

Towards a Taxonomy of Bullshit Illocutionary Acts: A Reply to Gascón and Mukerji and Mannino

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Abstract: I propose redefining Gascón's (2021) notion of argumentative bullshit by adding three words to its original formulation. Consequently, argumentative bullshit would be defined as the production of an argument without concern for *the strength of* the supporting relation between the reasons and the claim. I then examine Mukerji and Mannino's (2022) general account of argumentative bullshit. Using Grice's (1975) conversational maxims, I show how it can be further extended into a taxonomy of bullshit illocutionary acts—an extension Gascón himself hints at.

Résumé: Je propose de redéfinir la notion de « conneries argumentatives » de Gascón (2021) en ajoutant trois mots à sa formulation originale. Ainsi, le « conneries argumentatives » serait défini comme la production d'un argument sans se soucier de *la force* du lien de soutien entre les raisons et la conclusion. J'examine ensuite la définition générale de « conneries argumentatives » proposée par Mukerji et Mannino (2022). À l'aide des maximes conversationnelles de Grice, je montre comment cette définition peut être étendue à une taxonomie des actes illocutoires de « bullshit ».

Keywords: argumentation theory, bullshit argument, bullshit assertion, bullshit discourse, conversational maxims, illocutionary acts, linguistic pragmatics, rational argumentation

1. Introduction

This paper examines José Ángel Gascón's "Argumentative bullshit" (Gascón 2021) and Nikil Mukerji and Adriano Mannino's "Deeper into Argumentative Bullshit" (Mukerji and Mannino 2022), both of which are published in this journal. In Section 2, I

critique Gascón's definition of a bullshit argument, arguing that while it is flawed, it can easily be amended by adding three words. In Section 3, I use Grice's (1975) conversational maxims to analyse Mukerji and Mannino's proposal of a general account of argumentative bullshit. In Section 4, I discuss Meibauer's (2016) and Stokke's (2018) treatments of bullshit assertions, especially in relation to Grice's maxims. Finally, in Section 5, I explore how Mukerji and Mannino's account of argumentative bullshit can be further extended into a taxonomy of bullshit illocutionary acts—an extension Gascón himself hints at.

2. Gascón on argumentative bullshit

This section proceeds as follows:

- **§2.1:** I present Gascón's literal definition of a bullshit argument, which I call R_1 .
- **§§2.2–2.4:** I point to a key weakness in R_1 —if we adhere to it, most 'bullshit arguments' will not qualify as genuine arguments.
- **§§2.5–2.10:** I argue that R_1 disrupts the intended analogy with Frankfurt's concept of a bullshit assertion, on which it is purportedly based.
- **§§2.11–2.12:** I propose an improved definition of a bullshit argument— R_2 —by adding three words to Gascón's formulation.
- **§§2.13–2.18:** I analyse Gascón's examples of argumentative bullshit, showing that they in fact align more closely with R_2 than with R_1 .
- **§2.19:** I introduce a comparative table outlining key constitutive and regulative norms of assertions and arguments.
- **§§2.20:** I use R_2 to explain why counterarguing a bullshit argument feels odd while still recognizing it as an argument.

- §§2.21–2.22: I briefly discuss the nonalethic motivations behind bullshit arguments, showing that they are not always morally reprehensible.
- §§2.23–2.24: I assess Gascón’s comparison of lies, bullshit assertions, bullshit arguments, and bad arguments in light of R_2 .
- §2.25: I briefly examine Gascón’s suggestion to characterize as bullshit other types of speech acts beyond assertions and arguments.

2.1 Gascón introduces the notion of a **bullshit argument** as an extension of Harry Frankfurt’s concept of a **bullshit assertion**:

Harry Frankfurt characterised bullshit as assertions that are made without a concern for truth ... Here, I propose the concept of argumentative bullshit and show how a speech acts account of bullshit assertions can be generalised to bullshit arguments. Argumentative bullshit, on this account, would be the production of an argument without a concern for the supporting relation between reasons and claim (Gascón 2021, *Abstract*).

Taken literally, this extension defines **argumentative bullshit** as follows:

(R_1) The production of an argument **without any concern** for the supporting relation between the reasons and the claim, that is, without regard for whether such a relation even exists.

2.2 However, it seems odd to suppose that someone may produce an argument without any concern for whether there is a supporting relation between the reasons and the claim. The very notions of **arguing** and **providing reasons in support of a claim** are **inherently connected**:

Any attempt to explain what it is to be a reason for something seems to me to lead back to the same idea: a consideration that counts in favor of it. “Counts in favor how?” one might ask. “By

providing a reason for it” seems to be the only answer (Scanlon 1998, p. 17).¹

You can’t make much sense of the notions of premiss and conclusion unless you’ve got the notion of arguing; and you can’t make much sense of the notion of arguing unless you got the notions of premiss and conclusion (Pinto 1984, p. 16).

(See also Walton 2006, p. 6; Bermejo-Luque 2011, p. 108; Dutilh Novaes 2022, §1.) Hence, if we define argumentative bullshit as **R₁**, most ‘bullshit arguments’ **will not be arguments after all**; if a speaker is not trying to produce an argument, they will generally not produce one.

2.3 Gascón acknowledges this problem but fails, I believe, to fully grasp its implications:

I will focus on cases in which it is not even possible to pin down an argument that can be plausibly attributed to the arguer. In those cases, the argumentative utterance is so problematic that we cannot even outline a plausible scheme for the purported argument in order to assess its quality (Gascón 2021, p. 290).

the production of reasons for a claim without regard to whether the reasons given really support that claim ... The argumentative bullshitter ... does not care about the supporting relation (p. 293).

the arguer does not care about the relationship between the reasons and the claim ... they were never interested in supporting claims in the first place (pp. 300-301).

even though the arguer has produced something in the form of a reason, they do not seem committed to the belief that such a reason supports such a claim (p. 302).

Bullshit arguments are not real arguments; they are vaguely related claims whose point is rather to make a humorous pun, to appeal to religious or political sentiments, to portray oneself in a good light, or to denigrate the interlocutor, among many other possible purposes (p. 303).

¹ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this quotation.

interpreting it as an argument feels like a misrepresentation ... the arguer is just bullshitting (pp. 304-305).

However, if “bullshit arguments are not real arguments,” interpreting them as arguments “feels like a misrepresentation” and “it is not possible to pin down an argument that can be plausibly attributed to the arguer,” then we must ask: why define them as *arguments* in the first place?

2.4 In my opinion, if we were to take R_1 seriously, it would need to be completely rewritten. Rather than using the term ‘arguments,’ it should use ‘**bullshit pseudoarguments**,’ ‘bullshit evasive responses,’ or similar terminology. Instead of ‘reasons,’ it should refer to ‘apparent reasons.’ In addition, rather than referring to ‘the arguer’ in relation to it, we should merely say ‘the speaker.’

