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### Fearmongers: a rhetorical analysis

“I don’t have a future.” (“Lies”) is the opening line to the 1984 Exxon ad “Lies they tell our children.” A little girl is pictured, holding a pamphlet displaying the predictions that scientists have made for the next 25 years: worldwide famine, overpopulation, ice caps melting, mask-wearing. The predictions in the ad are now problems my generation has to face daily — a preventable crisis that could have been evaded if climate efforts had been made by generations before.

The ad continues. The ad cites facts that were taken out of context to further dismiss the findings and predictions scientists have made. Then, it states all of the great scientific strides that will be made in the future: making the reader believe that they should focus on the virtuous scientific accomplishments and ignore the daunting predictions. Finally, the ad ends by making the point that parents should question the “old mythologies” their children are taught about the environment because “our youngsters do have a future” (“Lies”). This ad is polluted with misinformation that is aimed at creating distrust in science and promoting fear surrounding the impending reality of climate change. It misinforms readers to believe the ideas written in their

children's books are something that is used only to crush children's dreams for the future rather than teaching them skills so that they may have a healthy future.

The ad, "Lies they tell our children," was written by an anonymous author from Exxon, an oil company. Between the lines of caution in this ad, lies corruption. Oil and gas companies are one of the primary contributors to the greenhouse effect which has led to the Earth's increasing temperature. Clearly, from the presence of misinformation in this 1984 ad, it is evident that oil companies and other benefactors have been creating misinformation, disinformation, and even fake news in media for years so that they can maximize profits and power. Professor Steven F. Hayward writes a propelling modernist argument that shares many commonalities with the ad both rhetorically and rudimentarily that will be examined through this essay. Professor Hayward in his essay "Why The Left Needs Climate Change" dismisses climate change by manipulating his audience through the use of religious ethos and logos philosophy but is motivated by political and economic gain; therefore, we must understand the rhetoric that he uses to spread misinformation fueled by the fear of change and the fear of the "other."

Arguably, one of Hayward's most powerful stratagems is synthesizing an argument that is centered around his audience, the conservative right-wing voters in the United States. Historically speaking, right-wing politics are known as conservative politics often governed by traditional Christian values. Religion can deeply govern an individual's beliefs, actions, and emotions. Hayward immediately formulates the idea within his essay that the leftist's goal to promote change in humanity to care for the environment is nothing more than their "secular religion." Hayward writes:

“The need to believe in oneself as part of the agency of human salvation runs deep for leftists and environmentalists who have made their obsessions a secular religion. And humanity doesn’t need salvation if there is no sin in the first place. Hence human must be sinners – somehow – in need of redemption from the left” (Hayward 1).

The use of religion simultaneously embodies ethos and pathos. By stating that the political left and environmentalists are forcing their religious-like belief onto other people because they believe those who do not follow their ideologies are inherently sinners and less than, Hayward instantly makes his audience feel uneasy, offended, angry. Meanwhile, the use of religion also acts as a stabbing point at the audience’s ethics. It is unethical to baptize someone as a sinner especially when they believe themselves to be a loyal follower of God. Additionally, in Christianity, it is believed that only God can provide redemption – not a human or a political party. Hayward, a devout Christian himself, uses his knowledge of Christianity to manipulate those into believing his opinion as fact. However, his opinion on what governs the environmentalists’ and leftists’ actions is nothing more than his opinion and cannot be backed by fact, yet he still misinforms his audience to believe that environmental ‘propaganda’ is nothing more than a forced secular religion rather than scientific data based on fact.

Hayward attempts to use logos in the remainder of his essay. He cites the work from Kenneth Minogue, a controversial Australian political theorist, and his philosophical book *The Liberal Mind*. Essentially, the book compares liberals to “medieval dragon hunters, who sought after dragons to slay even after it was clear they didn’t exist” (Hayward 2). Hayward goes on to say that just like other “smaller” issues like “microaggressions” (Hayward 2) environmentalists will eventually find a bigger dragon to fight. Through the use of logos and as some would

identify as a trustworthy source, such as philosophy, his argument further supports the narrative that the left environmentalists are nothing more than anti-Christianity dragon hunters.

