
Fearologics: Eco-Fear Protestations of Climate Crisis Activism Need Critique



R. Michael Fisher

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In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute

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Crisis Activism Need Critique

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Fearologics: Eco-Fear Protestations of Climate Crisis Activism Need Critique

- R. Michael Fisher,¹ Ph.D.

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Abstract

This paper introduces a new subfield of called *fearologics* as part of a larger methodology of fearanalysis. After defining the concept the author then applies it to the current raging activism and debates surrounding how best to do climate crisis activism and bring about the needed dramatic changes in our society in terms of global warming and the negative impacts it will have including the near-immanent collapse of social systems with ecological systems. As much as the author can empathize with the need to bring eco-fear into the picture of deliberations and the political sphere surrounding how we manage the environment, there are dangerous precedents being created, like a new species of fearmongering (logic) within the means in which to accomplish the ends of good environmentalist practices. A few recommendations are made in which the context of fearologics may bring new insights of how to critique environmental praxis without demeaning and/or ignoring the understandable and desperate cries for help coming from (mainly youth) climate activists today.

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General Concern: Relations of Fear to the Political Sphere

Note: For simplicity purposes in this technical paper, I will avoid excessive academic referencing to all the terms and my prior works explaining further details. It is best you do your own searching on the Internet and study as I have made my publications nearly all open access. I'll use a minimum of references to guide you.

The pursuit of fearology and its cousin practices like fearanalysis have emerged to help deal with the ever-increasing complexity of *the fear phenomena* in societies, especially in the 21st century (post-9/11 era). The argument I have made as a fearologist for decades is that currently humanity is far behind in creating sufficient (better) *fear management/education* in comparison to the rapid expanding production rate and complexification of fear (and culturally constructed 'fear'). Some critics, and I agree, believe we are dealing with a plethora of morphing 'new species of fear' and are barely able to identify them emerging, never mind manage them effectively. This is the general perspective set of disturbing intuitions, theory and thoughts behind the need for a critical study of fear (e.g., my proposed Fear Studies agenda) like never before in human history. All this leads to re-defining the very nature of the global Fear Problem problematique.

As I start this paper's introduction generically, one can see the many new terms that have been created around the study of the subject fear. We are no longer in the reductionist (hegemonic) field of mere adequate terms around the study of fear created by sciences, for example, neurobiology and psychology. This vocabulary and theoretical expansion includes my latest conception of fearologics. I would define it:

fearologics- is the domain of study and methodological approaches that encompass the specific examination of the multiple-logics by which individuals, groups, organizations and institutions or nations utilize and justify fearmongering practices for various power-based influential ends.

Indeed, to study *fear* (and 'fear') and its dynamics today in a postmodern world is an enormous task and all are invited to help participate. There are several glossaries slowly being developed for this expansion of fear terminology for Fear Studies, yet no one complete glossary or encyclopedia exists at the current time. I have made a few resources available for grasping the basic new vocabulary.²

² See for e.g., Fisher, R. M. (2011). A new 'Fear' Studies vocabulary. DIFS-3 Yellow Paper. Carbondale, IL: Center for Spiritual Inquiry & Integral Education. Fisher, R. M., and

The major concern underneath the specific interest of how climate crisis activists (e.g., regarding the global warming problems, regarding the Anthropocene era extinctions etc.) is how fearmongering, from all political camps (Left and Right), is exacerbating the situation of human ineptitude to manage this climate crisis. My concern runs along the same lines of concern as the sociologist and critic of the culture of fear (and its politics), Frank Furedi. I recommend many of his publications since the mid-1990s on this problem of how to best conceptualize and manage fear without destroying the social fabric of basic social trust (sociality) and basic institutional containment of crises in the social sphere (and environmental sphere) *via* the political sphere. Too many activists, of various stripes and “politics,” seems to be playing the “terror-card” for power and doing so near single-mindedly. They are driven to morally “correct” things, which is the upside of their initiatives, but unfortunately, their strategies and logics (e.g., rather dubious fearologics) are causing more problems than they may be solving—e.g., re: climate crisis.

This generic problem of justifying the means because of the ends is of course nothing new in human history. Good intentions (ends) is admirable but that does not mean we can ignore the less-than-good methods (means) by which the goal of a better world is being enacted. Critique is essential both inside and outside all social-ecological movements. That is what critical praxis is all about: we need good theory and overarching contexts to analyze what we are doing on the ground to bring about ‘corrective’ change. We may need to correct our ‘corrective’—is the basic point here I am making. Understanding and utilizing a new subfield of inquiry called fearologics may prove to be helpful to those trying to be helpful.

