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## **How a new identity-focused ideology has trapped the left and undermined social justice**

### **Rhetorical Analysis**

In "How a new identity-focused ideology has trapped the left and eroded social justice" (2023), Hugh Breakey discusses Yascha Mounk's book *The Identity Trap: A Story of Ideas and Power in Our Time*, asserting that progressivism based on identity—what Mounk calls the "identity synthesis"—is now a dominant but deeply ill-ideology on the left of politics. Breakey explains that Mounk criticizes this worldview not as a conservative but as a liberal, arguing that this kind of worldview diminishes essential values like universalism, objective reality, and the seeking of true social justice by overemphasizing ascriptive identities and promoting policies which risk making social division even more profound. He supports this thesis by outlining the intellectual genesis of the postmodernism, postcolonialism, and critical race theory identity synthesis in terms of seven overarching themes like standpoint theory and intersectionality, and proper credit to legitimate contributions by authors like Derrick Bell and Kimberlé Crenshaw. Breakey offers a reflexive and analytical tone aimed at liberal readers who care about social justice, calling them out to distinguish between constructive identity-sensitive reforms and polarizing ideological involvements that can end up serving to destroy their objectives.

Quote 1:

“Mounk argues that the new identity-focused ideology is not simply an extension of prior social justice philosophies and civil rights movements; on the contrary, it rejects both.”

Breakey uses comparison and definitional explication to emphasize Mounk's departure from historic liberal tenets. By evincing the identity synthesis as not a development but as a rejection of civil rights customs, he supports the criticism through juxtaposition of old and new. This strategy targets logos by challenging the consistency of the ideology's past tradition, and also appeals to ethos in the sense that it suggests authentic progressivism needs to keep abiding by universalist principles it once held.

Quote 2:

“Mounk distils the identity synthesis into seven core themes... Scepticism about objective truth... Doubling down on identity... Proud pessimism... Standpoint theory...”

Breakey adopts a categorical tone here to introduce intellectual seriousness and specificity to Mounk's critique. This enumerative strategy (the listing of seven themes) carries double rhetorical pay: it addresses logos by arranging an elaborate ideological structure, and ethos by positioning Mounk as a diligent, scholarly critic instead of a heedless critic. The alliteration ("proud pessimism") and charged terminology ("doubling down") also respectfully use charged terminology behind the scenes to anchor the argument's critical edge without overt polemic.

Quote 3:

“Genuine insights, important realisations and progressive values lure the sympathetic. But too often those insights are developed in extreme and implausible ways, ultimately betraying the very goals they claim to value.”

This sentence is an example of Breakey's concession—a rhetorical technique by which a speaker makes a concession in order to make themselves more believable before proceeding to criticise. By giving ground on the validity of some identity-based views, Breakey appeals to the reader's ethos and makes the argument appear just. The final sentence employs causal reasoning and irony ("betraying the very goals they claim to value") in a scathing criticism, demonstrating how well-meaning policies can be backward-looking if taken to excess. This provides a pathos-based warning for ethically troubled liberals.