# 3

# Arguments Based on Character: Ethos

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It was a moment many had been waiting for: on January 10, 2008, Ratan N. Tata, head of India's Tata Motors, unveiled Nano, "the people's car" designed to be affordable for those who had never dreamed of owning an automobile. Saying he hoped the Nano will bring "pride and joy" to millions of new owners, Tata stood aside to showcase the tiny car, reputed to sell for $2,500.

In describing the Nano, Tata Motors focuses not simply on its low cost but on what you might think of as its character: this people's car will be dependable, safe, fuel efficient, and low on emissions. In short, it is a car for everyone and can be counted on to serve its owners as well as its country's environment.

To be successful in selling the Nano, Tata Motors depends to a large extent on the character or ethos of the company itself. Writers and speakers (and companies) create ethos in at least two ways—through the reputation they bring to the table and through the language, evidence, and images they use. Tata Motors's homepage, for example, focuses on

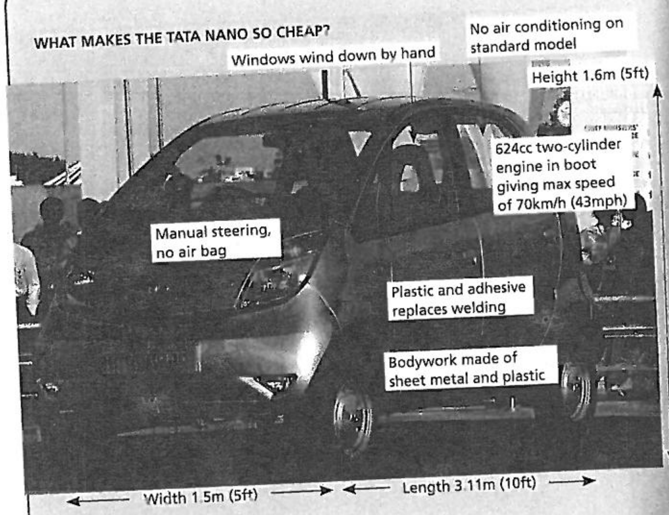
The Tata Nano, said to be the world's cheapest car

its ethos, beginning with its carefully worded motto "Green matters" and then drawing on its reputation in its opening statement:

> True to the tradition of the Tata Group, Tata Motors is committed in letter and spirit to Corporate Social Responsibility. It is a signatory to the United Nations Global Compact, and is engaged in community and social initiatives on labour and environment standards in compliance with the principles of the Global Compact. In accordance with this, it plays an active role in community development, serving rural communities around its manufacturing locations.

In making an argument based on the character of the company, Tata Motors is also creating an ethos that it promises the Nano will live up to, perhaps even exceed, as the company works to improve the car's performance, durability, and green qualities. In doing so, Tata is appealing to the values of many today who believe that humans must reduce our carbon footprints and save energy if we are to avoid irrevocable damage to our shared planet.

Audiences pay attention to ethos and to the values that it represents. Before we accept the words (or image) of others, we must usually respect



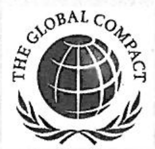
WHAT MAKES THE TATA NANO SO CHEAP?

Windows wind down by hand
No air conditioning on standard model
Height 1.6m (5ft)
624cc two-cylinder engine in boot giving max speed of 70km/h (43mph)
Manual steering, no air bag
Plastic and adhesive replaces welding
Bodywork made of sheet metal and plastic
Width 1.5m (5ft)
Length 3.11m (10ft)

## Not Just Words

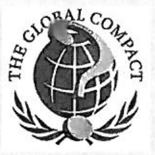
Someone browsing the Web for information about the Tata Nano will quickly come across images like the one on page 53—and also like the one above. This second, annotated image points out that the company can build and sell the Nano cheaply for good reasons. Some reasons, like the use of plastic, might worry those who have concerns about safety. Others may be disappointed at the lack of air conditioning or the hand-crank windows. This annotated image therefore can raise questions about some of the claims made for the Nano.

