The Rhetoric of the Global Warming Debate: Liberal and Conservative Perspectives on the Environment, Society, and Each Other

By Emily Arnold

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Approved by:

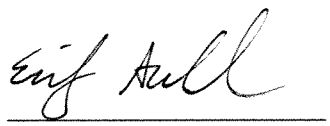
Dr. Ken McAllister
Department of English

Author's Statement

My main goal in writing this paper was to explore two subjects that I care deeply about, the environment and the political process, while utilizing tools I have gained through my coursework in the English and Linguistics departments. It has always puzzled me why people are drawn to certain political perspectives, and I found this particularly perplexing with regard to the global warming debate. Given that we are all privy to same scientific information, why are opinions about the reality and severity of global warming often drawn along party lines? This is the question I set out to answer through the examination of persuasive documents. I also relied on the work of Dr. George Lakoff, UC Berkley professor of linguistics, who has researched the moral viewpoints behind conservative and liberal ideals in his book *Moral Politics*.

I feel the project was largely successful, although, with more time I would have liked to explore this topic from a psychological perspective as well. Given my limited knowledge of this subject area, this research proved too time consuming to tackle here. It would also have been interesting to run my own experiment on how people interpret the same information in different ways, given their previous perceptions on the topic.

The process of writing a paper of this length and depth has left me much better prepared should I ever pursue a graduate degree. I also want to thank Dr. McAllister for his help in completing this project and the many other professors who have helped along the way.



Emily Arnold

Abstract

This paper examines the fundamental differences between conservatives' and liberals' perspectives on global warming. It will attempt to prove that these underlying ideological differences ensure that liberals are more ready to believe in the gravity of global warming, while conservatives remain skeptical. Additionally, it will examine how distortions of the liberal or conservative ideology are used to further divide the two groups, providing false reasons to ignore arguments of the opposing perspective. To do this, the persuasive tactics used in four global warming documents of various media will be analyzed.

Introduction

For most in the Western world, the idea that people could alter the earth's climate, surface, and weather patterns was the stuff of science fiction until about two decades ago. The news not only shattered previous assumptions about the impact of human behavior but caused a wide range of powerful emotional reactions: shock, denial, disbelief, fear, anger. In the United States, response largely depended on how these ideas clashed or coincided with preconceived notions of man's place in the world, particularly with respect to his ideal relationship to the environment. In such a climate, decisions to either ignore or fight these problems are not merely political; they threaten worldviews and identities.

An aspect of global warming that distinguishes it from past environmental issues is its lack of immediate, tangible effects. There have always been hot days. There are no burning rivers to serve as warning signs. On top of this, the process is a gradual one that takes satellite imagery as well as thousands of years worth of climate history and many other data points to understand. Even then there remains legitimate disagreement. It is no wonder that some are hesitant to latch onto the idea that the earth is warming, let alone that this warming will be

catastrophic. The interesting twist, though, is that so far, in the United States, it has been far more likely for a conservative to deny the existence of global warming, or to reject the idea that action should be taken to slow global warming, than a liberal.

The Bush administration is a primary example of the conservative response to global warming. Not only has the administration refused to put any restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions, it has also recently been accused of altering scientific documents on global warming before releasing them to the public or Congress in order to "heighten the degree of uncertainty" that the public associates with anthropogenic climate effects (Revkin). The evidence for this is compelling. Most major government-issued climate reports put out under the Bush administration have been edited by White House official, Phillip A. Cooney, a lawyer with no scientific background. Additionally, Mr. Cooney is a former lobbyist for the American Petroleum Institute. An example of such changes cited in the *New York Times* article, "Bush Aide Edited Climate Reports," is the insertion of the words "significant and fundamental" before "uncertainties" (Revkin). Director of Climate Science Watch, Rick Piltz, a branch of the nonprofit program GAP (Government Accountability Project), has scrutinized such changes and says such political interference in scientific documents is unprecedented. He makes his case in a large report entitled *Atmosphere of Pressure: Political Interference in Federal Climate Change*.

While I am convinced that such alterations occurred, it is difficult to assign motivations for these activities. In general, why would conservatives be so much more skeptical than liberals about global warming? While many of the opposing viewpoint would like to believe that personal profit is the motive, I feel this unfairly evokes a sense of "villain" or "evil-doer" that is often pounced upon, but which seldom exists outside of fiction. Surely it is improbable that conservatives actually believe global warming will be catastrophic and are consciously

preventing the United States from taking action that might mitigate it. To the contrary, the fact that many more conservatives than liberals have vehemently denied the existence of global warming for so long, suggests there is something inherent in the conservative mindset that excludes acknowledgement of global warming.

Tending to vote democratic myself, I began this paper hoping to determine what it is about the conservative worldview that clashes with global warming. After researching the topic, however, I concluded that both conservatives and liberals are likely to stray from solid facts in discussing global warming. Liberals are just as likely to exaggerate or emphasize the negative effects of global warming as conservatives are to deemphasize or negate them. It soon became clear to me that I could not write an unbiased paper about global warming and conservative worldview without also examining the liberal mindset and why the liberal value system allows for or even embraces global warming. Understanding the roots of our beliefs about global warming, as well as our opponents', may help us become more rational about the issue or lead to compromises that will preserve both our environment and the values that conservatives and liberals hold closest. For this reason, I feel the relationship between global warming and liberal and conservative worldviews is worth discussing.

