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Logos, Pathos, Ethos: Intersections of Philosophy and Rhetoric

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EXPERTISE, TRUST, AND CREDIBILITY: Rhetorical and Philosophical Lessons from the Climate Change Debate
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ABSTRACT
I aim to illuminate the relevance of expertise, trust, and credibility to the contemporary debate on anthropogenic climate change. Specifically I consider the relevance of expert trustworthiness and its absence for differently positioned parties to nested relationships of epistemic interdependency which undergird contemporary climate debates, research programs, and popular discourse. First, I analyze equivocations among different senses of climate expertise: the array of climate experts in one sense or another is varied, and in considering their epistemic, ethical, social, and political roles in climate change debates, we must take care not to conflate them. Next I consider ethical aspects of popular climate rhetoric attendant to the vulnerability to exploitation inherent to trust relationships. Expert untrustworthiness erodes the basis upon which our collective understanding of and responses to global climate change is built. I turn lastly to the problems of credibility and epistemic autonomy. While it can be tempting to treat climate change as something a person can know alone, the best evidence available to us does not admit of for independent assessment. Our need for epistemic interdependency includes not only wary reliance on testimony but also trust, and not only relations between experts and non-experts but also trust among scientists and other putative and substantive expert voices, none of whom can do the work alone. Trust in experts in the climate change debate can be rational and responsible, yet all parties are made vulnerable to rhetorical exploitation when the nature and scope of climate expertise and trust are obscured.

References for Part One (LOGOS): Equivocations on the Varieties of Climate Expertise
References for Part 2 (ETHOS): Morally Rotten + Healthy Trust in Climate Rhetoric
Ackerman, F. 2008. Hot It’s Not: Reflections on Cool It by Bjorn Lomborg. Climate Change 89.

References for Part 3 (PATHOS): Credibility and Climate Consensus