



## The Enthymematic Connotations of Trump's God and Devil Terms

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Drawing from scholarship in rhetorical theory, Destani Malicoat Capps analyzes a series of tweets by President Trump. She explains how Trump fuses three rhetorical devices—the enthymeme, the god/devil term, and the use of connotative meaning—into effective but dangerously manipulative political rhetoric. This essay was written for Rhetoric & Composition with Dr. Ben Wetherbee.

**R**HETORICAL DEVICES ARE BEAUTIFUL creations. Even singularly, they are swathed in astounding weight, determination, and aptitude; but rhetorical devices achieve their utmost peak of critical influence when they work in tandem with one another. Powerful impact is found within clusters of rhetorical devices. Rhetoricians survive and whittle out their persuasive strategies by Aristotle's ancient rhetorical playbook. Diminutive alterations are made and new combinations are forged, but the foundational devices—the building blocks of rhetorical manipulation—are identical, fixed, and persistent. Notable rhetoricians create their own assemblage of these devices, rendering their personal rhetoric effective, memorable, and custom-made. Through vigilant analysis of Donald Trump's famed phrases, one uncovers his talent for spewing admi-

rably effective rhetoric, similar to that of Ronald Reagan, by the fusion of three specific rhetorical devices—enthymemes, connotations, and god and devil terms.

Three main devices constitute Trump's approach to rhetoric—the first of which is the enthymeme. "Enthymeme" was coined by the rhetorical genius Aristotle, who wished to create a conduit between rhetoric as defined by the Sophists and that as defined by Socrates and Plato (Johnstone). Aristotle deemed a syllogism to be a dialectical proof because, when explicated, the premises necessarily follow one another; the enthymeme is a subunit of a syllogism better designed for rhetorical proof. Both the syllogism and the enthymeme are commonly based on widely-held, collective opinions, rely on deductive reasoning, and are grounded in probability (Johnstone). The enthymeme is simply a type of syllogism geared toward rhetorical persuasion; Aristotle actually refers to the enthymeme as "the rhetorical syllogism" (qtd. in Johnstone). Comprehension of the closely-knit relationship between the syllogism and enthymeme, and the enthymeme and rhetorical persuasion, is essential when attempting to illuminate the mechanics behind a speaker's rhetorical declarations.

Crucial differences between the syllogism and enthymeme can be outlined, however. First, the syllogism is intended to be comprised of logical premises, leading harmoniously to a necessarily-true conclusion; yet, the enthymeme—even as a syllogistic subdivision—must draw premises from another source: the views of the audience. Therefore, where the syllogism appeals to wisdom, the enthymeme alternately requests the attention of biased, collective naivety (Johnstone; Zarefsky). Audience awareness explains the monumentally successful and common implementation of the enthymeme; the appeal to sweeping opinions or beliefs allows for more persuasive, though not necessarily accurate, rhetoric. The second discrepancy between the two rhetorical proofs is the categorical classification of the desired conclusion. The enthymeme is used to

persuade and the syllogism to criticize (Cronkhite). Next, the syllogism is applied in circumstances where the rhetorician and audience pursue the answer to a comprehensive, broad question; alternatively, the enthymeme is *permanently* and *exclusively* employed when the question or conclusion is of a more precise nature (Johnstone). All enthymemes are a type of syllogism, but not all syllogisms are enthymemes. They are both used as tools of rhetorical proof but not in identical circumstances or with matching motivation.

The enthymeme is arguably the most commonplace strategy employed in present-day stylistic dialogue. It remains a vital rhetorical tool, despite its advanced age (Johnstone). This practical reasoning device is an important heuristic needed to conserve mental energy—and persuade the majority of those who lack the mental capacity for logical reasoning. This heuristic saves energy through its similarity to a fill-in-the-blank exam; the audience must determine the implied premise, which is usually done without difficulty because the premise is hard-wired into the audience’s cultural belief system (Johnstone; Zarefsky). By means of utmost simplicity, the formidable power of suggestive, implied persuasion is unearthed. The state of the syllogism and enthymeme is encompassed by fierce argumentation; critics cannot seem to agree whether these tools are valid or logically sound (Zarefsky). The argumentation creates a false dichotomy in which middle ground is uninhabited, unlivable, outlawed. According to David Zarefsky, the syllogism and enthymeme are now hardly used in rhetorical persuasion. This claim can and will be hotly disputed; through examination of political orations, it becomes obvious that these rhetorical tools continue to be abundantly active.

