

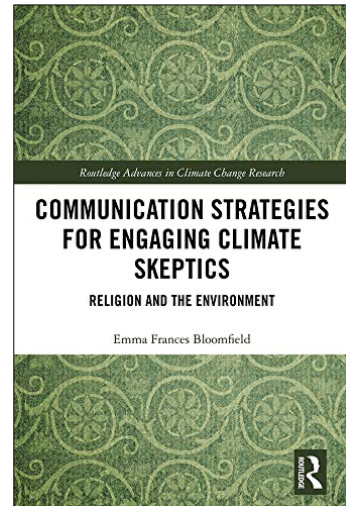
Emma Frances Bloomfield, **Communication Strategies for Engaging Climate Skeptics: Religion and the Environment**, New York, NY: Routledge, 2019, 182 pp., \$124.00 (hardcover), \$46.36 (electronic).

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***Communication Strategies for Engaging Climate Skeptics: Religion and the Environment*** provides a dynamic resource that crosses between the divides of academic investigation and practical outreach strategy. The work is organized around several rhetorical interventions that delve into identities behind climate skepticism with the premise that tactful and personal dialogue yields attitude change. Setting her research among Christian communities, author Emma Frances Bloomfield champions the importance of identity in belief formation and subjectivity in persuasion. In this manner, *Communication Strategies for Engaging Climate Skeptics* provides a practical application of rhetorical theory in the hopes of enacting tangible change.



Bloomfield’s intervention into rhetorical theory offers an application of Burkean form as a method of engaging in discourse as well as compounding on a theory of “rhetorical listening.” Deeply rooted in rhetorical tradition, *Communication Strategies for Engaging Climate Skeptics* reimagines Kenneth Burke’s theory of dramatism in an active, methodological manner. Skepticism of climate change and environmental stewardship is one piece of a larger conceptual web that forms a person’s identity in American Christianity that is indelibly tied to pillars of faith (p. 3). Teasing out the tensions and entanglements between faith and environmentalism, the researcher can better understand how to proceed with a persuasive plan. Key to this outcome is Bloomfield’s method: rhetorical listening.

Through rhetorical listening as method, Bloomfield dissects the complicated landscapes that build up and strengthen skeptic arguments. Following Ratcliffe’s (1999) definition of listening, Bloomfield’s responds to the three steps of the method: “acknowledging the existence of these discourses, [. . .] listening for the (un)conscious presences, absences, unknowns; and [. . .] consciously integrating this information into our world-views and decision-making” (p. 206). Bloomfield posits that if the researcher understands the pillars of identity that make up a person’s belief, then a persuasive argument can be made that works within the structured world of the individual.

Bloomfield further urges in *Communication Strategies for Engaging Climate Skeptics* for interventionists to adopt a comic approach to addressing climate skeptics. A comic frame, as introduced by Kenneth Burke promotes the perspective that climate skeptics are not antagonistic in perpetuity but rather mistaken, and through corrective deliberation offered redemption (1984).

*Communication Strategies for Engaging Climate Skeptics* traces the tangled roots of environmentalism with processes of Christian faith across three groups that have presence among

conversations of climate change skepticism in the United States: the Cornwall Alliance (CA), Action Institute (AI), and Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN). Her case studies illuminate three distinct relationships between American Christianity and environmentalism that she identifies as separators, bargainers, and harmonizers, respectively.

The nuance of picking climate groups with particular ontology strengthens her thesis that the context of arguments matters just as much of the presented discussion. In some contested and controversial cases, such as climate change, context can matter more, and the bespoke analysis and recommended strategies showcase Bloomfield's interventions.

Her method critically engages with climate skeptic groups in a dialogue scaled and set to the manner of subjective arguments. In her case-study chapters, Bloomfield dissects the arguments presented by the different groups to understand where the motivations, tensions, and drama of the arguments exist. Understanding the landscape of an argument allows a tailored response that works with group logic process and provides a nuanced corrective frame.

The CA is the token separator group in Bloomfield's analysis of separators. Separators, as the name evokes, are groups that distinguish hard boundaries between faith and environmentalism. The solid division means often that metaphors of war and violence are found at the forefront of their rhetoric, and environmentalism and faith are presented in antagonism with the other. To integrate persuasive potential in reasoning with separators, Bloomfield finds through her own interviews and analysis that asking questions, accepting premises, and fitting climate arguments into personal and individuated arguments comprise the most fitting tactics.

Bloomfield's work with the AI comprises her case study on bargainers. Bargainers "filter" climate science and environmental arguments through a biblical lens developed by their relationship to their faith. This is to say, climate arguments are often situated in conjunction with the skeptics understanding of structural matters in the Bible: "Does X assertion about climate change mesh with how I, through my faith, understand the world?" Rather than drawing a distinct antagonistic division between environmental rhetoric and faith, members of the AI cherry pick scientific knowledge and appeal to scientific structure. These qualities lead Bloomfield to conclude effective strategies are to shift dialogue out of scientific fields and appeal to implementing environmental change through "neutral" spaces, to shift the dialogue topically to analogous topics, or to cite specific examples in dialogue.

Harmonizers, in contrast to the separators and bargainers, showcase Bloomfield's interest in promoting not just communication efficacy but communication sustainability as well. Harmonizers of the EEN already acknowledge the wicked problem of climate change and remain comfortable in their American Christian identity. The chapters Bloomfield dedicates to the EEN posits the question: How do we mobilize? Strategies concluded from this section involve encouraging environmentalist practices in public spaces as well as appeals to urgency and scope of the issue.

Bloomfield's work on harmonizers and the EEN in particular present the potential to move beyond the communities of interest in *Communication Strategies for Engaging Climate Skeptics*. Her work touches

on a core tension in scientific outreach: how institutions and individuals activate communities and sustain interest in mobilizing in the face of leviathan proportion. Where her work is confidently placed within a rhetorical tradition, this book presents an example of research for practice. The book challenges researchers to think of theory and practice as inexorably intertwined.

In a time of critical importance for the future of our environment, Bloomfield's book addresses sustainable strategies for advancing communication around climate. The analysis presented offers innovative ways to consider messaging that incorporates a deeply humanist and interpersonal connection that explores the intersections of academic research and practice. While Bloomfield writes specifically on Christian communities, the structural premise of the "Executive Summary" in *Communication Strategies for Engaging Climate Skeptics* provides a resource for broader intervention strategy across communities as well as a critical example of how researchers can conduct research in the spirit of social change. The deeply humanist and interpersonal connection in Bloomfield's interviews bely the thesis stated throughout the book that "recognizing the multiplicity of ways climate skeptics make sense of climate change can prompt us to meet them where they are at" (p. 171).

#### References

- Burke, K. (1984). *Attitudes toward history (3rd edition)*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Ratcliffe, K. (1999). Rhetorical listening: A trope for interpretive invention and a "code of cross-cultural conduct." *College Composition and Communication*, 51(2), 195–224.