on logical problems (the specific kinds of problems signaled by a 'fallacy charge') as something deeply embedded in dialectical and rhetorical contextualized conditions.

Now, a fallacy charge ("That's a fallacy") issued within a communicative practice (an actual live exchange or a diachronic, either oral or written intervention in public discourse) may signify one of the following:

1. "That's a [*manifest*] lie" or "that's a [*manifestly*] wrong idea". If nothing else is said, this could be an extreme case of non-argumentative use, but this seldom happens. The manifest character of the wrongness is usually exposed, giving support to the use of a term such as 'fallacy' (a lie or a wrong idea in which any reasonably alert person should not fall, just as the speaker has not fallen). In its turn, this may mean that the marked content is either:
  - 1.1 *Unjustified*, a prejudice (as in Mill's *fallacy of simple inspection*) that would be allegedly dismissed if properly examined and discussed: arguments and reasons are here *asked for*.
  - 1.2 *Easily falsifiable*, i.e. there are known reasons or evidences against that content that will normally be subsequently produced or pointed out by the speaker: arguments and reasons *will issue* from the fallacy charge in order to support it and also attempting to block other argumentative uses of the object of the charge.
2. "Your argument is based on [*manifestly*] false or unfounded premises/data". In AD this means that the argument is liable to be *easily* attacked by an 'objection'. This is in fact a slight variation of 1.2 in which a previous argument has been

identified in the discourse of the charged-as-fallacious agent by the speaker. What usually happens is that the so alluded *counter-argument by objection* (the reasons or evidence that show the inadmissibility of the identified premise) is actually produced. But, being issued from a fallacy charge, this is not *any* kind of counter-argument by objection, but one that, it is claimed, *should not have been necessary*, in case everybody would have been as alert or duly informed as the speaker. The fallacy charge usually implies that such evidence was in fact *easily available* and that the prosecuted party should not have presented such contents as accepted or acceptable *at all*. This is not to be equated with presenting any argument whose premises could fall under some possible criticism, doubt or mere correction.

3. “[*It is manifest that*] the premises/data of your argument cannot support your claim” or “[*It is manifest that*] that’s not at all a (relevant) reason for your claim”. In AD this means that the argument is liable to be attacked by a ‘rebuttal’. In many cases this charge could be substantiated as implying that the (either given or guessed) *warrant* of the original argument is unacceptable or not applicable in a given case. As in 2, it is to be expected that the speaker/prosecutor would subsequently provide the actual *rebutting counter-argument* and that this would be done in a somehow *obvious* and *easy* way to support a fallacy charge. Because, again, the charge of fallacy implies that such a *manifestly hollow* argument should not have been presented at all, not just that it is an argument that can be actually rebutted in a discussion. This kind of fallacy charge is rather commonly over-exploited by interlocutors suddenly and opportunistically becoming fierce deductivists: “Hey, that’s a fallacy, that doesn’t follow from your data/premise”.
4. “[*It is manifest that*] you have overlooked well-known (weighty) reasons against your claim”. In this case, according to AD, the identified-as-fallacious argument is deemed to be *easily* ‘refutable’ or liable to an obvious *counter-argument by refutation*. But, in principle, counter-arguments by refutation in fact *accept* as *prima facie* reasonable the original, attacked argument—they do not dismantle it, as *objections* and *rebuttals* do—providing, however counter-considerations that favor an opposite or alternative claim. That an argument be refutable and insufficient is not at all enough to issue a ‘fallacy charge’, unless what is implied is that the speaker has *negligently* disregarded (or concealed) *obvious* counter-considerations, acting as if she had proved her claim *beyond (reasonable) refutation*. As this kind of ‘fallacy charge’ does not ultimately find a *logical flaw* in the identified argument but marks it as merely (though *guiltily*) partial, its *dialectical* nature, i.e. its dependence on the conventional rules of the particular exchange gets more salient. An attorney, for example, could not be charged for *just* presenting the evidence in favor of her client (she could be charged of professional misconduct for the opposite).

This general classification of ‘fallacy charges’ aiming at different kinds of *blameworthy* logical flaws in the speaker’s discourse and making part of the recipient’s assessing repertoire may be used to analyze real cases of alleged fallaciousness and make sense of the discursive agents’ concerns in various fields and argumentative practices.

