*The Trumpeter*
ISSN 0832-6193
Volume 32, No. 1 (2016)

# Defective Arguments Denying an Inconvenient Truth

*Jim Edward Gough*

## 1. I CANNOT ACCEPT AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH

The public discussion about global warming—its science, its effects, the human-based causes and the predicted consequences—suffers from a failure to employ the process of reasoning to change one's mind and subsequent determined behaviour, a process known as argumentation. We make good decisions based on a process that involves unbiased rational deliberation of the situation as it is and as it could predictably become. Instead, there is often a different approach. This involves an allegiance relationship to ideology, which does not address the challenge of argument. It is ineffective at bringing about reason-based change to beliefs, attitudes, and subsequent behaviour about the environment and serves only to entrench existing conflicting views. The issue of global warming has serious consequences for humankind and the natural world. This world is the basis of our life. Perhaps people are rendered inactive by the sheer speed and magnitude of the changes to the earth or rendered inactive by paralyzing inertia brought about by believing that "it just cannot be true" or "it cannot be accepted," making it unbelievable in all of its ramifications for current and future generations.

Al Gore claims this inaction is due to our pathological fear of the destructive consequences of global warming producing a "profound sense of powerlessness" (Gore 2006, 224) and fuelling a "collision and addictive unhealthy relationship to the earth" (Gore 2006, 223). But such addictive behaviours turn people who could solve problems into passive spectators and sometimes blind enablers. This is both unhelpful for discussions designed to bring about changes to our understanding and appreciation of the need to rationally change our beliefs and attitudes about the environment in order to determine a better approach and behaviour towards dealing with the global warming problems. There are few long-term solutions to problems when the motivation is fear, which holds temporary sway over our behaviour at best.

Environmentalists are often worried about the negative effects of sounding the alarm, which may turn out to be counter-productive for any possible solution. Instead of producing reaction it creates inaction. This inaction, however, is further exacerbated by the reactions to global warming arguments by non-argumentative global warming deniers. These deniers provide a seeming rationalization (not reason) for why the psychological inertia may be acceptable or

reasonable. Excuses are not arguments but rather ways of avoiding argumentation and the rational collection and relevant use of evidence and reasons to persuade.

Global warming deniers are diverse people whose similar reasoning strategy rests in the preservation of ideology. This classification is made without prejudice, not intended to poison the well by assuming an ad-hominem or guilt-by-association connotation but rather to stipulate a collection of strategies that seem to have an affinity with each other for one end—the denial of an ideologically inconvenient truth. The "global denier" classification is made simply for heuristic reasons of convenience: grouping some argument strategies together helps to identify similar features in argumentation.[1] These deniers display a set of similar, questionable, rhetorical, and ideological strategies in their attempt to persuade the public without even attempting to meet the challenge of argumentation to provide acceptable, sufficient and relevant evidence, facts or reasons (Shermer 1997, 46-55).[2] These ideological inclinations make argumentation about something as important as global warming, not merely very difficult but potentially impossible. The ideological approach of global warming deniers may even have inspired serious political oppression of opposing views, like the first voicing of the view that the environment is heating up because of a human-caused increase in the amount of carbon in the atmosphere (Bowen 2008, 23).[3]

If deliberate social action is to be connected to reasoning, then actions occur because of a prior rational commitment. A *substantive commitment* is defined as having three central features: (1) stability over time and a capacity to be revised, (2) action-guiding force, and (3) a rational relation to self-understanding and identity that is self-reflective. Argumentation can provide the means to achieve (1)→(3). The commitment is open to reasonable challenge by counter evidence or counter considerations at both (1) and (3) so as to revise (2) in light of new or open possibilities. On the other hand, any *unreflective commitment* made on the basis of ideology can only provide the basis, perhaps of (2) with no necessary connection to (1) since it contains no capacity to be revised and it could provide a connection to (3) only if the reference to "self-

[1] This is a legal term intended to allow someone the ability to make a claim bracketing off any negative connotations to the claim that may be a part of some negative interpretations of it.

[2] There is also a tendency among the deniers to embrace technology over nature in what Jacques Ellul (1980, 118) called the "technological imperative" such that they share the false claim that technology is neutral and like globalization is immune to blame for any evils to the natural world.

[3] One of the first people to identify the problem of global warming, and one of the world's acknowledged authorities on global warming, Dr. James Hansen, director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, faced political threats and intimidation (Bowen 2008). Hansen's initial claim in 1981 that global warming was due to anthropogenic causes was finally vindicated in the 2007 *Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate*. Hansen suffered the effects of "institutionalized bullying" with threats to his livelihood, research projects, research position, and so on.

reflection" is removed (Lieberman 1998, 5).[4] Substantive commitment may require a background of argumentation to support this loyalty so that it is not blind action (Toulmin 1969, 3).

On the other hand, ideology situates *loyalty* differently so that it is the central feature of an *unreflective commitment* overriding considerations (1)→(3). As Johnson and Blair (1977) point out the fallacy of blind loyalty "prevents you from even considering the evidence produced in an attack on something you hold dear…discounting in advance the possibility of evidence… refusing to acknowledge documentation that is plainly evident…when deeply-rooted identifications are attacked" (132-133). It is my suggestion that this move to blind loyalty negates the very possibility of argumentation and is a central focus in an irrational ideological commitment.

