

## **Pathos: The Pathetic Appeal (Emotion)**

Logos, ethos, and pathos are the three components of classical argument. While logos refers to appeals to argument (or techniques to invent such appeals), ethos refers to the appeals to the character of the person using those arguments (or techniques to invent such appeals) and pathos to appeals to the emotions of the audience (or techniques to invent such appeals).

Since the time of the ancients, pathos has been the most distrusted of the three components, mainly because of the false dichotomy between reason and emotion (for a recent refutation of this dichotomy, see Antonio R. Damasio's *Descartes' Error*). Yet, pathos is more than just emotions themselves; it is the artful appeal to the emotions of an audience, not only its self-interest but also its sense of sympathy and empathy for others.

In spite of this distrust, many arguments today rely heavily (sometimes entirely) on emotional appeals. Hence, as human beings, we do not turn off our emotions as we reason and furthermore our emotions are not individual but rather shared phenomena.

### **Emotion as a form of argument**

Emotion *is* a form of argument, even though philosophers and others since the Enlightenment (and even before, if one goes back to Plato) have denied the significance of emotion in human reason. Due to this mistrust of emotion, using it as a form of argument can be a delicate matter. If done properly, though, emotion is an incredibly powerful argumentative tool.

There are several considerations to bear in mind when using pathos. First, one must know who the audience and what their state of mind is, specifically how conducive they are to accepting the claim you are submitting. If they may accept it or already have (i.e. preaching to the choir), then one must consider how to make them accept it or strengthen their acceptance; if not, then one must consider how to appeal to them to reconsider, if at all.

The ability to change someone's mind is often related to the emotional intensity he or she feels toward the issue and the degree to which his or her identity is wrapped up in it. What this means is that the closer a member of the audience is to the author (in terms of social hierarchy, personal history, and/or identity), the more likely that the member will change his or her mind.

This proximity factor works not only with sociality, personality, and identity but also temporality and spatiality but inversely. The closer a member of the audience is to the time and space of an issue, the less likely that the member will change his or her mind. Furthermore, the closer the identity of a member of the audience is wrapped up in the issue, the less likely that the member will change his or her mind.

Another consideration to bear in mind when using pathos is the circumstances in which such emotions can be stirred, i.e. the rhetorical situation. In some situations, people will be more likely to change their minds than others; in others, they will be less likely. Finally, once one determines if and how much the audience can be persuaded, one must also bear in mind how to influence their emotions. This is usually done through style.

### **The Pathetic Force of Style**

The language one uses (i.e. style) can influence the emotional appeal of the argument. Such

techniques as figurative language, parallelism, rhythm, repetition, etc. can intensify the force of an argument. One can also use honorific and pejorative language, a common technique from ancient times. Finally, one can also insert what the ancients called an enargeia, an emotionally vivid description, typically a vignette at the beginning of a text.