Furedi (and others), like myself, have dedicated a lot of systematic critical and theoretical work on the “culture of fear” (e.g., problems of fearmongering and politics of fear) to offering guidance to those who believe they can justify any means re: the (mis-)use of fear to target anyone (or anything) who (that) disagrees with them; OR anyone who seems to not listen to them and thus not change (fast enough) because they want them to change and think just like they do. They want them to fear like they do. They want them to panic like they do—so that something will be done now! I’ll give some examples of this affective-coercion tactic (re: a type of narcissistic-based ideology—*via* self-justifying reified *fear-logic*) later in this paper.

Subba, D. (2016). *Philosophy of fearism: A first East-West dialogue* [see end Glossary]. Australia: Xlibris.

So, to be brief, this problem Furedi and I are getting at is one that could be named under the category of problems in the “*politics of fear*.”³ Let’s turn to some basic points of concern raised by Furedi (2018):

That fear has become politicized is widely recognized. Commentators and politicians frequently accuse their opponents of practicing “the politics of fear.”⁴

This concern is not that fear is politicized per se, it is inevitable and natural at some level that fear is part of the political sphere of human relations, just as affect is part of the political sphere as is psychological aspects. Then, what is of concern is more to do with a more vicious “politics” within the larger umbrella of the political sphere of social practices of any collective. A “politics” being a highly ritualized and institutionalized (partisanship battle) of competition. Furedi continues:

[likewise in America] In Europe, fear has become the weapon of choice on both sides of the political divide. Condemnations of the use of fear by populist parties are swiftly followed by warnings about the threat they pose to democratic societies....They both base their strategy “on generating fear.”⁵

Furedi asks: “why its pursuit has acquired such a commanding influence over public life throughout the Western world [?]” He then gives us a historical perspective:

One of the distinctive features of twenty-first-century society’s orientation toward uncertainty is the transformation of fear into a cultural perspective through which society makes sense of itself. Fear is rarely about anything specific—it is about every dimension of life. And when fear becomes detached from any specific object, it is frequently experienced as [a] problem in its own right.⁶

³ For a most important classic work on this topic, see Robin, C. (2004). *Fear: The political history of an idea*. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁴ Furedi (2018), p. 172. All Furedi excerpts from Furedi, F. (2018). Fear and the renunciation of politics. *American Affairs*, 2(4), 172-86. Retrieved from <https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2018/11/fear-and-the-renunciation-of-politics/>

⁵ Ibid., p. 173.

⁶ Ibid. p. 173.

And it is an unpleasant problem—even a problem (as F. D. Roosevelt named) as “fear of fear itself”—and, then you have a society creating a new level of or type of species of fear—or many species of fear to avoid fear. And, it is this last issue of ‘strange’ means of fear management that are going on today—that make the situation worse rather than better. Yet, people and institutions are not willing to let go (so it seems) of the generic strategy of weaponization of fear.

A Few Words About Multiple Logics (Fearologics)

Over the past few decades I have been intrigued, as an educator, that eminent academics have come to reveal that it is better if we think in multiples rather than static monolithic ways about many things. For example, most relevant to the discussion here about fear, is that we are now presented with a thesis of multiple intelligences and that multiple modes of learning and modalities of knowledge are required, multiple methodologies, epistemologies, etc.—especially, as these are essential for a complex and growingly diverse world we are entering. This general trend could be classified under the rhetoric of pluralism. I too have moved along this line of consciousness and valuation of pluralism—and, have even gone forward from that to critique it and strive for a post-pluralism. Yet, that is not the point here, but the multi-movement has produced also a multi-logic study and discourse, where no longer do we see living systems as only operating on one kind of logic, nor ought they be examined only by rational logic. Logics is the new way of embracing more ways of seeing ‘design’ within systems. And I am suggesting that the Fear Problem will only be analyzed well and (re-)solved by multi-logics that include the affective, moral and cognitive domains but more so, I’m now thinking we need a concept of fearologics analysis which looks to the diverse modes of (mis-)using fear as a “logic” for gaining power, individually and collectively. This fearologics analysis is an upgraded and more complex form of inquiry and intervention than merely generically talking about fearmongering (or sometimes called scaremongering tactics).