In this paper, I will use the political terms liberal and conservative to mean more than simply belonging to a political party or persuasion, but as representations of thought along a fault line of moral value judgments. I intend to argue that an individual's perception of global warming is influenced by his political ideology, and hence, his preconceived ideas about the way society should function. Additionally, misunderstanding these beliefs can lead to character attacks that further conceal the realities of global warming.

Research in the field of psychology on how preconceived attitudes and biases influence rational decision making and the acquisition of new information, makes these seem plausible. A study by Koriat, Lichenstien, and Fishhoff suggests that people tend to subconsciously look for information that supports "favored beliefs." This results in certain biases when done without giving equal consideration to "disconforming evidence" (Baruch). Additionally, people tend to think they know more about a subject than they actually do by overestimating the amount of knowledge they have acquired on it (Baruch).

In order to show that this is occurring with scientific information about global warming, I will be analyzing two pairs of persuasive documents, each pair containing a liberal and conservative viewpoint. In my analysis, I will be using the work of George Lakoff, a professor of psycholinguistics at UC Berkley, to examine conservatives' and liberals' underlying beliefs.

In his book, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, Lakoff seeks to explain why someone with a conservative or liberal view on one topic will tend to have the same view on another. For instance, he asks, "what does gun control have to do with abortion?" The answer he comes up with in his book is that it is not merely surface cultural differences that divide today's conservatives and liberals, but the basic moral principles at the root of these beliefs.

An expert in how the metaphors that are built into our language reflect our subconscious attitudes, Lakoff makes the case that our political beliefs are based around our concept of family. Metaphorically speaking, we see our nation as a family with the citizens in the role of "children" and the government in the role of parental authority. Thus, the values we believe should be instilled in our children and the methods we believe should be used to do this translate into how we think our citizens should behave and our government should run. He then organizes these

values into "categories of moral action." Lakoff's research helps explain why holding a certain set of liberal or conservative attitudes would cause a person to interpret information about global warming differently.

Before launching into a discussion of how the concept of global warming fits in with political worldviews, it is important to discuss what is meant here by the term "global warming." This is not a paper about the scientific realities of global warming, which are still highly controversial and which I am not qualified to debate. As this paper is about worldviews, I will be using the term to represent how global warming is realized in the minds of most Americans. The actual existence of global warming, the portion of global warming that is caused by human action, and how drastic the effects of global warming will be are not of primary consequence here. The words "Loch Ness Monster" create similar images among most people, regardless of whether or not they believe in a sea monster at the bottom of a lake or whether that sea monster actually exists. The same is true of global warming.

Global warming, as used here, represents an idea that human greenhouse gas emissions have begun to heat the earth's atmosphere in such a way that in the next few decades glaciers will melt, ocean levels will rise, and the ecosystems that most forms of life depend on will be altered. For many, global warming is also associated with collective environmental action to slow such effects in which all countries or all individual citizens commit to or are required to reduce greenhouse gases. Again, this association exists regardless of whether someone believes such solutions are viable or necessary. It is these associations with the term global warming, and not the scientific reality, that, in my view, conflict with the conservative worldview and match the liberal one.

Conservative and Liberal Perspectives on the Environment and Society

In this portion of this paper, I will analyze two documentary films about global warming, Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* and Steven Hayward's rebuttal film, *An Inconvenient Truth or Convenient Fiction? An Inconvenient Truth* was first shown at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival and subsequently made $49 million at the box office (Wikipedia). It also received two Academy Awards. Al Gore has since received a Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in preventing climate change. Gore, of course, is a prominent Democrat; he was vice president under Clinton and ran for president in 2000.

An Inconvenient Truth or Convenient Fiction? came out in 2007. Although never making it to mainstream theaters, the film premiered at three locations in the U.S and has been available for viewing over the Internet. This was a decidedly lower budget film, costing only $24,000, but in Hayward's own words, "I have a computer slide show about climate change, too, so I thought why not make a short film of my own?" (Glazov). Hayward is the F.K. Weyerhaeuser Fellow in Law and Economics at the American Enterprise Institute and Senior Fellow at the Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy. He also writes the annual *Index of Leading Environmental Indicators*. Clearly conservative leaning, he has published several books about Reagan and Churchill including *Greatness: Reagan, Churchill, and the Making of Modern Statesmen* (Glazov).

Contrasting the rhetorical appeals used in the films yields insight into the underlying value systems Gore and Hayward individually prescribe to as well those that liberals and conservatives prescribe to in general. While Gore outright claims that his mission is a moral one, Hayward denies a relationship between global warming and morality, claiming that it is instead,

a political issue. I will argue, however, that Hayward's view of global warming reflects a subconscious conservative moral viewpoint just as Gore's reflects a liberal one.