2.5 Moreover, R_1 appears to violate the analogy with Frankfurt’s concept of a bullshit assertion. Indeed, the defining characteristic of a bullshit assertion is indifference to truth:

Her statement is grounded neither in a belief that it is true nor, as a lie must be, in a belief that it is not true. It is just this lack of connection to a concern with truth—this indifference to how things really are—that I regard as the essence of bullshit (Frankfurt 2005, pp. 33–34).

This perspective makes sense because **aiming at truth** is a **regulative** but not a **constitutive norm of assertion**. By contrast, it would be nonsensical to say that ‘an assertion is bullshit if it is made without concern for making an assertion.’ However, this position is effectively what R_1 adopts in the case of bullshit arguments since the existence of a supporting relation between the reasons and the claim is not merely a regulative norm of argumentation but a constitutive norm. (In §2.19, I present a table comparing assertions and arguments with respect to these norms.)

2.6 Gascón identifies **commitment to truth** as a constitutive norm of assertion (2021, p. 297) but fails to properly distinguish it from aiming at truth (a regulative norm). This failure leads him into a

paradox regarding bullshit assertions—one that closely parallels the paradox he faces in the case of bullshit arguments:

The bullshitter, in this view, would be an asserter who does not honour the essential condition of assertion because they refuse to commit themselves to the truth of their assertions.

This may sound paradoxical: how could an assertion be made if the essential condition—that is, what *identifies* assertions—is not fulfilled? ... The solution to this puzzle, I believe, lies in the public character of the commitment ... If an utterance is seen as an assertion by their listeners, I would regard the essential condition of representatives as fulfilled—the speaker is indeed committed to the truth of the propositional content ... [even if] the speaker themselves does not acknowledge such commitment (Gascón 2021, pp. 297-298, his italics).

2.7 In my opinion, the defining trait of the bullshit asserter is not—unlike Gascón’s claim—that “they refuse to commit themselves to the truth of their assertions” or that they do “not acknowledge such commitment.” This refusal or lack of acknowledgment would be problematic because, as Gascón himself observes, “the public character of the commitment” imposes that commitment on the bullshit asserter whether they want to acknowledge it or not. A competent speaker understands this—at least tacitly—so they are unlikely to attempt to assert something while denying the commitment that comes with it. If they truly wished to avoid such a commitment, they would simply remain silent, shift the topic, ask a question, or explicitly distance themselves from the assertion by making a statement such as ‘Imagine I were to say so-and-so’ without actually asserting it.

2.8 Consider a child kicking a ball in the direction of a house, indifferent to whether doing so might break a window. Similarly, I argue that the bullshit asserter wants to *kick the ball*, that is, make the assertion, but does not care whether it *breaks a window*—whether the assertion is true or false. The bullshit asserter willingly takes on the commitment that comes with the assertion (otherwise, they would not assert it in the first place) but remains indif-

ferent to whether this commitment aligns with the facts. (As Pagin and Marsili observe, “[W]hen you assert that *p*, your primary commitment is to facts that are independent of your actions” [2021, §6.1].)

2.9 As Frankfurt explains:

What tends to go on in a bull session is that the participants try out various thoughts ... without its being assumed that they are committed to what they say ... The purpose of the conversation is not to communicate beliefs. Accordingly, the usual assumptions about the connection between what people say and what they believe are suspended. *The statements made in a bull session differ from bullshit* in that there is no pretense that this connection is being sustained (Frankfurt 2005, pp. 36-38, my italics).

Thus, in a genuine bullshit statement (one made outside a bull session), the usual commitments of assertions *are* in place. The bullshit asserter (at least tacitly) knows this fact and willingly makes the assertion yet remains indifferent to its truth. They do not care whether what they are saying is true or false, but they want to say it anyway.

2.10 Only on rare occasions, apart from bull sessions, might it appear that someone has made an assertion without wanting to accept the accompanying commitment. This situation can happen, for example, when a person speaks under duress or the influence of a drug, while acting in a play, or when inadvertently overheard thinking out loud. However, such cases differ from bullshit scenarios. One might argue that in such cases, just as with statements made in a bull session, the speaker did not truly intend to assert anything, and thus, no proper assertion was made. (Kenyon [2010] argues that seeming assertions made under duress are not genuine assertions but “capitulations.”)²

² An anonymous reviewer suggested that contrary to what I claim, one could still hold that neither bullshit assertions are genuine assertions nor bullshit arguments are genuine arguments. In this case, I would propose to define these notions clearly: it is confusing to define ‘bullshit assertions’ as ‘assertions such that so-and-so’ and then claim that ‘bullshit assertions are not genuine assertions.’ The same applies to bullshit arguments, as discussed in §§2.2–2.4.

2.11 Returning to bullshit arguments, notably, in certain passages of his paper, Gascón appears to shift focus. Instead of emphasizing whether the speaker intends to produce an argument rather than a nonargumentative utterance, he focuses on whether the speaker intends to produce a **good argument** rather than a **bad** one:

I would like to focus on a special case of bad argumentative performance, one that does not merely involve flawed arguments ... [In] a bad argument, ... the arguer is at least *trying* to put forward a good argument. They sincerely believe that their argument is good and should convince us, even if they are wrong (Gascón 2021, p. 290, his italics).

... arguments that were not designed to argue in a serious and responsible manner ... the anti-maskers' arguments do not seem to be serious arguments (p. 292).

... without considering whether *they themselves* even see their reasons as good grounds for their claim (p. 293, his italics).

2.12 These remarks suggest a way to resolve the issue with **R₁**: instead of defining a bullshit argument as mere indifference to the supporting relation between the reasons and the claim, we could frame it as indifference to the **quality** or **strength** of that relation. Accordingly, we can redefine argumentative bullshit as follows:

(R₂) the production of an argument without concern for **the strength of** the supporting relation between the reasons and the claim, that is, without concern for whether the reasons provide strong support for the claim according to the standards of reasonable argumentation.

This interpretation refines Gascón's definition by adding three words ("the strength of") to his original formulation. According to this reading, bullshit arguments remain genuine arguments, thus avoiding the paradox that **R₁** creates.

Once a coherent concept of 'bullshit pseudoassertion' or 'bullshit - pseudoargument' has been put forwards, it could be explored in detail.

2.13 A clearer contrast between these two readings of Gascón's definition (R_1 and R_2) emerges when we examine his own examples of argumentative bullshit. Interestingly, these examples appear to align more naturally with R_2 than with R_1 . Gascón's first two examples of argumentative bullshit are antimask arguments from 2020 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic:

I don't wear a mask for the same reason I don't wear underwear—things gotta breathe.