Fearologics ought to be able to help identify the new morphs of fearmongering in more detail, with more nuance, and all part of the over-arching “culture of fear” problematic. Fearologics ought to then help us critically analyze the fear-logics being used anywhere. Again, it is not about using fearologics to dismiss or deny or judge fearmongering as only monolithically ‘bad’ or ‘wrong’ etc. I prefer to be critical of fear-logics but not to overly pathologize them per se. We have to see they are exactly that fear-logics—they, have some logical reality and are not completely irrational

and insane. They just have their weaknesses, and yes, their pathological potentials as well. That is all part of good critical praxis to look so deeply into how we can (mis-)use fear. No one is free from such an accusation, but also no one ought to be berated and condemned for it—which is a means of ‘corrective’ to the condemnation processes of what Furedi pointed out above within the politics of fear dynamics currently quite unraveled and bursting forth onto the political scene—and, in fact, as Furedi and I agree, quite polluting the political sphere itself. That’s the ethical issue we are most concerned about—when fear acts to reinforce a “renunciation of politics” in the name of politics—an affective politics—a politics of fear.

Specific Climate Crisis Activists and Fearmongering

Elsewhere, I (and others) have written lots about *eco-fear*.⁷ So, let me start with a few examples recently in the rhetorics of the climate crisis activism going on and which is getting often a lot of press. I will focus on the liberal (so-called) side or Left. I myself easily located my own liberationist activism on the Left since my early youth as an eco-activism environmentalist. Thus, these two examples from that side of the political spectrum are one’s I deeply care about and have most likely perpetuated myself at some points. Yet, now, at age 67, I am much more critical of the displays of eco-fear—that is, of the dramatizations (including playing the “terror-card”) that come about in the public sphere because of fear of real and impending ecological crises. I am not an anti-environmentalist. I am not one often to quickly label people eco-terrorists either. But I am cautious of anyone playing the “terror-card” (i.e., panic-card). I am an anti-fearmonger activist in my own right. And, on a larger scale, as a fearologist and fearanalyst, I cannot (will not) give anyone of *any* political stripe or ‘good’ cause a bypass around criticality, around being responsible for their actions in the public domain, when it comes to “educating” and influencing within the public sphere and the future of this planet. This ethical imperative of responsibility goes with being a member of the political sphere.

I support youth in their enthusiasm and yes, idealism (if not naive-ism). I support rebellion—and, act to keep it healthy rebellion rather than less-helpful rebellion. The two examples come from youth rebellious protestations of eco-fear that is (ideally) utilized to create change and transformation for the better—that is, the better health and sustainability of the

⁷ See, for e.g., <https://fearlessnessmovement.ning.com/blog/ecocriticism-ecophobia-and-the-eco-fear-problem-a-new-technical-p>

planet. First, is from Greta Thunberg, a world-renowned teenage Swedish climate activist of the day. Thunberg gave a recent speech to adults:

[In this speech she says to the world (especially economic leaders): **"I don't want your hope.... I want you to panic I want you to feel the fear I feel everyday."**

[I responded in a blog:] Whoa! That's a quote I won't forget. And of course it is a claim about "fear" and *contra* "hope" (and a lot more)... this is philosophically and politically an important point to grasp and take in and then also critique... even Greta can learn from what she is speaking about... and, all of us as humanity, as *Homo sapiens*, as she likes to speak about need to reassess a lot of things we say as adults to youth, and say to them in this time of 'tipping point' cascading crisis on a planetary level.⁸

Since my earliest work on fear in the late 1980s, I saw the holes in the *fear/hope* rhetorics used by churches, parents, teachers, and the culture overall—especially in the Western world where I grew up. I didn't trust hope and I didn't trust fear and that all led to my being more and more critical of those authorities who are trying to say they "love us" as youth and want the best for us but they themselves are terrified and projecting their fear onto us so often. I didn't trust adults. Now I am one of them. Now I have to listen to youth telling me things I don't want to hear. I find it not hard to hear youth (like Greta) are in crisis themselves—existentially and otherwise. I don't downplay that or think they are exaggerating their state of suffering and worry. I do find it hard to hear her tell me I should panic because she is panicking (in her own controlled way) as to the loss of the future.

So, then in a following excerpt on another occasion, regarding the loss she is feeling (and so may others on the planet), Thunberg says something stunning to me and I would think to any adult from my generation:

⁸ <https://fearlessnessmovement.ning.com/blog/youth-leadership-fear-greta-thunberg>



This excerpt from a speech by Thunberg⁹ requires contemplation. But I return to and ask, not that she is deceiving me in any way, for she is truly speaking the truth from her experience. It has facts to back it up: we have collectively as older generations sold the future of our youth. It is as if we ‘hate children’ (we ‘hate’ the future)—it is as if a global dis-ease of such high fear and terror has spread within our souls that we just don’t care (enough) to act today in ways that preserve the next 7 generations (as Indigenous people’s ethics demands). We have surely strayed...