There is a simplification in my outline of the connection of action to commitment that cannot be allowed to go unnoticed. The connection is generally one to which many people—but not all—normatively aspire. Critics are correct to point out that "not even my reasoning combined with my deciding or forming the intention to carry it out is enough alone to produce the action" since emotions and circumstances can conspire to break any claimed uniformly predictable logical or causal connection (Stroud 2000, 27-38). So, the critic can correctly point out that my analysis here is a simplification of a process that may require a complex set of conditions in order to predict outcomes accurately. True enough. But those wanting more than my sketch of the conditions can find more comprehensive considerations elsewhere for comparison (Toulmin 1969).

Inaction is manifest as a rationalized excuse. This excuse provides little to no motivation to put to work relevantly available public knowledge about the environment and our relationship with it.

This incorporates changes to our living space within the natural world. When inaction is the easiest and most convenient route to take, the motivation is there. We become the tools, passive instruments manipulated by defective arguments and the motivational excuses these tools provide. It is, therefore, incumbent on those who value the protection of the natural environment to speak to this issue of what might be called "no general populus motivation" in light of clear knowledge to change our involvement in the life of the natural world. We have an ethical *duty* to prevent harm when we can, to inform and motivate those who need information about the natural world (Coeckelbergh 2015). Failure to do so is a failure to act ethically to

[4] This is a reference to a slightly modified version of the defining central features of commitment spelled out and developed in Lieberman (1998). It also may be a version of the mistake or fallacy in arguing known as *wishful thinking*, the view that what should or ought to (prescriptive claim) be the case, is, in fact, the case (descriptive claim), identified by several writers, including Browne and Keeley (2001, 102).

bring about what are claimed to be important ethical changes to our engagement with the natural world. This *Principle of Benevolence* is fundamental to human beings surviving in organized societies (Denise et al. 1999, 167).

There are various ways this ideological commitment to action or inaction operates through global deniers. First, sometimes the attack is against the messenger as a member of a claimed-to-be discredited group (guilt by association) rather than the message. An individual who identifies himself or herself as an environmentalist takes on a task, and perhaps even a social role which is not that of a scientist, as accurately documented, for example by David Suzuki in his autobiography (1988, 218-221). The goals of an environmentalist are, for example, not necessarily aligned with the promotion of the goals of science since science is not necessarily used in the interests of promoting the good of the environment but rather the promotion of scientific knowledge. This is not just a diversion off the main topic (issue); it is a diversion away from argumentation in alignment with the denier's preferred ideology. However, rather than attack the messenger, it is important to identify some features of the message conveyed, with these forming the basis of a challenge rooted in argument. This argumentation view is particularly philosophical in the sense that philosophers continue to challenge in a state of a "permanent foundation crisis, where (i) there is always a dispute about fundamentals [and] (ii) neither method nor any other alternative resource provides a neutral Archimedean fulcrum for the weighing of philosophical issues" (Rescher 2001, 42).

Second, there is unwillingness on the part of deniers to engage in argumentation, to take up the challenge to provide substantive evidence or reasons for one's controversial and opinionated claims (Gough 2001). This means they refuse to consider changing their beliefs and actions based on good reasoning. Third, there is the implicit belief that subjective, unsupported, uninformed opinion should count as much as arguments to convince us of any controversial claim, with no recognition that there is any significant difference between the two processes (Gough 2005).[5] This seems to be based on the mistaken belief that disagreement built on contradictory claims suffices as an instance of a counter argument or counter instance, which is a *straw man* misunderstanding of the aim and function of counter considerations in meeting the challenge of argumentation. The burden of proof always falls to the individual making the controversial claim, the outsiders to the mountain of evidence and experts that support the contrary view (Shermer 1997, 50-51). This is not an appeal to simple numbers but to the convincing weight of acceptable, relevant and sufficient grounds to change one's mind and actions (Govier 1985).

[5] This is a common mistake in my experience often made in classroom discussions of ethical issues and claims.

Fourth, there is the fundamental belief that particular ideological interpretations of economic considerations absolutely override or trump any other value determinations. One economist suggests, "no one is conscious of his ideology, any more than he can smell his own breath." So, for example, if one course of action costs less to perform than any other, it is automatically better than any other course of action [which might cost more]. This position has been called *identity politics* with an ideological component such that "taking benign capitalism as one of its basic assumptions, this ideology must deny the harsh realities of the global marketplace and posit false causes for its many shortcomings (for example, unemployment among the white lower class is 'caused' by affirmative action and not by the relocation of manufacturing to cheaper overseas labour markets)" (Williams 1998, 281). This is, of course, inconsistent with most ethical theories or principles, which generally claim that doing the right thing should override considerations of minor economic costs. Fifth, the denier believes that no sacrifice of self-interest, based on considerations of other non-human values, human values of future generations, and human values of current populations that are not directed in his or her line of sight, is ever justified. Each of these components of the denier's position will be examined and critically evaluated in what follows.

