

Using Ethos in Environmental Debate

A Rhetorical Look at the Issue of Drilling the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

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<i>Ethos in Science Communication</i>	2
<i>The Scientific Debate</i>	3
<i>World Wildlife Fund Commercial</i>	4
Satire	5
Ethos	6
Pathos	7
Logos	8
<i>Arctic National Wildlife Refuge</i>	9
Ethos	9
Logos	11
Pathos	12
<i>Ethos as a Driver of Persuasion</i>	12
<i>Works Cited</i>	14
<i>Appendix A</i>	16

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Ethos in Science Communication

Science is, among many things, a communicative discipline. The ability to communicate scientific findings and knowledge is not only important in the progression of science, but as well as the persuasion of scientific ideas (Penrose and Katz 5). Not only do scientists need to persuade other scientists of their findings or discoveries, but they also need to convince elected officials and the general public of the importance of their study.

Aristotle details in the *Rhetoric* how the *ethos* or character of the speaker can be one of the most influential portions of any rhetorical situation (Cooper). These same views hold true for scientific communication (Penrose and Katz 15). This paper will examine how ethos is used as a rhetorical technique to persuade a public audience through two pieces of science communication. These pieces were used to convince the public to oppose or support oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. Each communication piece attempts to persuade the audience of a different scientific view by portraying two very different characters. One piece, attempting to persuade the audience to support drilling, uses a character that the audience feels they can easily trust and appears to be knowledgeable in the conservation biological science issues involved. The other piece satirically uses an untrustworthy character to convince the audience to oppose drilling. Each piece uses ethos in a different manner to effectively persuade a different audience.

The Scientific Debate

For over forty years, the United States of America has been looking into the possibility of drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil. The debate has come and gone as different administrations have been voted in and out. In the two previous United States presidential elections, President George W. Bush's platform included drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). As oil supplies begin to dwindle in the United States and as oil consumption in the U.S. increases, the dependency of the United States on foreign oil supplies intensifies. There is a need in the United States to end their current dependence on foreign oil and use domestic resources to help solve the nation's energy crisis. One of the possible oil supplies is located in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) was "established to preserve unique wildlife, wilderness, and recreational values; to conserve caribou herds, polar bears, grizzly bears, muskox, dall sheep, wolves, wolverines, snow geese, peregrine falcons, other migratory birds, dolly varden, and grayling; to fulfill international treaty obligations; to provide opportunities for continued subsistence uses; and to ensure necessary water quality and quantity" (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Alaska). ANWR is located in the northeastern corner of Alaska bordering the Yukon Territory of Canada. The refuge is over 19.6 million acres in size and contains a variety of different ecosystems including the arctic coastal plains, the Eastern Brooks Mountains Range and the boreal forest in the southern portion of the refuge. ANWR is home to a variety of wildlife including polar bears, muskoxen, and the migratory porcupine caribou herd.

The porcupine caribou herd of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is at the center of the drilling debate in ANWR. The herd is comprised of over 130,000 animals. For centuries, the

porcupine caribou herd migrates each summer to the coastal plain to calve, obtain nourishment, avoid insects, and escape predators. However, the coastal plain is also the area where drilling would occur should oil be discovered in ANWR. The debate between the possibility for oil and the preservation of important caribou habitat has been going on for more than 10 years. This has turned into a battle of not only politics and conservation, but also of science.

In the summer and fall of 2005, a crucial vote to open up ANWR to drilling was occurring in the United States. The U.S. senate voted 52-47 to approve a U.S. budget bill that included drilling in ANWR. However, a week later Republican moderates forced leaders in the House of Representatives to abandon the plan to drill in ANWR. During this critical period, many communication pieces were produced and distributed to the public. Newspaper columns, ads, television spots, and Internet media were all released in hopes to rally the public to one side of the debate or the other. This media was not only released in the United States but also in Canada. Because the porcupine caribou are migratory species, they also call Canadian habitat their home. If there is a possibility of jeopardizing the herd, the debate of drilling in U.S. territory becomes an international issue. The possibility of causing damage to the porcupine caribou herd is the main scientific argument within this debate.

