

## Pathos as Inquiry: Knowing Your Audience

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People often think that *logos* is a logical argument that leads to truth, but that the emotional appeal to *pathos* is a deceptive rhetorical strategy that takes advantage of a weakness in the minds of the audience. Somehow, we think that we will find the truth by purifying our thinking of emotions to leave only the cold facts and the logical arguments. However, this view is far too simple. In his book, *Deep Rhetoric*, James Crosswhite argues that pathos is what “attunes” us to other beings (183). He argues that “logos would have no reason for being without pathos,” and that pathos provides motive and energy to logos, but would have no direction without it (175). He concludes, “There is no understanding without pathos” (183).

In other words, facts and arguments are important, but it is our emotions that make us care about the problem. Once we care, we will consider the facts and arguments.

### Pathos Is Necessary

In Book 2 of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle argues that it is necessary to go beyond the discussion of argument (*logos*) because arguments are heard differently by people who are friendly or hostile, or angry or calm (*pathos*). It is therefore necessary for the speaker to put the audience in the right frame of mind to hear the arguments. To do this, we must know which emotions produce pain and which produce pleasure and how to create them. Of anger, for example, Aristotle says we must know three things:

- The state of mind of angry people.
- Who the people are angry at.
- On what grounds they get angry.

Note that there is a research project implied in this list. If we do not know these things about our audience, we have to find out.

### Emotions and Their Opposites

Aristotle organizes his discussion of the emotions in terms of oppositions. The opposite of anger is calm, which he defines as “a settling down and quieting of anger.” Aristotle tends to see the source of anger in slights and insults committed by people we think are inferior to us. He argues that we become angry at those who don’t respect us, but will be calm toward those who seem to respect us. Being sorry for past actions against us and apologizing can also bring about calm.

George Kennedy notes in his translation of the *Rhetoric* that Aristotle saw the emotions as moods or temporary states that affect judgment (124). From this perspective, if the audience is in the wrong mood to accept our arguments, we have to figure out how to create the opposite mood.

Of course, there are other emotions than anger that may be rhetorically useful. Aristotle’s list does not quite reflect the way we think about emotions. Our list might look like this:

- love versus hate (Aristotle lists this as “friendly feeling” versus enmity)
- sadness versus happiness
- fear versus confidence,
- shame versus shamelessness,

- kindness versus cruelty
- pity versus indignation
- envy (a negative emotion) versus admiration (a positive one)

Aristotle doesn't really deal with the possibility of mixed emotions. For example, imagine that a mayor of a city is speaking to the residents after a major disaster, such as an earthquake or a hurricane. The people he or she speaks to are probably feeling fear for their lives and property, but they may also be angry that the government is not doing more to help them, and overwhelmed by the fact that they cannot help themselves or their family members. This can lead to a complicated emotion such as "frustration."

### **Application of the Concepts**

Finding out what your audience is thinking and feeling will help you become more persuasive to that audience. It will also make you think about the issue from different viewpoints, which may change your own thinking. Perhaps even more importantly, it will help you know what to say. In a sense, your audience is your most important writing partner.

Here are some basic questions that will help you analyze your audience and work on your rhetorical strategies.

### **Writing Strategies: Questions about My Audience**

- What is my purpose in responding?
- Who is my audience? What are some of their characteristics? What do they want?
- How do they feel about my issue or topic? Does this emotion make them more likely to agree with me, or less? Why or why not?
- Is there a different or opposite emotion that would put them in a better state of mind for my purposes? What is it?
- How can I get them to feel this way? This is where Aristotle's three questions are relevant:
  - What is the state of mind of people feeling this emotion? (How can you change this state of mind?)
  - Who do they feel this emotion toward? (How can you change how they feel about these people?)
  - What reasons do they have for feeling this way? (What counter-arguments can you make?)

### **Reading Analysis: Questions about an Author's Audience**

You can also ask questions like these about the articles you read:

- What is the issue or topic that the author wants to address?
- Who is the audience for this article? What does this audience probably believe and/or feel about this issue?
- What is the writer trying to make his or her audience feel?
- What strategies does the writer use to produce these emotions in the audience? (Look for specific examples that you think cause an emotional reaction.)

- Is the writer successful in making the audience more receptive to his or her logical arguments by putting the audience in the right emotional state? Why or why not?

Asking questions about the audience, whether they be about anger or some other emotion, is likely to make you more aware of your own views and why you hold them. If you know, for example, why the people you are trying to persuade are angry, you may become more sympathetic and may see your own position in a different way and make different arguments. As you become more open to the arguments the other makes, dialogue becomes more possible and you may become more persuasive because of it.

### **Works Cited**

- Aristotle. *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, 2nd Edition. Trans. George Kennedy. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006.
- Crosswhite, James. *Deep Rhetoric: Philosophy, Reason, Violence, Justice, Wisdom*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2013.