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Digitally deconstructing ‘straw man’ and ‘wicker man’ arguments: A software-aided pedagogy

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Abstract. This article models a software-based pedagogy, targetted at undergraduates, for assisting with detection and deconstruction of straw man arguments. The pedagogy is useful particularly where the student is unfamiliar with the standpoint attacked in the argument, where the text describing the standpoint is large and where the argument is lengthy too. I use a digital text analysis tool – Sketch Engine – to help reveal and deconstruct a *straw man* argument which misrepresents one specific aspect of a book. I then go on to use this tool in combination with another digital text analysis tool – WMatrix – to demonstrate too how the book’s wider standpoints conflict with the argument’s framing. I thus also show the argument to be a much bigger straw man, what I refer to as a *wicker man*. Advantages of using the digital tools are that (i) they efficiently set the student up to judge whether or not central topics in a large text being attacked are relevant absences from the argument attacking that text; (ii) the potential for arbitrariness in judging whether or not the argument is a straw man or a wicker man is significantly reduced, making in principle for scrupulous evaluation.

Keywords: Argumentation and pedagogy, argumentation and corpus linguistics, software-aided argument analysis, straw man arguments, Sketch Engine software, WMatrix software

1. Introduction

1.1. Orientation

This article highlights and illustrates a software-based pedagogy, aimed at undergraduates, for aiding the detection and deconstruction of straw man arguments. The pedagogy is useful especially where the student does not know (in any great depth) the standpoint attacked in the argument, where this standpoint text is large and where the argument is lengthy also. In this article, I use a digital text analysis tool – Sketch Engine – to assist in illuminating and deconstructing a *straw man* argument which distorts one particular aspect of a book. I then go on to use Sketch Engine in conjunction with another digital text analysis tool – WMatrix – to demonstrate also how the book’s wider standpoints jar with the argument’s framing. I thus also reveal the argument to be a much larger straw man – a *wicker man*.¹

A pedagogical advantage of using the digital tools is that they efficiently set the student up to establish whether central topics in a large text being attacked are relevant absences from the argument attacking

¹Made famous by the 1973 cult movie, ‘The Wicker Man’, an actual wicker man is a huge straw effigy. In pagan times, humans were trapped in the wicker man and sacrificially burned.

that text. There is also a methodological advantage to this software-assisted approach. Examination of the large text being attacked by an argument is non-arbitrary since it is steered by objectively-generated quantitative results. This, in turn, means that the potential for arbitrariness in evaluating whether or not the argument is a straw man or a wicker man is significantly reduced, making in principle for rigorous assessment.

1.2. Organisation

In the next section, I define and discuss straw man arguments and their sub-types. In Section 3, I highlight how the cohesion of an argument, how it hangs together through its vocabulary and grammar, is important to how it frames the standpoint it attacks, and important also to the critical pedagogy of this article. I also spotlight a key point of this article: an argument may only appear cohesive because of what it excludes. Revealing relevant absences from an argument can impact on its cohesive structure. In turn, this can illuminate the credibility of how it has framed the standpoint it attacks and thus whether or not the argument is a straw man.

Section 4 includes the data I examine to illustrate this pedagogy. It is an argument called 'Why Islam Doesn't Need a Reformation' which was written by the journalist and Muslim, Mehdi Hasan, and published on 17th May 2015. Hasan criticises a number of texts for allegedly calling for an Islamic reformation directly analogous to Luther's Christian reformation. As part of this critique, Hasan takes issue with Ayaan Hirsi Ali's book *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation*, published a little before his argument. *Heretic* consists of around 70,000 words.

In the rest of the article (Sections 5–8), I model how a combination of the digital tools Sketch Engine and WMatrix can be used conveniently by undergraduates to reveal Hasan's argument to be a *straw man*. Moreover, I show the deconstructive ramifications for Hasan's arguments from major themes of Hirsi Ali's book which he does not refer to. In so doing, I reveal Hasan's argument to be a much bigger straw man – a *wicker man* – relative to *Heretic*.

2. Straw man arguments

2.1. Definition

I have mentioned 'straw man' arguments, but not yet given a definition:

'... the technique used when an arguer ignores their opponent's real position on an issue and sets up a weaker version of that position by misrepresentation, exaggeration, distortion or simplification.' (Bowell and Kemp [3]: 252)²

The straw man argument is a particular form of fallacy – a dialectical fallacy. While 'dialectic' has meant different things since the time of Plato, it is commonly used now to refer to the exchange of opinions between debaters and the rules of engagement which facilitate meaningful debate or, as Wenzel [18,

²Similar definitions can be found in the literature: 'Straw man fallacy – A fallacy committed when a person misrepresents an argument, theory, or claim, and then, on the basis of that misrepresentation, claims to have refuted the position the person has misrepresented' (Govier [9, p. 201]); 'Straw man fallacy: A form of fallacy of emphasis in which someone's written or spoken words are taken out of context, thereby purposely distorting the original inference in such a way that the new, weak inference (the straw man) is easy to defeat' (Baronett [2, p. 287]); 'In the case of the Straw Man fallacy, the clear irrelevance emerges in the argument that is constructed on the basis of, or in response to, the misrepresentation or caricature' (Tindale [17, p. 25]).

p. 14] puts it, 'a procedure for regulating discussions among people'. This does not just apply to spoken debate. A written arguer may also violate dialectical standards by producing a straw man.

2.2. Types of straw man

The above definition of a straw man by Howell and Kemp can be discriminated. Talisse and Aikin [16] argue for two forms of straw man: (i) *misrepresentation* and (ii) *weak*. The first form involves a speaker or writer advancing an argument which misrepresents, in part, the standpoint they are attacking. The second is not a misrepresentation. Instead, it involves the antagonist selecting the weakest version of a protagonist's argument, or non-central aspects of the standpoint, because they are more readily criticisable.

Aikin and Casey [1] build on the stance of Talisse and Aikin [16] by arguing for a further sub-type of straw man argument – the *hollow man* argument. While the misrepresentation and weak man bear some resemblance to the standpoint which is attacked in the argument, the hollow man is a complete fabrication. The proponent of the standpoint which is being attacked simply did not advance anything remotely similar to that standpoint.

2.3. Dialectical obligations, space constraints and written arguments

The dialectical obligation that straw man arguments contravene is summed up in Tindale [17, p. 22]:

As arguers we are obligated to treat our opponents fairly, and that fairness includes listening carefully to what they say, knowing their position, and treating it with some respect. In good dialectical exchanges, arguers are also encouraged to consider the strongest point of their opponents and to try and assess that. Deliberately distorting a position by conjuring up a weak caricature of it is not fulfilling that obligation; nor does it do the arguer's own position a lot of good if the strategy is detected.

Tindale refers here to a spoken debate context for avoiding straw man arguments.

What about written arguments? The dialectical obligations of an argument to represent accurately the standpoint it attacks will depend on the written genre and the space available. For example, in a critical review of a philosophy book, such as in the *New York Review of Books*, which affords a few thousand words to the reviewer, one would expect the author to fulfil their dialectical obligations by giving an accurate account of the main element(s) of the book's standpoint. For a newspaper op-ed, of around 1,000 words, where a book might be mentioned in relation to a particular line that the op-ed author is taking, then clearly (i) there are space constraints on setting out the main elements of that book; (ii) in any case, it may well be irrelevant to the argumentative goals of the op-ed author to do this if they are only concentrating on one aspect of that book. I mention this distinction between critical review and op-ed since it bears on the straw man evaluation later.

2.4. Using software to help evaluate whether or not an argument is a straw man

As Scott Aikin and Robert Talisse hold, the effectiveness of a straw man argument depends on the 'audience's inexperience or ignorance' (Talisse and Aikin [16, p. 348]). It is impossible for even the most erudite to be richly knowledgeable of every single topic imaginable. Many, if not most, of us coming across an argument in the media, particularly op-ed arguments, will be ignorant, to different degrees, about the standpoint source attacked in the argument. That straw man arguments are ubiquitous compounds this problem:

'One encounters the straw man virtually anywhere there is an argument. This is especially so in the heated exchanges about politics and religion on Cable TV talk shows, talk radio, Internet discussion forums, and newspaper op-ed pages.' (Aikin and Casey [1, p. 87])

Students can of course go to the trouble to find out (more) about the standpoint attacked in the argument. Even if the data is voluminous because it is book length, say, their exploration is made much easier with books now in digital format. But, how do students guard against possible charges that what they focus on is merely arbitrary? The software-aided pedagogy of this article aims to go some way to addressing this state of affairs. Many of the most recurrent words and expressions in the standpoint data being attacked in an argument are likely to be indices of the main elements of that standpoint. The software that I utilise in this article can access easily these frequencies. Students can thus use this quantitative information about the standpoint *to direct, non-arbitrarily*, their qualitative engagement with that data. In turn, as I show, this conveniently facilitates an efficient and rigorous evaluation of whether or not the argument attacking that standpoint is a straw man.

3. Framing the standpoint attacked in the argument

3.1. An argument's cohesion and coherence

To facilitate evaluation of whether or not an argument is a straw man, in the first place the analyst needs to know accurately how the argument has framed the standpoint it attacks. In my use of 'framing', I echo Robert Entman's well-known definition:

Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. Typically frames diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe... (Entman [7, p. 52])

Since framing involves selection, by the same token it may involve significant exclusion. The latter might involve omissions which are deliberate and/or inadvertent.

