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Note to the reader:

these musings are preliminary and should not be mistaken for well formed thoughts. In particular, the purpose of the essay is to help the writer expand their thinking on these topics. Criticisms, complaints, and feedbacks welcome. Thank you to [@cwgoes](#) for pointing us towards rhetoric

, though our understanding here maybe provincial at best.

One effective tactic in building narratives that connect with potential users or target audiences of products is to use emotional messaging

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Emotional messaging pulls at the heart strings of the audience. In a few words, the message can unite large groups of otherwise disjoint sets of communities. The message resonates so deeply that the audience can and will change their belief systems / ideologies. In particular, people are willing to fight wars, quite their jobs, go to jail, or even get shot based on an emotional message.

This is one reason memes are effective. A picture or grouping of symbols maybe worth 1000 words, but it's also worth some number of emotions. Those emotions get people to make impulsive decisions / react.

Take, for example, the political slogan in the United States often put forth by presidential or congressional candidates; "Drain the swamp." This phrase resonates with frustrated voters who perceive the government is not working in their favor and that insiders are reaping all the benefits with backdoor dealings, and in the worst-case, corruption. One candidate named Donald J. Trump used this phrase rather effectively during the 2016 campaign cycle, and it resonated with various voters. Trump was able to convert this sentiment into a narrative around his candidacy. Since he was a business person and not a politician, the election-machine claimed, he would make more pragmatic decisions unlike the swamp creatures.

Take a second example. LVMH alcohol brands often advertise and target adolescents full of insecurities with their advertisements during sporting events. They place the commercial actors in economically privileged positions that often look like properties that celebrities might own or where a music video might be filmed. The advertisers then place Hennessy in the hands of the commercial's protagonists, showing they are cooler, calmer, and more collected with the alcoholic beverage in hand. This plays off a desire to live an Instagram lifestyle or experience the heavily marketed care-free celebrity lifestyle. In effect, the consumer of the commercial is programmed into thinking that if they too drink Hennessy, they can live an opulent lifestyle. Where in reality, drinking Hennessy with any frequency will do significant damage to one's liver and brain.

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Source: LVMH advertisement on youtube

Aristotle and a brief history of Rhetoric

You may be thinking this sounds familiar, but you can't put your finger on where this concept comes from. Emotional messaging is an appeal to the audience's emotions. This is [pathos

](<https://pathosethoslogos.com/>), a mode of persuasion appearing in Aristotle's [Rhetoric](#), which is an ancient Greek treatise on the art of persuasion, dating from the 4th century BC. The work may have not been intended for publication, but rather published as a collection of notes from his lectures. The work was also not without controversy as it received heavy criticism from Plato as immoral, dangerous, and unworthy of serious study, though Plato later softened his stance, describing Rhetoric as "winning the soul through discourse". The work was also rejected by the sophists, teachers in Ancient Greece.

Rhetoric was viewed by Aristotle as one of the three key elements of philosophy, along with dialectic and logic. Rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic.

- Logic is the study of correct reasoning, both formal and informal.
- Dialectic is a tool for philosophical debate intended for skilled audiences.
- Rhetoric, on the other hand, is a tool for practical debate for general audiences, relying on probable knowledge to resolve issues.

Dialectic and rhetoric, Aristotle conjectured, are best suited for human affairs. When someone says, "that's just rhetoric" often they mean it's not as precise as logical or dialectical arguments, as a way to label the philosopher's discourse as lacking or less than. As an example, often on crypto-twitter we witness both dialectical and rhetorical debates. There are

plenty of technical arguments whereby skilled audiences can test and learn. For example, the ongoing debate of whether it's valuable to run a full node and if full nodes can reject invalid state transitions was one such dialectic. The Modular vs. Monolithic blockchain debate is

rhetoric, however. The terms are vaguely defined and intended as persuasive arguments to convince general audiences (users, developers, investors).

Ethors, Logos, Pathos

If we unbundle rhetoric further we'll note there are three elements; ethos, logos and pathos. Ethos is ethical appeal, used to convince an audience of the philosopher's credibility or character. An example of ethos could be prefacing an article by explaining prior accomplishments or achievements to signal credibility. Another form of ethos, which we'll call indirect, can be seen broadly in the industry using the acknowledgements section of blog posts to signal that others with credibility have reviewed the philosopher's work. Ethos can also be thought of as a proof of authority when used indirectly; e.g. Vitalik said, "...". Directly, ethos can be thought of as using one's experience power to convince others of their arguments. If this is clear, let's talk about Logos.

Logos is the use of logic or reason to convince the audience of the philosopher's argument. Logos would involve bringing data or cited facts as points of support for the argument. An example of logos that is common is publishing research to convince the audience. Research often contains citations of previous art as well as empirical evidence, studies, and new conjectures based on the findings. For example, new research [published](#) about [Semaglutide](#) suggests initial optimism of its potential effectiveness in helping people cope with various addictions to food, alcohol, or [cannabis](#). While further studies will need to be conducted, the initial results are enough to justify further research. The arguments in the research are made with logic and reason. In the crypto industry, an example of Logos could be publishing a blog post about a particular topic which uses citations, code and math to make arguments from first principles – a form of logos.

Finally, we arrive at pathos, or previously what we've introduced as emotional messaging. In particular, Pathos is the use of emotional appeal to persuade an audience. Philosophers use pathos to evoke sympathy or pity from their audience. Sometimes they use anger to inspire action. We've covered a couple of prominent examples above, but let's review a few more. One example of this could be the January 6 event at Capital Hill. Trump used anger to inspire supporters to come to Washington D.C. and storm the capital. An example of such emotional appeal in our industry could be "Bankless". The name is a direct fuck you to the banks and inspires folks to join the movement - "we are headed west". In practice, the twitter algorithm promotes pathos. Tweets deemed controversial or edgy typically receive more engagement than balanced, level-headed takes. Of course, we don't have evidence for this claim or any others made here, other than appealing to you with a mix of rhetorical techniques. Pathos is powerful, though.

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Source: [Bankless.com](https://bankless.com)

Pathos

Pathos is at the heart of emotional messaging. Sometimes people will say after reading a book or watching a film, "that's a tear-jerker". They are specifically pointing to the use of language, stories, or imagery that resonated with them and pulled at their heart strings. Pathos can be used for good, for example, if one studies the [Story of the Dragon Tyrant](#), there are many lessons in there about love, adversity, and sacrifice which can help inspire people to advocate for change or stay positive amidst a rainy season.

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Source: Story of the Dragon Tyrant

Pathos, though, can also be used for selfish or malicious purposes. There exist groups of people and individuals who will use emotional messaging to manipulate others to behave in specific ways which benefit them. At times this may be something like telling a white lie because you don't want to hurt someone's feelings, like when a partner says, "I look like shit today don't I," and you say, "no, you look great". Other times, emotional messaging can be used to incite violence. Perhaps the most insidious use of emotional messaging is when philosophers use it to get people to part with their money, whereby the audience is manipulated by fear of missing out (FOMO) – ubiquitous in modern society by way of celebrity culture, conspicuous consumption, substance abuse, promiscuity, and a general lack of values. We won't go further here lest we be mistaken for a philosopher and a moralist at that.

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Conclusion

Hopefully, this discussion illustrates the power

of pathos, both the dangers and the benefits of its use as a rhetorical tactic. It is worthy of discussion as we (in the ecosystem) progressively reach for new narratives and memes that draw attention to our favorite projects. Mind the memetic warfare out there.