Others investigating the car and the company that produces it might note the home page claim that Tata is a "signatory to the United Nations Global Compact" and decide to find out what that means. They would soon find the logo of this UN group, which has strong suggestions of global harmony and peace:



THE GLOBAL COMPACT

The logo image is reinforced on the homepage of the United Nations Global Compact, which focuses on the organization's "ten principles in the areas of human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption [that] enjoy universal consensus." Together, the logo and images of the natural world featured on the Web site create an ethos of responsibility, openness, and trust. But readers and writers must examine issues of ethos carefully. If you looked further, for example, you would likely identify some critics of the ethos of the Global Compact. In fact, a group called Global Compact Critics uses another powerful symbol to do just that—by superimposing a big question mark on the Global Compact logo:



THE GLOBAL COMPACT

Look at the Web site for Tata Motors (http://www.tatamotors.com) or the Web site for the United Nations Global Compact (http://www.unglobalcompact.org):

- What specific issues of ethos can you find addressed on the homepage for either group? How is ethos created through the use of images as well as words?
- Now look at the Web site for Global Compact Critics (http://globalcompactcritics.blogspot.com), noting the way that this group uses images to question the ethos of the UN Global Compact.
- Working with a group, create some images that could help build a positive ethos for either the Tata Nano, the UN Global Compact, or Global Compact Critics.

their authority, admire their integrity and motives, or at least acknowledge what they stand for. Potential buyers of the Nano will know something of the ethos of Tata Motors since it is the largest manufacturer of automobiles in India and one of the country's ten top corporations. But Tata's advertising campaign will also make sure that buyers know a great deal about the way that the new Nano reflects the ethos of Tata's "Green matters": its very low cost, very high mileage ratio (fifty-four miles to the U.S. gallon), and high safety standards all help to build trust and a strong consumer base.

Character alone may not carry an argument, however, and the character of Tata Motors and its Nano probably won't speak to everyone. In fact, soon after its launch, several prospective customers interviewed by the news media said the Nano's low price could backfire on the company, driving away customers who look for status rather than fuel efficiency in an automobile. As one person said, "I still like big cars." In creating arguments based on character or ethos, writers must remember that a particular character will not appeal to every kind of audience.

Nevertheless, establishing ethos is important in arguments, whether the argument is made by a company (like Tata Motors), a person (such as a presidential candidate), a group (like the American Civil Liberties Union or Students for Academic Freedom), or an institution (such as a corporation, newspaper, or college). We observe people, groups, or institutions making and defending claims all the time and ask ourselves: *Should we pay attention to them? Can we trust them?* But establishing a persuasive ethos requires not simply seeming honest or likable but also affirming an identity and sharing parts or all of it with an intended audience. For example, while Tata, Porsche, and Tesla all hope to sell lots of automobiles, they are attempting to reach different audiences. Tata, as we've seen, is targeting the millions of everyday Indians who today are riding bicycles or motorscooters; Porsche aims for drivers who want the status of a beautifully designed, powerful, and expensive car; while Tesla wants to sell to those willing to pay big bucks for a zero-emissions electric car.

If a company (or anyone building an argument from character) is well known, liked, and respected, that reputation will contribute to its persuasive power. If its character is problematic in any respect, it may have to use argument to reshape an audience's perception. The fact that Tata Motors also produces heavy trucks, for example, could call into question some of its "Green matters" claim, leading consumers to question its ethos.

## Understanding How Arguments Based on Character Work

Because life is complicated, we often need shortcuts to help us make choices. We can't weigh every claim to its last milligram or trace every fragment of evidence to its original source. And we have to make such decisions daily: *Which brand of clothing should I buy? Whom should I vote for in the next election? Which reviews of an Academy Award nominee for best film should I believe? What are the real risks in taking prescription painkillers?* To answer serious questions, people typically turn to professionals—doctors, lawyers, teachers, pastors—for wise, well-informed, and frank advice. But people look to equally knowledgeable individuals to guide them in less momentous matters as well. An expert can be anyone with knowledge and experience, from a professor of nuclear physics at an Ivy League college to a short-order cook at the local diner.