An argument's framing can be seen in the recurrent vocabulary that the arguer uses to describe the topic and standpoint they attack. Identifying how an argument has framed the standpoint it attacks through recurrent lexis and semantically related lexis, in effect, reveals dominant *cohesion* in the text of the argument. By cohesion, I mean how a text is tied together by its vocabulary. For example, in:

Mary had a little lamb. Its fleece was white as snow.

cohesion is created across the sentences, in part, through the semantically related lexis 'lamb' and 'fleece'. Cohesion can also be grammatical. For instance, the pronoun 'its' links cohesively to 'a little lamb'.

Cohesion in a text is hardly trivial. Indeed, as the linguists Ronald Carter and Walter Nash say, 'The first requirement of any composition is that it should 'hang together'...' (Carter and Nash [5, p. 189]). Just like any effective text, the text of an argument needs to be well-formed:

'Cohesion distinguishes well-formed texts, focusing on an integrated topic, with well-signalled internal transitions [...]. It is founded on a very simple principle: each sentence after the first is linked to the content of one or more preceding sentences by at least one *tie*.' (Fowler [8, p. 83])

Cohesion is crucial, then, to the effectiveness of a *written* argument and thus to its persuasiveness.³

3.2. *An argument may appear cohesive/coherent because of what it excludes*

In discourse analysis, cohesion is often discussed in relation to another concept – *coherence*. This is the experience in reading or listening that the meaning of a text is unified. Coherence is a mental property. In contrast, cohesion is a property of the text.⁴ Cohesion is usually necessary to ensure our experience of reading a text is coherent, certainly where the text is not short. But, other factors are required for coherence such as relevant background knowledge.

Like any text, an argument needs to be cohesive to be effective. But, what if we find out that the argument has excluded key aspects of the standpoint it attacks? Highlighting relevant absences in the argument may disrupt its cohesive structure – both at a micro- and macro-level. If an argument's cohesion suffers, if its framing of the standpoint it attacks cracks, then there may well be repercussions for the sense we can make of it. And, if the argument loses coherence, in turn its credibility must suffer. As I will show, the critical reading strategy of this article rests on the following idea: *an argument may appear cohesive on the page and coherent in our reading because of what it excludes*.

3.3. *Tracing the cohesive structure of the argument*

An entailment of the above is that the analyst should seek to understand an argument's cohesive structure in some detail. That is to say, an analyst cannot deconstruct convincingly how an argument has framed the standpoint it attacks unless they have first traced this framing accurately. Systematically tracing recurrent lexical cohesive patterns of an argument makes for a precise, rigorous and targeted evaluation of potential straw man status.

I move on now to the data I use to model this software-aided pedagogy for helping undergraduates to assess rigorously whether or not an argument is a straw man.

4. Data

4.1. *Orientation*

To model the pedagogy, I use an argument called 'Why Islam Doesn't Need a Reformation'. The argument was written by the journalist and Muslim, Mehdi Hasan. It is an op-ed of 1,169 words which was published on 17th May 2015 in *The Guardian* newspaper. Figure 2 contains Hasan's argument with my annotations. But, if the reader would prefer to look at an unannotated version first, I have footnoted the *Guardian* link.⁵ In his op-ed, Hasan takes issue with a number of texts which have allegedly called for a 'Muslim Martin Luther(s)' to spark a reformation of Islam directly analogous to Christianity's

³I stress 'written' here since lack of cohesion is much more immediately apparent in processing a written text than with real time processing of speech. Because of the cognitive limitations of real time processing of spoken language, it is possible that an audience may be persuaded by an oral argument – particularly where the speaker is seductive – when in fact it may not contain as much cohesion, or indeed coherence, as they might suppose.

⁴On the cohesion/coherence distinction, see de Beaugrande and Dressler [6]; Widdowson [19, p. 49–51].

⁵<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/17/islam-reformation-extremism-muslim-martin-luther-europe> [accessed June 2018].

reformation. Hasan's article hyperlinks to these texts, as can be seen in Fig. 1. His opening paragraphs, together with the macro-framing of heading, subheading, content of photograph under the heading, and highlighted quotation from the op-ed, can also be seen in Fig. 1.

In his second paragraph, Hasan flags a book by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation*, which was published a little before Hasan's argument. In contrast to Hasan, Hirsi Ali is an atheist and ex-Muslim. *Heretic* consists of 69,546 words, which includes an appendix of 3,284 words discussing dissident and reformist Muslims.⁶

4.2. Using a digital tool to help ascertain an argument's framing

4.2.1. Systematically identifying an argument's framing

In later sections, I will reveal problems for Hasan's framing of the hyperlinked texts and *Heretic*. Before I do so, I need to identify this framing or, in linguistic terms, its cohesive structure which, in turn, contributes to its coherence. Echoing earlier, careful and comprehensive tracing of dominant cohesion enables the student to appreciate systematically, rather than impressionistically, how an argument repeatedly frames the standpoint it attacks. However, this identification procedure becomes laborious, and potentially error-prone, once the text consists of hundreds of words. These issues can be attenuated considerably by using a digital text analysis tool. Tracing dominant cohesion across the text with the help of such a tool reduces the prospect that students miss where an argument has framed the standpoint it attacks. In turn, accurate description of an argument's framing helps ensure the credibility of any subsequent deconstruction of it.

4.2.2. Using the lemma list function in Sketch Engine

To assist me with accurate identification of Hasan's framing, I loaded up his argument to the corpus linguistic package, Sketch Engine.⁷ Corpus linguistics is the software-based, quantitative investigation of a collection of electronic texts; such a collection is referred to as a 'corpus'.⁸ Sketch Engine was designed for working with corpora (the plural of 'corpus'), but there is no reason why it cannot be used on single texts, which is how I use this software in this article.

Plain text files are the default format for Sketch Engine. I copied and pasted Hasan's argument from the online Guardian into Notepad – a plain text editor for Windows – and saved the file. I loaded up Hasan's argument to Sketch Engine and generated a 'lemma list'. Many words have different word forms, e.g., 'go', 'goes', 'going', 'gone', 'went' are all part of the same word family. The general word which encompasses different word forms – morphologically equivalent to the simplest word form – is referred to by linguists as the *lemma*. So GO is the lemma for the above word forms.⁹ Generating lemmas from a large body of data is useful. Aggregating different morphologically related word forms under one label provides a convenient birds-eye view on lexical content. For my specific purposes here, this helps establish a keener sense of lexical repetition, and thus lexical cohesion, across an argument. To help achieve the most effective birds-eye view on the lexical content of Hasan's argument, I treated all data as lower-case. And since, in trying to access lexical content, it is helpful to have ready access to lexical words without the 'noise' of grammatical words (e.g. 'and', 'in', 'she', 'the'), I filtered out the latter by

⁶The figure of 69,546 words does not include the endnotes, or non-main body information such as the author's biography and the book's dedication.

⁷A free 30-day trial is available. See <https://www.sketchengine.eu> [accessed June 2018].

⁸For overviews of corpus linguistics, see O'Keeffe and McCarthy [12]; McEnery and Hardie [11].

⁹Lemmas are conventionally represented in small capitals.

Why Islam doesn't need a reformation *Mehdi Hasan*

Those who are calling for a 'Muslim Martin Luther' should be careful what they wish for

[Photograph of Martin Luther: Martersteig's depiction of German religious reformer Martin Luther burning the papal bull containing 41 theses issued against him].

In recent months, clichéd calls for reform of Islam, a 1,400-year-old faith, have intensified. "We need a Muslim reformation," announced *Newsweek*. "Islam needs reformation from within," said the *Huffington Post*. Following January's massacre in Paris, the *Financial Times* nodded to those in the west who believe the secular Egyptian president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, "could emerge as the Martin Luther of the Muslim world". (That might be difficult, given Sisi, in the words of Human Rights Watch, approved "premeditated lethal attacks" on largely unarmed protesters which could amount to "crimes against humanity".)

Then there is Ayaan Hirsi Ali. The Somali-born author, atheist and ex-Muslim has a new book called *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now*. She's been popping up in TV studios and on op-ed pages to urge Muslims, both liberal and conservative, to abandon some of their core religious beliefs while uniting behind a Muslim Luther. Whether or not mainstream Muslims will respond positively to a call for reform from a woman who has described their faith as a "destructive, nihilistic cult of death" that should be "crushed", and suggested Benjamin Netanyahu be given the Nobel peace prize, is another matter.

This narrative isn't new. The *New York Times*'s celebrity columnist Thomas Friedman called for an Islamic reformation back in 2002; US academics Charles Kurzer and Michaelle Browers traced the origins of this "Reformation analogy" to the early 20th century, noting that "conservative journalists have been as eager as liberal academics to search for Muslim Luthers".

“Islam isn't Christianity. They are not analogous, and it is deeply ignorant to pretend otherwise

Fig. 1. Initial paragraphs of Hasan's op-ed showing macro framing. Copyright Guardian News & Media Ltd 2018.

using a stoplist.¹⁰ Table 1 shows all lexical lemmas in Hasan's argument whose combined word forms occur at least five times.