Rhetorical analysts commonly fixate on the implications of linguistic connotations. For example, Roland Barthes includes connotative appeal as one of three major components of the rhetorical power of an image. Connotations are not simply irrelevant, insignificant adherences to a linguistic pronouncement, or *parole*; connotations are the *zeitgeist*—or a multitude that even outlasts singular

zeitgeists. Some connotations are perennial; others bloom with the season. Barthes states that images convey meaning differently than words or phrases do. The cultural baggage that images or symbols possess is what enables connotative delineations to be drawn from them. He finds connotation to be the most intriguing dimension of imagistic meaning. Similarly, Barthes' concepts of denotations, connotations, and linguistic components can be applied to strictly linguistic constructions as well—like speeches or other rhetorical assertions. Contrary to the definitiveness of denotations, connotations will necessarily fluctuate from culture to culture and between cohorts. In the connotative meaning, the linguistic construction intersects with warehouses of the audience's cultural presuppositions (Barthes). Audience ideology is the key to understanding which connotations will be evoked from a linguistic utterance.

God and devil terms are the rhetorical coinage of Richard Weaver. God terms inherently encompass all the morals to which an audience ideologically clings. The opposite is true for devil terms; these terms connote ideas or objects which are not complementary to the audience's worldview; therefore, audiences emphatically shun these ideas and terms (Broda-Bahm). Devil terms are not simply a matter of rejection; rather, they are a matter of identification. God terms and devil terms rely on a forceful "us versus them" mentality. Consequently, god terms connote rejoiced beliefs held within the mentality of the audience and the ideological menagerie with which they identify, and devil terms connote of the distastefully-defended beliefs of their disputants (Broda-Bahm). The audience does not have to work to make these connections; the connotations of god and devil terms are natural and effortless (Broda-Bahm). Constant submersion in these ideas—with these fierce cultural commonplaces—permits for this to be the case.

Cultural commonplaces and ideological identification are the two principles behind the success and motivation of enthymemes, connotations, and god and devil terms. Part-time president and full-time rhetorician Donald Trump presents his god and devil terms

with the knowledge that they will promote enthymematic connotations that endorse his audience's ideology. This is an advantageously potent, yet unoriginal, tool to promote his rhetorical agenda. Flash-back to the 1980s: President Ronald Reagan ingrained his rhetoric—and his audience—with metaphors of good and evil; predating Reagan's rhetoric, President Jimmy Carter carefully included god terms like “new” in his articulate discourses (Bosmajian 102-03). Most political rhetoric is thoughtlessly snatched from a horde of manipulatively plagiarized material. It is vital that humans gain awareness of the repetition and deception ceaselessly imitated by politician after politician, decade after decade. Terence P. Moran, in reference to George Orwell's *1984*, detects that “it is not events but labels that shape our perceptions in reality. Unlike events, labels are not fixed but flexible, open to manipulation, alteration, and even reversal” (qtd. in Bosmajian 102). These reused terms are manufactured into a rhetorical monopoly—there for exploitation by the politicians and discarded when that approach no longer suits them.

The repetition is truly remarkable—the commitment to such an organized system of manipulation. Reagan included variations of “free” so many times in one long speech that they averaged out to one instance per minute (Bosmajian 103). Reagan obviously stacked his speeches with god terms, with variations of “America” repeated fifteen times (104). Unsurprisingly, “America” is also one of Trump's favorite terms to reiterate. Another similarity between Reagan and Trump's rhetoric is reflected in Reagan's quote, “Our nation is poised for greatness. . . . Let history say of us, these were the golden years—when the American Revolution was reborn, when freedom gained new life an America reached for her best” (qtd. in Bosmajian 104). With peculiar recollections of this declaration, Trump flaunts his slogan “Make America Great Again!” God terms constitute one half of his presidential slogan; the stale unoriginality is breathtakingly banal. Additionally, Haig Bosmajian mentions *1984*'s domineering proverb “War Is Peace” (102). Recently, Trump was addressing his intention to rebuild the United States' military and

stated: “I want peace through strength” (@realDonaldTrump, “U.S.”). Disregarding consideration of the eerie parallel between this tweet and a fictional dystopian novel about tyranny (Orwell’s 1984), the tweet is, once again, heavily composed of god terms.