World Wildlife Fund Commercial

(World Wildlife Fund Canada, 2005; see Appendix A)

This piece of communication is a television ad produced by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) of Canada. Founded in 1967, World Wildlife Fund Canada has become one of the country's leading conservation organizations. This commercial was part of a public awareness cam-

campaign that included television, radio, magazine and newspaper ads. WWF wanted Canadians to be aware of the issue and take action by signing a petition against drilling in ANWR. This petition would then be sent to Prime Minister Paul Martin in hopes he would become politically involved. This television ad was very influential on the Canadian public, prompting over 70,000 Canadians to sign the online petition. The primary reason for its success is due to the rhetorical techniques used by the producers.

The ad portrays a southern United States oil tycoon talking to the public about reasons for drilling in ANWR. The ad utilizes satire as a rhetorical technique. Through satire the speaker portrays an interesting ethos that generates illogical (logos) arguments and evokes an emotional (pathos) response from the viewer.

Satire

There is no doubt that this ad produced by the WWF is a satire on popular political and economical opinion in the United States. In 1962, Hight wrote, “some satires are monologues. In these the satirist, usually seeking either in his own person or behind a mask which is scarcely intended to hide, addresses us directly. He states his view of a problem, cites examples, pillories opponents, and endeavours to impose his view upon the public” (13). The WWF television ad is a monologue portrayed by an actor to be southern United States oil tycoon. He is attempting to impose his opinion on the subject of drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Satires have very distinct characteristics and employ specific techniques.

“In nearly all good satire two special methods or attitudes are essential. The first is to describe a painful or absurd situation or a foolish or wicked person

or group, as vividly as possible. The satirical writer believes that most people are purblind, insensitive, perhaps anaesthetized by custom and dullness and resignation. He wishes to make them see the truth - or at least that part of the truth which they habitually ignore.” (Highet 18-19).

The truth that WWF wishes the viewer to see in this piece is the validity of arguments for drilling in ANWR that pro-drilling individuals use. WWF creatively uses a vivid character to describe the arguments employed by pro-drilling activists to get viewers to question the truth of the pro-drilling arguments. WWF employs several rhetorical techniques to convince the audience of the truth this satire wishes to clarify.

Ethos

The WWF commercial ad seeks to use a man of wealth and power as the principle character. In order to understand how the WWF used the ethos of this character rhetorically, one must look at what audience the commercial is intended for.

The commercial ad was targeted towards Canadians between the ages of 18-40 who may be politically and environmentally involved. This audience has also become extremely apprehensive toward American politics and policy. Due to this, the type of character that is being depicted in the commercial ad is one Canadians may be suspicious of. The character is portrayed as a wealthy oil tycoon; he is sitting in a very expensive chair with a flag of a non-discriminate country behind him. This tells the audience that this man is rich and powerful. In the *Rhetoric* (Cooper 2.16) Aristotle outlines the influence of wealth on a man’s character as “wealth upon character lies in the surface for all to see. The rich are insolent and superior.” Aristotle also states “the character resulting from wealth is that of a prosperous fool” (Cooper 2.16). It is just

this character that many modern Canadians cannot trust. The ethos of a character can be defined as a “mode of persuasion that relies on the speaker creating a credible character” (Enos 243).

What is satirical about this commercial is that from the character’s perspective, due to his wealth and position, he believes he is creating that credible character when the aim of the ad is to do exactly the opposite. Due to the audience’s response to the character’s ethos he quickly discredits himself.

Pathos

In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle outlines many different emotions that may be aroused by a rhetor (Cooper 2.1-11). Pathos in the case of the WWF commercial is aroused by the satirical character and language. In this case, the main emotion being elicited is anger.

Due to the ethos of the character and the arguments he uses to outline his position on drilling in ANWR, the viewer gets extremely angry at this position. What is interesting about the character’s arguments are that they are directly related to real arguments that pro-drilling activists use. This was purposely done on the part of WWF to arouse anger in the viewer by satirically looking at real arguments used by pro-drilling activists and politicians. “There are moments in the midst of a political crisis that a satirist can do no better than record the very words of the political figures involved” (Seidel 165-186). An example in this commercial concerns the caribou when the character says ” and the best part:’ all those caribou migrating directly to the drilling site. Our boys won’t even have to send out for fresh meat” (World Wildlife Fund Canada). One of the main arguments made by pro-drilling activists is that the porcupine caribou

herd can successfully co-exist with oil drilling (Arctic Power). WWF disagrees with this position. In the commercial this argument is shown to be invalid and ridiculed by the character portrayal. The image of killing animals for meat as they migrate to calve can easily arouse much anger in animal activists and others with environmental concerns. It is extremely effective in targeting some appropriate audiences by shocking the viewer into a state of anger. The ethos of the character portrayed works in conjunction with the necessary emotion that WWF, the rhetor, wishes to elicit in the viewer.

