

The Big Three: Ethos, Pathos, and Logos (Supporting Arguments)

In his work *On Rhetoric* (~340-335 B.C.E), Aristotle observes the following:

Persuasion is achieved by the speakers' personal characters when the speech is so spoken as to make us think them credible. We believe good people more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided. This kind of persuasion, like the others, should be achieved by what the speakers say, not by what people think of their characters before they begin to speak.

It is not true, as some writers assume in their treatises on argument, that the personal goodness revealed by the speakers contributes nothing to their power of persuasion; on the contrary, their characters may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion they possess.

1. **Ethos** (Greek for “custom” or “character”):

- phronēsis: practical wisdom, sensible
- aretē: excellence, virtuous, moral
- eunoia: good will, benevolence

“A person seeming to have all these qualities is necessarily persuasive to the hearers.”

-Aristotle, in *On Rhetoric*

2. **Pathos** (Greek for “suffering” or “experience”):

- appeals to, uses of the emotions and/or values of the audience (akin to ‘frames of mind’)
- What does the audience value? What do they hold in regard or esteem?

“There is no persuasion without . . . moving the passions.”

-George Campbell, in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 1776

- Emotional (pathos) appeals link the argument (and/or subject) and the audience's deeper, underlying motivations, convictions, and positions.
- Oftentimes these motivations, convictions, and positions are not known in any explicit form.
- Pathos appeals target our deeper commitments, our “gut” feelings, experiences, wisdom, or instincts, etc. Consequently, pathos appeals can be incredibly powerful motivators.

3. **Logos** (Greek for “word, reason”):

- appeals to or uses (explicit or implicit) of “factual” or empirical material, like numbers, statistics, dates, empirical proofs, etc.
- also, an appeal to the audience's sense of logic or reason