

Sample Student

FYC 13100

Professor Clauss

March 2, 2010

Journal #13: "Ethos and Pathos in King's 'Letter'"

King writes, "My Dear Fellow Clergymen:" in the salutation of his "Letter". This seemingly innocuous phrase is actually a pathos appeal in disguise. The men King is writing to value and desire that people show them respect. When King addresses them as "Dear Fellow Clergymen", he shows them the respect that comes with their position as members of the clergy which in turn helps get them in the mindset that King wants them to be in when he starts making his strongest arguments. By appealing to his audience's desire to be respected, King causes them to relax and open up to persuasion a little more just because he is being formal and respectful.

In the opening sentence of the third paragraph, King writes, "I am in Birmingham because injustice is here." There is a pathos appeal to King's audience's desire to right injustice. His audience, as a bunch of clergymen, would be concerned with righting injustice and by presenting the issue of racism as injustice King is appealing to his audience's values. King also uses an ethos appeal here. He demonstrates how virtuous and moral a person he is. In other words, King is demonstrating *arête*. By saying he is in Birmingham because of the injustice, King shows himself as being more concerned with the issue of injustice than anything else.

In the closing sentence of King's first paragraph, he writes, "I want to try to answer your statements in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms." This is an example of an ethos appeal. King is making the argument that he is not the kind of person who wants to be confrontational, but one who is trying to calmly explain his position. Specifically, King is displaying *eunoia*: benevolence and good will.

In paragraph 13, King writes, "I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws." Here, King is again using an ethos appeal to build up his *arête*. He makes this comment to show that he is concerned with following the laws and is not seeking complete disregard for the laws. King's purpose is to show that he is a virtuous person who is concerned with following the laws, so that he is not seen as just a criminal looking for ways to cause trouble.

In paragraph 21, King writes, "I must make two honest confessions to you". Here, King is using ethos appeals to help build his trustworthiness. By using the words 'honest' and 'confession', King implies that he is being truthful and since he is being truthful here, he deserves our trust throughout the remainder of his "Letter." Again, this enhances King's *arête*, showing his own moral virtue. King could have rephrased the whole paragraph to remove this opening line, but he was a savvy enough writer to understand that leaving this sentence in would have a much greater impact than simply starting in on his arguments about the white moderate. By leaving this sentence in, King makes arguments in this paragraph that his audience would not likely to be very open to, but he builds up his audience's trust in him with the opening sentence so that his audience is more open to his message because they see he is being open and honest with them.

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