They want to throw God's wonderful breathing system out the door. You're all turning your backs on it (Gascón 2021, p. 291).

He describes these as "remarkable arguments" and "very bad arguments" (pp. 292-293) but also notes the following:

One cannot avoid the feeling that a reasonable counterargument ... would be very awkward ... Even if they are seriously committed to their opposition to masks, the anti-maskers' arguments do not seem to be serious arguments (p. 292).

Anti-maskers ... are simply using humour and religious appeals without considering whether *they themselves* even see their reasons as good grounds for their claim (p. 293, his italics).

Later, he elaborates:

Other times, the purported supporting relation would be so clearly absurd that it seems implausible to attribute it to the arguer. This was the case with the anti-maskers' arguments mentioned in the Introduction. Just imagine how implausible it would be to interpret the first of those interventions as something like the following argument:

The fact that genitals need to breathe is a good reason not to wear underwear.

The upper airways are similar to the genitals in this respect.

Therefore, there is a good reason not to wear a mask (p. 303).

2.14 All these examples are undoubtedly very bad arguments. The supporting relation between the reasons and the claim is extremely faint, as the antimaskers probably know. However, this does not mean that there is no supporting relation at all or that the anti-maskers are indifferent to whether there is one:

[W]e must agree that we are able to recognize reasons even if they are not good reasons (Bermejo-Luque 2011, p. 108).

In fact, Gascón himself refers to these as “arguments” and their premises as “reasons,” albeit very poor ones. Indeed, they could not be *bad arguments* if they were not arguments at all. Thus, I conclude that these utterances qualify as bullshit arguments because the speakers do not care about *the strength* of the supporting relation between the reasons and the claim, not because they do not care about there being *some* supporting relation. This point reinforces reading **R₂**, not **R₁**.

2.15 Gascón’s next example of a bullshit argument is Donald Trump’s 2017 defence of his intention to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on the grounds that he “was elected to represent the citizens of Pittsburgh, not Paris” (Gascón 2021, p. 303). Gascón contends that this reason was not a “serious reason” but argumentative bullshit:

This cannot be plausibly interpreted as a serious reason—even Trump knew that the Paris Agreement was not about the citizens of Paris ... The most plausible interpretation, I submit, is that it was argumentative bullshit. Bad arguments are arguments after all, but it is characteristic of argumentative bullshit that it typically cannot be plausibly interpreted as an argument to which the arguer is willing to commit themselves. Bullshit arguments are not real arguments (Gascón 2021, p. 303).

However, it seems to me that Trump was perfectly willing to commit to this argument, which is why he made it. Had he wanted to avoid such a commitment, he could have given an evasive, nonargumentative response, such as ‘Why are you asking?,’ ‘I will not talk about that today,’ ‘Please, ask me something else,’ or ‘I’m going to build a border wall, and Mexico is going to pay for it.’ Likewise, when the antimaskers were pressed to justify not wearing masks, they could have responded with evasive, nonargumentative remarks, such as ‘I have nothing to say,’ ‘Why don’t you mind your own business?,’ or ‘Here comes the *masquerade* again.’

2.16 In a more surreal scenario, both Trump and the antimaskers could have offered completely nonsensical propositions as reasons for their claims. For example, Trump might have said:

'We have to withdraw from the Paris Agreement because I have an uncle called Paul.'

The antimaskers might have said:

'We don't wear masks because seven times seven is forty-nine.'

In these cases, there would arguably be no connection whatsoever between the proposition given as the reason and the claim being made. Hence, one could reasonably defend that no proper reason has been given and that no proper argument has been made. However, Gascón's examples clearly differ from such cases.

2.17 In fact, Trump's Pittsburgh-Paris argument could easily be expanded (like the underwear example but in contrast to the surreal cases just mentioned). For example, Trump might have added: 'As President of the United States, I don't feel bound by treaties signed outside American soil where people have a right to vote for me,' aligning with his *Make America Great Again* slogan. This would also be a bad argument but an argument nonetheless. Therefore, it seems unfair to claim that Trump had no interest in supporting his claim with some reason. Rather, he was indifferent to the quality of the reason. This point further supports the **R₂** reading over **R₁**. Gascón provides additional examples of argumentative bullshit, but I do not analyse them here. The reasoning applied to these cases extends *mutatis mutandis* to the others.³

³ An anonymous reviewer argued that contrary to what I claim, both antimaskers' arguments and Trump's Pittsburgh-Paris argument actually fit **R₁** better than they do **R₂**. According to this reviewer, the premises of these arguments are completely irrelevant to their conclusions, making them just as surreal as the examples given in §2.16—except for the fact that the former are drawn from real-life discourse and the latter are not. If that is the case, they should be studied as bullshit *pseudoarguments*, once this notion has been coherently defined (see §2.4 and footnote 2).

2.18 Based on the above, I conclude that R_2 is the most useful reading of Gascón’s notion of a bullshit argument:

Argumentative bullshit is the production of an argument without concern for the strength of the supporting relation between the reasons and the claim.

This definition adds three words (‘the strength of’) to Gascón’s original formulation. However, we have shown that it aligns with some aspects of his own reasoning and that the alternative reading (R_1) is flawed.

2.19 Notably, according to R_2 , the distinctive feature of a bullshit argument is not the absence of a constitutive norm of arguing but the absence of a regulative norm—namely, aiming for a strong supporting relation between the reasons and the claim (i.e., aiming for **cogency**). Thus, R_2 allows us to regard bullshit arguments as genuine arguments, in contrast with R_1 . The following table summarizes how assertions and arguments are constrained by the constitutive and regulative norms we have discussed:

Norm	Assertion	Argument
Constitutive Norm	Commitment to truth (without this, there is no assertion)	The reasons support the claim (if they do not, there is no argument)
Regulative Norm	Aiming at truth (the speaker can be held publicly responsible if the assertion is false)	Aiming for cogency (the speaker can be held publicly responsible if the reasons do not strongly support the claim)

(“[I]n the case of [a] statement ... I can be held publicly responsible if it turns out to be false” Searle 2010, p. 82.)

2.20 R_2 also allows us to explain why it feels “odd” or “awkward” to counterargue a bullshit argument (as Gascón remarks, p. 292) without denying that it is a genuine argument. By **grossly neglecting their duty** to aim for a good supporting relation between the reasons and the claim, the bullshit arguer makes it clear that they are not interested in a serious, rational argumentative exchange. They are willing to ‘argue’ in the formal sense of the word, but in most cases, they are not trying to change the other’s mind—nor are they prepared to change theirs—during the discussion. They are bullshitting in argumentation in the same way that bullshit asserters do in representative discourse: the bullshit arguer disregards the *cogency* of the argument, just as the bullshit asserter disregards the *truth* of the proposition asserted.