In order to analyze the worldviews each film sets up, I will be looking at the implied premises behind Gore's and Hayward's arguments as opposed to the arguments themselves. Arguably, the underlying value systems are evident in what the two movies feel is unnecessary to prove, those assumptions that the films take for granted about humanity's relationship to the environment. These are primarily visible in the way the two men sculpt their arguments. Each creates a story that makes sense to him as well as appeals to his audience, liberal in Gore's case and conservative in Hayward's.

In *An Inconvenient Truth*, Gore stresses impending doom for the earth and humanity if we do not take decisive action against global warming. Gore effectively includes recent disasters that strike an emotional chord with Americans, such as Katrina, WWII, and 9-11 implying that these atrocities and much worse are in store for us is we don't change our relationship to our environment. Katrina, in particular, is a theme the film often returns to. The images of floating bodies, fires, and shelters full of displaced families are exactly what Gore sees in our future.

Hayward, however, tells us these claims are highly exaggerated and that no extreme measures are needed to deal with global warming. Extreme, to Hayward, means anything that interferes with free markets or the overall economy. He claims that most of the data Gore is looking at is far more complicated than Gore makes it out to be and that the chances current climate trends will lead to disaster are unlikely at best. An optimist through and through, he states that the environment in the U.S. has been improving and that markets will continue to solve environmental problems as they arise.

Both men have the same scientific data available to them and at one point, even examine the same graph, yet they come to opposite conclusions about the effects of global warming and what we should do about it. Arguably then, the divergence in their conclusions has more to do with the men's preconceived beliefs about how the our society and how it should ideally function than it has to do with raw scientific data. As detailed below, each is looking at the facts through a different lens, which causes them to come to drastically different conclusions.

Gore's ideal for human interaction with the natural world is apparent in the opening scene of his film. A placid blue-green river fills the screen. Silhouettes of overhanging tree branches in the foreground make the viewer feel like he is peering out of a forest. Gore encourages this by telling us of the sounds we're hearing: "You notice the leaves rustling in the wind. You hear the birds." Throughout, we hear piano music. Though he stops just short of saying it, we get the feeling that natural scenes of beauty are somehow magical or sacred. He finishes the scene by saying "all of a sudden, it's a gear shift inside you. And it's like taking a deep breath and going 'oh yeah, I forgot about this.'" From these lines, we can gather that Gore believes nature gives something to people they can't get anywhere else. Perhaps it even contains secrets about ourselves that we have forgotten. The mention of breathing symbolically reminds us of a natural rhythm that exists within us, as well as the fact that we are interacting with the environment in merely completing this automatic act. All of this adds up to the idea that nature has some sort of intrinsic value that can't quite be named and certainly can't be measured in economic terms.

According to Lakoff, liberals tend to view nature through the frame of "mother" or "a living organism" that "gives us life and makes all of life possible and sustains us" (215). While they can also view nature as a natural resource for human consumption this is not the dominant metaphor and therefore is not given priority (216). The result is that most liberals feel nature can

be used for human benefit only in a sustainable manner that won't alter or harm the environment overall. Aside from these underlying assumptions, liberals also see nature as a thing of beauty which should be preserved for its own sake in the same way we preserve a beautiful piece of artwork. Lakoff argues that liberals see the preservation of such things as essential in a nurturing society.

Seen through this lens, nature is something to inspire wonder or stimulate development in people whose lives would otherwise be dryer and duller. Therefore, it is particularly important that young minds are exposed to it in order to become fully developed and well-rounded adults. All of these frames are embedded in the opening of Gore's film. Coming from this viewpoint, it is no wonder Gore feels we should protect the environment at any cost and that it is almost foolish to question the economic price of preventing global warming.

Hayward, on the other hand, thinks of the environment in vastly different terms than Gore does. Implied in his film is the idea that the environment should be preserved in order to serve human needs, while the belief that nature has some sort of mysterious, intrinsic value seems to be largely lacking. Hayward's ideal for human interaction with the environment is apparent in his description of Los Angeles which is, ironically, most environmentalists' nightmare city. He discusses how growing up there in the 1960s, there was often too much smog for running around outside. Today, however, "smog levels have fallen by more than 75%...even as the population and economy have continued to grow." This is Hayward's environmental ideal: a location that can support a vibrant economy, air that won't make anyone sick, and a maybe even a mountain view. The environment is fulfilling its role by providing for basic human needs. This outlook is probably why Hayward believes the environment in the U.S. has been improving "rapidly and

dramatically" in most areas. That humans are changing many aspects of the environment is not important so long as there is clean drinking water and breathable air.