He continues his argument to further dissolve the trustworthiness of the left party and the belief in climate change. Hayward criticizes, “true-believing environmentalists is drug addiction... for there is always a next fix for environmentalists: fracking, deforestation... the list is endless” (Hayward 2). Hayward’s source and idea on the comparison of drug use to the environmentalists’ motives come from the political scientist Anthony Downs in his dated 1972 journal *The Public Interest*. His comparison of the political left to drug users could be identified as a logical argument because of his use of the ABC structure, credible sources, and his authoritative tone leading his readers to perceive his misinformation as truth. Although Hayward’s drug use argument follows the logos structure, his argument lacks factual evidence. However, Hayward consistently proliferates credibility in his essay with his sources, tone, and disdain towards the opposite party as the argument is built.

Maybe the most powerful aspect of Hayward’s argument is the time it was published. “Why the Left Needs Climate Change” was published in June of 2015 leading up to the 2016 election of Hillary Clinton v. Donald Trump. This argument is powerful because it is in a kairotic moment in the United States – a time in the United States when the party animosity had finally been unveiled and individuals had become increasingly polarized over recent years. Hayward is aware of this divide and abuses the fragility of his audience to push forward his misinformation on the environmental status for his gain. He alienates the left party throughout his essay which allows him to easily spread his misinformation as truth. Hayward makes climate change seem like nothing more than a political ploy from the democratic party and lobbying environmentalists. Hayward argues:

“For [leftists] the only thing worse than catastrophic climate change is the catastrophe of not having a catastrophe to obsess over – and use as an excuse to extend political control over people and resources” (Hayward 3).

Hayward blatantly states that catastrophic climate change is nothing more than a tool for political control – not a scientific crisis. This is flagrant misinformation that he is feeding his readers. In reality, Hayward, like the 1984 ad, is using fear to control his audience. The 1984 ad used fear of change – fear that the truth of climate change was going to steal children’s adolescence. Hayward wields and manipulates fear of the opposing party – fear of varying religions, fear of divergent ideas, and fear of the “other” – to control his audience. The use of fear in both the 1984 ad and “Why the Left Needs Climate Change” makes arguments ethical, emotional, logical, and believable to their target audiences.

Both the 1984 ad and Hayward attempt to control readers for political gain. Hayward is an established author who writes many opinion-based articles in various newspapers and conservative blog, Powerlineblog.com, and is a resident scholar at UC Berkeley's Institute of Governmental studies. In his writing, he focuses on constructing pieces that walk the line of racism and overt offense to some readers so that he may gain publicity, income, and power. Hayward’s writing is so targeted at a particular audience that arguably he could write about any “controversial issue” and it would have the same result – diverge already divided parties. Hayward is aware that one of the simplest ways to unite individuals is to create more division through tribalism. He completely ignores gaining the minds of those from the left and places his undivided attention on the opinions of right thinkers to gain mindless control over them. His focus on religious ethos, logos philosophy and the kairotic moment in “Why the Left Needs

Climate Change” is only one example of how he uses the fear of the other to maintain his tribalistic control.

Understanding rhetoric that is utilized through Hayward's essay “Why the Left Needs Climate Change” allows us to identify how authors and media makers label misinformation as truth. Through the use of tribalism, Hayward forces his target audience of the political right to trust his ideas without question. Hayward’s tribalistic appeal contributes to fear in his readers and their inability to think for themselves and accept anything the opposing party may say about climate change. The use of fear in both the 1984 ad and “Why the Left Needs Climate Change” shows how fear contributes to the fragility of truth. It is important that we as individuals in the unstable United States' political climate can identify misinformation so that we may protect ourselves from manipulation.

Works Cited:

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