

Part Of The Narrative

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Over the past two years at least, “fake news” has been a major topic of discussion; we hear it a lot from President Trump. We have all seen or heard fake news if we watch or hear any kind of news programming. We hear it in the Mueller Russian probe, the Kavanaugh confirmation hearings, the mid-term elections, the #MeToo movement, the LGBTQ hysteria, climate change, and so forth—all contain elements of fake news or are made of it of whole cloth.

Why do people believe fake news? Can't they see right through it—just like we can—that it doesn't make any sense or that it is factually wrong? For instance, how can so many believe that there are 50+ genders? Scientifically, biologically, there are only two genders. It is very clear—there is male and there is female, and no amount of sex-change operations or therapies can change that. Gender is coded into each individual cell of a person's body. A person is male or female—and that's it! It is unalterable. But, no, people truly believe that gender is more than biological but a psychological realization and belief about oneself.

So, I ask, why are people so gullible? Why do people believe ridiculous, untrue things—and then act on them as though they are true and verifiable—sometimes even to the point of violence? Perhaps what I say today will provide a theory that explains the cognitive dissonance that we see in many liberals. By the way, I don't want to confine this just to liberals, because conservatives are susceptible to this too. But they are less susceptible because their wiring in their brains and their personalities tends to make them base their views on facts, logic, reality, practicality, and preservation of the status quo—with what works. So, they are far less likely to believe something "just because."

We have all heard of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. She has become famous—this representative from New York—for saying things that are factually incorrect. In fact, many of them are outright lies, real whoppers. For instance, she tweeted on December 2, 2018:

\$21 TRILLION of Pentagon financial transactions 'could not be traced, documented, or explained.' \$21T in Pentagon accounting errors. Medicare for All costs ~\$32T. That means 66% of Medicare for All could have been funded already by the Pentagon.

The *Washington Post* gave Ocasio-Cortez four Pinocchios for this demonstrable lie.

Pentagon spokesman Christopher Sherwood noted, “DoD hasn’t received \$21 trillion in (nominal) appropriated funding across the entirety of American history.” These accounting errors, over a 17-year period, could be credits or debits on the ledger, cancelling each other out. They did actually find \$21 trillion of accounting errors, but they could credits or debits, and credits and debits cancel each other out. These "accounting errors" are simply unverified transactions. The Pentagon is working to revise its (likely purposefully) obtuse accounting methods, and they are trying to correct this problem. But her "\$21 trillion" was actually not true.

When called on this, Ocasio-Cortez replied:

If people want to really blow up one figure here or one word there, I would argue that they’re missing the forest for the trees. I think that there’s a lot of people more concerned about being precisely, factually, and semantically correct than about being morally right.

So, to her and many others, precision, truth, facts, and correct speech are not as important than being right. (I won’t give any credence to her being *morally* right. She doesn’t know what true morality is, in my opinion.) Why do they believe this? Why do they believe that they can ignore the facts?

Well, you know I am a literature guy, and I look into literature things. There is a fairly new field of literary study called *narratology*. It may provide a reason why people can believe such false yet easily verifiable things. Narratology studies narrative/story structures and how people perceive, create, and are influenced by these narratives. One area of narratology—“cognitive narratology”—considers how narratives help people understand and interpret events in their everyday lives. It not only asks why readers feel “cheated” or confused or even angry when an author does not write the ending they expected, but also why people find it so hard to recognize and understand information that contradicts a strongly held belief in the real world.

Narratology finds that the ability to understand a narrative or a story is completely dependent on the reader’s and the author’s historical and cultural context. What happens is that authors and readers form a contract, if you will, that the *storyworld*—the possible world of the story, along with all its events, persons, places, ideas, laws, and relationships—have logic and verisimilitude. The reader then knows what can be true

and believable in the world of that narrative. He says to himself, "OK, I can take that; I'll just go with it," and he reads the story with that in mind that there is a different universe here, and he just goes with the flow.

The reader and author both bring their own realities into the mix, expanding the storyworld into a universe that both can believe in for as long as the contract holds—normally between the first word and the last word of the book. The mind of the reader moves from the world they live in, with its perceivable rules, to the storyworld, which has different perceivable rules. The reader reorients his mind to immerse himself and agree with what he perceives in the storyworld and all its details. He becomes immersed in it and accepts it.

However, what these narratologists have found is that storyworlds are not confined to fiction. Storyworlds can also be ideological. They can exist within somebody's head at all times. They are not the real world; they are a storyworld. They are of the ideological world. So, a person can reorient his cognitive stance—the way he thinks—to match an ideological interpretation of real, present, and historical events, just as well as he can do so to interpret a novel's narrative. In fact, we can think of society as a whole as a storyworld. But one person's storyworld is different from his neighbor's storyworld, because his neighbor brings different experiences to the table. Remember, this is a contract between the author of the narrative and the person who reads it, let's say. He brings a new experience in, so every person reading—let's say a book—really has a different storyworld because each reader is different.

Stories that make sense to one person may be incomprehensible to another, and vice versa. This is how people believe things that are not true, even when they are presented with evidence to the contrary. The facts don't match their narrative—what they think should be right in their own heads—so it is not right to them because the story they believe has different facts. To them, since the facts in the real world don't make any sense in their storyworld, then the real facts must be wrong.

So, the narrative in Ocasio-Cortez's world—in her worldview—Medicare for All is a moral right that trumps all facts, figures, evidence, proof, practical consideration, and godly principle. That is because the narrative they believe trumps everything. Before they can change, their narrative has to be changed. Let me put it this way: Before they can change, either they must change their own narrative, or it must be changed from outside.