## 2. The Critical Situation of Global Warming Deniers

In the introduction to the film *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), Al Gore, former Vice President of the United States (who has a science degree and has studied the science of global warming for more than 20 years) says: "This [global warming] is not a political issue. It is a moral issue." Global warming deniers are generally unwilling to meet either the moral challenge posed by Gore and others or the scientific/rational challenge posed by the results of independent, scientific, expert, reviewed research by more than 3,000 scientists from across the world. The deniers take the route of diverting our attention off topic, a *red herring* attacking the messengers of global warming (like Al Gore and Dr. David Suzuki) and ignoring both the scientific evidence and the moral imperative implicated by this evidence. As soon as the messenger becomes the enemy, an important issue becomes tainted with irrelevant ideological politicizing. In the magazine article "The Trials of Saint Suzuki," Suzuki's fall from grace as an environmental purist is *anticipated* on the flimsiest of support and with the frank concession that it seems to be the media itself that has set him up for the fall (MacQueen 2007, 66-72*)*. While it might appear like he is attempting to become more inclusive in the community by engaging businesses like Walmart in the creation of environmental solutions, others seemed willing to cry "sell-out" to discredit any change in strategy. The supporters seemed offended by any attempt by someone identified so thoroughly as one of their own to negotiate with those who pursue mediation with capitalist entrepreneurs. This route takes us nowhere towards resolving any controversy over global warming; it's another *red herring* diversion away from the

issues raised by an environmentalist in favour of an attack on his change, strategies, and the possible motives that could have precipitated it, all of which are irrelevant. Oddly enough, Suzuki's negotiations with Walmart establish that he does not consider himself to be a saintly, holier than thou, aloof, environmentalist but the kind of pragmatist the denier critics value.

Also, in the strategy they follow they *implicitly* deny both Suzuki's and Gore's claims, without ever challenging them as well as denying that the issue is a moral one and not a political issue. Sometimes this diversion is accomplished by setting up a *straw saint*, then demonstrating how the saint fails to lead a holy life consistent with the false character created for him. Once the move is made to an ideological political debate then all human behaviour is predicated on the motivation of self-interest in an ideally (yet unrealizable) free-market competitive model of decision-making (Robinson 1968, 42).

Rather than basing their rejection of global warming claims on actual science, these deniers are desperate for any evidence to support their cynicism. So interested in non-existent support, within one hour of it appearing on the web, deniers had posted on various email list servers and websites as well as a talk radio program a version of a fake scientific report. These deniers "jumped on a fake research article on the internet claiming that deep sea bacteria—not humans—are responsible for global warming." Dr. Mark Cox, the fake name of the author of the fake research paper, in a fake journal with a fake editor, said that the hoax was designed "to expose the credulity and scientific illiteracy of climate skeptics" (Cressey 2007). Of course, this strategy might have positive effects even though the means to awaken climate skeptics from their dogmatic slumber seems less than ethically praiseworthy. The so-called Sokal hoax, where a physicist wrote an article titled "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity" (Sokal 2006) satirized using ridiculous and exaggerated claims to ridicule claims made in political criticisms of science but the effort did much to fuel science wars and not to create any mediated negotiation of differences (Dusek 2006, 21). Productive social change was negated by mutual sublimation and entrenchment rather than an opening up—on either side—to new possibilities. Ideological motivations overpowered critical argumentation as the basis for good decision-making.

Web-based critics of global warming are of some importance because of the ease of access to their writings. In the case of one web site, the popularity of a science fiction writer, whose books and movies have had a wide audience of believers in fictional dramatization as facts, especially about recreating dinosaurs in a set of computer-generated technical feasts for the eyes and the imagination has inappropriately been the source of claims to authoritative expert knowledge. There is a difference between wordsmithing a fascinating movie script and supporting a scientifically credible claim. Michael Crichton (2003; 2005) fashioned what he characterized as a sustained attack against the fundamentalist/environmentalist's politicizing of

global warming. Ironically Crichton's attack seems better directed to his own non-argumentation efforts than to those of his foes, but this may be due to some ideological blinders he seemed to be wearing.

## 3. FROM PERIPHERY TO CORE POPULARITY

When spokespeople for the environment move from the periphery to the forefront of public discussion, then their new found popularity sets them up for a volley of personal attacks: Gore's home is a great consumer of energy; Suzuki seems impatient with those who want to subject his views to public debate or his bus is not the best choice for travelling and maintaining ecological integrity since biofuels are a costly use of land resources, and so on. All of these claims, of course, are irrelevant to the message. The messenger is not the message, nor is he a saint or saviour of divine origin, morally superior to the rest of the human race. For a historical reference to the same process, one need only read the attempts to discredit the characters of Martin Luther King Jr. or Mahatma Gandhi, in order to deny and divert attention away from their messages and the moral/rational challenges they presented. The main point of the denier's strategy to attack the messenger is to confuse people so they say "I just do not know *who* to believe" on the false assumption that there is some point to reasonably doubt the message based on irrelevant attacks on the messenger. The public's attention is diverted away from the message to the messenger with the attendant effect of a re-focus in the mind of the audience of the message around a non-existent controversy between experts in climate change. However, of any scientific predication of late, the one about climate change numbers its supporters in the thousands across the globe, from diverse situations and engaging in more and more scientific studies.