Readers give the people (or institutions) they know a hearing they might not automatically grant to a stranger or someone who hasn't earned their respect or affection. That trust indicates the power of arguments based on ethos or character and accounts for why people will often take the word of the "car guy" in their neighborhood more seriously than the reviews in *Consumer Reports*. And they'll believe *Consumer Reports* more readily than the SUV ads in *People*. Appeals or arguments about character often turn on claims such as the following:

- A person (or group) does or does not have the authority to speak to this issue.
- A person (or group) is or is not trustworthy or credible on this issue.
- A person (or group) does or does not have good motives for addressing this subject.

## Claiming Authority

When you read an argument, especially one that makes an aggressive claim, you have every right to wonder about the writer's authority: *What does he know about the subject? What experiences does she have that make her especially knowledgeable? Why should I pay attention to this writer?*

When you offer an argument, you have to anticipate pointed questions like these and be able to answer them, directly or indirectly. Sometimes the claim of authority will be bold and personal, as it is when writer and activist Terry Tempest Williams attacks those who poisoned the Utah deserts with nuclear radiation. What gives her the right to speak on this subject? Not scientific expertise, but gut-wrenching personal experience:

> **I belong to the Clan of One-Breasted Women. My mother, my grandmothers, and six aunts have all had mastectomies. Seven are dead. The two who survive have just completed rounds of chemotherapy and radiation.**
>
> **I've had my own problems: two biopsies for breast cancer and a small tumor between my ribs diagnosed as a "borderline malignancy."**
>
> **—Terry Tempest Williams, "The Clan of One-Breasted Women"**

We are willing to listen to Williams's claims because she has lived with the nuclear peril she will deal with in the remainder of her essay.

Writers usually establish their authority in other and less striking ways. When they attach academic and professional titles to their names, for example, they're subtly building their authority by saying "this is how I've earned the right to be heard"—they are medical doctors, have law degrees, or have been state certified to work as psychotherapists. Similarly, writers can assert authority by mentioning their employers (their institutional affiliations) and the number of years that they've worked in a given field. Bureaucrats often identify themselves with their agencies, and professors with their schools. As a reader, you'll likely pay more attention to an argument about global warming if it's offered by someone who identifies herself as a professor of atmospheric and oceanic science at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, than by your Uncle Sid, who sells tools at Sears. But you'll prefer your uncle to the professor when you need advice about a reliable rotary saw.

In the opening paragraph of "Why Take Food Seriously?" Mark Bittman calls attention to his credentials—a long history of working with food and contact with many others who cook—to build his ethos.

**LINK TO P. 779**

When your readers are apt to be skeptical of both you and your claim, you may have to be even more specific about your credentials. That's exactly the strategy Richard Bernstein uses to establish his right to speak on the subject of teaching multiculturalism in American colleges and universities. At one point in a lengthy argument, he challenges those who make simplistic pronouncements about non-Western cultures, specifically "Asian culture." But what gives a New York writer named Bernstein the authority to write about Asian peoples? Bernstein tells us in a sparkling example of an argument based on character:

> **The Asian culture, as it happens, is something I know a bit about, having spent five years at Harvard striving for a Ph.D. in a joint program called History and East Asian Languages and, after that, living either as a student (for one year) or a journalist (six years) in China and Southeast Asia. At least I know enough to know there is no such thing as the "Asian culture."**
>
> **—Richard Bernstein, *Dictatorship of Virtue***

Bernstein understates the case when he says he knows "a bit" about Asian culture and then mentions a Ph.D. program at Harvard and years of living in Asia. But the false modesty may be part of his argumentative strategy, too.

When you write for readers who trust you and your work, you may not have to make an open claim to authority. But you should know that making this type of appeal is always an option. A second lesson is that it certainly helps to know your subject when you're making a claim.

