

“Persuasion for a Better Cause”

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Alan Gross, professor of rhetoric at the University of Minnesota, proposes two types of rhetoric that authors use to strengthen their arguments: logos and pathos. These rhetorical strategies can be found in many articles, including those of scientific texts. While scientific texts are thought to be objective, the presence of these rhetorical strategies is proof that most texts are actually subjective. Logos is an appeal to logic through the use of facts including mathematical, scientific, or statistical data to support an argument. Pathos is an appeal to emotion. These two rhetorical strategies are effectively used in Peter Piot's piece in *Scientific American* titled: "AIDS: A Global Response." In the article, Piot argues that there needs to be a shift in focus on research and funding from developed countries to developing countries regarding the HIV/AIDS epidemic currently affecting the entire globe. This paper will first address how through detailed statistics regarding the spread of the disease, Piot convinces readers that their attention needs to be refocused to stopping the spread of HIV in developing countries. Then, I will address how through pathos, Piot communicates a sense of urgency to his readers and involves them personally in an issue that they are geographically detached from. This is significant because it opens up the genre of scientific writing to subjective arguments; the article wields both facts and appeals to emotion in order to reprioritize scientific research.

Piot uses logos to convince his readers about the crisis of the AIDS epidemic throughout the globe. The strength of using logos as a rhetorical strategy is that it targets the skeptical reader because logic, as opposed to opinion, is often difficult to argue against. The use of numbers and mathematical and/or scientific data is common in logos. Almost the entire opening paragraph of the article, excluding the last sentence, is text containing statistics. The second sentence of the article puts the frequency of AIDS in perspective to the uninformed reader: "Globally, over 8500 newly infected people daily join the ranks of the 21 million already living with one of the 10

known subtypes of the virus” (Piot 1). There are three instances in this one sentence of the use of numbers, something that is very hard to argue against. The only counterargument that a reader could have against this statement is that this fact could be false, or that it could be out-of-date. While these are potentially strong counterarguments, the use of multiple facts following this sentence supports the authors’ use of logos. An effective use of this rhetorical strategy that the author displays is that he uses logos after a statement that targets emotion. He begins the second paragraph with “[t]his is not to say that there is no hope,” and follows with, “In cities in Uganda, the number of HIV-infected pregnant women is lower now than 5 years ago” (1). The first sentence, with the use of the word “hope,” targets readers who are easily persuaded by emotion. However, the author recognizes that he may lose the support of his cynical readers after a statement targeting emotion (and such readers), and in turn addresses those suspicious readers with logos (specifically, the use of the number “5”) to regain their support.

A more elaborate example of how Piot uses logos to maintain his readers support and persuade their opinions is evident throughout the entire third paragraph of the article. The majority of this paragraph uses pathos to persuade the accepting reader, which could in turn deter the doubtful reader. In order to keep this doubtful reader’s support, Piot explicitly uses two instances of logos. In the first, he writes: “Fact 1: The AIDS problem is overwhelmingly concentrated in the developing world, where more than 90% of all HIV-infected people now live” (1). Because of the use of a mathematical statistic, this logo is stronger than the second, which says: “Fact 2: AIDS intelligence and R&D are overwhelmingly concentrated in the industrialized world, where the problem, though serious, is only a small fraction of the global epidemic” (1). The second “fact” that Piot offers particularly weakens his argument due to lack of raw data. The argument would be much stronger if a number or statistic were used in place of

“small fraction,” as this could have varying definitions. While this part of the argument could be improved, the very way in which Piot presents these two statements targets those readers who are looking for specific, hard evidence with which to base their opinions on. In stating “Fact 1” and “Fact 2,” Piot demonstrates audience awareness, as he knows that readers will want concrete facts to base their opinions on.

A more obvious strategy that Piot uses is the rhetorical strategy of pathos to appeal to his readers on a personal level. The article begins by explaining how the deaths of AIDS-infected people are “threatening health systems, economics, and national stability” (Piot 1). The effect of the word “threatening” is that it makes the statement personal. Though the reader may not have expected the article to be necessarily applicable to him or her, this one word changes the appeal of the article. Because the topic of AIDS is sensitive in itself, a word such as “threatening” and the context in which it is used changes the topic from global to personal. All citizens are indirectly part of health systems and the economy, and for one to read that the deaths of AIDS-infected people will affect these two things relates AIDS infection to individual people through economics and healthcare. It is this relation which brings the topic from a global level to a personal one, to that of the reader. The last sentence of the paragraph ties this idea together, stating: “the largely invisible, shifting, and expanding global epidemic of HIV makes the planet a more dangerous place for all” (1). The use of words such as “invisible,” “shifting,” and “expanding” drive home the concept of the disease being an epidemic. These words are designed to make the reader feel out of control. They give a sense of constant growth and urgency. Then, following these words Piot bluntly states: “the planet [is] a more dangerous place for all,” bringing a global issue down to a personal level (1). The effect of having this statement at the

beginning of the article is that throughout the rest of the piece, the reader knows that whatever information is presented about AIDS—good or bad—can be applied on a personal level.