The denier gives us no reason to doubt the science or the message. Confusion created by distraction and diversion cannot distort what is right. Shifting the priority to the messenger from the message is not only irrelevant but also unethical as it indicates that considerations of the person should take priority over the message and avoids the challenge of argument. There are all kinds of humans who give us a good message but are unable to live up to it fully, including religious prophets, like Jesus Christ or even Gandhi.[6]

## 4. MEETING THE CHALLENGE IN A PUBLIC DEBATE

When discussing issues of public concern, the responsibility of the discussant is to make sure the debate is conducted on a level in which the maximum amount of relevant information will be available so the public can make well-informed decisions. Open, rationally considered

[6] Gandhi's self-reflective approach employing the ideas of *sarvodaya*, universal justice and concern for all, *ahimsa*, do no harm, *satyagraha,* truth above all, and *trusteeship*, employing only what is immediately needed in order to hold some in reserve for others, are all factors in favour of an approach to global warming not based on ideology but cooperative actions.

skeptical challenges are the mainstay of both science and morality because it provides the basis for opening our minds to other possible alternatives, alternatives based on competing evidence or equally viable interpretations of the same evidence. Science as a profession is, and has been for a very long time, openly skeptical of the processes used to collect evidence, formulate hypotheses and germinate theories. This approach has generally made scientific discoveries and claims very reliable as the source for making good decisions in the public interest. This is the mainstay of a well-informed and effective liberal democracy.

Deniers, however, are generally not open-minded skeptics but rather closed-minded uninformed ideologues—by their own admission. Many of their opinion pieces start with 'good ol' boy' arrogant, ignorant, and self-deprecating lines like, "I'm not educated (like those whose views I oppose) and I know nothing (other than what I want or prefer to believe that is in my personal best interest) but you should pay attention to me *because I have an (uninformed) opinion* that you should both respect and accept." Anyone who buys this line should be open to paying big money for my pet rock! The focus for the denier is on any science that will protect the interests of his or her political, self-interested ideology. Implicitly, science that is inconsistent with or at odds with the denier's self-serving ideology is bad science or not science at all. The filter for the denier is political ideology, not open-minded skeptical inquiry, which is often avowed as the goal of science.

If supporters of a global warming warning focus the discussion on changes from anthropocentric bias to an earth-based view, then there will be sparse references to an earlier (unrelated) set of predictions of a global winter created by a nuclear disaster. The initial conditions that spawned the predictions of a nuclear winter are significantly different from those that form the basis for global warming. So, the only thing both predictions have in common is that they were both made by scientists—based on different assumptions and evidence! Deniers of the predictive explanatory power of the theory of evolution follow a similar non-rational path of diversions off topic, focusing on insignificant gaps and the differences in measurement provided by carbon dating as opposed to radiometric dating. Significantly once the gaps are explained and the measurements improved, the theory essentially remains intact. [7]

## 5. Opinionated Letters to the Editor

Some people, namely some newspaper editors, seem to think that opinionated letters to the editor are important because they spur debate and emotionally engage people in public issues.

[7] I call such references to relevant but insignificant and insufficient facts a "cherry picking" approach which is not systematic and not theoretically significant in causing anyone to have good reasons to overturn the findings of science using a controlled systematic approach that is both relevant and sufficient, offering adequate grounds for considered judgements.

I am not one of these people. Opinions are often best kept to oneself, especially in those cases when voicing them creates more unhelpful dissonance and conflict, making sound rational decisions impossible. As an example of what seems to be a frustrating waste of time, I'm not convinced by a recent letter from a global temperature change denier (Jeffrey 2007) on the basis of this letter's non-evidence to support its disclaiming of science-based global temperature changes.

The letter doesn't contain an argument so I cannot give you a summary of it. Instead, this denier gives ample reasons to believe that (a) his letter is about his own opinionated view of self-serving economics—"these sorts of restraints will only make Canada less competitive and drive industry and manufacturing away" (based on opinionated speculation, no evidence provided)—a claim not widely supported by economists. It is not about what the denier inconsistently claims it is about—"there is no way to accurately link major climatic events with human activity" (again, his opinion with no evidence provided), and (b) his own letter demonstrates the fault he accuses others of committing—"wearing no clothes" or offering no evidence. It is an interesting and puzzling phenomenon, especially for teachers, that some people commit the very mistake they accuse others of making, suggesting a kind of myopic thinking that inhibits open mindedness in results. In place of evidence, he offers introductory textbook fallacious mistakes in reasoning like "the *green pedants* have truly become *proficient spin doctors* at *generating science fiction* to support their cause" (again, no evidence, no argument, no rational response but a personal irrelevant attack against Suzuki and Gore),[8] which of course does not counter the evidence-based claims of thousands of independent scientific studies about global temperature change found in authoritative research journals and publications as well as on credible web sites attached to major educational institutions across North America.[9]

## 6. MISTAKES IN REASONING

One thing the denier and I agree with is that "Albertans aren't dumb," but our basis for saying so is different. I rely on reasoning and I won't be convinced by any opinion based on mistakes in reasoning, like the common one that confuses cause and effect.[10] These mistakes are often found on unreliable and non-credible denier websites.[11] I am also not convinced by irrelevant *red herring* scare