Even if an author doesn't make an explicit effort to assert it, authority can be conveyed through fairly small signals that readers may pick up almost subconsciously. On his blog, educator and writer Mike Rose responds to "In the Basement of the Ivory Tower," an *Atlantic Monthly* article that he says "offers a disheartening portrait of the 'non-traditional' (or 'remedial' or just run-of-the-mill) college student, a portrait common in mass media, and in high-brow media particularly." In the passage below, we've italicized self-assured prose that Rose uses in criticizing this essay:

> ***It is certainly accurate* that a number of people do enter higher education poorly prepared. And *we do need to think hard* about what the current push for "college for all" truly means, how it can be enacted in an effective way, and whether or not it offers the best remedy for past educational inequality. These are *important questions*. Articles like "In the Basement of the Ivory Tower" *don't help us answer them.***
>
> **—Mike Rose, Mike Rose's Blog**

## Establishing Credibility

Whereas authority is a measure of how much command a writer has over a subject, credibility speaks to a writer's honesty, respect for an audience and its values, and plain old likeability. Sometimes a sense of humor can play an important role in getting an audience to listen to you: it's no accident that all but the most serious speeches begin with a few jokes or stories. The humor puts listeners at ease and helps them identify with the speaker. In fact, a little self-deprecation can endear writers or speakers to the toughest audiences. We'll often listen to people confident enough to make fun of themselves, because they seem clever and yet aware of their own limitations.

The National Institute of Mental Health boosts its credibility by having a spokesperson acknowledge how difficult it is for an immigrant to admit to suffering from depression.

LINK TO P. 769

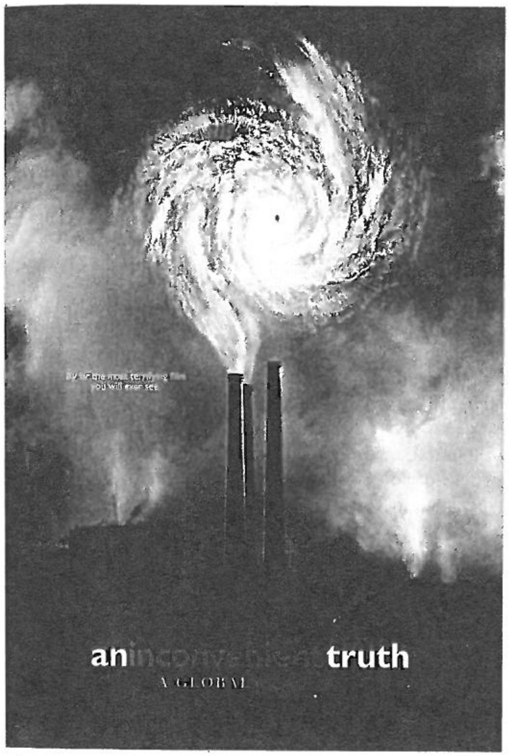
Take, for example, the opening scene of *An Inconvenient Truth*, the documentary on the dangers of global warming. Al Gore, who later won an Academy Award for this film, takes the stage dressed in a dark suit, holding a PowerPoint clicker, and looking urgent. The Global Warming Slideshow for which he has become so well known occupies the huge screen behind him as he prepares to address a large group of students. There's a pause, and then Gore says, "Hello, my name is Al Gore, and I used to be the next president of the United States." The students erupt with roars of laughter, cheers, and whistles at this very effective piece of self-deprecating humor.

But humor alone can't establish credibility. Although a funny anecdote may help dispose an audience to listen to you, you will need to move quickly to make reasonable claims and then back them up with evidence and documentation—or, in electronic environments, to link your claims to sites with reliable information. That is, showing your authority on a topic is itself a good way to build credibility.

But there's even more to it than that. Consider that a number of studies over the years have shown that tall, slender, good-looking people have an advantage in getting a job or getting a raise. Apparently, employers make assumptions about such people's competence based on nothing more than good looks. You probably act the same way in some circumstances, even if you resent the practice.

You might recall these studies when you make an argument, knowing that like it or not, readers and audiences are going to respond to how you present yourself as a person. In other words, be sure that your writing visually conveys your message as effectively as possible. Choose a medium that shows you at your best. Some writers love a written text garnished with quotations, footnotes, charts, graphs, and a bibliography. Others can make a better case online or in some purely visual form. Choosing a medium carefully will help you design arguments that assure readers they can trust you.