4.2.3. Tracing dominant patterns of lexical cohesion in Hasan's argument

Figure 2 shows annotation of major lexical cohesive links across the argument based on recurrent lemmas in Table 1. Any text of reasonable length is saturated with cohesive devices. I choose a threshold of five lexical word forms (see Table 1) for a set of lexical cohesive links to be detailed in Fig. 2 since this number enables me to appreciate precisely dominant ways in which Hasan frames Hirsī Ali's argument while leaving Fig. 2 still readable.¹¹ In Fig. 2, I throw into relief dominant cohesive structure in Hasan's

Table 1
Lexical lemma list for Mehdi Hasan's argument ≥ 5

RANK	FREQ.	LEMMA	WORD FORM	FREQ.	WORD FORM	FREQ.
1	20	MUSLIM	muslim	14	muslims	6
2	19	ISLAM	islam	15	islamic	4
3	14	REFORMATION	reformation	14		
4	10	LUTHER	Luther	9	Luthers	1
5	6	REFORM	reform	5	reforms	1
6=	5	CHRISTIANITY	christianity	4	christian	1
6=	5	JEW	jews	4	jewish	1

Why *Islam* doesn't need a **reformation**

Those who are calling for a '**Muslim** Martin **Luther**' should be careful what they wish for

[Photograph of Martin Luther: Martersteig's depiction of German religious reformer Martin Luther burning the papal bull containing 41 theses issued against him]

Mehdi Hasan Guardian 17th May 2015

[A]

In recent months, clichéd calls for **reform** of *Islam*, a 1,400-year-old faith, have intensified. "We need a **Muslim reformation**," announced Newsweek. "*Islam* needs **reformation** from within," said the Huffington Post. Following January's massacre in Paris, the Financial Times nodded to those in the west who believe the secular Egyptian president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, "could emerge as the Martin **Luther** of the **Muslim** world". (That might be difficult, given Sisi, in the words of Human Rights Watch, approved "premeditated lethal attacks" on largely unarmed protesters which could amount to "crimes against humanity".)

Fig. 2. Hasan's argument annotated for major cohesive links. Copyright Guardian News & Media Ltd 2018.

¹⁰ A stoplist is a list of words automatically omitted from a computer-generated word frequency list. Many are available free online, e.g. <http://www.textfixer.com/resources/common-english-words.txt>. There is no definitive stoplist since its makeup will depend on the purposes of the user. I created my own stoplist of English grammatical words (auxiliary verbs, conjunctions, determiners, modal verbs, prepositions, pronouns).

¹¹ In order to leave Fig. 2 readable, I also do not annotate for grammatical cohesion vis-à-vis the lemmas of Table 1, e.g., where 'He' refers to 'Luther'. Moreover, while the lemma CALL has seven word forms, I do not annotate in Fig. 2 for this lemma since it predominantly collocates with 'REFORM'.

[B]

Then there is Ayaan Hirsi Ali. The Somali-born author, atheist and ex-Muslim has a new book called *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now*. She's been popping up in TV studios and on op-ed pages to urge Muslims, both liberal and conservative, to abandon some of their core religious beliefs while uniting behind a Muslim Luther. Whether or not mainstream Muslims will respond positively to a call for reform from a woman who has described their faith as a "destructive, nihilistic cult of death" that should be "crushed", and suggested Benjamin Netanyahu be given the Nobel peace prize, is another matter.

[C]

This narrative isn't new. The New York Times's celebrity columnist Thomas Friedman called for an *Islamic reformation* back in 2002; US academics Charles Kurzer and Michaelle Browers traced the origins of this "Reformation analogy" to the early 20th century, noting that "conservative journalists have been as eager as liberal academics to search for Muslim Luthers".

[D]

Apparently anyone who wants to win the war against violent extremism and save the soul of *Islam*, not to mention transform a stagnant Middle East, should be in favour of this process. After all, CHRISTIANITY had the **Reformation**, so goes the argument, which was followed by the Enlightenment; by secularism, liberalism and modern European democracy. So why can't *Islam* do the same? And shouldn't the west be offering to help?

[E]

Yet the reality is that talk of a CHRISTIAN-style **reformation** for *Islam* is so much cant. Let's consider this idea of a "Muslim Luther". Luther did not merely nail 95 theses to the door of the Castle church in Wittenberg in 1517, denouncing clerical abuses within the Catholic church. He also demanded that German peasants revolting against their feudal overlords be "struck dead", comparing them to "mad dogs", and authored *On the Jews and Their Lies* in 1543, in which he referred to Jews as "the devil's people" and called for the destruction of Jewish homes and synagogues. As the US sociologist and Holocaust scholar Ronald Berger has observed, Luther helped establish antisemitism as "a key element of German culture and national identity". Hardly a poster boy for reform and modernity for Muslims in 2015.

[F]

The Protestant **Reformation** also opened the door to blood-letting on an unprecedented, continent-wide scale. Have we forgotten the French wars of religion? Or the English civil war? Tens of millions of innocents died in Europe; up to 40% of Germany's population is believed to have been killed in the thirty years' war. Is this what we want a Muslim-majority world already plagued by sectarian conflicts, foreign occupations and the bitter legacy of colonialism to now endure, all in the name of reform, progress and even liberalism?

[G]

Islam isn't CHRISTIANITY. The two faiths aren't analogous, and it is deeply ignorant, not to mention patronising, to pretend otherwise – or to try and impose a neatly linear, Eurocentric view of history on diverse Muslim-majority countries in Asia or Africa. Each religion has its own traditions and texts; each religion's followers have been affected by geopolitics and socio-economic processes in a myriad of ways.

Fig. 2. (Continued.)

The theologies of *Islam* and CHRISTIANITY, in particular, are worlds apart: the former, for instance, has never had a Catholic-style clerical class answering to a divinely appointed pope. So against whom will the “*Islamic reformation*” be targeted? To whose door will the 95 fatwas be nailed?

[H]

The truth is that *Islam* has already had its own **reformation** of sorts, in the sense of a stripping of cultural accretions and a process of supposed “purification”. And it didn’t produce a tolerant, pluralistic, multifaith utopia, a Scandinavia-on-the-Euphrates. Instead, it produced . . . the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

[I]

Wasn’t **reform** exactly what was offered to the masses of the Hijaz by Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, the mid-18th century itinerant preacher who allied with the House of Saud? He offered an austere *Islam* cleansed of what he believed to be innovations, which eschewed centuries of mainstream scholarship and commentary, and rejected the authority of the traditional ulema, or religious authorities.

[J]

Some might argue that if anyone deserves the title of a Muslim Luther, it is Ibn Abdul Wahhab who, in the eyes of his critics, combined Luther’s puritanism with the German monk’s antipathy towards the **Jews**. Ibn Abdul Wahhab’s controversial stance on Muslim theology, writes his biographer Michael Crawford, “made him condemn much of the *Islam* of his own time” and led to him being dismissed as a heretic by his own family.

[K]

Don’t get me wrong. **Reforms** are of course needed across the crisis-ridden Muslim-majority world: political, socio-economic and, yes, religious too. Muslims need to rediscover their own heritage of pluralism, tolerance and mutual respect – embodied in, say, the Prophet’s letter to the monks of St Catherine’s monastery, or the “convivencia” (or co-existence) of medieval Muslim Spain.

[L]

What they don’t need are lazy calls for an *Islamic reformation* from non-Muslims and ex-Muslims, the repetition of which merely illustrates how shallow and simplistic, how ahistorical and even anti-historical, some of the west’s leading commentators are on this issue. It is much easier for them, it seems, to reduce the complex debate over violent extremism to a series of clichés, slogans and soundbites, rather than examining root causes or historical trends; easier still to champion the most extreme and bigoted critics of *Islam* while ignoring the voices of mainstream Muslim scholars, academics and activists.

[M]

Hirsi Ali, for instance, was treated to a series of encomiums and softball questions in her blizzard of US media interviews, from the New York Times to Fox News. (“A hero of our time,” read one gushing headline on Politico.) Frustratingly, only comedian Jon Stewart, on The Daily Show, was willing to point out to Hirsi Ali that her **reformist** hero wanted a “purer form of CHRISTIANITY” and helped create “a hundred years of violence and mayhem”.

[N]

With apologies to **Luther**, if anyone wants to do the same to the religion of *Islam* today, it is ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who claims to rape and pillage in the name of a “purer form” of *Islam* – and who isn't, incidentally, a fan of the **Jews** either. Those who cry so simplistically, and not a little inanely, for an *Islamic reformation*, should be careful what they wish for.

Fig. 2. (Continued.)

argument with the following formatting:

CHRISTIANITY: capitals
Islam: italics
Jew: courier new font bold
Muslim: underlining
Luther: highlighter
reformation/reform: bold

It is worth saying also that software can only recognise words and not meaning. Given this, the analyst should, where appropriate, eschew excessive subservience to quantitative data when making judgements about meaning. For instance, I group 'reform' with 'reformation' by bolding both words.

5. Deconstruction of Hasan's straw man argument

5.1. Hasan's strawmanning of the texts hyperlinked in the first paragraph

Figure 2 throws systematically into relief Hasan's framing, in paragraphs [A], [B] and [C], of a set of texts which he hyperlinks to. As before, for Hasan, these texts are calling for reform of Islam along the lines of the Protestant Reformation and to be led by 'Muslim Luther(s)'. The photograph of Martin Luther emphasises this framing. However, it does not take us long to be suspicious of such framing. The first text of the three which are hyperlinked in paragraph [A] is 'We Need a Muslim Reformation', written by Naser Khader, a senior fellow of the Hudson Institute (*Newsweek*, 26 March 2015). Being a short text of 614 words, it is relatively easy to see that Khader does not even mention Luther. In the second link, 'Islam Needs Reformation from Within' by Raza Rumi (*Huffington Post*), there is no mention of Luther either. This is another reasonably short text – 1025 words – and so again the absence of Luther is fairly easy to notice, especially with a web browser word search facility.