[8] This seems to be the presumptive approach of American Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump with his championing of catchphrases, like "lying Ted" over rationally considered reflective critical responses to opponent's views.
[9] See Gough (2008) for an initial consideration of the problem of web-based information in research.
[10] This is a mistake rarely, if ever, made by a scientist following rigorous use of the scientific experimental method.
[11] We need to ask ourselves: Who authored the site—someone or some organization with expert-tested scientific knowledge or someone or some organization with no scientific expertise and an ideological axe to grind instead of reliable evidence-based, ideologically-avoiding, independent authority?

tactic diversions like, "Alberta's natural resources are under the sole jurisdiction of the province of Alberta, not the government of Canada."[12] Consider also irrelevant simplistic accounts of how "carbon dioxide is basically plant food"[13] that can't meet the challenge posed by empirical evidence favouring the global temperature change claim. Albertans who have even a minimal understanding of science will not confuse the cause of an increase[14] in water vapour[15] with the effect[16] since no actual scientific research can support any kind of reverse/confused causation and remain credible.[17]

If the deniers were able to provide more than name calling and unsupported opinionated speculation, one might be convinced that "mankind is not causing cataclysmic changes to the Earth's climate" but unfortunately, what the denier gives the reader according to his own words, "lacks any real, proven and empirical scientific evidence" (Jeffrey 2007). Due to some kind of sympathetic/symbiotic affinitive response, deniers seem to find each other. In the case of this letter, for example, it sounds like some of the information (opinionated speculation?) in the letter came from a non-scientific, non-credible website authored by someone without any identified scientific credentials and the letter is strewn with quotations from other "letters to the editor" or vaguely identified "lectures," instead of reliable scientific studies in peer-reviewed publications (Archer 2007, 25).[18] Letters to the editor, of course, are not subjected to review by experts in the field, while books like those of Archer have the authority of a science-educated expert or reviewing process. Letters to the editor are not primarily meant to inform but to interest readers in buying the newspaper, sometimes initially to read and then to get upset by the most outrageous claims possible. This sells newspapers. Such incitement of public interest can sometimes be considered a good goal but may not elicit an informed, knowledgeable response to change anyone's mind about anything. Sometimes people may object that these kinds of letters to the editor are "taken in the wrong way" as an inducement to the reader to respond with an argument or as containing an argument, when they may also be a parody of an argument—an attempt to ease tension with humour. However likely these possible motives, the effect is more often to cause subsequent writers to cite the uninformed views of the letter writer as if they constituted an argument or some other piece of authority to

[12] What has this got to do with claims to support global warming? The answer would seem to be—nothing, making it completely irrelevant to the topic at hand.
[13] We need to ask ourselves the relevant skeptical question: What does this prove? In and of itself, it seems to prove nothing relevant to the topic at hand.
[14] Sometimes this is claimed to be 25 percent or greater but without scientific backing the sky is the limit for any piece of unfounded speculation.
[15] This is an increase in the amount of gases creating atmospheric temperature increases.
[16] This is an increase in water vapour brought about by a measurable increase in greenhouse gases.
[17] Although not described exactly as I identify the mistake, Cederblom and Paulsen (1986) identify the mistake as "the causal mistake might be in the wrong direction" (186) and in general this could fall under the mistake of confusing a correlation or association with causation.
[18] Such publications are relatively easy to find and to understand.

disclaim the arguments of those "egg-headed thinkers"[19] whose goal is to impress and at the same time confound the general public.

## 7. CONFUSING IDEOLOGICAL POLITICAL CONCERNS WITH ETHICAL INTERESTS

At first it may seem confusing, but the first thing a denier does is interpret an ethical concern, interest or imperative as a political claim meant to restrict his or her natural right to freedom, to choose individually for themselves without recourse to any collective or community and its interests. So, most deniers make a category mistake by reducing ethical issues to political ones. These are not the same nor do they raise the same challenges. You may need to provide me with some reasons of expediency or practical immediate self-interest why I should allow for some restrictions on my individual freedom of choice, but this is a political consideration and not necessarily an ethical concern. The reasons given to support a decision about the environmental impact of global warming may be ethical in order to convince me to restrain my political interests but these are not political reasons for a political restriction. The denier, however, seems to see the world only in political terms. So, while Gore claims he is asserting an ethical consideration, the denier interprets this as a political claim made by someone as far left as it is possible to go and remain a human being. Since the welfare of others, anyone other than oneself, may be an interest of some of those on the left in politics, the political category usurps the ethical consideration. I don't, for example, make a political claim that I know of when I tell my daughter that she should show respect for the interests of her sister, and in making this claim, I don't consider myself to be a left-leaning political animal of one sort or another.

