

The modern discourse, ethos and pathos.

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As I wrote in my short introduction to [rhetoric](#), it consists of three parts according to Aristotle, credibility (ethos) the emotion and psychology of the audience (pathos) and the patterns of reasoning (logos). Out of those three aspects, one is focused on the message being conveyed from the speaker to the listener, two are focused on “communications”. In this sense, we can categorize the terms as:

Logos : The reasoned argument that is to be communicated.

Ethos: The credibility of the person presenting the argument.

Pathos: The ability of the speaker to communicate in a manner, which appeals to the emotions of the audience and is adapted to their psychology.

An even simpler classification would be that the means to communicate is pathos and ethos, while what is to be communicated is the end of the communication.

On ethos in modern discourse

In terms of credibility, it is to assess the speaker, “does this person live according to his message”, “Is the person someone we should listen to based on their background?” it is totally unrelated to the message itself. Now there are cases where ethos does play a major part, a Stephen Hawking on physics, Richard Dawkins on evolutionary biology and Lawrence Krauss on mathematics. The hard sciences is where value judgments have very little place and as a result, a background in the hard sciences lend credibility. In fields such as psychology, sociology and political science, the effect of a degree is less, because the fields are “soft sciences” in that they do contain a higher degree of subjectivity and value judgments. For instance, there are political scientists who support communism as an ideology, there are political scientists that support capitalism, liberalism, feminism, authoritarianism, monarchy rule, and every other system of governance, yet biologists agree on evolution as a general theory, physicists agree on the theory of relativity, and mathematicians agree on how to perform long-division.

The further a field gets from mathematics, the more subjective and value laden it gets. All the way down to such academic heavyweight fields as “gender studies” and “art criticism”. Listening to an MD over a mechanic makes sense if you’re having health issues, not if your breaks are not working. Listening to a political scientist or politician, may not mean you get a better or worse answer to a governance perspective than listening to an autodidact.

Who is to say that the person with a degree in political science hasn't followed a specific curriculum that means including and excluding certain sources and books, based on the preference of a professor, or professors. Marxist-Leninist philosophy used to be required for all University students behind the Iron Curtain. Many Universities teach neoclassical economics, but in doing so exclude both Marxist, Keynesian and Austrian economics to varying degrees. An autodidact who takes foundation classes, and reads a large selection of varied literature on a topic, may have a more well-rounded education within a topic.

On pathos in modern discourse

A second focus is on pathos, "does this person touch my heart", "and does this person speak in words that do not offend my sensibilities", "is how the message is being conveyed tasteful to me". It is also unrelated to the message itself. It is merely a tool to make the pill go down a little bit easier, the sugar to help the medicine go down. This is often what people refer to when they call someone a great orator, or a great public speaker, it is their ability to pander to their audience, to appear to be the equal or slightly above an audience, yet not speak down to them. To present a message in a manner where feelings are prioritized over truth, and sensibilities are prioritized over clarity.

Tell tell signs of pathos in modern discourse is emotional appeals, hamstrung conditional logic, distancing words, identity politics and a lack of clarity. People often accuse politicians of lying but they are not lying, they are just presenting their message in a way that would have the least potential for the highest amount of people to take offense.

That's why politicians say things like:

"I'm complete in favor of the second amendment; however I think extended magazines need to be outlawed"

Instead of being honest and just saying

"I think Europe and Canada have a better approach to firearms regulations as proven by statistics"

Then people accuse them of lying once they get into office and act in accordance with their own views.

Pathos is falsehood, action is truth.

On logos in modern discourse

The role of logos in any discourse, is to be what is to be communicated as initially stated. Communication for the sake of communication is "small talk" where you discuss the weather and what you got for Christmas. Or you ask, "how is the wife and kids" without really caring.

In a true debate, it starts with a reasoned argument, that is then communicated through the speakers credibility and the ability of the speaker to arouse the emotions and passions of an audience. This puts the main weight on the idea to be communicated (the end) and less weight on how and by whom it is communicated (the means).

Logos in and of itself is the formulation of a reasoned argument, based on logical validity and soundness, it is the birth of a new idea or the reformulation of an existing idea.

Unfortunately, in the age of 140 character limits, 30 second attention spans and catch phrases, the role of logos has lost the glory it once held. The focus is on how an idea sounds and the charisma of who speaks it rather than how reasoned it is. This can be demonstrated by things like:

- The wage gap – Dis-proven by economists yet maintained as a talking point. "Women earn within 2% of men, and in some cases more than men" is just less effective as a talking point. [1] [2] [3]
- 1/4 women will be raped or sexually assaulted in college – Sounds very good, because 1/30 or 1/40 plus the wholly definition of sexual assault these days just sounds bad. [4] [5]
- The Western World hates women – Because pointing out that women have a range of legal benefits

and protective legislations that men do not undermines your case. [6] [7]

- Women are harassed more than men online – A great talking point and grounds for protection and censorship but blatantly false. [4]

In conclusion

In order to act as an intellectual with integrity, logos has to be the focus of your arguments, the logic and the facts you are trying to communicate. However, as I've argued [before](#), logos is not the most effective for persuasion or pandering to an audience. I read an [article](#) recently by Illimitableman where he handles conventional logic vs Machiavellian logic, which is useful reading, as those who are high in one are rarely high in the other.

[1] <http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-wage-gap-myth-that-wont-die-1443654408>

[2] <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/harvard-prof.-takes-down-gender-wage-gap-myth/article/2580405>

[3] [Economic facts and fallacies – Thomas Sowell](#)

[4] <http://www.iwf.org/news/2432517/One-in-Four-Rape-myths-do-injustice-too>

[5] [Who Stole Feminism](#) – Christina Hoff-Sommers

[6] https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/vawa_factsheet.pdf

[7] <http://thoughtcatalog.com/janet-bloomfield/2014/08/5-legal-rights-women-have-that-men-dont/>

[8] <http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/10/22/online-harassment/>

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