

Why Logic is Unpopular

Value hierarchies are inevitable. What value belongs at the top to make sure the others stay in their proper place?

The ancient Greeks spoke of three perspectives: pathos, ethos, and logos. From a pathos perspective, emotions and feelings take center stage. From an ethos perspective, reputation and tradition are what really matter. From a logos perspective, reason is what guides to wise action.

The Primacy of Logos

There will always be tension between people with different values and tendencies, and this tension often manifests most obviously in politics. Most people are driven primarily by instinct (pathos) or tradition (ethos), which is why self-described “liberals” consistently find themselves at odds with self-described “conservatives”. Some few are driven primarily by reason (logos). Logic is unpopular because it calls into question both instinct and tradition.

In politics, instinct-dominant (pathos) people seek validation of their feelings and messages that make them feel good, usually because something sad/scary/unfair is presented along with an easy solution that would make everything better. Tradition-dominant (ethos) people seek assurance that the messenger is trustworthy, usually because they are part of the in-group or because they signal about duty and allegiance to established institutions like governments and churches and against out-groups and their institutions. Reason-dominant (logos) people seek to establish the truth of ideas and messages, even when it causes them to subordinate natural tendencies and inherited traditions to come into consistent harmony with the wisdom they cherish.

By Their Egocentric Biases Ye Shall Know Them

If you aren't sure whether you're dealing with a pathos-dominant person or an ethos-dominant person, you can look for patterns in their behavior.

Typical emotion-driven behavior:

- Tend to engage in hot cognition with motivation bias
- Feelings/intentions valued over facts/results (“it’s more important to be morally right than factually correct” or “that wasn’t real socialism”)
- Easily scared/overwhelmed, and therefore easily controlled (“we need to do something!”)
- Furious “mama bear” overreactions when challenged
- Confuse “open minded” with “empty headed”

- Oppression narratives with victimhood as a status symbol (various privilege/equity/social justice/forced redistribution schemes)
- Anecdotal NAXALT fallacy and tactical nihilism in response to statistical evidence

Typical tradition-driven behavior:

- Tend to suffer from the illusion of asymmetric insight and base rate neglect
- Obedience to authority valued over truth (“it’s the law” equivocation)
- Retreat to dogma and orthodoxy when challenged
- Pearl-clutching fear of ambiguity and change (belief that the only alternative to the status quo is chaos)
- Confuse “consensus” with “evidence”
- “Might makes right” crusade narratives
- Tendency to oversimplify patterns and overlook exceptions

The Cure for Irrational Tribalism

A society that subordinates reason is destined to corruption and ruin as the fruitless scramble to justify and rearrange prejudices to satisfy confirmation bias replaces the quest for truth. Narcissistic moral relativism and political power struggles only escalate the conflict. It is only by subordinating emotion and authority to wisdom that can we avoid catastrophe.

“If we have the truth, it cannot be harmed by investigation. If we have not the truth, it ought to be harmed.”

– J. Reuben Clark