LOGOS IS SYNONYMOUS WITH LOGIC

Nancy Fox

Logos. *Ethos*. *Pathos*. The three basic rhetorical appeals. Surely Aristotle laid them down for all writers over 2,300 years ago, right? In his text, *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle presents logos as argument itself, aligned with ethos, the appeal of a speaker's character, and pathos, the appeal to audience attitude or feeling. Together, these appeals infuse an argument with its persuasive power. However, an often simplistic, formulaic, and transactional use of these complex terms detaches them from their potential meaning. Such is the persistent problem, or bad idea, about logos.

Logos, the "argument itself" according to Aristotle, consists of material such as data and narrative, as well as the cogent reasoning that allows us to make sense of our stories. However, through careless practice, mistranslation, or misconception of the word's origins, logos is often defined simply as logic. Logic, in Aristotle's terms, is a tool for scientific calculation and investigation. Aristotle is considered the father of logic because he invented a structure called the *syllogism*, exemplified by the famous statement: "Socrates is a man. All men are mortal. Therefore, Socrates is mortal." The first two assertions—"Socrates is a man. All men are mortal"—are premises that lead "of necessity," in Aristotle's terms, to the only conclusion: "Socrates (a man) is therefore mortal."

But logic that serves scientific investigation is a different strategy from the logos appeal of rhetorical argument and storytelling. Logos is grounded in audience and situation—not scientific deduction. In fact, the ancient Greeks had a variety of definitions for logos, including computation and exposition, as well as forms of verbal expression, such as oratory and poetry, that represent an expansive and faceted story. None of these definitions were so

reductive as merely *logic*. It is confusing, then, that the entry on logos in the *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition* opens with the words "logical appeal," which also appear consistently in many other canonical works in the field, not to mention in textbooks that translate scholarly concepts for students. Logos is commonly defined as a set of logical (and therefore inevitable) conclusions drawn from assertions or claims, such as the syllogism.

Audiences and particular rhetorical situations may require logical reasoning and even syllogisms, but situations are rarely completely encompassed within one form of reasoning or arguing. Perhaps the best example would be a court case, in which syllogistic arguments, narrative appeals, and community values intertwine. The case is not fully explicable or approachable through one kind of proof. Writers are not constrained by formal and limiting systems like logic, which are highly useful for some circumstances, but irrelevant or even inappropriate to others, including the kinds of writing situations in which students often find themselves. Students are often challenged to understand and make arguments about political, social, artistic, policy, or cultural topics that cannot be demonstrated or logically proven.

All sources that dispute the logic-only definition speak of logos as complex, a bit mysterious, and resistant to easy analysis. It's true that Aristotle defined logos as "the argument … (and) proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself." However, textual evidence of logos existed centuries before the systematizing hand of Aristotle traced the strands of rhetorical proofs through logos, ethos, and pathos in 350 BCE. Ancient texts reveal competing perspectives of logos, from spiritual to structural. The Online Writing Lab (OWL) of Purdue University gathers these disparate views in one succinct statement that poses and resolves the problem of this potent word: "Logos is frequently translated as some variation of 'logic or reasoning,' but it originally referred to the actual content of a speech and how it was organized."

Teaching logos as logic in rhetorical arguments sets students up for confusion. They may study the myriad ways we build arguments, from articles to films, stories, songs, and marketing or political campaigns. Yet when asked to analyze arguments and make their own, students are often ill-served by a hunt for logical entailments among situated arguments about issues for which there is no one, entailed, necessary answer to be demonstrated. Recognizing logic's innate limitations to encompass all that logos is and can be, some folks in computer programming and the writing world itself

propose such hybrid terms as *fuzzy logic* and *informal logic* to resolve this issue. They open the term logic itself to less predictable—and more human—ways of thinking and speaking about ourselves. In a closely related issue, beyond the reach of this chapter but worthy of further investigation, an appreciation of the true meaning of logos can allay concern that digital landscapes are distorting our interactions and relationships. It's the reduction of our human communication to logical systems based on algorithms that logos, our robust language story, can redress, enliven, and enlighten.

Further Reading

The primary texts collected in *Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present,* edited by Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg (Bedford Books), trace the use of the term logos through time and cultural development of rhetorical practices. But the origins of the word logos can be discovered in the earliest texts by Heraclitus, "Concerning the Logos," which describes the sacred nature of logos, and Aristotle's *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse,* the source for a practical understanding of logos as it informs our daily communications with one another.

Scholars who trace the various strands of logos—spiritual and practical—in the context and texture of ancient Greek culture include Debra Hawhee and Sharon Crowley in *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students* (Allyn and Bacon); Susan Jarratt in her foundational *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured* (Southern Illinois University Press); and Jeffrey Walker, who investigates the deeper sources of logos in human communication, beneath strategy, in *Rhetoric and Poetics in Antiquity* (Oxford University Press).

Print and online sources that offer a fast but effective consultation about logos, its history, and its current practice, are the *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition: Communication from Ancient Times to the Information Age,* edited by Theresa Enos (Garland); *Sourcebook on Rhetoric: Key Concepts in Contemporary Rhetorical Studies,* by James Jasinski (Sage); *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms,* by Richard A. Lanham (University of California Press); and "Logos" in the websites, *Silvae Rhetoricae* and Purdue OWL.

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