Later in the article, the author offers a sense of encouragement as he discusses specific research that has been done on the disease. “Recent scientific breakthroughs are encouraging. [A]ntiretroviral drugs now promise not only to defer disease progression and improve quality of life” (1). The use of rhetoric is effective here because it changes the readers feeling of responsibility, developed after reading the opening paragraph, to a feeling of hope. He does so through language such as “encouraging,” “promise,” and “improve” (1). The author’s use of uplifting language offers a sense of comfort to the reader. He even goes so far as to say that “there are encouraging advances.” In addition, the use of the phrase “promise not only,” and specifically the word “only,” implies that there are multiple positive effects of antiretroviral drugs. After having applied the “threat” of AIDS at a personal level, appealing to the reader in a positive way with this language intends to make the reader feel better. It’s as if the author is trying to convey a sense of reassurance in his reader. In doing so, he prepares his readers for the reality of the disease, the negative aspects that come with the positive ones. Piot leads his readers along an emotional rollercoaster, appealing to their need to feel good about themselves, but then also presenting the truth in a way that leads them to the conclusion he wants.

After appealing to the positive emotions of his reader, he drives home his argument about shifting research and focus on the disease from developed countries to those that are currently developing. Following the proposition of his argument, he states that there is “little hope” without this shift, and that the “main hope” for the future is the development of vaccines to be accessible to people in developing countries (1). The use of the word “hope” twice in the same sentence again appeals to the readers emotions, but in this context it has a negative connotation.

The author supports his argument by presenting the situation in a “black and white” sense, as if there is no optimism for the future regarding this disease without the connection between developed and developing countries. Piot assumes that his readers will appeal to the sense of hope, and therefore support his argument.

In the conclusion of the article, the author joins his argument and the rhetoric he uses together, saying: “Ignoring the AIDS research needs of 90% of the epidemic is not just unethical. It is plain irrational. The task is to make the global epidemic less dangerous: anything else offers false security for all” (1). This statement uses obvious examples of both pathos and logos. The word “unethical,” is a direct gesture to pathos, and addresses the moral side of the argument. Piot is saying, indirectly, that disregarding the needs of AIDS research is immoral. He is appealing strongly here to the readers’ personal morals. This is a bold move by Piot, as he is questioning his readers’ ethics. Then, after doing so, he makes an indictment, stating “It is plain irrational.” The idea of irrationality is the complete opposite of logos, which uses logic as a means of persuasion. Piot is making the point that it would go against logic to ignore the needs of research. He persuades his readers through the appeal to logic, inferring that it would be logical (and morally correct) to address these needs. The author calls upon his readers to refuse to be ignorant, and says that being ignorant is only creating a fake sense of protection. He once again offers a seemingly simple solution to the problem—either one supports making AIDS less treacherous and the problem is solved, or one is ignorant to the disease and the problem remains. The strategy used here is that the author makes his argument seem extremely optimistic, and makes the counterargument seem extremely destructive because he makes the situation seem “black and white.” The effect of presenting the two sides to the argument in such simple manners is that it targets the readers’ sense of practicality. Piot makes the assumption that the practical

decision to this problem would be to agree, and solve the problem, rather than to disagree and have the problem continue.

The use of rhetorical strategies by Piot makes his article effective in persuading his readers toward agreeing with his argument. He makes his readers feel like the HIV/AIDS epidemic affects them on a personal level, while addressing the skeptics who aren't as easily persuaded. The ability for Piot to be able to persuade his readers is powerful because his writing can stand up to close scrutiny. It is this fact that strengthens his paper, and demonstrates how pathos and logos can be effectively utilized to persuade an audience. The key point to distinguish here is the very type of genre in which these strategies exist: scientific writing. While it is thought that science and the presentation of scientific data is objective, Piot, with his use of logos and pathos, proves that there is, in fact, subjectivity in the way scientific data is presented. The global issue is that there is rhetoric of science, a way that science is presented that relies on persuasion. We must recognize that this rhetoric is present because we are constantly bombarded with biased opinions which attempt to persuade us in certain directions. It is vital to have the ability to critique and recognize in what ways these opinions are warped so that we can make our own conclusions without being persuaded by others. In applying this ability to a scientific text, one can see that what is commonly thought of as objective is certainly not. As Gross writes, "We can argue that scientific knowledge is not special, but social; the result not of revelation, but of persuasion" (375).

## Writer's Memo

This paper meets outcome one because the main focus was on analyzing an argument with complex, close work with a specific text. I feel that my work with specific words and phrases in support of demonstrating pathos and logos shows this close working with the text. I bring out the counterarguments, and where the argument is weak in making its points. The biggest weakness of Piot's article was *his* failure to address a counterargument, and his portrayal of the opposite side as exaggerated and assumed. The use of the Gross article, and also of other sources which gave me more information about Piot himself targets outcome two, as I incorporated multiple texts to help support my own argument of Piot's argument being persuasive. These texts were applied, such as his experience with working with AIDS and politics, to support my argument of how ethos supports his argument. Outcome three was met in the fact that while analyzing the persuasive language of someone else's article, I was persuading my reader to believe my argument (that Piot's writing was successfully persuasive). I believe that it is this awareness that makes my own writing stronger, and writing this paper helped me to do so, as it called upon me to analyze why someone else's argument is necessarily persuasive. Just as Piot's writing is not perfect, mine is not either, but I do feel that I make a clear argument in working closely with the text and focusing on the three main areas of rhetoric: ethos, pathos, and logos. Outcome four was strongly met in this paper as I completely rewrote this essay after visiting the Odegaard Writing Center on Thursday. While I was aware that what I had written before really needed some work, the tutor at the writing center helped me to realize where I was running into problems, and helped me find a better article to work with. After this problem was solved, I was able to proceed with a stronger argument, and took her ideas strongly into account



before trying to rewrite my paper. This paper is completely different from the one that I came to class with on Tuesday, and I feel that this strongly addresses outcome four.

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