According to Lakoff, thinking about the environment in this frame is typical of the conservative worldview. He claims that conservatives subconsciously believe that the existing power relations in the world make up the natural order of things. Therefore, they are morally legitimate and should be upheld (104). Lakoff terms this "upholding moral authority" and claims it is one of the top five categories of conservative moral action. As he defines it, moral authority is similar to the religious chain of being concept, where certain creatures are closer to God than others. When applied to the environment, this translates into the idea that since humans are more powerful than plants and animals, humans have a natural authority of the environment. This legitimizes viewing the environment as "a resource for human use" (82). The flip side of this frame, however, is that those who are dominant over others also have a moral obligation to care for those beneath them, so man is simultaneously nature' steward (82). This can seem similar to the liberal viewpoint since both metaphors are present; however, being a steward to the environment tends to be less important than pursuing one's self-interest in the conservative worldview. An important factor in this is that another, higher ranking category of conservative moral action is "promoting self-discipline, responsibility, and self-reliance" (167). Even so, it is important to note that the idea that nature has some intrinsic value is not entirely absent; it merely has lower priority than it does in the liberal worldview.

Another important difference in the liberal and conservative environmental worldviews is how each views society's current relationship to the environment. Again, Gore and Hayward differ drastically in their views of industry, business, and economic growth. Gore's film is full of dramatic images of billowing factory smoke, strip mines, and molten rock. One particular image

of a lava-like river of industrial liquid seems straight out of a *Lord of the Rings*-style epic. The color red, which is often used as a symbol of evil in the West, is prominent in these clips, giving modern industry a villainous persona—one whose purpose is to pillage the Earth. To Gore, the economic, industrial, and political systems we have created destroy the environment and prevent action from being taken against global warming. The sort of imagery in the film shows modern civilization as being isolated from or in opposition to our environment, a fatal mistake in Gore's mind.

This view is a part of Gore's overarching pessimism regarding our current relationship to the environment. He sees global warming as stemming from the more deeply rooted problem that we are living out of harmony with the earth. To many liberals, our habit of growth and expansion necessitates pillaging the earth; we continue to take more and more, which seems impossible to sustain indefinitely. Those sharing Gore's perspective are concerned with the means by which we deal with global warming as well as ends, as they would like to see a deep reworking of our relationship to the environment as a whole.

Hayward seems to pick up on this sentiment when he accuses Gore and other environmentalists as being hypocrites. He points out many specific instances of environmentalists' hypocrisy, including a bumper sticker he saw on a Ford V-8 that read, "I vote to protect the environment," and a "green issue" of a fashion magazine that was not printed on recycled paper. In doing this he tries to prove that environmentalists are not actually concerned with making the environment cleaner and the world a better place. Instead, they are stuck on a set of irrational principles like getting rid of fossil fuels or allowing the government to control more resources, even though these may not be the most effective or efficient ways to solve the problem. He says that environmentalists are not enthusiastic about carbon sequestration because

"it would be letting us off the hook from our evil ways of using fossil fuels," and calls this attitude a monomania. Similarly, he also argues that Gore's avoidance of a nuclear power discussion shows that environmentalists are more concerned with the means than then ends.

In a way, he's right. 'Quick fixes' like nuclear power or carbon sequestration that do not force us to think differently about our actions or relationship to the earth in general are unacceptable to many environmentalists, even if they do appear to help solve the global warming problem. In doing only these things, we are not addressing the deeper, more fundamental problem of taking too much too recklessly, and a solution like carbon sequestration can only be temporary. Something else will certainly come along as a consequence of our destructive ways.

Conservatives, on the other hand—Hayward included—do not see growth and expansion as problematic but as part of the solution. They see this as an important part of boosting the economy, thus bring more people out of poverty and into a position where they have the liberty to care about the environment. As Hayward see it, a healthy economy and free markets will always provide the solutions to new environmental challenges that should arise and it is foolish to shackle this process. In fact, he credits them with improving the smog situation in Los Angeles implying that they are the main part of the "reasonable policy prescriptions" he advocates in the beginning of the film.

For this reason, Hayward describes Gore and others sharing his beliefs not only as wrong but as "potentially dangerous" bullies who are out to support their own special interests. Hayward states outright that Gore wants, "large political interventions in the economy," "a vast expansion of government power," and laws that will make energy much more expensive. To Hayward these are the actions of the enemy. In intervening, not only do you upset the incentives

that make environmental progress possible, you also take away freedoms and money from those who, in his mind, have every right to them.

Hayward's most specific criticism of Gore's film is the plan of limiting driving to 10,000 miles a year per person or in Hayward's words "as little as 5,000 miles a year." Now to be clear, this is not Gore's own idea. In the film, he does discuss the National Resources Defense Council chart, which shows steps that, if taken, would reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1970's levels. Neither he, nor the plan he is discussing, say anything about legally forcing people to follow such a rule. At the same time, while Gore does not specifically propose these ideas, he does tout them as proof that we have the technology to "effectively address" the problem of global warming today.

To Hayward, however, the mere idea of such a proposal is so outrageous it is not even worthy of discussion. He introduces it disdainfully as an idea that "particularly interested him," though his tone says it all. This is followed by a pan of the audience that focuses on a young professional shaking his head in disgust. Clearly, the underlying message is that this and other proposals that involve government limitations on personal or corporate decisions are entirely unreasonable and extreme.