The third hyperlink is to another short text (715 words) written by Roula Khalaf (*Financial Times* January 14th 2015). Hasan frames this text as follows:

[A]

[...]

Following January's massacre in Paris, the *Financial Times* nodded to those in the west who believe the secular Egyptian president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, "could emerge as the Martin Luther of the Muslim world". (That might be difficult, given Sisi, in the words of Human Rights Watch, approved "premeditated lethal attacks" on largely unarmed protesters which could amount to "crimes against humanity".)

Yet this is another misframing since Khalaf's actual words are: 'Some even mused that Mr Sisi could emerge as the Martin Luther of the Muslim world'. So Khalaf is reporting the thoughts of others rather

than espousing herself the view that Sisi could become a Muslim Martin Luther. (Nor, then, is the *Financial Times* promulgating this outlook as Hasan implies). Indeed, Khalaf explicitly distances herself from this very viewpoint:

The former general [Sisi] who led the 2013 coup against an elected government of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood has since waged a relentless and bloody campaign of repression against the group and cracked down on the media. He is an unlikely leader of a reformation.

So, ironically, Khalaf's criticism of Sisi as being unsuitable to lead an Islamic reformation is more or less the same as Hasan's(!).

In paragraph [C], Hasan claims that *The New York Times's* celebrity columnist Thomas Friedman called for an Islamic reformation back in 2002. Clicking on the hyperlink to his column in the *New York Times*, the reader comes to another short text – 786 words – where they find out that, certainly, Friedman endorses Islamic reform. But the reader also discovers that Friedman has centred his article on the then political unrest in Iran as a:

promising trend in the Muslim world. It is a combination of Martin Luther and Tiananmen Square – a drive for an Islamic reformation combined with a spontaneous student-led democracy movement.

In much of the article, Friedman focuses on the Iranian and Muslim, Hashem Aghajari, an academic who was arrested and sentenced to death after giving a speech on the need for 'Islamic Protestantism.' His arrest led to student protests. Here again is Friedman:

Mr. Aghajari's speech [...] began by noting that just as "the Protestant movement wanted to rescue Christianity from the clergy and the church hierarchy," so Muslims must do something similar today. The Muslim clergymen who have come to dominate their faith, he said, were never meant to have a monopoly on religious thinking or be allowed to ban any new interpretations in light of modernity.

So this is not a straightforward case of Friedman calling for a reformation of Islam – inspired or not by Luther. This is because much of Friedman's op-ed describes Hashem Aghajari's own call for reform of Islam analogous to the Protestant Reformation. Importantly, though, Aghajari makes no reference to Luther.¹²

5.2. Hasan's strawmanning of Hirsi Ali's 'Heretic'

In paragraph [B], Hasan criticises Ayaan Hirsi Ali's book *Heretic*. As a book of 70K words, this is far larger than the aforementioned hyperlinked texts. Using the search function in the Kindle app, I discovered that *Heretic* contains 12 instances of 'Luther'. Checking the linguistic contexts for these 12 instances, I found that at no point does Hirsi Ali call for a reformation directly analogous to Luther's. In fact, she says the following (first line of Fig. 3):

The Lesson of Luther. Will a Muslim Reformation look exactly like the Christian one? No, of course not. (Hirsi Ali [10, p. 57])

All 12 instances of 'Luther' are displayed in the concordance visualisation of Fig. 3, a neater and more panoramic display than afforded by a Kindle. To produce this visualisation, I converted the Kindle file

¹²<https://www.memri.org/reports/call-islamic-protestantism-dr-hashem-aghajaris-speech-and-subsequent-death-sentence> [accessed June 2018].

Christian Reformation viable. The Lesson of Luther. Will a Muslim Reformation look exactly indulgences for salvation. His name was Martin Luther and his words helped trigger both a First, unlike previous European heretics, Luther was able to exploit a new and powerful of European states---among them England---to back Luther's challenge to the pope's ecclesiastical real reform stand? Who Speaks for Islam? Luther's Reformation was launched against a When the pope sought to anathematize him, Luther could retort: ``I am called a heretic by number of European states in backing Luther's challenge to the status quo. All three technology, like the printing press in Luther's time, can certainly be used to promote just as there was a constituency receptive to Luther's message in sixteenth-century Germany. cannot be achieved by suicide notes. Like Luther's Reformation, it needs theses: calls mind might be an Islamic Renovation. I am no Luther. Nor do I have ninety-five theses to London who would emerge as a modern-day Muslim Luther. I abandoned the idea because such a

Fig. 3. Concordance for all 12 instances of 'Luther' in *Heretic*.

into a plain text file, the default format for Sketch Engine,¹³ and loaded up into Sketch Engine. In the final concordance line, Hirsi does mention 'Muslim Luther'. But this is to dismiss the idea:

When I first conceived of writing a book about a Reformation of Islam, I imagined it as a novel. Entitled *The Reformer*, it was going to tell the story of a charismatic young imam in London who would emerge as a modern-day **Muslim Luther**. I abandoned the idea because such a book was bound to be dismissed as fanciful. (Hirsi Ali [10, pp. 224–225])

Another advantage of Sketch Engine over Kindle is that it automatically calculates the word frequency of *Heretic* at 69, 546 words. This knowledge enables me to make some useful contrastive percentage calculations of how frequent 'Luther' is in Hasan's argument and *Heretic*. 'Luther' is the 4th most common lexical word in Hasan's argument, occurring 10 times (0.9% of the text). This contrasts sharply with its frequency in *Heretic*; 'Luther' at 12 instances is the 527th most common lexical word in *Heretic* (0.02% of the text).¹⁴ 'Luther' can hardly then be said to be quantitatively significant in Hirsi Ali's book. Indeed, the concentration of 'Luther' in Hasan's argument is 45 times higher than the concentration of 'Luther' in *Heretic*.

To conclude, since Hirsi Ali does not call for an Islamic reformation, directly analogous to the Christian reformation which is to be led by a Muslim Martin Luther(s), and with 'Luther' being anyway a peripheral figure in *Heretic*, Hasan produces a straw man. He misrepresents, thus, Hirsi Ali's position in paragraph [B] when he says:

[B]

Then there is Ayaan Hirsi Ali. The Somali-born author, atheist and ex-Muslim has a new book called *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now*. She's been popping up in TV studios and on op-ed pages to urge Muslims, both liberal and conservative, to abandon some of their core religious beliefs while uniting behind a Muslim Luther.

and later in [G] and [M]:

[G]

Islam isn't CHRISTIANITY. The two faiths aren't analogous...

[M]

[...]

Frustratingly, only comedian Jon Stewart, on *The Daily Show*, was willing to point out to Hirsi Ali that her reformist hero [Martin Luther] wanted a "purer form of CHRISTIANITY" and helped create "a hundred years of violence and mayhem".

5.3. Summing up deconstruction of Hasan's straw man argument

All the authors that Hasan hyperlinks to either report calls for reform of Islam or call for it themselves. But none of them call for reform to be led by a Muslim Martin Luther(s) as though an Islamic reformation would mirror the Christian reformation. Hasan has thus strawmanned these authors. Specifically, these

¹³<https://calibre-ebook.com/> [accessed June 2018]. Before loading up to Sketch Engine, I deleted from *Heretic* text which is not part of its main body and appendix, e.g., frontispiece, contents and endnotes.

¹⁴I focus on lexical words rather than grammatical words since it is with the former where conceptual content lies. As usual, to remove the 'noise' of grammatical words, I employed a stoplist – the same one that I used in Section 4.2.2. Just as I did in that section, I treat all words as lower case in order to derive the most birds-eye view perspective on lexical frequency.

are misrepresentation straw men (Section 2.2). In fact, the only reference to 'Islamic Protestantism' derives from the *Muslim* academic Hashem Aghajari, who is cited in Friedman's article.

Lastly, let me comment on Hasan's reference, in paragraph [C], to US academics 'Charles Kurzer (sic) and Michaelle Browers' noting that "conservative journalists have been as eager as liberal academics to search for Muslim Luthers". This is an accurate quotation from their text (Browers and Kurzman [4, p. 6]). Hasan is using this reference as support for his claim that the call for a Muslim Luther is not new. Yet, as I have shown, none of the other authors that he has flagged explicitly call for a Muslim Luther. So the reference to Browers and Kurzman [4] is being used as backing for a position for which there is no evidence in the other texts Hasan cites.

6. What if Hasan's text is also a wicker man argument?

6.1. Orientation

My deconstruction of Hasan's strawmanning, in Section 5, related specifically to the framing of his argument – once again that the authors he cites had allegedly called for an Islamic reformation directly analogous to the Christian reformation and to be led by a Muslim Luther(s). In deciding whether or not this was a fair representation of *Heretic's* stance, all I really needed to do was target 'Luther' in *Heretic*. In doing so, I discovered that 'Luther' is actually not of major concern to Hirsu Ali. It follows, thus, that I have barely explored her 70,000 word book. But then again there was no real need to do this in relation to Hasan's dialectical obligations. That is to say, given the specificity of his argument, and the fact that Hasan's text is an op-ed with limited space, he did not criticise other aspects of *Heretic*. In turn, this meant that he was not obligated to set out *Heretic's* major standpoints.