Logos

The ethos of the character on the commercial not only influences the viewer's emotion, but will also influence the logos of the argument being made by the character. Normally in order for a rhetorical appeal to be successful, the arguments must look to be logical to the viewer. However, in this satirical look of pro-drilling arguments, the logic is non-existent. In fact, WWF specifically uses the character to point out how *illogical* the arguments being used to support drilling are. This is best used in the statement "Will there be the occasional oil spill? Sure. But the arctic is teeming with birds with soft downy feather perfect for soaking up oil spills" (World Wildlife Fund Canada). With this statement, the commercial shows a bird completely covered in oil and possibly near death. Canadians became very aware of the effects of oil on wildlife due to disasters such as the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska in 1991. The image of the oil-slicked bird directly conflicts with the argument being made by the character in the commercial ad. At this point the viewer must choose which is the most logical argument of the two: the one the charac-

ter is making or the image of the oil slicked bird. Due to previous experience, the viewer has already learned the effects of oil on animals. Therefore, the image of the oil-slicked bird appeals to the viewer's logos much more than the statements being made by the character.

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

(Arctic Power; see Appendix A)

On the opposite side of the debate, those who support drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge have a different set of scientific arguments to support their opinions and also implore different rhetorical techniques to persuade their audience. On a website devoted to promoting drilling in ANWR, a Flash movie has been produced to help Americans decide whether or not to support drilling. The website is sponsored by a group called Arctic Power who are in favour of drilling in ANWR to help build economic security to the people of Kaktovik (a First Nations community located inside ANWR) and to help solve the United States' Energy Crisis. This Flash movie uses some interesting rhetorical techniques to help their case. These techniques are very different than those used by WWF. One of the most important reasons for the difference is the contrasting audience that this piece is targeting. The piece is targeting mostly Americans who are perhaps undecided on whether they should be supporting the drilling in ANWR bill. What is similar about this piece is that like the WWF commercial ad, it uses ethos as a primary rhetorical function to aid in its message.

Ethos

The Flash movie is narrated by Fenton Rexford a member of the Inupiat community of Kaktovik located in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. He greets the viewer in the Inupiat language and introduces himself as part of the community. He speaks in a thick Inupiat accent and due to his age, presents himself as an important member of the community. There is an evident ethos built by the narrator, as he explains he “was taught to respect the land and its resources” (Arctic Power). Native Americans are perceived by the remainder of the nation to be in touch with the land and responsible in terms of resources use. As Mr. Rexford continues to talk about the need to drill in ANWR, he explains how Alaskans and in the Inupiat community strongly favour drilling. The ordinary American would be more than happy to support Native Americans in any type of environmental action, as they are perceived as probably knowing what is best for their land.

There is also a certain type of ethos that follows someone who declares himself as an environmentalist. Fenton Rexford claims, “We Alaskans are strong environmentalists.” (Arctic Power). Killingsworth and Palmer describe to us the extension of the environmentalist ethos:

In this traditional mode, the news media have cast environmentalists as the spoilers of economic development in a rhetorical that covertly (or unconsciously) upholds the values of industrialization and the creation of new jobs in the community, regardless of the nature or source of these jobs. People need work; they need money; they need to satisfy their most immediate needs. That much is clear. The values of environmentalists who oppose job-creating industry, on the other hand, appear in news accounts as mysteriously unfocused. Like all images of the *other*, the resulting portrait of the environmentalist comes to be chiefly characterized by the negative. The environmentalist is anti-development, antiprogress, against the building of this road or power plant” (26)

In the case the environmentalist would be perceived as being against drilling in ANWR for oil. Despite the possible negative view of the environmentalist as anti-development, Rexford

identifies himself as an environmentalist who seeks responsible development of the resources to help serve the nation's energy needs and to create jobs. This increases his ethos for two separate groups. First Rexford increases his ethos among those who may harbour a negative view of environmentalists by saying he is pro-development. He also increases his ethos among those who do relate with environmentalists by calling himself one.