Hayward's rejection of any form of government intervention can be attributed to two of Lakoff's proposed categories of conservative moral action, "Promoting self-discipline, responsibility, and self-reliance" and "upholding the morality of reward and punishment" (Lakoff 167). Both categories are seen to be violated when there is interference with free markets. For one, such interference disrupts the natural mechanisms that reward those who work hard and punish those who do not. Lakoff claims conservatives see successful businessmen or entrepreneurs as succeeding through hard word and self-discipline, and for this reason, they

deserve to keep all the money they have earned (170). It follows then, that less wealthy people in society have not worked as hard and deserve their lot as well. Ultimately, market interference brings the whole conservative moral system crashing down as there is no longer incentive to do the right thing (this being working hard and becoming self-reliant) (Lakoff 68). In the realm of the environment, such market interference would include taxes or subsidies that are aimed at certain industries as well as laws governing what products can be manufactured. Thus, it is likely Hayward is so vehemently opposed to market interference in the name of global warming because it provides disincentives to pursuing those values conservatives hold as primary.

Liberals, on the other hand, tend to value citizens that are empathetic or nurturing over those who are self-reliant and self-disciplined (Lakoff 173). For this reason a liberal would more likely view the conservatives' 'model businessman' as someone who steps on others (or in this case, the environment) to gain more for himself.

In *An Inconvenient Truth*, Gore shows a picture of a scale with a stack of gold bars on one side and the globe on the other, as if those who favor economically conservative action are willing to sacrifice the "whole planet" for a little extra cash. This 'balancing act' scene relies on several assumptions. First, it implies that those who are not for reforming our economic system are only interested in personal wealth. As Gore pretends to ponder the scale he says of the gold bars "mm-mm, don't they look good," as if one could potentially be too blinded by the prospect of wealth to care that the we are sacrificing the planet. Clearly, self-interest is viewed here in a negative light. Gore depicts those who would make environmental sacrifices for economic reasons as greedy, corrupt, or having skewed values.

Finally, Gore and Hayward also disagree about who is a victim of the global warming phenomenon and who is not. In Gore's film, the earth itself, as well as creatures, ecosystems and

people who could be harmed by rising temperatures and sea levels, tend to be depicted as damsels in distress. Near the start of the film, we are told of how "fragile" the earth's atmosphere is when Gore compares it to the layer of varnish on a globe. Additionally, we are constantly reminded throughout the film of the innocent victims, both human and non-human, that global warming creates. As previously mentioned, the Katrina victims are prominent throughout the film, and Gore makes a connection between the severity of this hurricane and rising temperatures. Additionally, we also hear about people in the Himalayas who rely on rapidly depleting snowmelt as a water source, the 10,000,000 refugees that will potentially be displaced when the oceans rise, the polar bear who is left to drown in the arctic ocean after the ice breaks apart beneath him, the chicks who are no longer getting enough caterpillars to eat, and lil' Susie whose ice cream melts because it is too hot.

This focus on victimhood is actually a core part the liberal value system. Lakoff proposes that in the liberal worldview, the three highest categories of moral action are "empathetic behavior and promoting fairness," "helping those who cannot help themselves," and "protecting those who cannot protect themselves" (165-166). Of course, this implies that liberals, in order to be moral, must find someone or something that can play the role of helpless victim. For example, one cannot help those who cannot help themselves without there first being someone who cannot help himself. Without such a role, these forms of moral action could not exist.

For environmentalists, the environment fulfills the role of one who cannot help itself, protect itself, and is not being treated fairly or with proper empathy. In showing the environment in this light and displaying so many images of victims, Gore is appealing to powerful liberal moral values as well as providing an emotional appeal. In contrast, we do not see any victims in Hayward's film, as the conservative moral perspective does not require them. This is another

reason why it makes sense for Hayward to be more skeptical or place less emphasis on global warming's impact on people and the environment.

It seems the only thing Gore and Hayward have in common is that they both see themselves as David up against Goliath, the voice of reason in an unreasonable world. Both men bring up the idea that the opposing side has all the money, resources, and media stories several times. To those who claim that 'global warming skeptics' are distorting the facts, Hayward asks, "is it really possible that a tiny handful of skeptical individuals are managing to outweigh environmental activist groups with multimillion dollar budgets – not to mention national governments committed to this issue?"

Gore uses a similar, though more subtle, tactic when he compares global warming skeptics to the tobacco industry, an extremely powerful political force also in the business of "manufacturing doubt." Gore also links skeptics to the powerful oil and gas lobby. Is it possible that the cards could be as heavily stacked against both men as they would like to imply? Probably not, but Americans love a good story about the underdog's triumph. They like to believe that the stepped on, kicked around, little guy is morally right, and its only a matter of time until the bully gets his. Since both Hayward and Gore are each suggesting a set of moral values, it makes sense that they would want to associate themselves with the small. The development of this type of ethos is yet another form of moral appeal found in the films.

To summarize the underlying beliefs of each film, Gore values nature for its intrinsic worth. He sees modern civilization as being in opposition to or out of harmony with the environment. Those who do not want political or economic intervention as greedy or corrupt. The environment is a victim that deserves to be treated fairly and with empathy.