I will focus now on cases where fallacy charges aim, in some way or another, at *narratives*; narratives with some kind of role in argumentative exchanges. The aim will be to make sense of the kind of charge that is meant when someone says: "That's a fallacious narrative".<sup>4</sup> We'll see that even if narratives may in fact function as reasons in explicitly argumentative discourses and purporting the use of a variety of argument schemes, there are also less obvious but equally intriguing argumentative roles for narratives that make them liable to charges of fallaciousness and that require a certain nuanced comprehension and most especially the kind of *dynamical* sense of argumentative practices that I have so far emphasized.

#### 4 "That's a Fallacious Narrative"

The main problem with the term 'narrative' is that it seems to have two kinds of usage: (a) a more concrete, 'linguistic' one, referring to *actually narrative* (in form and structure) pieces of verbal communication and (b) a more abstract and elusive, 'discursive' one, referring to a kind of general impression about a certain topic (a complex bunch of ideas and expectations) extracted from a collection of public interventions.<sup>5</sup> Both kinds of *narrative* may receive fallacy charges. And sometimes these get somewhat mixed.

In the first case, the attacked object is directly identifiable in the interlocutor's words and may have at least the variety of argumentative roles that has been described in Olmos (2015, 156–157)<sup>6</sup>:

- i. Digressive stories (either fictive or real) causally and historically independent from the circumstances referred to in the claim, which are, nevertheless, presented as reasons for its acceptance (e.g. arguments from example, from similarity, from precedent, etc.)
- ii. Storied accounts of past or expected events historically and causally related to the specific contents mentioned in a claim or conclusion that function as reasons for it (e.g. arguments from consequences, from means and ends, from sacrifice and waste, from pragmatic inconsistencies, etc.)
- iii. Narrative claims (usually versions of past events) whose veracity, accuracy or plausibility is supported by additional reasons, typically involving source reliability, as in arguments from position to know or from witness testimony.
- iv. Self-standing narratives whose perceived coherence and persuasiveness might be either presented or taken as a reason for their own veracity (as in iii.) or

<sup>4</sup> I will not address here the notion of the so-called 'narrative fallacy' or 'narrative bias,' mainly used in cognitive psychology. This concept has just a slight relation with what I am interested in here, among other things because it is more an academic 'diagnostic label' than a recognizable (counter-argumentative) fallacy charge in discursive exchanges.

<sup>5</sup> These feature as acceptions 1a and 1b in the Merriam-Webster definition of the term 'narrative' (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/narrative>).

<sup>6</sup> I have slightly modified the presentation and description of my four categories which are nevertheless the same as in 2015.

for the plausibility in another setting (e.g. in real life) of the event-types or behavior-types they depict (as in i.).

In the case of the ‘discursive’ notion of *narrative* (a rather extended and fashionable usage in contemporary public interventions), as the *narrative* itself is a somewhat elusive object, the accusation of *fallaciousness* is also more difficult to pinpoint in relation to an allegedly relevant argumentative structure. Nevertheless, I’ll try to cope with the examples in that regard.

We find the expression ‘fallacious narrative’ in multiple texts of diverse import and origin. A nice example is Samuel Willard’s (1681) anti-Anabaptist pamphlet entitled *Ne sutor ultra crepidam, or, Brief animadversions upon the New-England Anabaptists late fallacious narrative wherein the notorious mistakes and falshoods [sic] by them published are detected* (printed in Boston) that was an answer to John Russell’s (1680) apologetic text *A brief narrative of some considerable passages concerning the first gathering and further progress of a church of Christ in Gospel-order, in Boston, in New-England, commonly (though falsly [sic]) called by the name of Anabaptists for clearing their innocency from the scandalous things laid to their charge* (also printed in Boston).

Russell’s piece, although a concrete verbal intervention and therefore not a narrative in the *discursive* sense, was neither exactly a full-fledged *narrative* in linguistic terms, but it surely contained many narrative passages. It was rather a well ordered and argued defense against a series of eight ‘charges’ publicly issued against the members of the First Baptist Church of Boston. Each charge occupied a chapter and apologetic, in many cases *narrative* reasons—telling about the acts and deeds of particular members of the said church, and thus classifiable as type ii narrative arguments—, duly numbered and, in some cases, further justified, were given in response to them.

In this case, the term *narrative* seems to stand more for *account* than for *chronicle*, but both Samuel Willard, the combative author of the response, and also Increase Mather,<sup>7</sup> who signed its preface “To the reader” stick, nonetheless, to the term. In fact, the charge of *fallaciousness* is attributed by the latter to such narrative in a way that is rather coincident with my views regarding the *easy-to-contradict* character of the attacked discourse. Were it not so, its alleged mistakes would be *excusable* (and not fallacious):

[that] the Anabaptists by their fallacious Narrative, have grievously offended God; inasmuch as the things by them misrepresented, were not done a far off (for then mistakes about them would have been excusable) but at home, where right Information was easie [sic] to have been obtained; had they been willing to have known, and that others should have known the truth (Mather, in Willard 1681: s.n.).