2.21 Naturally, bullshit arguers typically have nonalethic motivations for arguing the way they do. They may aim to fire up their base, infuriate their opponents, sell a product, or pursue some other goal, and they may be quite effective in achieving these ends. For instance, the bullshit argument that ‘If you love your baby, you should buy our products’ may serve as a powerful selling tool. In this respect, again, bullshit arguments do not differ from bullshit assertions. Both bullshit assertions and bullshit arguments are defined by an indifference: the **lack of a particular intention** on the part of the speaker. In the case of a bullshit assertion, the defining factor is indifference towards the truth of the proposition asserted. In the case of a bullshit argument, I have thus far argued that the defining factor is indifference towards the strength of the supporting relation between the reasons and the claim (we will soon see that there is a second type of indifference that should also be considered). However, both bullshit asserters and bullshit arguers typically have nonalethic motivations for saying what they say, and they may be very effective at fulfilling those motivations. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine these motivations in detail, but it is easy to see that they do not always need to be of a deceitful or reprehensible nature.

2.22 In fact, Gascón acknowledges, in relation to bullshit assertions, that

[B]ullshit is tolerated and even encouraged in many contexts of interpersonal relations where truth is not the main concern. These are usually contexts in which politeness trumps truth, as in the elevator example (Gascón 2021, p. 295).

I believe the same reasoning applies to bullshit arguments. For example, to be polite to a neighbour in a lift, I might say, ‘The weather will be nice tomorrow’—without caring whether it is true, just to make conversation—and this statement would count as a bullshit assertion. (This is Gascón’s elevator example [p. 292], slightly rephrased.) However, I could also say, ‘The weather will be nice tomorrow, I feel it,’ thereby adding a (very poor) reason to support my claim. This would count as an argument, albeit a very weak one. Moreover, if I utter it without concern for cogency, simply to make conversation, it would be a bullshit argument. However, I do not intend to deceive or harm my neighbour by making this argument—I am just being polite. It is easy to conceive of other examples in which bullshit arguments are produced with a respectful, caring, or even compassionate intent.

2.23 Furthermore, R_2 allows us to refine the comparison that Gascón draws between lies, bullshit assertions, bullshit arguments, and bad arguments of various kinds. First, the bullshit asserter is undoubtedly “unlike a liar” because “lies are assertions that are believed to be false,” whereas “the bullshitter is unconcerned about whether the assertions they are making are true or false” (Gascón 2021, pp. 292–293). However, as we have repeatedly emphasized, argumentative bullshit cannot be “the production of reasons for a claim without regard to whether the reasons given really support that claim” (p. 293) because that would undermine the argumentative nature of the utterance, resulting in a virtual contradiction in terms. Instead, argumentative bullshit should be defined as the production of reasons for a claim without regard to whether the reasons provide *strong* support for the claim. Hence, the ‘argumentative liar’ would be, by comparison, a speaker who knowingly provides *weak* reasons in support of a claim. This strategy aligns closely with “sophisms”—that is, “argumentative tactics

used to deceive an audience”—which Gascón (rightly, in my view) classifies alongside lies (p. 293).

2.24 In addition to sophisms, Gascón discusses “paralogisms” (i.e., “errors of reasoning”) and “bad arguments that are put forward sincerely,” equating them to “those who ... mistakenly make a false assertion” (2021, p. 293). I agree. An arguer who inadvertently reasons incorrectly or puts forwards a bad argument without intending to is not comparable to a liar. Rather, they resemble an asserter who, in good faith, attempts to state the truth but happens to be mistaken and thus produces a false assertion. In the next section, I defend that producing an argument without concern for the truth of its premises should also be considered argumentative bullshit. (In fact, this case constitutes the second form of indifference I alluded to in §2.21.) If this reasoning is correct, then a speaker who knowingly provides *false* reasons in support of a claim would also qualify as an ‘argumentative liar’ (or a kind of “sophist” to use Gascón’s term).

2.25 Finally, it is worth noting that Gascón suggests “to characterise as bullshit not only assertions but also other types of speech acts” (2021, footnote 8, p. 298). In particular, he mentions promises and orders. Regarding bullshit promises, Gascón writes that they “can be promises in which the speaker does not regard themselves as *committed* to perform the action in question—even if they *intend* to do it and therefore fulfil the sincerity condition” (footnote 8, p. 298, his italics). This view parallels Gascón’s position on bullshit assertions as discussed in §2.6 and is liable to similar criticisms. Regarding bullshit orders, Gascón claims that they “can be orders in which the speaker does not *expect* the listener to perform the action in question—even if they *want* the listener to do it” (footnote 8, p. 298, his italics). I think it would have been more coherent, from Gascón’s perspective, to characterize bullshit orders as those in which “the speaker does not regard themselves as committed to having ordered anything” (or something to that effect). In any case, we take up this suggestion in Section 5 and develop it into a systematic taxonomy of bullshit

illocutionary acts. Our analysis of bullshit promises and bullshit orders, however, will differ from Gascón's as much as our treatment of bullshit assertions and bullshit arguments does.

3. Mukerji and Mannino on argumentative bullshit

This section critically examines Mukerji and Mannino's (2022) discussion of argumentative bullshit.

- **§3.1:** I point out that Mukerji and Mannino's discussion of Gascón's proposal overlooks the difficulties with R_1 that we identified in §§2.2–2.4.
- **§3.2:** I defend Gascón's position against an objection raised by Mukerji and Mannino on a minor point.
- **§§3.3–3.5:** Drawing inspiration from a comment by these two authors, I propose a further refinement of Gascón's definition of argumentative bullshit, which I call R_3 .
- **§3.6:** I apply R_3 to two of Gascón's examples of argumentative bullshit.
- **§3.7:** I summarize Mukerji and Mannino's account of Cohen's and Carson's non-Frankfurtian varieties of bullshit assertion.
- **§3.8:** I use Grice's conversational maxims to assess Frankfurt's, Cohen's, and Carson's varieties of bullshit assertion.
- **§§3.9–3.12:** I discuss Mukerji and Mannino's definition of argumentative bullshit.

3.1 In their analysis of Gascón's paper, Mukerji and Mannino do not address the difficulties with R_1 that we identified in §§2.2–2.4. If anything, they appear to dismiss R_2 as a plausible reconstruction of Gascón's concept:

[T]he essential Frankfurtian feature of argumentative bullshit is that the arguer does not care whether the premisses of her argument are true ... or whether the premisses genuinely support her conclusion ... The quality of the argument is neither here nor there (Mukerji and Mannino 2022, p. 454).