With easy-to-use data-mining tools to hand, it is straightforward to discover non-arbitrarily the main topics, words and phrases of *Heretic* as indices of its main standpoints and thus conveniently not pass up an opportunity to engage more fully with *Heretic*. Having done so, I can then explore rigorously whether or not its main standpoints have further negative implications for the stability of Hasan's framing. That is to say, I may discover that Hasan's argument is potentially a much larger straw man – a *wicker man*.¹⁵

¹⁵When I first encountered Hasan's argument, I had not yet read *Heretic*. But I was aware of Hirsu Ali's status as a long standing critic of Islam and especially for controversial broad-brush statements she made in the past. Consider, for example, the following in an interview from 2007 with Rogier van Bakel for *Reason* magazine:

Hirsu Ali: I think that we are at war with Islam. And there's no middle ground in wars. Islam can be defeated in many ways. For starters, you stop the spread of the ideology itself; at present, there are native Westerners converting to Islam, and they're the most fanatical sometimes. There is infiltration of Islam in the schools and universities of the West. You stop that. You stop the symbol burning and the effigy burning, and you look them in the eye and flex your muscles and you say, "This is a warning. We won't accept this anymore." There comes a moment when you crush your enemy.

[...]

Rogier van Bakel: So when even a hard-line critic of Islam such as Daniel Pipes says, "Radical Islam is the problem, but moderate Islam is the solution," he's wrong?

Hirsu Ali: He's wrong. Sorry about that.

Hirsu Ali is given the opportunity to clarify that by 'Islam' she might instead mean 'radical Islam' and thus that it is jihadist terrorism, not Islam per se, that needs to be 'defeated' or 'crushed'. But, she declines to align with this more reasonable position. Hirsu Ali's standpoint here is somewhat baffling given that i) the vast majority of Muslims are peaceful; ii) those most affected by jihadist violence are Muslims.

So when I encountered Hasan's argument, I was not positively predisposed to Hirsu Ali especially since Hasan reminds the reader, in paragraph [B], of her previous incautious remarks. But, in Hasan's summary, no longer was Hirsu Ali calling for Islam to be 'crushed' in a war with the West. Instead, in *Heretic* she was advocating the much less radical position that Islam needed reform. Intrigued that she had softened her position, I was interested to see whether or not Hasan had accurately represented it. My examination in what follows shows that Hasan's portrayal of other aspects of Hirsu Ali's book is not a fair representation.

Echoing above, one might object to this wider exploration by saying that, since it exceeds the specific goals of Hasan's argument, it is not dialectically justified. Yet, there is some justification for exploring the possibility that Hasan's argument is a larger straw man vis-à-vis *Heretic*. This is because, in paragraph [K], Hasan goes beyond his criticism of the alleged call for Muslim Martin Luthers by conceding that reforms are necessary:

[K]

Don't get me wrong. Reforms are of course needed across the crisis-ridden Muslim-majority world: political, socio-economic and, yes, religious too. [...]

What if Hirsi Ali's ideas for reform are captured by these broad categories of 'political', 'socio-economic' and 'religious' which Hasan agrees are needed? Then it would, I contend, be legitimate to explore whether or not Hirsi Ali's ideas for such reforms directly conflict with Hasan's framing of his argument. My deconstruction, in Section 5, mostly applied to paragraphs [A] to [C]. Before I explore the possibility that Hasan's argument is a wicker man, I need to trace further structure in Hasan's argument beyond paragraphs [A] to [C] as preparation for any subsequent deconstruction.

6.2. Macrostructure in Hasan's framing

Guided by the micro-cohesive structure in Fig. 2, I summarise Hasan's argument beyond [A] to [C] by indicating how he has macro-constructed three parallels across paragraphs [E], [F], [H], [I], [J], [M] and [N]. These parallels link Luther and Ibn Abdul Wahhab, who produced a puritanical, fundamentalist form of Sunni Islam in the 18th century ('Wahhabism'), which is practised in Saudi Arabia to this day. These parallels are as follows:

1. Both Luther and Wahhab had similar reformist objectives in seeking purification of Christianity and Islam respectively;
2. Both Luther and Wahhab were anti-Semitic. ISIS¹⁶ (with its roots in Wahhabism) is also anti-Semitic;
3. Both Luther's and Wahhab's reforms led to bloodshed and thus negative legacies.

The parallels can be seen in Fig. 4, which enriches the annotation of Fig. 2 by also highlighting recurring word forms of the lemma PURE (×4 words).

6.3. WMatrix

6.3.1. Semantic domains

Aside from using Sketch Engine again (see Section 6.6), the corpus linguistic software tool that I mainly employ to explore the possibility of Hasan's argument being a wicker man is WMatrix [14].¹⁷ A web-based tool, WMatrix has a number of functions. The one I use for this article utilises WMatrix's capacity for analysing 'semantic domains'. WMatrix automatically groups semantically related words in a text or corpus under a larger semantic category. So, for example, WMatrix groups the words, 'tank', 'military', 'soldier' under the larger category, or 'semantic domain', WARFARE. WMatrix can do this because it has been programmed to group lexical words under larger semantic categories in accordance

¹⁶'ISIS' stands for 'Islamic State of Iraq and Syria'. It is a jihadist terrorist organisation whose religious outlook is Wahhabist. ISIS is also known as 'ISIL' ('The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant'), 'IS' (Islamic State) and by its Arabic acronym 'Daesh'.

¹⁷A free one month trial is available. See <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/wmatrix/> [accessed June 2018].

1. OBJECTIVES OF LUTHER & WAHHAB

[H]

The truth is that *Islam* has already had its own **reformation** of sorts, in the sense of a stripping of cultural accretions and a process of supposed “purification”.

[...]

2. ANTI-SEMITISM OF LUTHER & WAHHAB

[J] (Luther's anti-Semitism is also mentioned in [E])

Some might argue that if anyone deserves the title of a Muslim Luther, it is Ibn Abdul Wahhab who, in the eyes of his critics, combined Luther's puritanism with the German monk's antipathy towards the **Jews**.

[...]

3. LEGACIES OF LUTHER & WAHHAB

A NEGATIVE LEGACY OF LUTHER -

[M] (this point is also made in [F])

Frustratingly, only comedian Jon Stewart, on The Daily Show, was willing to point out to Hirsi Ali that her **reformist** hero wanted a “purere form of CHRISTIANITY” and helped create “a hundred years of violence and mayhem”.

A NEGATIVE LEGACY OF WAHHAB -

[H] (Wahhab is introduced in [I])

[Wahhab's reformation] didn't produce a tolerant, pluralistic, multifaith utopia, a Scandinavia-on-the-Euphrates. Instead, it produced ... the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

[N]

With apologies to Luther, if anyone wants to do the same to the religion of *Islam* today, it is ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who claims to rape and pillage in the name of a “purere form” of *Islam* – and who isn't, incidentally, a fan of the **Jews** either. Those who cry so simplistically, and not a little inanely, for an *Islamic reformation*, should be careful what they wish for.

Fig. 4. Macro- and micro-cohesive structure in Hasan's argument between [E] and [N] which is relevant to *Heretic*.

with an in-built lexicon. This is a useful function since it helps the analyst to appreciate the most frequent topics in a large text.

6.3.2. Key semantic domain analysis and data contrast

While knowing the most frequent topics in a text is useful, we need to go one step beyond this to augment data mining rigour. This is because while a semantic domain might be frequent in a text (or corpus), it does not necessarily follow that it is being used any more frequently than normal. To find out if a semantic domain in a text is *unusually frequent*, we can compare its frequency with the same in a large corpus of texts which we treat as a norm of the language. The latter is known as a 'reference

corpus' and needs to be large enough so that we can assume it is a reasonably representative snapshot of the language. It also needs to contain a balance of common genres (e.g., conversation, news) if it is to be a credible snapshot.

For the identification of topics in a large text, the human mind is far more subtle and discerning than a software tool, such as WMatrix, which generates semantic domains algorithmically. Humans minds, however, will differ in what they regard as key topics in a book. Moreover, human identification of topics in a large text of 70,000 words can be onerous and, to do this consistently, arduous. A better research practice would use other human identifiers so as to facilitate inter-coder consistency and reliability. This is very labour intensive for an undergraduate pedagogy though. The advantage of the preset lexicon that WMatrix uses is that it avoids variability, laboriousness and inconsistency. Yet WMatrix still carries the disadvantage that it may isolate topics that a team of human identifiers would disagree with. This is why it is important that use of WMatrix always involves *comparison* and *contrast* between two (or more) datasets. That is to say, one cannot use WMatrix to provide an absolute identification of topics in a text or corpus. The advantages of WMatrix come into play when it is used *relatively*.

6.3.3. How I use WMatrix

Below I employ WMatrix to find, rigorously, key semantic domains in both *Heretic* and Hasan's argument. This enables me to see very clearly what statistically unusual topics of Hirsi Ali's book are *absent* from Hasan's argument. In turn, this procedure conveniently, efficiently and scrupulously sets me up to judge whether or not there are relevant topics absent from Hasan's argument which may have wider ramifications for the credibility of its framing than what I highlighted in Section 5.

Since *Heretic* was published in the USA, for my analyses below I use the American English 2006 (AmE06) reference corpus of 1 million words (see Potts and Baker [13]).¹⁸ This is the most recent American English reference corpus that WMatrix uses. AmE06 has been tagged for semantic domains. This makes it possible to ascertain which semantic fields in *Heretic* are statistically frequent with regard to AmE06. These are known as *key semantic domains*. The 'keyness' of a semantic domain in a text (or corpus) is calculated using the log likelihood metric. A log likelihood of 7 or over indicates statistical significance ($p < 0.01$) in WMatrix.¹⁹

6.4. Top statistically significant semantic domains in *Heretic* absent from Hasan's argument

Table 2 shows the top 10 key semantic domains for *Heretic*; Table 3 shows all the key semantic domains for Hasan's argument. As the reader can see, 'Law and Order' and 'People: Female' feature amongst the top ten key semantic domains in *Heretic*. These semantic domains are absent from Hasan's argument, not just from the key semantic domains in Table 3. While it is an analyst's subjective choice which key semantic domains to zoom in on, this is not arbitrary zooming, all the same, since all the domains in these tables are statistically significant.