Hayward feels the environment has been improving and will continue to do so if our economy continues to grow and free markets are allowed to work. Any form of government intervention will upset the incentives for people to act in their own self interest, which includes protecting certain aspects of the environment. The primary role of the environment is to support human activity. The beliefs portrayed in these films influence how liberals and conservatives view global warming. They make it harder for conservatives to believe global warming is a problem and easier for liberals to do so.

Conservative and Liberal Stereotypes

In this next portion, I will be focusing on the ways liberals and conservatives stereotype each other. These stereotypes make it easier to disregard information about global warming that opposes one's worldview.

According to research on intergroup relations, it is human tendency to divide people into distinct groups based on traits, behaviors, or characteristics, despite the fact that these all exist along a spectrum. Individuals automatically place themselves within certain groups, and this creates "ingroups" and "outgroups." Often this leads to a heightened perception of differences between oneself and members of the outgroup, and also makes one more likely to distrust those in the outgroup (Brewer).

This means that a conservative would be more likely to trust information that he believes is coming from a person of the same political perspective and less likely to trust information he sees as coming from someone of a liberal one. The opposite would also be true. Furthermore, as will be illustrated, exaggerating or distorting particular liberal or conservative ideological traits facilitates the dismissal of their views. The underlying liberal and conservative beliefs about the

society and the environment discussed in previous section are often misconstrued for this purpose.

To examine this subject, I will be looking at two texts on the subject of global warming made for popular entertainment. The first is Michael Crichton's 2004 novel, *State of Fear*, in which eco-terrorists use global warming as a means to manipulate public thought and bring in additional funding. The second text is the 2004 sci-fi, natural disaster film by well-known director, Roland Emmerich, entitled *The Day After Tomorrow*. As seen in most big-budget Hollywood films and best-selling novels, these two stories make use of stereotypes to create good guys and bad guys. The fact that these two accounts of global warming are so highly exaggerated, makes them ideal for analysis.

It is important to point out that while *State of Fear* and *The Day After Tomorrow* are both primarily commercial endeavors, the authors of these works have additional messages about global warming they would like their audiences to take home. According to a *New York Times* article, Emmerich, an outspoken Bush opponent, believes *The Day After Tomorrow* unites "his political and financial motivations" (Revkin). Additionally, Gyllenhaal, who plays the lead, was quoted as saying, "Your first fear with a movie like this is that it's so spectacular it would nullify the idea. People might just get back in their S.U.V.'s at the end" (Revkin).

Similarly, it is no secret that Crichton believes the message underlying the dramatizations of *State of Fear*. The novel contains footnotes and graphs from scientific sources, as well as a personal statement. He has been asked to speak about global warming 'hype' at several prestigious venues, including the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, then under Sen. James Inhofe, a Republican from Oklahoma. Clearly, the novel intends to appeal to conservative sympathies just as *The Day After Tomorrow* targets liberal ones.

In *State of Fear*, the liberal environmentalists are represented through several different stereotypes. There are several common threads among these which journalist and historian, Thomas Frank helps shed light on. Frank has written extensively about how conservatives have successfully stereotyped liberals, and in doing so, influenced recent elections. In his book, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*, he argues media hype over the red-state blue-state divide created a "culture war" between conservatives and liberals. This has caused many to define liberals and conservatives by seemingly trivial things like what they buy and eat (17). Currently, he claims, many "red-staters" believe that liberals comprise "a wealthy, pampered, arrogant elite," while conservatism is "the faith of the hardworking common people of the heartland, an expression of their unpretentious all-American ways just like country music and NASCAR" (20).

Crichton uses many of these stereotypically "liberal" traits in his characters. Ann Garner, a liberal actor's wife, fits the stereotype of the wealthy liberal who will believe in a cause so long as it is convenient. She is one of a host of minor celebrities in the novel who are superficially attached to trendy causes. As an example, Crichton tells us that while flying to a fundraiser in a private jet they "talked about their hybrid cars, which they had bought for their maids," (140). Ann's environmentalist beliefs crumble when faced with the quick wit of Dr. Kenner, a known global warming skeptic. She tells Kenner, "it's guys like you who have make our environment the polluted mess that it is now," although, it is soon revealed that she drives an SUV and owns three mansions (473-474). To give her credit, though, she heats her pool with solar energy.

This sort of stereotype implies many of those involved in the environmental movement only are so in order to justify their sense of elitism and because they are not required to make any real sacrifices. Looking at Frank's work, it seems that the most recent surge toward

environmental consciousness, largely driven by the global warming scare, has been interpreted as liberal snobbery and condescension by many in the Republican camp. There are many reasons for this. For one, environmentalism tends to begin with those unconcerned about making ends meet. This has been witnessed on a world-wide scale, where it has become a concern of mainly the wealthiest nations. On a smaller scale, American society is set up in such a way that it tends to be far cheaper and less time consuming to ignore environmental impacts all together. Those who are worried about feeding their families are most likely not as concerned with the wasteful packaging of that food or the where the food was grown. This is the sort of sentiment that makes up this first stereotype. Ultimately, the fact that environmental consciousness tends to be a cause of the well-off does not change the realities of global warming; however, if someone is convinced global warming was invented to help the rich boost their egos, there is no way he will take time to ponder the scientific data.