3.2 Mukerji and Mannino object to Gascón's claim that "there are no necessary and sufficient conditions that uniquely identify argumentative bullshit," arguing that he has, in fact, provided a clear-cut definition of the concept (Mukerji and Mannino 2022, p. 449, n. 13 [quoting Gascón 2021, p. 306]). However, I believe they overlook an important distinction. Immediately before making this claim, Gascón states that "certain guidelines can be outlined to detect the likely presence of argumentative bullshit." Among the examples he provides are "When critically questioned about the supporting relation between reasons and claim, the arguer refuses to discuss it" and "Counterexamples ... are disregarded outright by the speaker" (Gascón 2021, p. 306). Thus, when Gascón asserts that there are no necessary and sufficient conditions that uniquely identify argumentative bullshit, he is referring to these indicative guidelines, not to definitional conditions. We must bear in mind that the key element of bullshit arguments (like that of bullshit assertions) lies **within the sphere of the speaker's intentions**. Consequently, the **external indicators** that Gascón offers as hints for detecting "the likely presence of argumentative bullshit" are not definitional criteria but rather observable symptoms of the phenomenon. I believe these symptoms are what Gascón is referring to when he states that they cannot be reduced to a list of necessary and sufficient conditions.

3.3 Mukerji and Mannino (2022) also criticize the division that Gascón draws between arguments that are **bullshit because of the relation between the reasons and the claim** and arguments that are **based on bullshit premises**:

When an arguer puts forward an argument ... they commit themselves to two aspects of the argument: the truth of the reasons and the supporting relation between the reasons and the claim ... Argumentative bullshit regarding reasons, then, would involve an arguer being unwilling to commit themselves to the truth of certain

assertions. This is simply Frankfurt's concept of bullshit ... and for this reason I will leave it aside.

The kind of argumentative bullshit that I find most interesting has to do with the supporting relation between a reason and a claim. In what follows, I will use the term "argumentative bullshit" to refer only to that specific kind (Gascón 2021, p. 300).

Mukerji and Mannino argue that this division is unjustified:

Gascón thinks that if ... the arguer is indifferent as to whether her premises actually support her conclusion, then it cannot be reduced to ordinary Frankfurtian bullshit ... we beg to differ. It is simply not clear to us why argumentative bullshit ... should not be viewed as ordinary Frankfurtian bullshit just because the essential bullshit attitude concerns the supporting relation between premisses and conclusion rather than the premisses themselves (Mukerji and Mannino 2022, p. 450).

3.4 I disagree with both Gascón and Mukerji and Mannino on this point. In my view, Gascón mistakenly downplays the difference between arguments that are bullshit because they have bullshit premises and plain bullshit statements. In fact, he should not deny the label 'argumentative bullshit' for the former (I will elaborate on this point immediately). However, Mukerji and Mannino also err, in my opinion, by downplaying the difference between arguments that are bullshit due to their premises and those that are bullshit due to the relation between the premises and the claim. This distinction will be highlighted in the taxonomy of bullshit illocutionary acts that we will explore in Section 5.

3.5 This understanding suggests a further refinement of the definition of argumentative bullshit introduced in the previous section:

(R₃) Argumentative bullshit is the production of an argument without concern for the truth of its premises or the strength of the supporting relation between the premises and the conclusion.

(I have chosen to refer to 'the premises and the conclusion' instead of 'the reasons and the claim' for purely stylistic reasons; I do not ascribe any substantive difference to these pairs of terms in the present context.) According to **R₃**, an argument can qualify as

bullshit in three different ways: (i) by relying on bullshit premises, (ii) by displaying indifference towards the strength of the supporting relation between the premises and the conclusion, and (iii) by exhibiting both flaws simultaneously. All such cases are ‘Frankfurtian,’ but it is useful to distinguish them from plain bullshit assertions.

3.6 Gascón’s first two examples arguably exhibit both flaws. Indeed, it is doubtful that the antimaskers truly refrained from wearing underwear, and it is foolish to assume that “They want to throw God’s breathing system out the door.” Consequently, the antimaskers were not only indifferent to the strength of the supporting relation between the premises and claim but also to the truth of the premises themselves. We will return to **R**₃ in §3.21.

3.7 Furthermore, Mukerji and Mannino introduce into the discussion several non-Frankfurtian varieties of bullshit, aiming to expand Gascón’s framework into “**a general account of argumentative bullshit**” (2022, p. 468):

... on Frankfurt’s view, what a speaker says will be categorised as bullshit only if she has the requisite attitude, namely an indifference to the truth of what she says ... Cohen thinks this cannot be the whole story. For it would make it conceptually impossible to categorise any incomprehensible gibberish uttered by a hopelessly confused person as bullshit so long as she genuinely tries to make a valuable contribution to a debate. Intuitively, though, there is a sense in which nonsensical utterances are bullshit, too, even if they are made in earnest (Mukerji and Mannino 2022, p. 443).

As Thomas L. Carson (2016) argues, there are other senses, besides Cohen’s, in which an utterance can be bullshit without there being an indifference to the truth on the part of the bullshitter.

- The first kind of such bullshit may be classed as *evasive bullshit*. It is marked by the bullshitter’s refusal to answer the question under consideration ...
- The second kind may be called *rambling bullshit* (though this is not Carson’s own phrase). To illustrate it, Carson gives the example of a student taking an exam in which she is asked to write an essay on a clearly defined question about which she basically

knows nothing. However, she expects her teacher to give her partial credit for “making an effort” and writing anything that comes to mind. Therefore, this is what she does (p. 444, their italics).

... the account of argumentative bullshit that Gascón offers may be generalised to accommodate such non-Frankfurtian notions of bullshit (Mukerji and Mannino 2022, p. 459).

3.8 There is a striking connection between this repertoire of bullshit types and **Grice’s conversational maxims** (Grice 1975). Specifically, an assertion qualifies as Frankfurtian bullshit when it is made **without regard for the maxim of quality** (i.e., the speaker does not care about truth). An assertion counts as Cohenian bullshit if it involves an **irreparable violation of the maxim of manner** (i.e., the utterance is unclarifiable; see Cohen 2002, p. 332; Mukerji and Mannino 2022, p. 459). Finally, an assertion qualifies as Carsonian bullshit (whether “evasive” or “rambling”) if it entails a **deliberate violation of the maxim of relation** (i.e., the speaker chooses not to be relevant). These connections will also help us develop our taxonomy of illocutionary bullshit acts in Section 5.

3.9 Mukerji and Mannino propose their own definition of argumentative bullshit, distinguishing between two primary types:

Frankfurtian argumentative bullshit ... that which results when someone argues with *indifference to the standards of reasonable argumentation* (Mukerji and Mannino 2022, p. 462, their bold type and italics).