The denier understands the problem of global warming as an ideological and political issue that is being manipulated inappropriately or contrived to get an individual's compliance with what is for them an ideologically-imposed response to a problem. The denier falsely claims there is no political discussion of the issue, no consensus vote, no political process of deliberation and decision. That's right. This is *not* a political issue but an ethical issue. There is no plausible reason to doubt the science because there is a political conspiracy to thwart "contrary science," but because of something much simpler: there is *no* contrary science. There are counter-factual and contrary claims constituting the basis for a disagreement but not an argument. If you disagree with my argument, it is a mistake to think that your disagreement alone constitutes a reason to doubt my argument, cause suspicion of my motives, or condemn a unified body of support based on the careful gathering of evidence or reasoning to the best overall reasoned response . There is a faulty comparison between a knowledge-grounded and developed

[19] Academics are often accused to be those who simply confuse very simple issues and responses that people of practical abilities can clearly understand. Also, as if to compound the academic malaise, many of them are diagnosed as suffering from debilitating "communist" thinking or tendencies, all of which are unsupported and probably false.

scientific approach based on the findings of many scientists employing tested procedures. These procedures are repeated, under controlled conditions, in a variety of circumstances over variations in time and place. An opinion is based on what the person who holds the opinion would like to be the case. It's a self-authenticating personal preference.[20]

The conversation would take on a to-and-fro movement between those involved, a willingness to subject one's beliefs to the critical scrutiny of others, and a willingness to take serious counter considerations into account in the revision or abandonment of one's position or conclusion. Martin Heidegger identifies this as the process of hermeneutics (Inwood 2000). Informal logicians advise students who create arguments to employ what they call the rebuttal criterion (Damer 1995, 16-17). That is, "when people read or hear an argument they keep a running mental record of the participants' commitments…they maintain mental commitment stores or commitment tags," which "will typically change during the debate, as participants accept and reject each other's assertions" (Rips 2008, 703). But ideological tags or political commitments are often not subject to argumentative negotiation (Crusius and Channell 2003). Instead, plausibility is defined by the denier antecedently as political or political/economic ideology, such that ideological plausibility is the very fabric of the denier's existing knowledge with respect to the way the world "is" and necessarily has to be. Rips calls these deniers those who follow "a conservative commitment policy," which "makes a speaker's commitment to a claim less likely to change on the basis of later conversational moves" so that "speakers would tend to retain their initial positions toward a claim through subsequent exchanges" (2008, 706). I find the suggestion that a conservative could move his or her position to a moderate or liberal stance, on the basis of the moves within a conversational argument (and that such a staging could function as common ground in dispute resolution), beyond belief when it comes to entrenched ideological commitments. This would seem to, implausibly, require a different logic for each different ideological commitment.

Nicholas Rescher's (2001) rejection of possible worlds' machinery to resolve counterfactual dispute resolution among arguers is instructive of the problem in this instance. The intent of the use of some counterfactuals in arguments, he claims, is to preserve "to the greatest reasonable extent the fabric of our existing knowledge with regard to how matters actually stand in this world of ours" (222). However, when the arguer combines what he accepts as "givens" along with his predominant assumptions, then there is an "inconsistent set of propositions" established, which is unacceptable. This necessitates a "consistency-restoring alternative," which involves a priority ranking of alternatives or negotiated or mediating

[20] This is different from an opinion voiced by someone in a position to have the authority of expert, tested specialized knowledge, such as a physician who offers "informed advice" or the expert opinions presented in a law court.

alternatives (Rescher 2001, 223). He describes the general situation as follows: Each of our beliefs is surrounded by a family of others so that the introduction of a belief-countervailing assumption introduces logical inconsistencies, and the resolution of these inconsistencies can be accomplished in a variety of different ways, since in such conflicts there are generally different ways of making some of the conflict-engendering beliefs give way to others. We require a policy of prioritizing, and given such a resource we can then choose effectively among the competing possibilities.

However, Rescher's account suffers the same problem as Rips' account. Rescher claims "the situation is that of making the optimal—minimally disruptive—readjustment in our accepted beliefs compatible with introducing that belief-contravening assumption among them" and "*all that is ever needed is an acceptability prioritization with respect to the handful of propositions that figure immediately in the particular case at hand*" (2001, 226; italics in original). However, like Rips, it appears we need to negotiate or mediate between arguers, on the basis of an acceptable prioritization principle relevant to "the particular case at hand," which seems in the case of ideological motivation akin to moving the earth's axis and its rotation in a different direction—functionally impossible, though theoretically interesting.

## 8. Confounding Local Weather with Global Climate Patterned Variations

In the face of overwhelming evidence pointing in one direction, then, the denier's strategy is to move from science to anecdotal narrative. This is a version of the mistake of diversion, a mistaken inference from some specific part of the global weather patterned system to a claim about the characteristics of the general system itself. So, for example, it is not uncommon to hear someone in a colder climate say something like the following: "If we are supposed to be experiencing global warming then why are our winters as cold as ever?" However, the issue is not whether some part of the global weather system is warmer than usual but rather whether the patterns in the overall system are statistically warmer than in the past. This is the mistake that Arnaud (1964) called "passing from a qualified truth to an absolute truth" (261) and what others have characterized as confusion over findings at the micro level indicating something substantive about what is happening at the macro level—an inductive mistake like hasty generalization.