WMatrix can reveal all words under a particular semantic domain. Table 4 shows the most frequent words under 'Law and Order' in *Heretic*. Table 5 shows the most frequent words under 'People: Female' in the same.

¹⁸Each text in AmE06 is around 'as close as possible to 2,000 words to the nearest complete sentence'. Moreover, 'all texts [in AmE06] have hard copy publication years between 2004 and 2008, with year and frequency as follows: 2004 (1 text), 2005 (48 texts), 2006 (400 texts), 2007 (45 texts), 2008 (6 texts), or 80% from 2006, and 98.6% 2005–2007' (Potts and Baker [13, p. 302]). Since the overwhelming majority of the texts were published in 2006, this explains the name of the corpus.

¹⁹ $p < 0.01$ indicates a 1 in 100 likelihood that the result could occur purely by chance.

Table 2

Top 10 key semantic domains for *Heretic*

Religion and the supernatural
Law and order
Dead
Geographical names
The Media: Books
Violent/Angry
Not allowed
Kin
Politics
People: Female

Table 3

All key semantic domains for Hasan's argument

Religion and the supernatural
Politics
Change
Comparing: Usual
Speech acts
Living creatures: animals, birds, etc.
In power
Strong obligation or necessity
Easy
Seem
Violent/Angry
Dead
The Media: Books

By analysing the co-texts of 'sharia' and 'law' – the most frequent words in Table 4 – we see repeatedly Hirsi Ali arguing that law and religion must be separated in Islam. For example, Hirsi Ali exhorts the following:

'Shackle **Sharia** and end its supremacy over secular **law**'. (Hirsi Ali [10, p. 74])

This is one of her 'five theses' for Islamic reform.²⁰ It is a central standpoint in Hirsi Ali's book, but it is not mentioned in Hasan's argument. Her use of 'theses' echoes the ninety-five theses of Luther which ignited the Protestant Reformation in Europe:

In October 1517, a somewhat obscure but very obstinate monk in the Saxon town of Wittenberg wrote ninety-five theses decrying the Church's practice of selling indulgences for salvation. His name was

²⁰Her other theses are as follows:

1. Ensure that Muhammad and the Quran are open to interpretation and criticism;
2. Give priority to this life, not the afterlife;
3. End the practice of "commanding right, forbidding wrong";
4. Abandon the call to jihad. (Hirsi Ali [10, p. 74]).

Table 4

Top 10 words under the key semantic domain 'Law and Order' in *Heretic*

Word	Semtag	Frequency
Sharia	G2.1	103
law	G2.1	79
laws	G2.1	29
punishment	G2.1	26
legal	G2.1	25
rules	G2.1	23
punishments	G2.1	18
code	G2.1	14
court	G2.1	13
sentenced	G2.1	12

Table 5

Top 10 words under the key semantic domain 'People: Female' in *Heretic*

Word	Semtag	Frequency
women	S2.1	129
woman	S2.1	37
girls	S2.1	28
female	S2.1	18
girl	S2.1	18
Womens	S2.1	11
womans	S2.1	7
feminists	S2.1	5
feminist	S2.1	2
Crone	S2.1	1

Martin Luther and his words helped trigger both a theological and a political revolution.

[...]

The upshot was a huge upheaval. [...] After more than a century of bloody religious wars within and between states, a new order was established that gave primacy to secular authority over religious (the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* essentially left it to each of the various European princes to choose the faith of his realm).

[...]

In short, the liberation of the individual conscience from hierarchical and priestly authority opened up space for critical thinking in every field of human activity.

Centuries later, Islam has had no comparable awakening. (Hirsi Ali [10, p. 58])

To be clear, secularism was not one of Luther's theses. It was an unforeseen legacy of the Protestant Reformation. So when Hirsi Ali draws analogy with the Protestant Reformation, it is with its ultimate enduring *legacy* – secularism and critical thinking. This is a positive legacy for Hirsi Ali.

6.5. Frequent collocations in *Heretic* absent from Hasan's argument

There are 103 instances of 'Sharia' in *Heretic* (see Table 4). There are 129 instances of 'women' (Table 5). Figure 5 is a randomised sample, using Sketch Engine, of ten instances of 'Sharia' which show how this word collocates with 'women' in *Heretic*. The concordance in Fig. 5 reflects a more specific reformist standpoint for Hirsi Ali: *Sharia law, based on the Quran, requires fundamental reform to furnish women greater rights*.

Further exploration, in *Heretic*, of all instances of 'sharia', 'law' and 'women', together with their collocates, bears this insight out. For Hirsi Ali, it is by separating law and religion, and thus instituting secularism, that women's rights can be augmented in Muslim-majority countries.

6.6. Most common 2-grams in *Heretic* absent from Hasan's argument

One limitation of WMatrix is that it is restricted, in the main, in its key semantic domain function to the analysis of single words. Since meaning is commonly conveyed through collocation, it also makes sense to explore collocation differences between *Heretic* and Hasan's argument. This can be done using the *n*-gram analysis function of Sketch Engine. An '*n*-gram', in corpus linguistics, is a regularly repeated string of words. *n* refers to the number of words in the string and 'gram' is equivalent to word. For instance, the string 'on the' is a 2-gram. As this example illustrates, *n*-grams do not necessarily coincide with a grammatically complete unit. Table 6 shows the ten most frequent lexical 2-grams in *Heretic* generated via Sketch Engine.

The fourth and fifth most frequent 2-grams in Table 6 are 'commanding right' and 'forbidding wrong'. Neither of these 2-grams is mentioned in Hasan's argument. As before, the user can click on individual results in Sketch Engine to generate concordances which enable them to see how these *n*-grams are being used. In *Heretic*, Hirsi Ali argues that Sharia law is both taught rigorously to the child ('commanding right') and enforced by strictly intervening in behaviour which contravenes Sharia ('forbidding wrong'). She alleges that 'commanding right and forbidding wrong' are practices of social control in Islam. Moreover, since these forms of control contribute to a sustaining of unequal relations between women and men in Islamic societies, she contends that they require comprehensive reform. For example, Hirsi Ali claims the following:

Women and men have very specified roles in Islamic society. It is spelled out exactly how each sex should act. And a man has an unequivocal right to command a woman, even if that woman is purportedly his teacher. (Hirsi Ali [10, p. 154])

Indeed, ending the practice of 'commanding right, and forbidding wrong' is another of Hirsi Ali's five theses (see footnote 20).²¹

²¹The reader may be wondering why I stop at 2-grams. Why not examine 3-grams, 4-grams etc? The larger the text or corpus, the more likely that there will be *n*-grams in excess of 2-grams. However, these are likely to be *n*-grams which contain grammatical words, which thus do not contain conceptual content. For example, the 3-gram, 'the Muslim world' occurs forty-one times in *Heretic*. But since the 2-gram 'Muslim world' occurs forty-three times, examining the 3-gram does not reveal much more. Besides, I am using Sketch Engine to contrast the content of *Heretic* with an argument of 1,169 words. Given the size of the latter, it would be unlikely to have highly recurrent 3-grams. Indeed, the most common 3-gram in Hasan's argument, at only three instances, is 'a Muslim Luther'.

its treatment of women, and sharia-based punishments of stoning and testimony, and in consent to marriage. Sharia even states that women are considered Not untypical of the transgressions sharia identifies is the "rebellious wife," One of the most onerous burdens sharia imposes on women is guardianship subordinate role assigned to women in sharia **law**. That subordinate role has long The rule of civil **law** rather than sharia **law** will ensure all citizens are code to be worth at most "half a man." Sharia subordinates women to men in a No group is more harmed by sharia than Muslim women, however-a inequality of the sexes is central to sharia. The Quran says that a son shall According to sharia, women inherit half what men inherit

Fig. 5. 10 randomly generated concordance lines for 'sharia' from *Heretic* highlighting the collocates, 'law' and 'women'.

Table 6
Top 10 lexical 2-grams in *Heretic*

Lexical 2-grams	Frequency
medina muslims	43
muslim world	43
muslim reformation	33
commanding right	31
forbidding wrong	30
boko haram	28
islamic state	26
saudi arabia	23
united states	22
islamic world	20

6.7. Summary

From these data minings, it is clear that a central standpoint in Hirsir Ali's *Heretic* is that Sharia – the law and its enforcement – requires root and branch reform, especially so that women's rights may be radically augmented. A key way that this can be implemented is by 'shackling Sharia' and instituting secularism into Islamic societies where it does not yet exist. For Hirsir Ali, secularism is a positive ultimate legacy of the Christian reformation.

To emphasise again, Hasan is not dialectically obligated to engage with these central standpoints of *Heretic* since the focus of his argument is criticising the alleged calls for a Muslim Luther to lead an Islamic reformation directly analogous to the Christian reformation. Yet as I have also stated, Hasan accedes to the need for socio-economic, political and religious reforms in Islam. And as I previously contended, this licences the following experiment: importing into Hasan's argument key reformist points of *Heretic* – which self-evidently fall under the broad categories of socio-economic, political and religious reform – to explore whether or not they lead to further deconstruction in Hasan's text. This is indeed what happens. In Sections 7 and 8, I reveal that Hasan's argument is a much bigger straw man – a wicker man – vis-à-vis *Heretic*. In Section 7, I reveal instability in Fig. 4.