Worthy of consideration are the potential benefits of these rhetorical devices to politicians. What could Trump gain from the tireless reiteration of enthymemes and god terms? Trump entrusts his audience with the responsibility of decoding his enthymemes; he trusts in this process because he is aware that the audience has an ideological storehouse of linguistic connotations and cherished values, equipped to decode his implicit message. Trump, along with many other conservatives, has deemed “immigrant” to be a devil term. In his tweet, “I look forward to working w/ D’s + R’s in Congress to address immigration reform in a way that puts hardworking citizens of our country first” (@realDonaldTrump, “I look”), there is politically-motivated language, but nothing appears to be blatantly belligerent. However, there is a problem, and it begins to unravel after distinguishing the god terms: *hardworking*, *citizens*, and *first*. This, in addition to the existing knowledge that immigration is a devil term, leads to an enthymematic revelation. Trump desires to create immigration reform and do so in such a way that “hardworking citizens” are benefited. But, the implicit premise demonstrates an aversion to indolent noncitizens. If the group he named comes first, it necessitates that a group must come in last. For Trump and his audience, who share a political ideology, the preexisting standard of immigration as inherently bad must manifest in order to decode this enthymeme. In 2004, Tune A. Van Dijk coined the “ideological square,” a method of analysis which contemplates where the speaker places the emphasis (Mohammadi and Javadi 3). Specifically, does the author place emphasis on “our” good features and “their” bad ones? Does the speaker deemphasize “our” bad qualities and “their” good ones? These are tremendously helpful questions, especially in the context of Trump’s approach to immigration. Examining where Trump places emphasis in his rhetoric can tell the

reader more about his intentions. Enthymemes serve many purposes, but this one specifically is used to blanket offensive material and potentially manipulate voters.

The cycle from stated enthymeme to existing god term to connotative appendages is quite similar to the dispersion of other common values in society: reiteration and absorption. Through examination of Reagan and Trump—and even George Orwell’s fiction—one is able to pinpoint the exaggerated, mechanical replication of god terms and enthymemes in certain connotative scenarios. Trump has several other statements full-to-the-brim with enthymemes and god terms, such as “the Fake News is working overtime” and “We need to make AMERICA SAFE!” (@realDonaldTrump, “Tax Cuts,” “Congress”). The cyclical, synchronistic pattern is as follows: a god or devil term is used, connotations that are attached to this word are exposed, and then these connotations help the audience to uncover the implied enthymeme. The cycle is repetitive—like the limited vocabulary of America’s presidents—and each step feeds into the overarching cultural ideology. In order to divulge information to the audience, the rhetorician will use ideological terms with essential, innate connotations, and, in turn, the audience will recognize the enthymeme because of similar intrinsic belief systems and values.

Evaluation of rhetoric is necessary. Norman Farclough presents an inquisitive model that demands further investigation into textual structures, such as words that are ideologically disputed, reiterated, prejudicial, part of larger systems of meaning, or insinuating (Mohammadi and Javadi). Reading, listening, and speaking with reference to this model will enable the audience to retrieve genuine meaning; correspondingly, this model is responsible for certain analytical questions necessary for analysis of Trump’s language. Specifically, in the tweets examined here, Trump restates six god/devil terms or phrases: “safe,” “peace through strength,” “puts hardworking citizens first,” “fake news,” “Make America Great Again,” and “new immigration reform.” “Safe” is a simple, overused term that

holds no intrinsic danger, but when it is connected to societal biases, new slipperiness emerges. “Safe” means free of danger, with arousal of desirable connotations. However, from the fingers of @realDonaldTrump, “safe” is a god term used to evoke the suggestion that society at present is *unsafe* and safety must be achieved by separate-ness—in context of immigration. These connotations reveal the enthymeme: Safety is of utmost concern, but America is presently unsafe and must be protected from the threat of immigration. Next, “peace through strength” evokes feelings of unity and the false conclusion that peace may only be achieved through power, hence affirming the implicit premise that the military must be strengthened. “Fake news” is an interesting devil term used by Trump; it projects an aura of unreliability around the media. However, the underlying premise is even more troubling: Trump has the unrestricted immunity to deem any source he disagrees with to be “fake news.” Finally, “new immigration reform” basically consists of one god term, “new” (“reform” implies new as well), and one devil term, “immigration.” “New/reform” is a term that, when combined with immigration, lacks pathetic appeal. With this combination, immigration reform apathetically converts, becoming parallel with any other emotionally detached legislation, neglectful of the fact that it is literally alienating human beings. The phrase insinuates that the immigration system is not only ineffective but that immigrants are a problem to be solved. This starkly demonstrates one benefit of enthymemes: not coming across as a racist and misanthropic tyrant.

Donald Trump, among a flock of other presidents and rhetoricians, takes advantage of the cycle that perpetuates ideology. Enthymemes, god terms, connotations—and even devil terms—do not inherently signify any dangerous or delinquent value. An “us versus them” mentality, however, creates danger. Misanthropy, sexism, racism, classicism create danger. Lack of education creates danger. Manipulative rhetoricians create danger. It is critical that humans are educated about identifying enthymemes, the danger of group-think, and false dichotomies. Political, enthymematic rhetoric is not

discourse that should ever be skimmed; rhetoric must be analyzed, fragmented from its illusory deception. God and devil terms awaken connotations that enable the audience to thoughtlessly interpret the enthymeme's implicit, and usually revolting, premise. Enthymemes are used for persuasion; ensure that the persuasion is not blinding. ►►

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