<sup>7</sup> Increase Mather [1639–1723] was a well-known Puritan clergyman and at that time president of Harvard College.



Willard, the main author of the pamphlet, does begin his text claiming that his opponent's discourse is *both* false (thus subject to fallacy charges of the kind 1.2 or 2. in my classification) and, when not exactly false, malicious in its interpretations, representations and intimations (i.e. partial, and so, *refutable*, as in category 4). Moreover, it is not just any kind of weak or subject-to-criticism piece, but one whose shameless faults should have prevented its publication, so as to make the response unnecessary (a characteristic I have also alluded to in my considerations):

There are two things which every one who designs to give the World an Account of the History of things done, ought principally to endeavour; viz. 1. Truth of expressions, with a plain and full recital of all essential passages thereto belonging. 2. Candor, in Animadverting charitably upon them, not setting our malicious glosse upon things deserving a better interpretation, which rules if the Author of this Narrative had in any degree observed, this reply had been needless (Willard 1681, 1).

There is finally a passage where Willard again uses the full expression 'fallacious narrative'. However, here the author gives it a paradoxical twist, because it seems that even if (in his view) misrepresenting the meaning of the attitudes and deeds of the Baptist Church founders and followers, the narrative has made them known... to their shame. It is, again, a kind of intervention that (this time for the defendant's benefit) should not have taken place at all:

The childe doth his Father the best kindness to say nothing of him, when by speaking he doth but revive his Infamy. But I take it for a just judgement of God on that generation of men that by a fallacious Narrative, they should enforce us to make the World acquainted with the scandalous conversation of these beginners, which had otherwise slept in the private records of those Churches wherein they were acted (Willard 1681, 9–10).

So, here the apologetic narrative is not considered fallacious for telling false things but for indicating that the things it tells may act as reasons "for clearing their innocency from the scandalous things laid to their charge", as Russell's title states and Willard's discourse mocks. Willard may try to falsify some of the things said by Russell (and that is one of the meanings with which he uses the expression 'fallacious narrative'), but his chief point here is rather that the narrative—and he presents this as an *obvious* thing—does not support a judgment of acquittal and so it is *fallaciously* presented as part of an argument that is *easily rebuttable* (according to category 3 of fallacy charges).

Accusations of employing or spreading 'fallacious narratives', sometimes in the literal sense of false or cunningly contrived stories or accounts leading to incorrect (factual or practical) conclusions (as in the previous case), or much more often in the alternative sense of dubious and interested pieces of information and partial representations of acts and intentions that lead to a faulty ideological *imagery* or *mythology* about a topic abound in public controversies and political discourse. The following two examples of on-line partisan texts—on opposite sides of the political spectrum—use the charge from the start, featuring in their very titles:

- “Racial Inequality: A ‘fallacious narrative’”, by C. Gonzalez (2016)
- “The Fallacious Narrative of Free Market Capitalism”, by A. L. Keefe (2021).

It is somewhat difficult to compare them, as the latter is a lengthy analysis of capitalism, its dire consequences, the way it is ideologically supported, the way it can be debunked and even the cognitive reasons for its persuasiveness, while the former is a brief blog entry criticizing certain aspects of the discourse of the *Black Lives Matter* movement. In both cases, though, the charge is justified by the contention that certain *lemmas* that are central to a *whole system* of beliefs, expectations, vindications and political standpoints (“a way of presenting or understanding a situation”, as the Merriam-Webster 1b definition goes) can be (in principle *easily*) discredited, what would amount to discrediting the *whole system*, or at least some of its main convictions.

These *lemmas* are, in the first case that “black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise”, and, in the second one, a long list of them mostly implying the labor character of the capitalist’s contribution to production, e.g. “in marketing, hyping, and contributing to the way the purchaser subliminally values the product, the owner’s application of capital is in itself part of the labour that creates the product or service in its desired form, therefore ethically entitling that capital and its capitalist to a cut”. These and other subordinate *lemmas*, it is claimed, would be significant pieces in the reconstruction of the mentioned *systems of beliefs and expectations* that, in order to be identified, receive, in the two cases, a label and a name. The label is the same for both: these systems constitute *narratives*, obviously in the *discursive* and not in the *linguistic* sense. And this is an essential step in order to be able to talk consequently about a ‘fallacious narrative’. The name for each *narrative* is what appears in their titles: “racial inequality narrative” and “free market capitalism narrative”.