Cohenian argumentative bullshit ... that which results when an *arguer utters unclarifiable nonsense* to support a proposition (p. 466, their bold type and italics).

3.10 In addition to these types, they discuss two further categories:

Above, we mentioned two other types of bullshit that Carson discusses. The first was *evasive bullshit* ... can there be evasive, argumentative bullshit as well? It seems to us that there can be. This occurs when a speaker has been asked whether she affirms or denies *p* and ... in an attempt to avoid committing herself to either *p*

or $\neg p$... she ... draw[s] inferences ... [with] no answer to the question (Mukerji and Mannino 2022, p. 460, their italics).

Finally, then, there is *rambling bullshit* ... An argumentative version of rambling bullshit results when some part of the rambling is made to look like it logically supports some other part of the rambling (p. 460, their italics).

Mukerji and Mannino do not clarify whether ‘Carsonian argumentative bullshit’ (my term, not theirs), in either of these two forms, should be classified as a subtype of Frankfurtian or Cohenian argumentative bullshit. It seems that it should not be. Carsonian bullshit is a deliberate violation of the conversational maxim of relevance rather than mere indifference to it. Therefore, even if one considers relevance to be among the standards of reasonable argumentation, Carsonian bullshit would not count as Frankfurtian bullshit. Nor would it be Cohenian since the maxims violated in each case—relevance for Carsonian bullshit and clarity for Cohenian bullshit—are distinct.

3.11 Another aspect that Mukerji and Mannino leave unspecified is their conception of “standards of reasonable argumentation.” Consequently, their definition of Frankfurtian argumentative bullshit is a **conceptual framework** (or “conceptual account,” as they term it [p. 465]) rather than a fully developed theory:

When paired with a substantive account of what these standards are, this concept is developed into a full *conception of argumentative bullshit* (Mukerji and Mannino 2022, p. 465, their italics).

I take this aspect to be a strength of their definition. By not committing to a specific set of argumentative standards, it allows for different ways of completing the definition, according to different conceptions of such standards.

3.12 Thus, if we adopt a rudimentary model of argumentation evaluation, where a good argument consists of true premises and strong support for its conclusion, then the way to spell out Frankfurtian argumentative bullshit will be precisely **R3**. However, this model has faced criticism, and many alternatives have been proposed (Bermejo-Luque 2011, p. 14). For example, a good argu-

ment has been defined as one that would convince a universal audience (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1958/1969, p. 31), persuade a reasonable critic (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p. 1), further the resolution of a dispute about expressed opinions (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984, p. 151) or show its target-claim to be correct (Bermejo-Luque 2011, p. 14). Each of these models leads to a different interpretation of Mukerji and Manino's definition of Frankfurtian argumentative bullshit (e.g., 'indifference to convincing a universal audience,' 'indifference to persuading a reasonable critic,' and so on).

4. Meibauer and Stokke on bullshit assertions

This section critically examines Meibauer's (2016) and Stokke's (2018) discussion of bullshit assertions, especially in relation to Grice's conversational maxims.⁴

- **§4.1:** I note that Meibauer (following Cohen) recognizes Frankfurtian bullshit and Cohenian bullshit. However, he disregards Carson's evasiveness as a kind of bullshit.
- **§4.2:** I argue that Meibauer fails to distinguish between a loose concern for truth and a complete lack of concern for it.
- **§§4.3–4.7:** I critique Meibauer's two reconstructions of Frankfurt's concept of bullshit, pointing out that in both of them, clause (b) is incompatible with clauses (a) and (c).
- **§§4.8–4.9:** I contend that, even if one follows Stokke in rejecting Grice's maxims as the basis for a general definition of bullshitting, they remain useful for classifying different subtypes of bullshit.

4.1 Meibauer observes:

Cohen (2002: 338) ... draws a distinction between general bullshit (Frankfurt bullshit) and academic bullshit (Cohen bullshit). The

⁴ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for bringing these works to my attention and pointing out the need to discuss them here.

former is connected to everyday life ... and its essence [is] the speaker's indifference to truth. The latter, in contrast, is connected to the academy ... and its essence [is] the unclarifiability of bullshit (Meibauer 2016, p. 84.)

However, Meibauer does not classify evasiveness as a form of bullshit, stating:

Carson is certainly right in observing that the candidate acts evasively. However, it is not clear whether his answer constitutes bullshit. What he is concerned with is not the truth but how he can avoid a truthful statement. In this sense, it does *not* constitute bullshit since it does not display an indifference to what is true (Meibauer 2016, p. 79, his italics).

4.2 Furthermore, Meibauer seems to overlook the difference between having **a loose concern** for truth and having **a lack of concern** for truth (i.e., no concern at all). Throughout his discussion, he repeatedly cites Frankfurt as defining bullshit assertions in terms of the latter:

Frankfurt's bullshit heuristics basically comprises two ingredients. The first ingredient is a certain "lack of concern for the truth" (Meibauer 2016, p. 71).

[T]he Frankfurtian concept of bullshitting ... has to do with an indifferent attitude to truth (p. 84).

Frankfurt characterizes the bullshitter as follows: "He does not reject the authority of truth, as the liar does, and oppose himself to it. He pays *no attention to it at all*. By virtue of this, bullshit is a greater enemy of the truth than lies are." (p. 87 [quoting Frankfurt 2005, p. 61], my italics).

Meibauer also states:

In the following, I will stick to Frankfurt's intuitions ... (p. 71).

The core of bullshitting is always indifference to truth (p. 86).

Despite these statements, his reconstructions of Frankfurt's concept are framed in terms of a "loose concern for truth," as if 'loose concern' and 'no concern' were interchangeable:

Bullshitting (revised)

The speaker was bullshitting at time t that p iff:

- a. The speaker acted as if he asserted that p , however:
- b. [loose concern for the truth] the speaker neither intended to present p as true nor intended to present p as not true.
- c. [misrepresentational intent] the speaker intended that the addressee does not become aware of (b).
- d. [too much certainty] the speaker presented p with far more certainty than would be adequate considering his loose concern for the truth (see (b)).

(Meibauer 2016, p. 75, his italics; and similarly on p. 72, without clause d).

This approach is puzzling to me. In general, having a loose concern for something implies *some* concern, though not much. This case is distinctly different from that of having *no concern at all*.

4.3 Furthermore, there seems to be an issue with the two reconstructions of Frankfurt's concept of bullshit that Meibauer presents (on pp. 72 and 75, respectively). In particular, clause (b) does not appear to entail a loose concern for truth, nor does it align with Frankfurt's definition. More importantly, this clause seems incompatible with clauses (a) and (c) in these reconstructions. Specifically, it cannot be the case that the bullshitter simultaneously (a) "acted as if he asserted that p ," (b) "neither intended to present p as true nor as not true," and (c) "intended that the addressee does not become aware of (b)." I cannot make sense of this situation.