You can also establish credibility by connecting your own beliefs to core principles that are well established and widely respected. This strategy is particularly effective when your position seems to be—at first glance, at least—a threat to traditional values. For example, when author Andrew Sullivan (who is himself a conservative) argues in favor of



The movie poster for *An Inconvenient Truth*

legalizing same-sex marriages, he does so in language that echoes the themes of family-values conservatives:

> **Legalizing gay marriage would offer homosexuals the same deal society now offers heterosexuals: general social approval and specific legal advantages in exchange for a deeper and harder-to-extract-youself-from commitment to another human being. Like straight**

> marriage, it would foster social cohesion, emotional security, and economic prudence. Since there's no reason gays should not be allowed to adopt or be foster parents, it could also help nurture children. And its introduction would not be some sort of radical break with social custom. As it has become more acceptable for gay people to acknowledge their loves publicly, more and more have committed themselves to one another for life in full view of their families and their friends. A law institutionalizing gay marriage would merely reinforce a healthy social trend. It would also, in the wake of AIDS, qualify as a genuine public health measure. Those conservatives who deplore promiscuity among some homosexuals should be among the first to support it.
>
> —Andrew Sullivan, "Here Comes the Groom"

Yet another way to affirm your credibility as a writer is to use language that shows your respect for readers, addressing them neither above nor below their capabilities. Citing trustworthy sources and acknowledging them properly prove, too, that you've done your homework (another sign of respect) and suggest that you know your subject. So does presenting ideas clearly and fairly. Details matter: helpful graphs, tables, charts, or illustrations may carry weight with readers, as will the visual attractiveness of your work (or your Web site, for that matter). Again, even correct spelling counts.

Writers who establish their credibility in this way seem trustworthy. But sometimes, to be credible, you have to admit limitations, too: *This is what I know; I won't pretend to understand more.* It's a tactic used by people as respected in their fields as the late biologist Lewis Thomas, who in this example ponders whether scientists have overstepped their bounds in exploring the limits of DNA research:

> Should we stop short of learning some things, for fear of what we, or someone, will do with the knowledge? My own answer is a flat no, but I must confess that this is an intuitive response and I am neither inclined nor trained to reason my way through it.
>
> —Lewis Thomas, "The Hazards of Science"

When making an argument, many people would be reluctant to write "I suppose" or "I must confess," but those are the very concessions that might increase a reader's confidence in a scientist and writer like Lewis Thomas.

In fact, a powerful technique for building credibility is to acknowledge outright any exceptions, qualifications, or even weaknesses in your argument. For example, a Volkswagen ad with the headline "They said it couldn't be done. It couldn't," shows pro basketball star Wilt Chamberlain, who at seven feet, one inch, tall just can't fit inside the bug. This ad is one of a classic series in which Volkswagen pokes fun at itself and admits to limitations while also promoting the good points about the car, gaining credibility in the bargain.

Making such concessions to objections that readers might raise, called *conditions of rebuttal*, sends a strong signal to the audience that you've scrutinized your own position and can therefore be trusted when you turn to arguing its merits. Speaking to readers directly, using *I* or *you*, for instance, also enables you to come closer to them when that strategy is appropriate. Using contractions and everyday or colloquial language can have the same effect. In a 2008 commencement address, Oprah Winfrey argues that the graduates need to consider how they can serve others. To build her case, she draws on her own experience—forthrightly noting some mistakes and problems that she has faced in trying to live a life of service:

> I started this school in Africa . . . where I'm trying to give South African girls a shot at a future like yours. And I spent five years making sure

Oprah Winfrey in South Africa

> that school would be as beautiful as the students. . . . And yet, last fall, I was faced with a crisis I had never anticipated. I was told that one of the dorm matrons was suspected of sexual abuse.
>
> That was, as you can imagine, devastating news. First, I cried—actually, I sobbed. . . . And the whole time I kept asking that question: What is this here to teach me? And, as difficult as that experience has been, I got a lot of lessons. I understand now the mistakes I made, because I had been paying attention to all of the wrong things. I'd built that school from the outside in, when what really mattered was the inside out.
>
> —Oprah Winfrey, Stanford University Commencement Address

In some situations, however, you may find that a more formal tone gives your claims greater authority. Choices like these are yours to make as you search for the ethos that best represents you in a given argument.