No, it is not this factual and experiential reality that I have issues with, or that Furedi would have issues with. We don’t want to support however, only a victim-identity to this all. But at the same time, Furedi and I have lived over 60 years on this planet, and so our difficulty is putting ourselves in the shoes of someone 15-16 years old (like Thunberg). Yet, we too have children, and grandchildren. It is not that we don’t understand to some degree the imperative of ‘emergency time’ that Thunberg and climate activists are presenting. Let’s see another recent case from the same climate activist crowd in a recent protest march:

⁹ <https://fearlessnessmovement.ning.com/main/search/search?q=Greta+Thunberg>



This protestor sign: “I Don’t Want You to Be Hopeful... I WANT YOU TO PANIC” is really along the same lines as Thunberg’s message and rhetoric of the ‘emergency time’ imposition. And, from a rational perspective it is reasonable to see why this dramatic rhetoric. But I still am not in agreement with the means to an end being displayed in this discourse, which is unfortunately, part and parcel of the politics of fear itself. It feeds the politics of fear, and I don’t think in any really useful way. It may express rebellious youth feelings and sentiments—and, their own political positioning. I’m fine with the expression but it has to be more than an expression of feelings that can operate effectively within the political sphere—that is, to really bring about collaborative negotiations between parties—where we all have to (more or less) address global warming and the crises of the Anthropocene era. Sure, it is frustrating that there are “deniers” of any such problems. Yet, they too are part of the political sphere—part of political life, and they for sure will resent every much as the climate Left activists resent their position. It all breeds fear and resentment politics and relations.

Panic is not a solution to anything, at least one would have to convince me it does. After studying fear and fearlessness for 30 years, “panic” (like anxiety) may be real, but it isn’t effective to actually best bring out the full Defense Intelligence of individuals or the collective. There are many alternatives to “panic” that is. You know, it is amazing that panic disorder is a pathology in the mental health field, but when it comes to the cultural and political arena, panic is ‘normalized’ and defended as a good fear management response. I could write a book on panicology (yes, that is actually a new recent discipline)—and on fearology—and yet, writing books is not going to stop the phenomenon of the climate activists (Left) and their rhetorics. But, that’s not my goal per se in this technical paper. My goal is to point out what is going on and to say that fearologics has ways to understand this behavior going on.

Fearologics: Some Recommendations

Identifying the specimens of fear-logics, as part of the study of fearologies, is not as easy as it may at first appear. Fear-logics, like rhetorics and discourses, have their own near-arbitrary history (e.g., see Foucault, see Robin) of origins and manufacturing and domination and subordination dynamics. So, in no way do I want to see this technical paper introduction to fearologies as comprehensive but rather it is only a skeleton.

So, to begin to analyze at least the two cases from eco-fear rhetorics of the day (within the Left ecocriticism and eco-movements of activism), there is the inevitable question that arises, that is, from the perspective of an activist trying to ‘wake people up’ to the real and impending disaster of some social and/or ecological event that they deem is an ‘emergency.’ Obviously, their opponents (if not enemies) are crafted out in part by their resistance to accepting the emergency—and, at least their opponents are not convinced it is as severe as stated by the activist (who is often labeled an extremist). This is all part of a back-n-forth judgment and condemnation process along a particular flow of fear-logics. Let’s try to break this down further.

The one aspect is that a particular fear-logic of conservation (and, perhaps of the “conservative” and/or Right) is that we ought not get all riled up about some event (even global warming) to the point where an emotionalism is the ruling il-logical result. Too much emotion, is too much il-logic. Fear being one of the worst destroyers of logic and reason. So, goes the beginning assumptions and architecture of the defense of this *conserving* fearological position—which, in this case is one not to be suade by eco-fear being produced by the Left in this case. So, there is a kind of defensive reactionism on both sides. On the Left (eco-activist) there is the logic of (based on science) that an emergency is going on and we have to act radically and extensively now re-aligning all ‘normal’ priorities of the day—or of the State and so on. That’s a logical deduction from the facts of science of global warming and climate crisis events, and it is a logical deduction from the amount of terror (fear) that is felt and operating in the Left eco-activist. The latter reinforcing the former, and visa versa—into a *non-conserving* fearological position and opposition—thus, we have a contestation about the nature of appropriate fear involved in this situation and a conflict also over how fearful and emotional one should be anyways when trying to solve any problem.