4.4 For example, an actress performing in a play will act as if she is asserting p (clause a), without intending to present p as true or false (clause b). However, to do this, she needs the audience to recognize that she is merely acting. Otherwise, the audience might interpret her words as serious, nonfictional claims (e.g., if she says that she is a serial killer, someone might call the police). This, of course, is not the usual intent in a theatrical performance. Therefore, it seems that in such a context, clause (c) cannot coexist with clauses (a) and (b).

4.5 On the other hand, it can be argued that the participants in a bull session (as Frankfurt describes these sessions) do not actually intend to make the assertions they seem to be making. They act as though they are making those assertions (clause *a*) but without intending to present them as true (clause *b*). However, in so doing, they rely on the fact that the audience (i.e., the other participants in the bull session) understands this intent, at least tacitly. This shared understanding allows them to speak freely, without the usual commitments. Therefore, clause (*c*) does not apply in this case either.

4.6 Finally, in a proper bullshit assertion (made outside of a bull session), it can be argued that the speaker does not normally want the audience to be aware of their intentions (similar to clause *c*). However, if the speaker acts as though they are asserting *p* and the audience is unaware of any hidden disclaimer, then the audience will take the speaker's utterance as a genuine assertion. Hence, the audience will interpret that the speaker has presented *p* as true. The speaker (at least tacitly) knows this fact, so they cannot 'act as if they were asserting *p*' and 'intended not to present *p* as true' at the same time. Hence, clause (*a*) and something similar to clause (*c*) are satisfied in bullshit assertions but not clause (*b*).

4.7 In fact, I cannot imagine any unfoolish speaking or normative situation in which clauses analogous to (*a*), (*b*) and (*c*) are simultaneously present. For example, someone may sign a contract without caring about the commitments they are making and may not want the other party to realize this fact. However, no rational person would 'act' as if they were signing a contract without intending to make a commitment while also hiding this fact from the other party. This situation would not make sense because people understand that once a contract is signed (assuming that all the legal requirements are met), they are bound by it. Notice the crucial difference between 'signing a contract **without caring about** the commitments it entails,' 'signing a contract **without intending to comply** with those commitments,' and 'signing a contract **without intending to make** those commitments at all.' Each case corresponds to a completely different intentional state: the first is anal-

ogous to the bullshitter, the second to the liar, and the third to the actress in a play or the participant in a bull session.

4.8 Regarding Stokke (2018), it is important to note that his analysis of bullshit in this book is part of a broader discussion on *Lying and Insincerity* (the book's title). In Chapter 2 ("Lying and Gricean Quality"), he expresses a clear preference for Stalnaker's theory of communication over Grice's conversational maxims for the analysis of lying and insincere speech:

I think that the right way to understand insincere speech is in terms of the theory of communication found in the work of Robert Stalnaker ... In this chapter I will be concerned with arguing against an alternative way of thinking of lying in terms of the liar's communicative goals. In particular, I will be concerned with arguing against conceptions of lying based on the Gricean maxims of Quality (Stokke 2018, p. 37).

Then, in §6.3 ("Bullshitting and Gricean Quality"), Stokke does not consider distinguishing between different kinds of bullshit assertions based on which conversational maxim is violated and in what way. Instead, he examines a range of cases that have been identified as instances of bullshit (by Frankfurt, Carson, and others) and argues that no characterization in terms of Grice's maxim of quality can account for them all. From this examination, Stokke draws the conclusion that, much like lying, bullshit cannot be adequately analysed through Gricean maxims. Instead, he proposes his framework of *Questions Under Discussion* ("QUD", which is based on proposals by Craige Roberts and Robert Stalnaker):

it seems doubtful that one can identify a sufficient condition for bullshitting in terms of (a version of) the Second Maxim of Quality. As I now go on to argue, the same applies to the other Quality maxims (Stokke 2018, p. 145).

In Part I of this book I argued that, instead of characterizing lying and misleading in terms of Gricean norms of conversation, these kinds of non-alethic modes of speech are better understood in terms of their relation to inquiry, and in particular, to subinquiries, or QUDs. We will see that the same framework provides an elegant and illuminating way of accounting for the phenomenon of bullshitting, or speaking with indifference toward truth (p. 146).

4.9 However, even if we grant Stokke's claim that his characterization of bullshitting in terms of QUD accounts for all cases of bullshit assertions (or even bullshit arguments, if we interpret his framework broadly), it is still useful to divide this complex phenomenon into smaller subcategories. My aim here is not to provide **an all-encompassing definition** of bullshitting but rather to construct **a clear and practical taxonomy** of different types of bullshit illocutionary acts. In this respect, Stokke has not shown that Grice's maxims cannot serve this purpose.

5. Towards a taxonomy of bullshit illocutionary acts

This section proposes a taxonomy of bullshit illocutionary acts, without claiming to be definitive or exhaustive.

- **§§5.1–5.5:** I categorise simple illocutionary acts into five types (following Searle's [1975] taxonomy) and identify three forms of bullshit—Frankfurtian, Cohenian, and Carsonian—within each.
- **§5.6:** I extend this framework to a complex illocutionary act—argumentation—and identify three forms of argumentative bullshit: Frankfurtian, Cohenian, and Carsonian. The first type is further divided into two subcategories: bullshit owing to the premises and bullshit owing to the relation between the premises and the conclusion.

5.1 Representatives (assertions)

- *5.1.1 Frankfurtian Bullshit Assertions*

Assertions made without a concern for truth—not intending to lie but indifferent to whether what is said is true (thus without regard for Grice's maxim of quality). For examples, see Frankfurt (2005).

- *5.1.2 Cohenian bullshit assertions*

Assertions made in an obscure and unclarifiable way (thus constituting an irreparable violation of Grice's maxim of manner). For examples, see Cohen (2002).

- 5.1.3 *Carsonian bullshit assertions*

Assertions in which the speaker deliberately avoids being relevant to the conversation (thus involving a deliberate violation of Grice's maxim of relation). For examples, see Carson (2016). (The distinction mentioned in §3.7 between evasive and rambling bullshit is, I believe, too fine-grained to be included in this general framework.)

5.2 *Directives (orders and similar speech acts)*

- 5.2.1 *Frankfurtian bullshit directives*

Orders (or analogues) issued without concern for whether the hearer will fulfil the request—not because the speaker does not want them to do so but because they are indifferent to whether it happens. *Example:* Asking a neighbour for salt as a pretext for making their acquaintance without caring about actually receiving the salt.

- 5.2.2 *Cohenian bullshit directives*

Orders (or analogues) given in an obscure and unclarifiable way (similar to 5.1.2). *Example:*

'Write an essay in which you dialectically explain the logic or form of explanation specifically adapted to the determinant intervention of class struggle in the very fabric of history.'

