

# Against Censoring Contradiction

## *Example Philosophy Essay*

### **Introduction**

In his article “Censoring Contradiction” in the Washington Times, Mark Steyn argues that peer reviewed climate science cannot be trusted (Steyn 2009). In this paper, I shall argue that this argument is fallacious. First, I will identify his argument. Next, I will discuss the historical context in which the argument was made. I will then show that his argument is based on a fallacious induction and relies on a fallacious argument from authority and ad hominem arguments.

### **The Problem: Climategate**

This argument was made in the context of an incident that some media outlets referred to as “Climategate.” A server used by the Climatic Research Unit (CRU) at the University of East Anglia in England was hacked. The unknown hacker stole and selectively published emails and other personal documents written by scientists at the CRU. The emails included discussions of the best way to present data, combat the arguments of climate skeptics and use statistical techniques to emphasize certain pieces of data. The documents also include personal criticism of Mr. Stephen McIntyre (Revkin 2009). Instead of focusing on the criminal act of data theft and concerns over the safety of personal digital information, this incident sparked a discussion about whether climate change is a conspiracy of the scientific conspiracy (Revkin 2009). In the context of this scandal, Mr. Steyn makes an argument based on several articles published in peer-review journals before 2006. He cites articles published by Stephen McIntyre in Climate

Science and Geophysical Research Letters that “correct” Michael Mann’s hockey stick climate diagram for both statistical and scientific errors. (Committee 2009). Drs. Michael Mann and Phil Jones responded unfavorably to Stephen McIntyre’s publications by contacting editors of these journals (Steyn 2009). This argument has been analyzed and according to a National Research Council Report, the statistical errors mentioned by McIntyre were shortcomings but were small and did not change the conclusions made by Mann et al (Committee 2006). In response to criticism from fellow climate scientists that the hockey stick diagram relies on tree-ring data which is not as conclusive as previously believed and on a climate model that has faced much criticism, Mann et al republished in 2008 (Mann 2008). McIntyre attempted to criticize this second publication to which Mann published a response that concluded “McIntyre and McKittrick raise no valid issues regarding our paper” (Mann 2009). While the arguments that Mr. Steyn makes are in response to “Climategate,” his claim of censorship by Michael Mann and Phil Jones refer to events that happened in 2006 and are considered to be resolved by most involved.

### **Steyn’s Argument**

Mr. Steyn’s argument is an enumerative inductive argument. In the article, he concludes that “The trouble with outsourcing your marbles to the peer-reviewed set is that, if you take away one single thing from the leaked documents, it’s that the global ‘warm-mongers’ have wholly corrupted the ‘peer-reviewed’ process” (Steyn 2009). His argument takes the following form.

- Dr. Michael Mann and Dr. Phil Jones contacted editors of peer-reviewed journals discouraging the publishing of future articles by Stephen McIntyre after he published a paper that questioned their climate theories and statistical techniques.
  - Michael Mann and Phil Jones are PhD climate scientists that often participate in peer-reviewed science.
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- Therefore, climate scientists and peer-reviewed climate science should not be trusted.

### **Errors in Steyn's Argument**

I will now discuss the fallacies of Mr. Steyn's argument. Even if the premises of Mr. Steyn's argument are taken to be true, the induction that he draws from them is fallacious. Mr. Steyn is making a generalization that if these two scientists attempted to censor articles that questioned their respective research on climate change that all PhD scientists and peer-reviewed climate science should not be trusted. This is a fallacy of hasty generalization because one example of censoring is not sufficient evidence to make this generalization about the peer-review process and climate scientists.

In addition to the fallacious induction, Mr. Steyn's argument relies on a fallacious argument from authority. His first premise assumes that Mr. Stephen McIntyre published legitimate climate science in peer-reviewed journals and Dr. Michael Mann and Dr. Phil Jones attempted to censor this material purely because it disagreed with their respective work. However, Mr. McIntyre is lacking the professional expertise to be an authority on climate change. Mr. McIntyre's academic record includes only a bachelor of science in mathematics from the University of Toronto and study of philosophy at Oxford. Mr. McIntyre has self-

admittedly never studied climate in an academic setting and his research is not funded or supported by any scientific organization (for example NSF, GSA, etc.). Mr. McIntyre's experience includes a career in the mineral business and a consultant position at the conservative think tank, The Marshall Institute neither of which provide the expertise to assess complex climate modelling (Marshall Institute). In his argument, Mr. Steyn also fails to mention that every example of censoring that he refers to specifically involves Mr. McIntyre and that most reputable peer-reviewed journals would not publish articles written by authors with no professional or academic experience on a subject.

In addition to the fallacious induction and arguments from authority, throughout his article Mr. Steyn uses numerous ad hominem arguments. His premises include that environmentalists (specifically those that read the New York Times) are "gullible," politicians that base legislation on climate science are "gibbering madmen escaped from the padded cell," and that climate scientists are "a few dozen thuggish ideologues" (Steyn 2009). Mr. Steyn additionally attempts to discredit Michael Mann and Phil Jones by prefixing their names with "Mr." instead of "Dr" (Steyn 2009). The conclusion he draws from these arguments is that rational Americans should not trust any climate science from the peer reviewed community. His premises provide no information about the issues, but rather personally attack anyone making or accepting climate science.

### **Conclusion**

Mr. Steyn's argument was fallacious because it was based on a fallacious induction, fallacious arguments from authority, and ad hominem arguments. Questions about the peer-reviewed process may remain. For example, an article that was written by a non-qualified author

was published in several peer-reviewed journals. However, these issues exceed the scope of this paper.

### References

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