Logos

In the case of the Arctic Power movie, the narrator makes some very logical arguments to try to persuade the viewer. In terms of his argument that “development and animals can co-exist”, powerful visual photographs are used that may influence the viewer. Photographs are shown of grizzly bears walking on, or sitting around a pipeline near the drilling site of Prudhoe Bay. The animals seem to be unfazed by this unnatural intrusion. Later, Rexford goes on to explain that the caribou of the Central Caribou herd, “often gather around the (drilling) facilities to seek relief from the mosquitoes” (Arctic Power). Again, photos of the caribou herd in front of the drill site are shown in vast numbers. In this case, both rhetorical language and visual rhetoric aid in validating the argument. Animals are particularly vulnerable to mosquitoes, as they have no real ways of protecting themselves. Caribou are often pestered and bitten by innumerable mosquitoes (Allison and Wilson) and the relief from them would certainly be welcome. In fact the behaviour has even been documented scientifically that caribou will seek areas with fewer mosquitoes (Walsh *et al.* 465-473) and near drill sites they will use certain areas of drill sites that have fewer mosquitoes (Pollard *et al.* 659-674). From the view of the scientist and from the av-

erage person this argument seems very factual based on studies of caribou, but also based on one's own personal experience with mosquitoes.

The image of the Prudhoe Bay caribou herd is also very convincing as caribou are found in herds numbering in the thousands. The sheer number of animals displayed around a drilling site is convincing that the site cannot possibly be harming the population of the caribou herd. Rexford also points out that the Central caribou herd has “grown in the past 20 years” with an active oil drilling industry in place. Aristotle gives us a hint as to the reason why the narrator uses this type of factual information to back his argument. Aristotle offers the idea that certain types of men will “judge each case by the facts”. Due to the character and ethos of the narrator, he is using factual information about a similar caribou herd and animals successfully adjusting to oil drilling and development.

Pathos

Arctic Power wishes to use the ethos of the narrator and logical arguments in order to appeal to the audience. Inadvertently, however, the Arctic Power piece can also elicit a strong emotional response from the viewer. Killingsworth and Palmer offer the advice that “the appeal to emotion in the rhetoric of public debate is always risky. A writer who seeks one response may elicit a contrary one” (71). In some instances the visual portrayal of the grizzly bear and caribou among an unnatural backdrop may evoke some sadness and even anger in the part of the viewer. While in some circumstances these images can appeal to the logos of a viewer, they can also perform the opposite function in terms of the pathos.

Ethos as a Driver of Persuasion

In the case of the two Arctic National Wildlife Refuge communication pieces, ethos is the main rhetorical mechanism used to persuade the audience. They are each very compelling for very different reasons. In the World Wildlife Fund television ad, the producers use the target audience to invent a character that instead of appealing to the audience does exactly the opposite. Although Aristotle tells us that a rhetor must be intelligent, moral and of good will (Prelli 87), the effective portrayal of a character in this commercial can be the opposite when satirically portrayed. This was a very effective method of using satire to create an ethos that would upset, shock and anger the viewer. Cleverly at the end of the ad, WWF states to the viewer “Some people think drilling in a wildlife refuge is a good idea. If you don’t, stop them” (World Wildlife Fund Canada). This helps WWF maintain their ethos as a respected conservation organization.

The Flash media movie produced by Arctic Power also uses ethos to persuade their audience. In this case, ethos is used in a more traditional sense where the scientific ethos of the narrator addresses both technical and moral issues (Prelli 87). He addresses the scientific evidence of wildlife reaction to drilling around Prudhoe Bay and he also addresses the benefits of the Inupiat community and the nation.

Undeniably, the ethos of the speaker in each of these communication pieces is the driving force behind their individual successes. In order to analyze the ethos in scientific discourse and environmental argument one must ask, “ who is the person, or *who does the person claim to represent*, who puts forth the arguments about the environment?” (Killingsworth and Palmer 23). This is an important question to ask in terms of each of these communication pieces. Each

speaker is chosen to speak for very different purposes. The narrator for Arctic Power attempts to appear more credible as his position is more questionable; the WWF oil tycoon is depicted as less credible to emphasize a position and evoke action. Each piece however, uses this ethos effectively for the audience in which it is intended.

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Appendix A

Communication Pieces

- The 60 second World Wildlife Fund ANWR commercial can be found at <http://www.wwf.ca/media/default.asp>
- The Arctic Power Flash Movie and be found at <http://www.anwr.org/flash.htm>