I will not evaluate up to what point both authors succeed or not in accomplishing their self-assumed, clearly counter-discursive and allegedly counter-argumentative tasks. My aim is just to understand what they mean with their charges of *fallaciousness* and their mention of *narratives*. In both cases, it seems that part of the claim is, precisely, that the allegedly unfounded or ill-founded nature of the *lemmas* is contributing to the embrace of equally dubious evaluative (political standpoint) and practical (political activist) claims. However, while these are the ultimate target of the writers, both try to accumulate reasons (either numeric data, definitions or qualifications) against the specific *lemmas* they have identified and isolated in an exercise of what seems to really work as an *objection* (dismantling thus their opponents arguments), but whose criticism they pretend to extend from the sources and basis of those arguments to their down-the-road conclusions.

My impression, nevertheless, is that the ‘fallacy charge’ is not founded solely on the supposedly erroneous character of those *lemmas* that also lead to erroneous standpoints. To find an opponent’s view erroneous and counter-arguable is not enough to issue a fallacy charge. The alleged problem here is, precisely, in the *narrative* and *intricate* quality of the worldview these *lemmas* help support and construe and it is that *narrative quality* that makes them appear as somehow intractable. That your ideas constitute a *narrative* seems to make them less

deliberative, less open to weighing and partial criticism, to qualification or to the inclusion and adoption of alternative or moderating views. And that is just one step away from being considered 'fallacious'. It is implied that those who embrace *the whole narrative* would find it difficult to consider and evaluate *available* and even *obvious* data and reasons against its founding beliefs. For example, Gonzalez maintains that: "the narrative of 'systemic racism' is severely undermined by a *dispassionate look* at some facts and statistics"; and according to Keefe: "It is no longer difficult to see that both past and future are being sold out for the current capitalist, *before our very eyes*" (my emphasis in both cases).

In these examples, then, the criticism against certain ideas condensed in the specified contents of the *lemmas* is reinforced by the implication that there are *obvious data* and *reasons* against those lemmas (a kind of fallacy charge of the type 2) that however evident become somehow *invisible* to those who embrace the *whole narrative*. This could be easily related to the kind of cognitive bias known as 'confirmation bias' and pass for a phenomenon related more to reasoning than to argument. But here we have no external psychologist spotting an error, but a discursive agent issuing a fallacy charge in the realm of communication and reason-exchange. The *narratives* in the examples are deemed *fallacious* because they definitely have certain consequences in the way positions are *argued for* in the public arena and these allegedly undesirable consequences are pictured as something that goes beyond disagreement and especially beyond counter-arguable or weak argument precisely in the way I have tried to convey in this paper.

In my next and last example, this notion of the *narrative implications* of a discourse that finally lead to the charge of 'fallacious narrative' is also apparent:

- "African-American Sisters Aging With HIV and Co-Morbidities", by I. Monroe (2014)

Here the label is not as distinctly used as in the previous examples—it does not appear in the title, for example—and, moreover, the object of its criticism is not so fiercely criticized. Monroe undertakes the analysis of a 'qualitative study' about African-American women aging with HIV and co-morbidities, published by Warren-Jeanpiere et al. (2014). Monroe welcomes the study, its focus on a neglected collectivity and, it seems, she likes the general approach in which the subjects of the study are interviewed about their daily lives and ailments. What she does not like and what extracts from her the charge of a 'fallacious narrative' is, in her own words: "what was being promoted by the study".

She quotes some interpretive lines from the paper to the effect that "Co-morbidities, including diabetes and hypertension, were perceived to be more difficult to self-manage than HIV," and "This difficulty was not attributed to aging but to daily struggles such as lack of income and/or health insurance, an inflexible work schedule, and loneliness." And these, for her, seem to imply that, thanks to HIV's new meds and technological advancement, an 'isolated HIV condition' would be a somewhat unproblematic question:

But *the study skews, if not creates, a fallacious narrative*. It implies that HIV as a sole chronic stressor (as if that's possible in any HIV-positive person's life, especially people of color) isn't as unmanageable as the co-morbidities that most African-American women acquire with the disease as they age. *And the reason is* because of new meds and technological advancement in the field (emphases added).

