

Debating skills in *Common Sense*

张一可 计 15 2021010793

Greek philosopher Aristotle has put forward the theory of three key methods commonly used in persuasion, which he called “ethos, pathos and logos”. In his theory, ethos refers to using personal characteristics of the speaker as a tool to make his arguments sound more authoritative and convincing. Pathos persuade listeners by evoking certain emotions in their mind, such as anger or sympathy, and logos work by strengthening the logic in the author’s reasoning and analysis. From my point of view, the way Tomas Paine states his point in *Common Sense* is just a perfect combination of these three debating skills.

To begin with, the “ethos” part lies in the author’s quoting stories from Bible to show that monarchy as well as heredity succession is a kind of “original sin”. By resorting to the divine scripture for his argumentation, he can possibly convince the thousands of pious Puritan believers in American colony to accept his idea. He also portrayed his figure as “not driven by pride, party or resentment”, but “argues for the interest of the continent”. By setting up his personal image as impartial and patriotic, he is also able to make his arguments more convincing.

As for “pathos”, the trick of taking advantage of people’s emotions is most strikingly embodied in the third part of the pamphlet. Tomas first tried to provoke the sense of historical mission and responsibility in his readers. By stressing the wide range of influence a separation might brought in the whole world and by emphasizing the lasting influence it may have on future generations, he reminded his readers of the righteousness and significance of their action. As a result, readers are more likely to be infected by his passion and be stimulated into action. Also, he used the example of Boston, where there is an actual war broke out between Britain and American colony, to arouse the feelings of anger and hostility in his readers. To do so, not only did Tomas described the scene of people suffering in war, but he also threw out questions like “Can you shake hands with the murderers? If so, you have the heart of a coward and the spirit of a sycophant” to his readers. These words, as he said, serves to the purpose of “awakening people from unmanly and fatal slumbers”, and people are supposed to get emotionally affected.

When it comes to “logos”, Tomas also used a bunch of sophisticated arguing skills to strengthen the logic and reliability in his reasoning. Some skills that impress me most are as follows. Firstly I notice that to confirm the ground of his arguments, Tomas didn’t come to the point of British government or relationship between America and England directly, but made an effort to clarify the definitions used in his arguments. By explaining the difference between society and government in a clear way, he managed to make the basis of his arguments more tenable. Addressing OPV (Opposing Point of View) is another method Tomas frequently used in his arguments. When dealing with a question, he always thought of the possible arguments that his opponents might come across, and argued them back pointedly. By finding out the defects and absurdity in those arguments, he is able to defend his own standpoint. For example, in the third part of the book, he refuted opposing arguments of “England

protected America”, “England is the parent country” one by one to make his readers get a clear idea of the current situation and the relationship between England and America. He even analyzed what kind of person his opponents were most likely to be. After this analysis, he aimed his arguments at those “moderate men who are just a little bit ill-judged”, this polite way he addressed his opponents may also make them feel respected and convert their mind. To settle down people’s potential worries about what America will be like after its separation with England, he also described detailed plans that American colonies could follow to set up a continental government and to build a self-governed, promising Puritan society.

Of course, there are many other arguing skills that Tomas used for the “logos” part. He successfully quoted credible examples such as historical events, drew comparisons and analogies, and used quotes and metaphors to strengthen his arguments.

According to the analysis above, I believe Tomas Paine successfully used the debating skills of “ethos, pathos and logos” to confirm his arguments. When he analyzed the challenges America was currently facing from a logical, practical and historical way, it's really hard for his readers to not be convinced by those both rational and passionate arguments and become aware of the “common sense” that they have unconsciously chosen to ignore.