7. Deconstruction of Hasan's wicker man argument I

7.1. Deconstructing parallel 1: Objectives of Luther and Wahhab

Hirsir Ali's stress is on a legacy of Luther's reformation – secularism. So, when Hasan parallels Wahhab's and Luther's objectives in [H], his argument veers from Hirsir Ali's focus. This tension is indicated in Fig. 6 with the following double-headed dotted arrow:



7.2. Deconstructing parallel 3: Legacy of Luther and Wahhab

7.2.1. Negative legacy of Luther and Wahhab (Hasan) vs positive legacy of Luther (Hirsir Ali)

When Hasan does parallel Luther's and Wahhab's legacies in [H], [M], [N], he would thus seem to be on relevant ground. That is to say, Hasan's corresponding of the religious wars in Europe following

the Reformation (a legacy of Luther) with the ultraviolence of ISIS (a legacy of Wahhab) would seem to be a legitimate move. However, the religious wars of the Reformation are not the only legacy of Luther. Hirsī Ali's focus on secularism is what she perceives as a *positive legacy* of the Reformation when Hasan highlights a *negative legacy* of same. This tension is indicated in Fig. 6 with the following double-headed arrow:



7.2.2. Non-enduring legacy of Luther vs enduring legacy of Wahhab

The ensuing religious wars in Europe ended centuries ago. There is a tension, then, in Hasan paralleling a *non-enduring* legacy of Luther with an *enduring* legacy of Wahhab. A like-for-like paralleling would instead be between the enduring legacy of Wahhab and the enduring secularist unforeseen legacy of Luther's reformation. Bringing the latter's absence alongside Hasan's argument, however, problematises one of Wahhab's enduring legacies – (at the time that Hasan's text was published) the lack of female equality in non-secular Saudi Arabia/ISIS. This tension is indicated in Fig. 6 with the following double-headed arrow:



To conclude: by importing, alongside Hasan's argument from Fig. 4, a central standpoint in *Heretic* that secularism is a positive and enduring legacy of the Protestant Reformation, the framing of Hasan's text in parallels 1 and 3 is deconstructed.

7.3. Deconstructing parallel 2 in Fig. 4

I have deconstructed parallels 1 and 3 in Fig. 4. What about parallel 2? When Hasan draws attention to Luther's anti-Semitism, is this relevant vis-à-vis *Heretic*? By this I mean, does Hirsī Ali make Luther's moral character an important component of her stance? As before, all 12 instances can be seen in the concordance of Fig. 3. In none of these mentions does Hirsī Ali appeal to Luther's moral character which could, in turn, legitimate a relevant response that she has omitted a key moral deficit – his anti-Semitism. To conclude, since Hirsī Ali does not make Luther's moral character central to her argument, Hasan's fixing on Luther's anti-Semitism, at least vis-à-vis *Heretic*, lacks immediate relevance.

8. Deconstruction of Hasan's wicker man argument II: Ascertaining recurrent collocates of 'Muslim(s)' in *Heretic* which are absent from Hasan's argument

8.1. Collocates as absences

It is possible that an argument uses the *same* categories as the standpoint text that it attacks, yet does not use the same *collocates* to modify these categories. Below I perform a contrastive collocate analysis of *Heretic* and Hasan's argument. I focus on the lexical lemma MUSLIM since, at 20 instances, this is the most common in Hasan's argument (see Table 1).

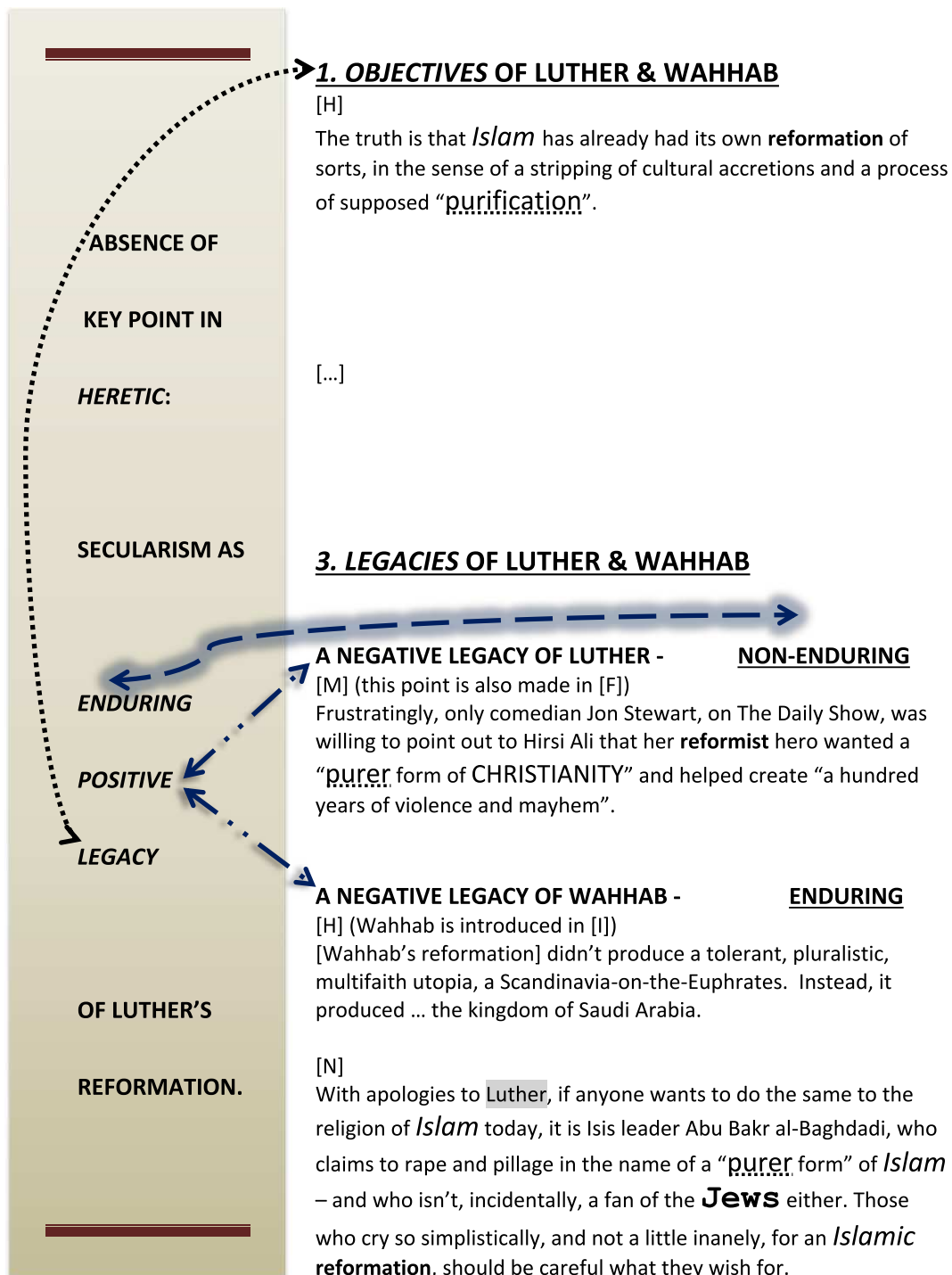


Fig. 6. Deconstruction of parallels 1 and 3 in Fig. 4; double-arrowed lines signal tensions.

Table 7

Lexical collocates of MUSLIM (1L) in *Heretic* and Hasan's argument; collocates of MUSLIM common to both texts have been removed

Hasan's argument		Hirsi Ali's <i>Heretic</i>	
Collocate 1L	Freq.	Collocate 1L	Freq.
mainstream	2	Medina	44
ex-	2	Mecca	11
crisis-ridden	1	young	9
medieval	1	Sunni	5
diverse	1	Modifying	5
		moderate	5
		American	5
		practicing	4
		ordinary	3

8.2. Categorisation of Muslims in *Heretic I*: 'Mecca' Muslims and 'Medina Muslims'

I used Sketch Engine to calculate the most frequent collocates for MUSLIM in both *Heretic* and Hasan's argument. I looked for collocates one place to the left (1L) of MUSLIM, since that is where noun modification commonly occurs. Because I am interested in distinct differences in collocate framing, I deleted collocates which were common to *Heretic* and Hasan's argument. The results can be seen in Table 7. It is clear that there are differences in the collocates of MUSLIM used by Hasan and Hirsi Ali. In Table 7, I have highlighted the collocate differences that I will discuss below. I choose these collocates since they classify contemporary Muslims broadly, not just in terms of their particular Islamic denomination.

Hirsi Ali employs 'Mecca'/'moderate', 'Medina' and 'Modifying' to categorise different broad types of Muslim.²² She uses 'Mecca' and 'moderate' interchangeably to describe conservative Muslims. They may be patriarchal, and may not embrace gay rights, but all the same do not support nor engage in violence – the vast majority of Muslims. The reason she uses 'Mecca' as a classifier here is to reflect Mohammed's peaceful attitude to converting non-Muslims to Islam when he lived in Mecca. In contrast, she refers to 'Medina Muslims' as those who resort to violence such as ISIS, Al Qaeda and Boko Haram. The reason she chooses 'Medina' as a modifier is to reflect Mohammed's martial turn when he moved to Medina.

