

This is supplementary material for Stephen Paur's webtext "Post-Trump Rhetoric and Composition: A Review of Bruce McComiskey's *Post-Truth Rhetoric and Composition*" published in *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*, 27(2), available at <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/27.2/paur/index.html>.

## **Transcript for "What Is Politically Motivated Reasoning?"**

So, I have a question. "Politically motivated reasoning." What is that, exactly?

I'm so glad you asked. Your question aligns perfectly with the subject of this video!

Unbelievable.

Politically motivated reasoning is a phenomenon social psychologists have observed in which our moral values and political commitments influence how we process information by affecting how receptive we are to certain factual statements—or, conversely, how skeptical we are of them.

Ah. So it's one of those things that makes us less rational.

Mm, not quite. As Daniel Kahn (2015) emphasizes, politically motivated reasoning is not the same thing as being irrational. In fact, Kahn says, at an individual level, it's perfectly rational to weigh the social costs and social benefits of asserting the truth of some things and not others. Check out this quote.

"Given the social meanings that factual positions on [various hot-button] issues convey, failing to adopt the 'right' stance—the stance that conveys who [you] are, whose side [you're] on—could have devastating consequences for your standing with others whose support is vital to your emotional and material well-being. Under these conditions, it's a perfectly rational thing for one to attend to information in a manner that promotes beliefs that express [one's] identity [in the 'correct' way], whether or not [the beliefs themselves] are factually correct." (p. 13)

Huh. That's interesting. But I mean, is there even such thing as reasoning that's NOT motivated, that's not at least a little tainted by bias?

Probably not. Here, check out this other quote from the Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs (2004) textbook, *Writing About Writing...*

Another quote? What do you do, just carry these around in your back pocket in case you have to whip one out for a moment like this?

I do. Yeah.

Sorry, never mind.

"A major principle of rhetoric is that texts and discourse are always motivated by particular purposes, needs, and values. And because a given discourse (talk or writing) always carries

specific motivations, it can never be 'objective' in the sense of 'neutral' or 'unbiased.' Discourse is always and inevitably slanted because it is always motivated."

Does that mean we have to resign ourselves to relativism, radical skepticism, or even moral anarchy?

I don't think so. I'd say it just means we have to look at individual factual claims in the larger context of the identities, arguments, and worldviews those claims are being enlisted to support or validate, and to closely examine the needs, values, motives, and interests that underpin a person's desire to believe something is true.

I see. It just means our perspectives are never ideologically innocent, but always biased, slanted, and limited in some way or another.

Exactly. You got it.

Uh. Wow. Recognizing these "facts" of rhetoric, as it were, can help us all become more effective communicators and more critically aware readers, viewers, and composers.

Yep.

I'd say it can also help us be more honest and upfront with ourselves and others about what our real goals and interests are, which can help us figure out how to more gracefully navigate conflict, and possibly find common ground, when we find ourselves at cross-purposes with one another.

Alright, alright. Yeah, yeah. But that's enough of that. I'm the one in charge of this video, okay.

Whoa, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to cause offense. Kind of sensitive, isn't he...

Hey, don't address my viewers directly, only I can do that...

"Your" viewers? Who says they're "your" viewers? That's a little presumptuous, don't you think?

Presumptuous? I'M being presumpt—listen, bub, this is MY show, I was the one generous enough to fly you all the way out here, YOU'RE the one...

We'll be right back after a word from our sponsors!

Sponsors?? We do not have sponsors—

Well, that's not surprising.

Alright, alright, cut, cut... alright, where's the intern... Intern! Hey! One grapefruit soda please, stat—no, no, no, one, I just said one, he doesn't—

GoPro, stop video.