Since weather affects people so personally, it is difficult for them to extrapolate from their own situation to that of a system of which their perspective is only a very small part. There is failure to be able to stand back and consider, from several sources, predictions about patterned variations, not always regular but concomitted alterations that have probability predictors. To situate oneself as observer of one's own situation to that of a system over a protracted period of time is to make a reasoning mistake. This may be to represent the accidental as essential, as in the fallacy of accident (Aristotle *Sophistical Refutations* 1401b14), but it may also more likely

be an instance of the *fallacy of composition* (Toulmin et al. 1979, 182-183) by making a claim about the whole of the weather system based on particular individual and potentially disconnected regional experiences.[21]

## 9. ECONOMICS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Finally, the deniers seem to have the economic trump card, which basically starts with the completely unsupported claim that the good life and ecological values are consistent and can be reduced to economic calculations, while no economic inefficiencies can be sacrificed for either the good life or ecological values. When did we sign our lives over to the economic calculators, to those whose calculations and predictions are some of the least reliable of all the sciences? I don't remember. Maybe I was walking in the woods at the time. The use of economic efficiencies to trump action on the environment is a sad case of the 'tail wagging the dog.' We are supposed to be so well informed or well educated formally or through experience that we are able to control the use of economic efficiencies, not allow them to control us. When did we surrender our individual freedom to economic efficiencies, predicted by economists' basing their calculations on our assumed self-serving egoistic behaviour? I didn't surrender and I am not sure others did. However, we are being told a story we did. This assumes, without argument, a certain relationship between all human beings and the natural world when what is needed is an argument.

As a general rule of thumb, scientists attempt to determine the truth as impartially as possible and subject their research to public scrutiny, which is based on evidence-based criticism. By contrast, most deniers seem to have an *ideologically-based agenda,* often involving another conspiracy, such that "Among climatologists, this is common knowledge (95 percent of greenhouse gas effects caused by water vapour) but among special interests, certain government groups, and news reporters this fact is under-emphasized or just ignored altogether," which makes the focus on scientific research and the truth incidental or irrelevant (Jeffrey 2007). Or, alternatively, they focus on so-called conspiratorial agendas to get us to do something that we really don't have to do if it weren't for the perceived threat of a conspiracy. This conspiracy is often part of a left-leaning, red threat to our unrestrained self-interested pursuit of our own interests exclusively of any and all effects. Michael Crichton's speeches fall into this category of big, left-wing-dominated, government-destroying individual freedoms. A good question to ask of the deniers is: Why would anyone want to do this? On this strategy, scientific evidence isn't important if it doesn't fit the agenda. Any interpretation of scientific evidence must fit prior allegiance to the political/ideological story.

[21] This is a mistake in reasoning that could be an inductive mistake or a mistaken comparison. A more critical comprehensive discussion of the fallacies of composition and division is detailed in Daniel and Gough (2009).

It can be reasonably recommended that *any* reader should *not* consider accepting the claims in this letter to the editor or from any other denier, before subjecting all their claims to credibility, reliability or evidence-based authority tests (not opinionated, agenda-driven speculation; Gough 2008). If there is open debate, then the condition should be that it is informed and not an ignorance-based debate in a free and democratic society. The freedom to shout lies, introduce the unfounded threat of invisible conspiracies, unfairly discredit genuine scientists who base predictions on knowledge instead of bias, ascribe false motives of political control or domination to global warming proponents like Suzuki and Gore, is not ethically acceptable in any public argumentation context because of how it impinges on the choices of others to base their decisions on the truth. Doing so creates a climate of confusion, not enlightenment. The freedom to create false expectations that "we really don't have to do anything because, according to some opinions published in the paper, there is no reason to sacrifice our self-interest for some dubious theory about global warming" is ethically unacceptable because it portrays the situation of the world in a false light, leading to mistaken judgements of value. What the denier fails to recognize is that political freedom has ethical constraints, without which political freedom would be simply political license. To speak in the public domain about issues that can have serious ethical implications is to speak responsibly in a trustworthy fashion, which is to assume an ethical position with all of the reasonable expectations that follow from such a position.

Should we pause and reconsider the possible damage caused by global warming and our response to it based on the unsupported opinions of deniers or the determinations of ideological perspectives over reasoned considerations of evidence? Not for a moment! But, someone might respond, "Isn't it important to subject prevailing views to critical scrutiny?" Of course it is, but only if the critic does his or her best to get accurate information, seeks to discover the truth rather than avoid it, accepts the challenge of argumentation, and does not retreat to opinionating to save ideology. We should pause to ponder why an "inconvenient truth" would cause deniers to inform us of their lack of information and why others might even consider that these deniers provided any reasonable or credible challenge at all to the truth about global warming. Free speech is important, but not when it is simply the voicing of unsupported and unsupportable opinions, especially when such opinions do nothing to advance our clear understanding of what is happening to the earth and what we may need to do about it. Free speech is clearly not an end but rather a means or a way of determining what is true—what is true based on tested means of providing reasoned support for a claim.

## WORKS CITED

Archer, David. 2007. *Global Warming: Understanding the Forecast*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Arnaud, Antoine. 1964, *The Art of Thinking*. Translated by James Dickoff and Patricia James. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co.

Bowen, Mark. 2008. *Censoring Science: Inside the Political Attack on Dr. James Hansen and the Truth About Global Warming*. New York: Dutton.