To be as observant and objective as possible, looking from multiple perspectives and multilogics—one ought to be able to see both sides, and more importantly search for other fearological positionings rather than just

the binary one of *conserving* and *non-conserving* fear-logic applied to environmental issues. Part of the problem with the non-conserving (radical) positioning is that it doesn't want to hear what the other priorities (or even emergencies) are on the conserving end of the spectrum of possible ways of living in the public sphere. It is this narrow-minded (albeit, partially justifiable) over-reach of domination of rhetoric in the Left activists here that is so off-putting to many who do not share their view and believe (and, partially justified) they are trying to be converted against their will. Worse is, they feel the Left activists give no alternatives and are thus completely ideological rigid and uncompromising—of course, the same 'mirror' projection goes the other way too.

There is no doubt the non-conserving fearological position is feeling more fearful than the other side—or at least, they are more willing to feel and are in less denial of the terror of the end times nearing (so-called) with ecological and social collapse. I can certainly feel and intuit and see the knowledge that exists to predict indeed we are at a dangerous tipping point if not passed it—and, great collapse is on its way already—virtually unstoppable and only minorly can be remediated. But I could be wrong, and Thunberg could be wrong. It is the fearological positioning of the non-conserving fear-logic that wants to be driven by fear—to make sure it doesn't let go of its rigid and already decided position what is going on and coming in reality. They have crafted a fear-based reality. At least, the fearologies of the day has to critically investigated if it is fear-based—and, that is complex enough to assess but not impossible.¹⁰ How to get both parties in this particular binary opposition, in this case, to agree to look at whether “fear is ruling” their analysis and interventions and strategies, would be a great victory on the way to conflict transformation.

The reality of fear's role is not what is at issue. The real problem is getting oppositions to do transformative conflict work on the fear-issue itself before and as essential to the critical praxis of dealing with a formidable (if not wicked) problem—one like global warming and climate crisis. My experience has been, and Thunberg and others can examine their own work and attitude, is a generic impatience and annoyance of Left and Right on this issue re: eco-fear. There has to be a willingness, on both sides, to study fear—their own and others—and find that that is core to any real compassionate solutions and collaborations. Without all the righteous indignation and resentment, with accompanying impatience, there has to be the will-

¹⁰ I recommend Fisher, R. M. (2013). The problem of defining the concept of "fear-based." Technical Paper No. 48. Carbondale, IL: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

ingness on the Left, for example, to say they really do have to examine how fear may be both a symptom of the problem itself that is being created in the oppositions (in the Culture Wars)—and, that fear may also lead to multiple alternatives—where eco-fear is not just negative or positive and where justifying weaponization of fear (i.e., fearmongering) is potentially seen as unethical political practice, no matter what political side one is on. The notion of fearlessness and its integral fearologic is one such alternative, but there are many others. Again, I have not intended to go into all the ways and multiple logics that ought to be worked with in trying to solve these problems. I merely wanted to point out there are multiple ways—and, so far Left (and Right) are typically too-ideologically driven and narrowly conceiving. They like their provocations and slogans, and challenges of the ‘other’ viewpoint. They like their binaries, nice clean and clear cut.

All these latter tendencies are a sure sign of an unhealthy (if not pathological) narcissism of one sort or another. They are tendencies psychosocially at the base of ever dogmatism ever invented in human history—thus, an ideology is formed. And, then there is even the ideology (justification) of weaponizing fear for their ‘good’ cause and means are justified because of the ends. All a slippery immoral slope, as I see it. Fear-based fearologics are deadly as far as I know. Recognizing them, and their own logic, is essential to see that one can use them, just like a discourse (Discourse, a la Foucault)—and, not even realize they are using one. For example, be aware I say to all, that Thomas Hobbes, the modernist political philosopher of fear justified that the lesser fear of the State is preferred to the fear of one’s fellow man (and of Nature herself). This Hobbesian fearologic is quite similar to anyone who has mis-used fear (via fearmongering) against opponents and typically, like with Hobbes, they do not reflect on their own fear-state (logic) that is breeding their very analysis and solutions.

I trust this introduction to fearologics gives the bare skeleton sketch of some possibilities to get beyond the one side accusing the other of fearmongering and leaving it at that—trying to make a case for political and power gains. Democracy and the political sphere will be ongoing undermined if this continues. Chaos, more or less, will ensue, and yes, some of that chaos may be useful to deconstruction of the pathological oppressive fear-based society we live in. Yes, I get that, and am not afraid of chaos for that reason; however, when it is done without sufficient critical praxis, and well thought through options (and fearologics)—then, I am skeptical and resistant to anyone wanting to create chaos in society—even if they have the best justified ends.