(Inspired by Cohen 2002, p. 339, n. 28.)

- 5.2.3 *Carsonian bullshit directives*

Orders (or analogues) in which the speaker deliberately avoids being relevant to the conversation (similarly to 5.1.3). *Example:*

'Can I get you something to drink?'

'Get me a new job, please.'

5.3 *Commissives (promises and similar speech acts)*

- 5.3.1 *Frankfurtian bullshit commissives*

Promises (or analogous commitments) made without concern for fulfilling them—not with the intent to break the promise but indifferent to whether they will keep it. *Example:*

'I'll take you to the party if you promise to behave.'

'Yeah, I promise to behave.'

(Spoken absentmindedly simply to gain access to the party.)

- 5.3.2 *Cohenian bullshit commissives*

Promises (or analogous commitments) expressed in an obscure and unclarifiable way (as in 5.1.2 and 5.2.2). *Example:*

I promise to dialectically explain the logic ...' (as before).

- 5.3.3 *Carsonian bullshit commissives*

Promises (or analogous commitments) in which the speaker deliberately avoids being relevant to the conversation (as in 5.1.3 and 5.2.3). *Example:*

'Do you promise to clean the house?'

'I promise not to watch too much TV.'

5.4 *Expressives (verbal expressions of psychological states)*

- 5.4.1 *Frankfurtian bullshit expressives*

Verbal expressions of psychological states made without concern for truth—not with the intent to deceive but with indifference as to whether the expressed inner state is genuine. *Example:*

'Say thanks.'

'Thanks.'

(Spoken absentmindedly, merely to comply with the request.)

- 5.4.2 *Cohenian bullshit expressives*

Verbal expressions of psychological states that are obscure and unclarifiable (as in 5.1.2, 5.2.2, etc.). *Example:*

'I feel as if I was ready to dialectically explain the logic ...'
(as before).

- 5.4.3 *Carsonian bullshit expressives*

Verbal expressions of psychological states in which the speaker deliberately avoids being relevant to the conversation (as in 5.1.3, 5.2.3, etc.). *Example:*

'Do you like working here?'

'I've got a headache.'

5.5 *Declarations (speech acts that, if successful, bring about a state of affairs by their very performance)*

- 5.5.1 *Frankfurtian bullshit declarations*

Declarations made without concern for whether the declared state of affairs actually comes about—not because the speaker opposes the outcome but because they are indifferent to it. *Example:*

'To get the money, you have to accept the award.'

'OK, I accept the award.'

(Spoken absentmindedly, simply to receive the money.)

- 5.5.2 *Cohenian bullshit declarations*

Declarations made in an obscure and unclarifiable way (as in 5.1.2, 5.2.2, etc.). *Example:*

'We shall define dialectic in this book as the logic or form of explanation ...' (as before).

- 5.5.3 *Carsonian bullshit declarations*

Declarations in which the speaker deliberately avoids being relevant to the conversation (as in 5.1.3, 5.2.3, etc.). *Example:*

'What is your opinion on this matter as President of the Committee?'

'As President of the Committee, I declare that this meeting is over.'

5.6 Argumentation

(See Bermejo-Luque 2011, pp. 71–72, for a characterization of argumentation as a complex illocutionary act.) The definitions of Frankfurtian, Cohenian and Carsonian bullshit arguments are adapted from Mukerji and Mannino's definitions.

- 5.6.1 *Frankfurtian bullshit arguments*

Arguments made without concern for the standards of reasonable argumentation—not with the deliberate intent to violate them but with indifference to whether those standards are met. I propose calling this category **Mukerji and Mannino bullshit (MM bullshit)** for short). The precise characterization of this category may vary depending on the conception of reasonable argumentation. However, it seems that, in most frameworks, indifference to whether the premises are true or whether they provide strong support for the conclusion will constitute indifference to argumentative standards, whatever these are. This reasoning leads to two specific subtypes:

- 5.6.1.1 *Frankfurtian bullshit arguments regarding the premises*

Arguments made without concern for the truth of the premises—not intending to use false premises but indifferent to whether they are true (similar to 5.1.1). *Example:*

'Science tells us that there is life on other planets, so why not believe it?'

(Said by someone who is indifferent to whether the premise—'Science tells us that there is life on other planets'—is true but recognizes that, if it were true, it would strongly support the conclusion that there is life on other planets.)

- 5.6.1.2 *Frankfurtian bullshit arguments regarding the relation between the premises and the conclusion*

Arguments made without concern for the strength of the supporting relation between the premises and the conclusion—not intending to commit a fallacy but indifferent to whether the premises provide strong support for the conclusion. *Example:*

‘Many people are convinced that there is life on other planets, so why don’t you?’

(Said by someone who knows that the premise—‘Many people are convinced that there is life on other planets’—is true but is indifferent to the fact that it provides weak support for the conclusion that there is life on other planets.)

- 5.6.2 *Cohenian bullshit arguments*

Arguments made in an obscure and unclarifiable way (similar to 5.1.2, 5.2.2, etc.). *Example:*

‘Marx was right, as you will see if you dialectically explain the logic ...’ (as before).

- 5.6.3 *Carsonian Bullshit Arguments*

Arguments in which the speaker deliberately avoids being relevant to the conversation (similar to 5.1.3, 5.2.3, etc.). *Example:*

‘What do you think about climate change?’

‘Church’s theorem implies that first-order logic is undecidable.’

Notice that, unlike the surreal examples discussed in §2.16, this response provides a genuine argument—the argument from Church’s theorem to the undecidability of first-order logic. What makes this argument bullshit is its irrelevance to the conversation in which it appears. (The distinction mentioned in §3.10 between evasive and rambling argumentative bullshit is, I believe, too fine-grained to be included in this general framework.)

6. Conclusion

Just as Harry Frankfurt opened the door to the academic discussion of bullshit assertions, so José Ángel Gascón has for bullshit

arguments. Just as Gerald Cohen and Thomas Carson expanded Frankfurt's notion to include new types of bullshit assertions that Frankfurt had not considered, so Nikil Mukerji and Adriano Mannino have extended Gascón's concept of argumentative bullshit. The groundwork has now been laid for the study of argumentative bullshit to develop further, just as the study of bullshit in representative discourse has developed in recent decades.

In this article, I have highlighted two key points that can advance this line of inquiry. First, Gascón's original definition is ill-formed but easily corrected with the addition of three words. Second, Mukerji and Mannino's general framework for argumentative bullshit can be expanded into a more comprehensive taxonomy of bullshit illocutionary acts, paving the way for the investigation of yet more types of bullshit discourse.

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