Browne, M. Neil and Stuart Keeley. 2001. *Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking.* 6th edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Cederblom, Jerry and David Paulsen. 1986. *Critical Reasoning.* 2nd ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Coeckelbergh, Mark. 2015. *Environmental Skill: Motivation, Knowledge and the Possibility of Non-Romantic Environmental Ethics.* New York: Routledge.

Cressey, Daniel. 2007. "Author of Spoof Paper Speaks." *Nature News Blog*. 9 November. http://blogs.nature.com/news/2007/11/interview_author_of_spoof_pape.html.

Crichton, Michael. 2003 "Environmentalism as Religion." Commonwealth Club Speech, San Francisco, CA, September 15. http://www.michael-crichton.com/speech-environmentalismasreligion.html.

—. 2005. "The Case for Skepticism on Global Warming." National Press Club Speech, Washington, DC, January 25. http://www.crichton-official.com/speech-ourenvironmentalfuture.html.

Crusius, Timothy W. and Carolyn E. Channell. 2003. "Resolving Conflict: Arguing to Negotiate and Mediate" in *The Aims of Argument: A Brief Guide*. 4th ed., 293-320. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Damer, T. Edward. 1995. *Attacking Faulty Reasoning: A Practical Guide to Fallacy-Free Arguments*. 3rd ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Daniel, Mano and Jim Gough. 2009. "The Fallacy of Composition." *Proceedings of the Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation*. http://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive/OSSA8/papersandcommentaries/61/

Denise, Theodore, Sheldon P. Peterfreund and Nicholas P. White. 1999. *Great Traditions in Ethics*. 9th ed. New York: Wadsworth.

Dusek, Val. 2006. *Philosophy and Technology: An Introduction*. New York: Blackwell Publishing.

Ellul, Jacques. 1980. *The Technological System*. Translated by Joachim Neugroschel. New York: Continuum.

Garvey, James. 2008. *The Ethics of Climate Change: Right and Wrong in a Warming World*. Continuum.

Gore, Al and Billy West. 2006. *An Inconvenient Truth*. Directed by Davis Guggenheim. Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures Corporation.

Gore, Al. 2006. *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit*. New York: Rodale.

Gough, Jim. 2008. "The Critical Evaluation of Bibliographic Web Sources." *College Quarterly* 11, no.1 (Winter): 5.

—. 2001. "The Differences between Opinion and Argumentation." *Argumentation and its Applications: Proceedings of the Fourth OSAA Conference*, University of Windsor, May 2001. http://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive/OSSA4/papersandcommentaries/42/.

—. 2003. "Economic Reasoning and the Environment: What is Wrong with Free-Market Environmentalism?" *Professional Ethics* 11, no. 4 (Fall): 37-55.

—. 2005. "The Misuse of Non-Argumentative Approaches in Practical Ethics Discussions." *College Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (Fall): http://collegequarterly.ca/2005-vol08-num04-fall/gough.html.

Govier, Trudy. 1985. *A Practical Study of Argument*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Hieb, Monte. 2003. "Global Warming: A Closer Look at the Numbers." Last modified 10 January 2003. http://www.geocraft.com/WVFossils/greenhouse_data.html.

Inwood, Michael. 2000 "Hermeneutics and Circularity." In *A Heidegger Dictionary*, 87-90 Oxford: Blackwell.

Jeffrey, R.J. 2007. Letter to the Editor. *The Red Deer Advocate*, March 13: A6.

Johnson, R.H. and J. Anthony Blair. 1977. *Logical Self-Defense*. 1st ed. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson.

Lieberman, Marcel S. 1998. *Commitment, Value and Moral Realism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

MacQueen, Ken. 2007. "The Trials of Saint Suzuki." *Maclean's*, 5 November: 66-72.

Northcott, Michael S. 2007. *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

Rescher, Nicholas. 2001. *Philosophical Reasoning: A Study in the Methodology of Philosophizing*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Rips, Lance J. 2008. "Reasoning and Conversation." In *Reasoning: Studies of Human Inference and its Foundations*. Edited by Jonathan E. Adler and Lance J. Rips. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Robinson, Joan. 1968. *Economic Philosophy.* London: Penguin.

Ryle, Gilbert. 1949. *The Concept of Mind*. London: William Brandon and Son.

Shermer, Michael. 1997. *Why People Believe in Weird Things: Pseudoscience, Superstition, and Other Confusions of our Time*. New York: Freeman and Company.

Sokal, Alan D. 1996. "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity." *Social Text* 46-47 (Spring/Summer): 217-252.

Stroud, Barry. 2000. "Practical Reasoning." *Reasoning Practically*. Edited by Edna Ullmann-Margalit. New York: Oxford University Press.

Suzuki, David. 1988. *Metamorphosis: Stages in a Life*. Toronto: Stoddart.

Toulmin, Stephen, Richard Rieke and Allan Janik. 1979. *An Introduction to Reasoning*. New York: Macmillan.

Toulmin, Stephen. 1969. *The Uses of Argument*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Williams, Anna. 1998. "Conservative Media Activism: The Free Congress Foundation and National Empowerment Television." In *Media, Culture and the Religious Right*. Edited by Linda Kintz and Julia Lesage, 275-294. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.