Crichton also makes use of the fitness guru and health nut liberal stereotype. This stereotype takes the form of Janis, one of the protagonist's casual flings. At six in the morning, he wakes up to the sound of her exercising at the foot of his bed (68). He then proceeds to have a cup of coffee, which she tells him has "nine-hundred and twenty-three different chemicals," and "causes cancer, miscarriages, and nervous tension" (69). She also harps on him for not buying organic products, eating a fattening donut, and leaving the shower running, which is not "environmentally conscious" (69). It seems Crichton wants to show us that liberals do a lot of finger shaking over petty things.

Looking again at Frank's claim that what you buy is now given greater weight than how you think, it seems the above sentiment has been fueled by the environmentally conscious consumer. Products like organic cotton clothing and all-natural recycled toilet paper are now

emphasized more than the asceticism traditionally associated with the environmental values. According to *New York Times* fashion writer, Alex Williams, the modern environmental movement is arguably "equal parts concern for the earth and for making a splash." Additionally, many 'green' solutions involve condemning certain consumer behaviors that are not up to the newest trend in environmental standards. This aspect of environmentalism plays directly into the stereotype of finger-wagging, liberal elitism.

This depiction can actually be seen as a misrepresentation of an aspect of liberal ideology. According to Lakoff, "nurturing and strengthening oneself" is a category of liberal moral action as one must be well-nurtured in order to care for other (119). Actions like eating well, staying healthy, practicing yoga, etc. would fall into such a category. Thus, the above stereotype, as well as the behaviors it is based on, stem from this underlying belief. Again, depicting liberals as Crichton does here serves to undermine their credibility.

Another liberal stereotype in Crichton's book is the gloomy pessimist. Nick Drake fully embodies these traits. The head of a popular environmental non-profit, he is the ultimate killjoy. It appears the only thing he is capable of talking about is what is wrong with the world, and the environment in particular. Furthermore, he is never happy. Crichton writes, "Drake was a solitary, ascetic man, who detested big parties and noise" (53). Clearly, he lives to be miserable, and would like others to be so as well.

The pessimist is common liberal stereotype; most have probably seen conservative bumper stickers reading something along the lines of, "Annoy a liberal: Work Hard and Be Happy." Here, this stereotype comes out of the fact that environmentalism focuses on problems. This was seen when comparing Gore's film to Hayward's; Hayward was far more optimistic about the world state and course than Gore was. Of course, this a tautology; if there were no

problems, there would be no need for social movements, and conservatives have plenty of complaints as well.

One major distinction, however, between environmentalism other causes, is the importance of keeping things exactly as they are. It is common to hear environmentalists talk about preserving the environment for 'our children' or 'the next generation.' Thus, any alterations to the natural world are seen as problematic, something to rally against. Because our environment is being constantly altered either by human or natural means, the worries can seem endless. This is what Crichton pounces on in his creation of Nick Drake. Of course, it is far easier to dismiss an environmentalist's perspective once the claim is made that he is "just looking for something to complain about."

Finally, Peter Evans, an environmental lawyer, is the novel's slow-witted protagonist. Despite his mix up with a terrorist plot, Crichton wants us to think of him as your average Joe. He holds certain beliefs, like global warming is causing the Earth to warm and oceans to rise, yet when asked to defend his views the best he can do is to say they are common knowledge (82). In doing this, Crichton intends to portray the general population of global warming advocates as docile sheep, ready to believe anything they read in the *New York Times*. Evans represents a state of naivety many conservatives typically associate with liberals. This is shown in the well-known quote often attributed to Churchill, "If you're not a liberal when you're twenty you have no heart. If you're not a conservative when you're forty you have no head." Here it is clear that liberalism is associated with a naïve idealism, that is detached from the realities of life. Such an implication is an easy way to dismiss liberal ideology. We see some of this naivety in all four liberal environmentalists characters in Crichton's book.

In *The Day After Tomorrow*, there are not as many conservative characters as there are liberals in *State of Fear*. Those that do exist have smaller roles. One reason for this is that it is easier to fictionally "prove" that global warming is real and has disastrous effects than that global warming is made up or exaggerated. Showing the disastrous results of climate change on screen is enough to negate anything a skeptical character can say; however, in *State of Fear*, for instance, a lack of disastrous results does not necessarily prove anything about the future. This is likely one reason why Emmerit does not include a long line of global warming skeptics in need of conversion the way Crichton does.

What the film does provide, is a Vice President character that looks suspiciously like Cheney, who embodies many of the stereotypical characteristics liberals see in conservatives. Just as Crichton drags his liberals to the side of reason, Vice President Becker is led to see the error of his ways by the end of the film. No lengthy lectures are needed, however. Millions of people dieing from a resulting ice age is apparently enough.