## CULTURAL CONTEXTS FOR ARGUMENT

### Ethos

In the United States, students writing arguments are often asked to establish authority by drawing on personal experiences, by reporting on research that they or others have conducted, and by taking a position for which they can offer strong evidence and support. But this expectation about student authority is by no means universal.

Some cultures regard student writers as novices who can most effectively make arguments by reflecting on what they've learned from their teachers and elders—those who are believed to hold the most important knowledge, wisdom, and, hence, authority. Whenever you're arguing a point with people from cultures other than your own, therefore, you need to think about what kind of authority you're expected to have:

- Whom are you addressing, and what is your relationship with that person?
- What knowledge are you expected to have? Is it appropriate or expected for you to demonstrate that knowledge—and if so, how?
- What tone is appropriate? If in doubt, always show respect: politeness is rarely if ever inappropriate.

## Coming Clean about Motives

When people are trying to sell you something, it's important (and natural) to ask: *Whose interests are they serving? How will they profit from their proposal?* Such suspicions go to the heart of ethical arguments. It's no accident that Jonathan Swift ends his satirical *A Modest Proposal* with his narrator claiming he will benefit in no way from what he suggests—that the people of eighteenth-century Ireland end their poverty by selling their infant children to be used for food:

> I profess, in the sincerity of my heart, that I have not the least personal interest in endeavoring to promote this necessary work, having no other motive than the public good of my country, by advancing our trade, providing for infants, relieving the poor, and giving some pleasure to the rich. I have no children by which I can propose to get a single penny; the youngest being nine years old, and my wife past child-bearing.
>
> —Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal*

Even this monster of a narrator appreciates that his idea will gain no traction if his motives are suspect in the least. He's also smart enough to discuss his potential conflicts of interest (his own children and his wife). This is always a sensible strategy whenever your motives for offering an idea might seem driven by its potential advantage to yourself or by your attachment to a particular class, gender, faction, or other group.

Here, for example, someone posting on the Web site Serious Eats, which is "focused on celebrating and sharing food enthusiasm" online, acknowledges—in a footnote—that his attention to Martha Stewart, her Web site, and a *Martha Stewart Living* cookbook may be influenced by his employment history:

> Martha Stewart* has been blipping up on the Serious Eats radar lately.
>
> First it was this astronaut meal she chose for her longtime Microsoft billionaire friend Charles Simonyi, "a gourmet space meal of duck breast confit and semolina cake with dried apricots." Talk about going above and beyond.
>
> Then official word comes that marthastewart.com has relaunched with a fresh new look and new features. The site, which went live in its new form a few weeks before this announcement, is quite an improvement. It seems to load faster, information is easier to find, and the recipes are easier to read—although there are so many brands,

> magazines, and "omnimedia" on offer that the homepage is a little dizzying at first.
>
> Third, while reading Apartment Therapy's Kitchen blog, I ran across a review of the *Everyday Food* cookbook, which was released recently by Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia: "Guests said that the dinner cooked from this book tasted like 'restaurant food' and we'll take the compliment. There is a fullness of flavor in these recipes that is not found in other quick fix recipes. . . ."
>
> * *Full disclosure: I used to work at* Martha Stewart Living *magazine.*
>
> —Adam Kuban, "Martha, Martha, Martha"

Especially in online venues like the one Kuban uses here, writers have to expect that readers will hold diverse views and will be quick to point out unmentioned affiliations as serious drawbacks to credibility. In fact, attacks on such loyalties are common in political circles, where it's almost a sport to assume the worst about an opponent's motives and associations. But we all have connections and interests that represent the ties that bind us to other human beings. It makes sense that a woman might be concerned with women's issues or that investors might look out for their investments. So it can be good strategy to let your audiences know where your loyalties lie when such information does, in fact, shape your work.