Monroe seems to be pointing out that such an 'isolated HIV condition', in fact, does not really exist (at least in the targeted group) and so presenting an *explanatory reason* for its manageability (the new med's efficacy) and, thanks to complexities of abduction (Olmos 2020), *defending* the factual correctness of such an *explanans* because it *actually explains* the relatively easy-to-manage nature of isolated HIV, seems to definitely deserve an argumentative critique, dismantling the *explanandum*-character of the phenomenon as badly identified. As the scenario the *narrative* seems to picture is not relevantly realistic and the *narrative* plays an argumentative role in establishing and reinforcing the idea of the efficacy of HIV's new meds, this efficacy-claim is not really well-argued for. Such an efficacy-claim should, instead, be tested in conjunction with the rest of the subjects' problems, and not in a hypothetical, imaginary isolated circumstance.

Monroe acknowledges that the criticized paper does finally maintain that "HIV self-management and co-morbidity self-management must go hand-in-hand", a practical conclusion with which she fully agrees, but still she finds fault in bringing forth (be it for the argument's sake) such an allusion to the 'isolated HIV condition'. But why exactly the 'fallacy charge'?

This is a somewhat twisted example, because, on the one hand, Monroe seems to be demanding, in fact, a really *more narrative* (more complex, holistic and causally entangled, Cf. Olmos 2020) account of the lives and condition of African-American women aging with HIV, and, on the other hand, the 'fallacious narrative' she mentions is not presented as a *linguistic narrative* at all in her interlocutors' paper, but would just be a kind of imaginary (rather simplified) scenario whose relevance is *presupposed* by some interpretive lines in the study. So Monroe's issue is not *with* narratives as reason-giving resources (as could have been the case in the previous pair of examples).

Monroe may seem a little bit over-sensitive with her fallacy charge when she is rather in agreement with most of the paper she is analyzing. What seems to preoccupy her, though, is the hovering presence of what she feels to be an *unfaithful model* (Contessa 2014, 127–130) for assessing the efficacy of HIV treatments: "It paints an almost-sanguine picture that there are optimal and user-friendly HIV cocktails out there for African-American women". And this *unfaithful model* (however innocuous its argumentative role in the attacked paper) is in *stark and painful* contrast with these women themselves' daily experience and most especially with the really heartbreaking cases Monroe has encountered in her own research: as, e.g. Imani's (*not her real name*) sad story with which she starts, in fact, her commentary.

In a situation like Imani's—infected with HIV among other co-morbidities, having lost in the past years many of her friends to the disease, searching for employment, suffering the black community's stigmatization and utterly depressed—"medication

adherence” and “a will to live” are not realistic expectations. And this makes of the supposed efficacy of HIV medication in completely different circumstances an almost irrelevant *datum*. For Monroe, then, the *fallaciousness* of the case lies in the kind of disgusting sensation she feels before an *abstract narrative* that is *palpably* unrelated to what she feels to be the issue to address. I may think that she is demanding from a research paper to refrain from using (or merely alluding to) a simplified model that may help explore certain aspects of the problem by analyzing its various elements one by one. As we know, isolating and simplifying phenomena, be it materially (as in a laboratory) or mentally (as in a thought experiment), is a powerful tool of science. But whether her demand is answerable or not is not my issue here. Her motives, at least, seem praiseworthy enough.

## 5 Conclusions

Some of the intuitions commented upon in the first part of this paper regarding the meaning of ‘fallacy charges’ have been confirmed by the selected examples. There is always an allusion to a *negligent* disregard or misuse of what is *obvious*, *blatant* or (as in the last example) *pressing*. Of course these are not objective characteristics of certain contents but the value attributed to them by the discursive agent that issues the fallacy charge.

The fallacy charges I have analyzed also regard *argumentative* characteristics of pieces that may or may not have been presented as arguments in the original discourse. It is, again, the agent issuing the charge the one that receives the previous intervention and reconstructs for their examination and according to her own understanding, the logical relations operating in it, in order to respond, not only *critically* but *censoriously*, to it.

Finally, the *narrative* nature (sometimes, just *narrative* understanding) of the censored discursive pieces has made our task even more difficult. In part because of the not-so-easy-to-grasp argumentative workings of explicit (linguistic) narratives. However, the greatest difficulty has been posed by the, nowadays most extended, use of the term *narrative* in its ‘discursive meaning’. In those cases, the difficulties of both identifying the object of censorship and the exact meaning of the charge multiply. But these are difficulties for us, mere analyzers (not even, for the time being, assessors), as the competent speakers seem to feel at ease saying what they say and meaning what they mean and expecting to be understood by a more or less generally educated public.

The resources of argumentative analysis help us approach the task but it is good to keep the eyes and ears open to the intricacies of real exchanges that may force us to enrich and qualify our theoretical categories.

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## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** There are no potential conflicts of interest (financial or non-financial) to report.

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## Example's texts

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