8.3. Categorisation of Muslims in *Heretic II*: 'Modifying' Muslims

The final category of Muslim that Hirsi Ali uses is 'Modifying'. These are Muslims who seek reform of Islam. They are not, however, part of the mainstream since they are 'dissidents'. She alleges that being a dissident or 'Modifying Muslim' entails potential peril:

Yet those under the greatest threat are the **dissidents** and reformers: the **Modifying Muslims**. They are the ones who face ostracism and rejection, who must brave all manner of insults, who must deal with the death threats – or face death itself. (Hirsi Ali [10, p. 21])

Hirsi Ali devotes an appendix to discussing 'Modifying Muslims'. The appendix consists of 3284 words. Below, I include an excerpt where Hirsi Ali characterises dissidents in the West:

²²There are 648 instances of MUSLIM in Hirsi Ali's book. 349 instances are 'Muslims' and 299 are 'Muslim'.

There is a growing number of ordinary Muslim citizens in the West who are currently braving death threats and even official punishment in dissenting from Islamic orthodoxy and calling for the reform of Islam. These individuals are not clergymen but “ordinary” Muslims, generally educated, well read, and preoccupied with the crisis of Islam.

Among them are Maajid Nawaz (UK), Samia Labidi (France), Afshin Ellian (Netherlands), Ehsan Jami (Netherlands), Naser Khader (Denmark), Seyran Ateş (Germany), Yunis Qandil (Germany), Bassam Tibi (Germany), Raheel Raza (Canada), Zuhdi Jasser (U.S.), Saleem Ahmed (U.S.), Nonie Darwish (U.S.), Wafa Sultan (U.S.), Saleem Ahmed (U.S.), Ibn Warraq (U.S.), Asra Nomani (U.S.), and Irshad Manji (U.S.). (Hirsi Ali [10, p. 239])

Note that these dissident ‘Modifying’ Muslims are also characterised as ‘ordinary’ Muslims (see also Table 7). Hirsi Ali uses ‘ordinary’ to signal that ‘Modifying Muslims’ are neither clergy nor religious scholars.

8.4. How these collocate differences lead to deconstruction in Hasan’s framing

Let me now compare Hirsi Ali’s classification of Muslims with Hasan’s classification of the same. When Hasan mentions ‘Mainstream Muslims’, this is more or less equivalent to Hirsi Ali’s ‘Mecca Muslims’:

[B]

[...] Whether or not mainstream Muslims will respond positively to a call for reform from a woman who has described their faith as a “destructive, nihilistic cult of death” that should be “crushed”...

Hasan mentions ‘violent (Muslim) extremism’ twice ([D]; [L]), which equates to Hirsi Ali’s ‘Medina Muslims’. In these instances, though Hasan’s and Hirsi Ali’s classification of MUSLIM are lexically different, they are not semantically different.

What about how Hasan sees reformists? Consider the following:

[B]

Then there is Ayaan Hirsi Ali. The Somali-born author, atheist and ex-Muslim has a new book called *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now*.

[...]

[L]

What they don’t need are lazy calls for an Islamic reformation from non-Muslims and ex-Muslims, the repetition of which merely illustrates how shallow and simplistic, how ahistorical and even anti-historical, some of the west’s leading commentators are on this issue. It is much easier for them, it seems, to reduce the complex debate over violent extremism to a series of clichés, slogans and soundbites, rather than examining root causes or historical trends; easier still to champion the most extreme and bigoted critics of Islam while ignoring the voices of mainstream Muslim scholars, academics and activists.

In [L], Hasan explicitly repudiates reformists who are ex-Muslim – such as Hirsi Ali – in favour of *mainstream* (‘Mecca’) Muslim reformists. (Presumably, in [L] Hasan has Hirsi Ali in mind since she is the only ‘ex-Muslim’ he specifically refers to in his argument). A stark absence from his framing, however, are the numerous dissident or ‘Modifying’ Muslim reformists. That is to say, Hasan does not mention *non-mainstream* Muslim reformists who Hirsi Ali spends a large portion of her book highlighting.

To conclude: had Hasan been arguing that reform of the Islamic world was *not* needed, one might say that Hasan not mentioning: i) the non-mainstream Muslim reformists detailed in *Heretic*; ii) the non-mainstream Muslim reformer Hashem Aghajari discussed in the Thomas Friedman article he criticises (see Section 5.1) would be irrelevant to his main goal: to attack those who have allegedly called for a Muslim Martin Luther(s) to lead an Islamic reformation directly analogous to the Christian reformation. But, to reiterate, in [K] Hasan does concede that reforms to Islam are needed. This legitimates a critical perspective on his argument's framing which takes broad appreciation of Muslim reformist types in *Heretic* (especially as this is a book which Hasan has already strawmanned).

8.5. Summing up deconstruction I and II of Hasan's wicker man

I have shown how further exploration of *Heretic* using digital text analysis tools helps to reveal conveniently that its central standpoints conflict with the macro-structural and micro-structural framing of Hasan's argument more fully. Similar to Section 5, this is a misrepresentation wicker man which relies on omission from Hirsi Ali's book, whether or not this is intentional.

9. Reflection

9.1. Demonstrations

In this article, I have shown the value of using digital text analysis tools for helping to reveal and deconstruct dialectical shortfalls of an argument where the text being criticised in that argument is large. Firstly, I deconstructed the op-ed argument in line with its dialectical obligations to represent accurately the portion of the long text it criticises. I showed the argument to be a *straw man*. I also showed the value of digital text analysis tools to help conveniently and rigorously explore how the wider standpoints of the long text problematise the argument's framing. The much larger straw man or *wicker man* that I exposed went mostly beyond the op-ed's dialectical obligations vis-à-vis its specific thesis. Yet, as I highlighted, the exploration of whether or not the op-ed is a wicker man was justified by i) the op-ed admitting that socio-economic, political and religious reforms to Islam were necessary; ii) Hirsi Ali's book arguing for such reforms.

I showed that, once an argument's misrepresentations and omissions are accounted for, the cohesive structure of the argument destabilises which, in turn, creates problems for its coherence. Accurate tracing, beforehand, of the micro-cohesive structure of the argument enabled acute appreciation of macro-cohesive structure. In turn, this facilitated a systematic deconstruction of the dialectical deficiencies of the argument. Moreover, I highlighted how relevant absences from an argument may not only occur through stark omission, but through use of different collocates for the same categories. Lastly, I should be explicit that the case study of this article is meant as an illustration of the value of software in education. I do not claim this case study to be an empirical test.

9.2. Methodological advantages

This article has modelled a pedagogy where digital tools emanating from corpus linguistics are used to generate objectively and conveniently the most recurrent topics (at least how the software identifies them), words and phrases in long standpoint data which, in turn, enable the analyst to see if they are absent from an argument of reasonable length which opposes that standpoint. In turn, rigorous critical

grip on the argument's dialectical quality is enabled. The student still needs to perform interpretative work to ascertain whether or not recurrent words and expressions in the attacked standpoint which are absent from the argument are, in fact, relevant ones. After all, algorithms cannot perform critical qualitative interpretation.

The key point here is that use of these tools sets the student up to do this not only in a convenient way. Since the tools also rein in arbitrariness, they augment the rigour of the dialectical evaluation. All judgement is subjective in taking place in a single head. But since judgement of straw man status is based on objectively-generated data, this increases the chances that others will find the judgement convincing. In other words, the approach increases the prospect that judgement of straw man status has inter-subjective validity. Lastly, there is another key methodological advantage. Targeted reading of big standpoint data on the basis of statistically frequent semantic domains, relatively frequent words and expressions automatically extracted from that data facilitates the efficiency of the straw man evaluation.

9.3. Pedagogical advantages

Once an argument has been judged to be dialectically fallacious or sound, this does not mean, naturally, that the student now needs to adopt the standpoint criticised in the argument. On the contrary, now that they understand both standpoints, they are in a position to decide where *they* stand in the debate and thus assert critical independence. This may be matured through researching other viewpoints and scholarship relevant to either side of the argument. Rodenbeck [15], for instance, finds Hirsi Ali's categorisation, 'Mecca Muslims', to be reductive:

But surely the 1.5 billion "Mecca" Muslims do not all fit into a single hapless category. Like the members of any great religion, one might imagine they instead have a diversity of views, as designations that Muslims use for one another, such as, for example, Salafist, Sufi, Ismaili, Zaidi, Wahhabist, Gulenist, Jaafari, and Ibadi, would suggest.

It is conceivable too that a student may disdain both sides of an argument in favour of a fresh position.

The approach of this article can thus be used as a pedagogy which not only engenders intellectual satisfaction and empowerment from highlighting straw and wicker man arguments, but also extends critical awareness of domains of debate. It is best if the student is unfamiliar with the attacked standpoint. There is little point in using the strategy presented if the student already knows the attacked standpoint in detail. Felicitously, the pedagogy engenders a secure quantitative foundation for the student to develop their knowledge, and progress to making an informed decision about where they stand. Another pedagogical advantage is as follows: rhetorical sensitivity is sharpened. Students are able to see where categories in an argument might be insufficiently specific and differentiated in how they are used to describe the standpoint the argument opposes.

Lastly, should a student ascertain that, in fact, the argument accurately represents the long standpoint it attacks, they have not wasted their time. This is because they have established that the argument has passed a dialectical test of quality. And, whether or not the argument is a straw man or wicker man, if they choose an argument where they are (largely) unfamiliar with the attacked standpoint, the student importantly learns about a new domain of debate, or extends their appreciation of it, *in a sustainedly engaged and fact-based manner*. Positive things.

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