Becker is often pitted against the hero, Jack Hall, a scientist investigating historic climate, and the film's voice of reason. After the opening scene, in which the Larson Ice Shelf breaks off from Antarctica, we see Jack speaking at a conference attended by the Vice President and other political bigwigs. Faced with Jack's comment that, "at the rate we're burning fossil fuels and polluting the environment, the ice caps will soon disappear," he replies, "Our economy is every bit as fragile as the environment. Perhaps you should keep that in mind before making sensationalist claims." When they leave the conference, it is revealed they were meeting in New Delhi, and there is a blizzard outside. It is apparently the coldest temperature on record, and "stop global warming" is being chanted by the masses in the background.

This scene depicts several conservative stereotypes that were used in creating the Vice President's character. Clearly the citizens of New Delhi are being adversely effected by global warming and are demanding something be done, yet these demands are brushed aside. This shows the Vice President to be compassionless and out of touch with the needs of the people. This is further emphasized later in the film, when he refuses to evacuate the northern half of the U.S. despite predicted deadly storms with temperatures of -150° Fahrenheit.

This stereotype partly stems from the conservative belief that people should become self-reliant and independent. As discussed in the previous section, many conservatives believe moral people are taught to be strong by receiving rewards for being self-disciplined and self-reliant and punishments for not behaving this way. In society these rewards and punishments typically equate to monetary compensation or lack thereof (Lakoff 189). To liberals, however, this viewpoint often boils down to the idea that conservatives are hard-hearted and mean.

Another stereotype present in the conference scene is the idea that conservatives only care about money. This stereotype was also hinted at in Gore's film, where the Earth is shown balanced against some gold bars. Again, this stereotype relates back to the underlying conservative idea that those who earn their money should be allowed to keep it, thus maintaining incentives to "act morally" (Lakoff 189). That conservatives are greedy or corrupt is a misinterpretation of this ideology. In *The Day After Tomorrow*, the accusation that Jack's claims are "sensationalist" is directly tied to the Vice President's comments about the economy; Emmerich is not shy about claiming money is behind his "skepticism."

Finally, the film also depicts the Vice President as close-minded and even slightly ethnocentric, two other characteristics conservatives are often pegged with. He refuses to acknowledge something should be done about climate change even after people are killed by

soft-ball size hail in Tokyo and L.A. is torn up by tornados. At this point he and his officials are still checking on solar output as a probable cause. To Jack, who tells him they have to start making long-term preparations immediately, he says, "All you have is a theory." The ethnocentrism is thrown in at the end, in the form of satire. Most of the U.S. has been forced to evacuate to Mexico and Latin America, and the former Vice President, now the President, makes a broadcast thanking these countries, "which we formerly thought of as the third world" for their hospitality. Apparently he has been humbled by being shown undeserved hospitality.

Claims that conservative thought is nothing more than close-minded ethnocentrism, or as Frank puts the stereotypes, "crypto-racism, a disease of the elderly, the random gripings of religious rednecks, or the protests of 'angry white men' feeling left behind by history," is actually a misrepresentation of the underlying ideology. Here, Lakoff's proposed category of "upholding moral order" seems to be what is misconstrued. As stated previously, this category justifies existing power relations among entities, stating that those who are in power are there because of their own strength or work ethic and are thus deserving of that privilege. Applying this to global warming, if a liberal is able to label a conservative as close-minded or a "speciesist" he does not have to consider the point of view further.

What all of these stereotypes have in common is the ability to undermine rational arguments. In the case of global warming, people are bombarded with information, some scientific and much of it not. Often they receive information that contradicts what they have just heard. Additionally, it is unlikely that global warming has had many tangible effects on them to date. According to research on attitude formation, in such instances, where people are relatively uninformed about an issue, or they expect the issue will have few direct effects on them, they are less likely to think carefully about it (Petty). Both tend to be true of global warming. One result

of this is that people will rely on a "meaningful subset of information" (Petty). This is seen in all of the stereotypes listed above, where some aspect of liberal and conservative views is taken out of context, and the underlying ideology is discarded. Additionally each stereotype serves as an excuse to reject an opposing viewpoint without giving it full consideration.

Conclusion

In looking at the persuasive tactics of four global warming documents created for the general public, it is clear that conservatives and liberals fundamentally differ in the way they view the environment and man's relationship to it. These underlying differences in perception ensure that, as a whole, liberals are more ready to believe in the gravity of global warming while conservatives remain skeptical. Thus, facts about the science of climate change are employed to the advancement of one's own beliefs. As Dr. Stephen Schneider, a climatologist at Stanford University, states, "You're going to end up with, in the name of science, a debate that is really ideological."

Lack of understanding about these ideological differences leads to claims by both groups that members of the other are naïve, closed-minded, or corrupt. Additionally, distortions of the liberal or conservative ideology are used to further divide the two groups, providing false reasons to ignore arguments of the opposing viewpoint. It is important see through these layers to the beliefs and values one's own perspective is based upon. It is only after understanding these foundations that we will be able to move forward politically in the global warming debate.

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