

## The Three Appeals of Rhetoric: Ethos, Pathos, and Logos

Aristotle lived in Ancient Greece in the fourth century B.C. He was interested in many subjects including philosophy, science, poetry, ethics, rhetoric, music, and government. His writings covered these subjects and many more. Aristotle is well-known for his *Treatise on Rhetoric*, which described the three main appeals of persuasion: ethos, pathos, and logos. Book I of the treatise gives general information about rhetoric, while Book II gives detailed instruction on using the three appeals to change the beliefs or actions of others. Ethos refers to the credibility and character of the speaker; pathos involves the emotion and empathy experienced by the audience during the speech; and logos is based on the speaker's reasoning and logical arguments. This paper discusses the ethos, pathos, and logos found in a TED talk on antibiotic resistance given by Maryn McKenna. The purpose of the speech was to educate and persuade the audience concerning the problem of antibiotic resistance, its causes, its consequences, and its solution. McKenna gives hope to a bleak story by advising listeners what they personally can do to reduce antibiotic resistance.

Ethos is the persuasive power that a person gains from credibility and character, based on the *audience's* point of view. In some cases, the audience is aware of the speaker's expertise and reputation before the speech, but often the speaker has only his or her words to convince the audience that he or she is trustworthy, charitable, and knowledgeable. In addition, the people listening to the speech want to feel that they are similar to the speaker in having a good and noble character. The three components of ethos identified by Aristotle are good sense, good moral character, and good will. Good sense or "common sense" is shown by a person who gives clear reasons for his/her beliefs and actions, as well as presenting solid analogies illustrating his or her main points. An example of establishing good moral character is a speaker who discusses



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values and principles and how they have figured in her/his life. This informs the audience that the speaker has a strong conscience and is, therefore, less likely to lie to them or mislead them. A speaker is judged as having good will if he or she exhibits honesty, focuses on the audience's best interests, and desires to give solutions that will benefit them. Other ways that a speaker can improve his/her ethos are using the type of language the audience uses, answering questions asked by the audience members (saying "I don't know" when appropriate), giving the source of all statistics and other figures, and arriving early to talk to people before the speech. A person who is late for a speech (unless it is due to unavoidable difficulties such as traffic jams) already has a huge black mark against him or her, because most people feel disrespected when a speaker is late. Another way to end up with bad ethos is to quote statistics without giving their sources. The problem with bad ethos is that once one has it, getting rid of it and replacing it with good ethos will be difficult. Without good ethos, the speaker may be disregarded, dismissed, or even avoided. Who wants to listen to a person who does not appear to know their subject or who can't be trusted? In the TED talk on antibiotic resistance, McKenna established good ethos by presenting her statistics along with their sources (CDC, doctors in Sweden, British government, Alexander Fleming), by expressing disagreement with the pharmaceutical companies who do not want to develop new antibiotics that are "not in their best interest," and by using words that show she has the audience's best interests in mind. For example, she explains how people can change the devastating trend toward antibiotic resistance, using the word "we," and emphasizes previous cases in which social norms were changed. The ethos presented by McKenna was convincing; however, I believe she could have been more effective if she had identified her own background as a public health journalist so that the audience would be aware of her expertise.



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Pathos is the emotional connection between the speaker and the audience. Although the use of pathos is sometimes considered to be manipulative, it is a valid and, in fact, essential part of rhetoric. A speaker who does not establish this emotional connection is unlikely to persuade listeners to change their thinking or behavior. Pathos can sometimes be used too often, resulting in the opposite effect: listeners are "turned off" by emotion overload. One essential method of using pathos is telling stories. For instance, if the purpose of the speech is to persuade listeners that climate change is real and can have devastating consequences, one might tell personal stories about people in an extreme, unusual, and devastating typhoon. A politician defending his or her policies on immigration might talk about the hardship families suffer when their home country is in turmoil and their only hope is illegally entering the U.S. It is important to make these stories specific, because they will provoke feelings more efficiently if they are personal -- if a member of the audience can imagine themselves going through the same situation. But the words are not enough with pathos; the speaker must also demonstrate those emotions. If a story is sad, it isn't necessary for the speaker to burst into tears, but it isn't effective to speak in a monotone either. He or she must show, using intonation, word choice, and body language, that he or she shares the feelings that are being described. A personal story which evokes emotion is often used as a "hook" at the beginning of a speech. Maryn McKenna told a story about her great-uncle who died from an infection when he was thirty years old. At that time, she explains, antibiotics were still a few years away, and there was little doctors could do for infections. She told the story in an understated, matter-of-fact way -- without much intonation -- but the story itself was powerful enough that it didn't matter. However, later in the speech, when she was describing the solution and encouraging the audience to do their part in reducing antibiotic resistance, she still spoke without much enthusiasm. This reduced the pathos of her argument.



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Logos, the third appeal, focuses on evidence and reason. Reason includes inductive (moving from specific to general) and deductive (general to specific) thinking. In order to achieve good logos, the speaker needs to present facts, use statistics when appropriate, provide step-by-step arguments, and avoid fallacies and biases. For example, if a person wants to persuade people to donate bone marrow, he or she might give statistics on the number of people who need bone marrow transplants but die before they get that opportunity. He or she might also state that it is not uncommon for the only match to be a stranger than a family member. Similarly, if one wishes to encourage people to give money for a cause, one can explain how much money was raised in the last year, how the money benefited the cause, and how much money has been raised so far this year. It is essential to avoid fallacies such as the "slippery slope" and "either-or" fallacies, even if it seems that they might further the purpose of the speech. Use of fallacies is not ethical and would not promote good ethos. Also, people who are aware of the fallacies and recognize them in the speech might disregard the valid points of the argument. Logical fallacies and cognitive biases are everywhere, and most of the time humans do not recognize them because they are part of human nature. Therefore, one should look over a written speech and check for fallacies and biases. Good logos is crucial to the effectiveness of a speech, whether the purpose is to inform or persuade. A claim that is not backed up by evidence and reasoning will not be accepted by listeners. In her speech, Maryn McKenna outlined the process of antibiotic resistance beginning with the development of penicillin and the subsequent growth of penicillin-resistant bacteria; this was repeated as new antibiotics were created. When she discussed the need for social change, she gave examples of similar alterations in norms concerning littering, seat belt use, and smoking in public. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Alexander Fleming were two of the authorities she used. Finally, she explained



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the recent discovery of multi-drug resistant bacteria using a logical and compelling argument. Logos was her strongest component.

Ethos, pathos, and logos, the elements of rhetoric described by Aristotle, are essential in speeches that persuade or inform. Maryn McKenna, in her TED talk on antibiotic resistance, used these elements well. She could have improved her talk by demonstrating the emotions she was trying to evoke in the audience and by including her background as a public health journalist to further good ethos.

McKenna, Maryn. "What Do We Do When Antibiotics Don't Work Anymore?" Online video clip. *TED.com*. TED, Mar. 2015. Web. 3 July 2015.



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