

The Theme of Propaganda

Propaganda is a form of communication that intends to affect people's beliefs and behaviors rather than merely communicate ideas. Most forms of propaganda rely heavily on emotional, rather than rational, appeal. It is often intentionally misleading, relying on half-truth, generalities, logical fallacies and outright lies in order to achieve its ends.

Propagandistic ideas may seem plausible and compelling, but are often fallacious, incorrect, and dangerous. Propaganda is often directed against a particular political, religious, cultural, or social group, or employed in order to promote a specific political agenda. Thus, it is often used during times of war or crisis in order to stir up hatred against a particular country or group.

Some techniques frequently employed in the creation of propaganda are the oversimplification of ideas, broad generalizations and stereotyping, false and exaggerated patriotism, the promotion of a group mentality, censorship, and the use of oversimplified language and slogans. Additionally, propaganda is often designed to create a false sense of collective fear or collective euphoria in order to lure people to blindly accept the policies or ideas of their leaders. One of the most crucial characteristics of propaganda is the deliberate **manipulation of language**.

In *Animal Farm*, Orwell relies heavily on the theme of propaganda in order to voice his criticism of the Communist regime that had taken control of the Soviet Union following the revolutions of 1917. Although Orwell himself was sympathetic to Marxist socialist ideals, he considered Soviet Communism to be a perverted version of Socialism. Indeed, *Animal Farm* clearly illustrates that Orwell recognized the Soviet Communist regime as a totalitarian and undemocratic government.

The **manipulation of language** stands at the core of *Animal Farm*. In chapter I, Major the pig rouses the other animals by telling them of a dream he had in which he envisioned a future free of oppression and human dictatorship. The animals are excited about the prospect of equality and self-determination; they wholeheartedly embrace Major's socialist ideals. After Major's death, however, the other pigs—predominantly Napoleon—begin the gradual manipulation of language characteristic of a successful propaganda machinery. The pigs become responsible for the oversimplification and falsification of the Seven Commandments originally painted on the wall of the barn and for spreading slogans such as “four legs good, two legs bad,” which even the least intelligent of the animals can comprehend.

In addition to creating a sense of collective belonging, these slogans, as well as the propaganda song *Beasts of England*, aid Napoleon and the pigs in generating a group mentality that requires the blind acceptance of ideas and eliminates dissent and rebellion. In fact, the exploitation of less intelligent animals as well as the deliberate denial of education to the bulk of animals other than pigs play a crucial role in enabling Napoleon and the pigs to foster an environment in which they can create a totalitarian government.

The Manipulation of Language: Logical Fallacies

Propaganda, particularly the deliberate manipulation of language, often employs logical fallacies. Logical fallacies are parts of a seemingly reasonable argument that, upon close inspection, turn out to be erroneous or deceptive. A fallacious argument will likely appear to be extremely persuasive. Recognizing logical fallacies, therefore, requires the careful examination of an argument in order to determine its validity.

In *Animal Farm*, the pigs, particularly their public propagandist Squealer, constantly use logical fallacies in order to justify their actions and decisions. The other animals are unable to discern the faulty reasoning presented by the pigs because they are uneducated and naïve. The reader, however, will recognize the fallacious arguments presented by the pigs as the same arguments often presented by totalitarian leaders in order to defend their status and their decisions.

Logical fallacies have many different names, and some of them are very similar to each other. Some of the most commonly used logical fallacies are:

Hasty Generalization:

Hasty Generalization involves making assumptions about a person or a group of people based on insufficient evidence or examples. Hasty generalizations often include words such as “always,” “all,” “every,” etc. For example, “All women are bad drivers” is a stereotype and, clearly, does not apply to every woman who drives a car. There is not sufficient evidence to support this claim. In *Animal Farm*, Boxer’s slogan that “Napoleon is always right” is an example of hasty generalization. Even though Napoleon might be able to make correct decisions most of the time, he cannot be right all of the time. Therefore, to justify an action simply by saying, “We must do this because Napoleon is always right,” is a logical fallacy.

Ad Hominem:

Ad Hominem is a practice that involves disagreeing with your opponent, not by explaining why his or her idea is unreasonable, but by attacking your opponent’s character or personality. For example, in *Animal Farm*, the animals might argue, “You shouldn’t listen to Mollie’s ideas; she is a self-centered and arrogant horse.” This kind of reasoning is an example of an ad hominem attack. Even though it might be true that Mollie is arrogant and self-centered, it does not necessarily follow that her ideas are unreasonable or bad.

Red Herring:

An arguer who uses a **Red Herring** goes off on a tangent not immediately related to the argument at hand. While what the arguer is saying might be interesting and relevant in its own right, it has no bearing on the actual argument under discussion. The intent, of course, is to distract the opponent and derail the discussion in the absence of a fair and reasonable response.

Appeal to Authority:

Appeal to Authority is a practice that involves referring to famous or influential people in order to substantiate a claim. A person who uses Appeal to Authority attempts to persuade his audience simply by stating that certain famous or influential people believe the same thing, even if these people are no experts on the discussion in question.

False Cause and Effect:

This fallacy, also known as **Post Hoc**, asserts that, since one event—A—occurred before another event—B—, A must have caused B. Of course, there is absolutely no necessary causal relation between the two events simply because of the chronology of their occurrence.

False Dichotomy:

In a **False Dichotomy**, an arguer presents a situation and pretends that the listener has only two choices, when in reality there are more than two options. For example, if the pigs say, “You either support Napoleon, or you prove that you want Mr. Jones to return,” they commit a **False Dichotomy** because the other animals might well prefer a third alternative: not living under the leadership of Napoleon or Mr. Jones.

Literary Concept

PROPAGANDA

Propaganda is a biased, one-sided communication meant to influence the thoughts and actions of an audience. Methods used in propaganda are much stronger than those used in persuasion. A propagandist may conceal contradictory information and discourage debate. Propagandists may also lie, distort facts, and rely on very simple and repetitive messages. At the same time, the propagandist works to gain the audience’s trust. Powerful symbols and loaded language, or the use of the connotative meanings of words to manipulate the audience, are tools of the propagandist.

In one interpretation, the distorted ideas spread among the animals by the character Squealer represent the use of propaganda as a way of manipulating people in society. Squealer convinces the animals that their memory is inaccurate—that in fact Snowball was in collusion with Jones, that Snowball destroyed the windmill, and that Napoleon needs his special privileges. These are, of course, lies and excuses, and show that the ruling class of pigs are deceiving the masses for personal gain.