There are other ways, too, to invite readers to regard you as trustworthy. Nancy Mairs, in an essay entitled "On Being a Cripple," wins the attention and respect of her readers by facing her situation with a riveting directness:

> First, the matter of semantics. I am a cripple. I choose this word to name me. I choose from among several possibilities, the most common of which are "handicapped" and "disabled." I made the choice a number of years ago, without thinking, unaware of my motives for doing so. Even now, I am not sure what those motives are, but I recognize that they are complex and not entirely flattering. People—crippled or not—wince at the word "cripple," as they do not at "handicapped" or "disabled." Perhaps I want them to wince. I want them to see me as a tough customer, one to whom the fates/gods/viruses have not been kind, but who can face the brutal truth of her existence squarely. As a cripple, I swagger.
>
> —Nancy Mairs, "On Being a Cripple"

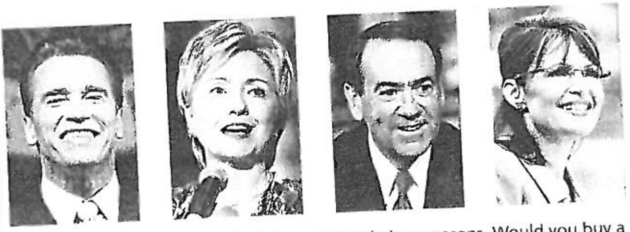
The paragraph takes some risks because the writer is expressing feelings that may make readers unsure how to react. Indeed, Mairs herself admits that she doesn't completely understand her own feelings and motives. Yet the very admission of uncertainty helps her to build a bridge to readers.

### RESPOND •

1. Consider the ethos of each of the following public figures. Then describe one or two public arguments, campaigns, or products that might benefit from their endorsements as well as several that would not.

    Oprah Winfrey—TV celebrity
    Margaret Cho—comedian
    Kate Winslet—actress
    Colin Powell—former chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of State in the George W. Bush administration
    Sarah Palin—former governor of Alaska and Republican vice-presidential candidate
    Dave Chappelle—humorist and columnist
    Jeff Gordon—NASCAR champion
    Nancy Pelosi—speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives
    Bill O'Reilly—TV news commentator
    Marge Simpson—sensible wife and mother on *The Simpsons*
    Jon Stewart—host of *The Daily Show* on Comedy Central

2. Voice is a choice. That is, writers modify the tone and style of their language depending on whom they want to seem to be. In the excerpts from this chapter, Mike Rose wants to appear fair yet confident; his language aims to convince us of his expertise. Andrew Sullivan wants to seem mature, objective, and unthreatening to traditional family values. Nancy Mairs wants to come across as frank and brutally honest about herself and her situation. In different situations, even when writing about the same topics, Rose, Sullivan, and Mairs would likely adopt different voices. Rethink and then rewrite the Sullivan passage on pp. 61–62 from a more personal, subjective viewpoint, taking on the voice (the character) of someone who is gay or has gay friends or family members and using the pronoun *I* if appropriate. Or rethink and rewrite the Mairs passage on p. 66, taking on the voice of someone, either "crippled" or not, who uses *I* much less frequently than Mairs does—perhaps not at all. You may also need to change the way that



Public figures try to control their images for obvious reasons. Would you buy a used car from any of these distinguished men and women?

you claim authority, establish credibility, and demonstrate competence as you try to present a different and a more personal or a less personal ethos.

3. Opponents of Richard Nixon, the thirty-seventh president of the United States, once raised doubts about his integrity by asking a single ruinous question: *Would you buy a used car from this man?* Create your own version of the argument of character. Begin by choosing an intriguing or controversial person or group and finding an image online. Then download the image into a word-processing file. Create a caption for the photo that is modeled after the question asked about Nixon: *Would you give this woman your email password? Would you share a campsite with this couple? Would you eat lasagna that this guy fixed?* Finally, write a serious 300-word argument that explores the character flaws or strengths of your subject(s).
4. A well-known television advertisement from the 1980s featured a soap-opera actor promoting a pain-relief medication. "I'm not a doctor," he said, "but I play one on TV." Today, many celebrities—from athletes like Venus Williams to actors like Leonardo DiCaprio—use their fame in promoting products or causes. One way or another, each case of celebrity endorsement relies on arguments based on character. Develop a one-page print advertisement for a product or service you use often—anything from soap to auto repair to cell-phone service—or a political position. There's one catch: your advertisement should rely on arguments based on character, and you should choose a spokesperson who seems the *least* likely to use or endorse your product or service. The challenge is to turn an apparent disadvantage into an advantage by exploiting character.

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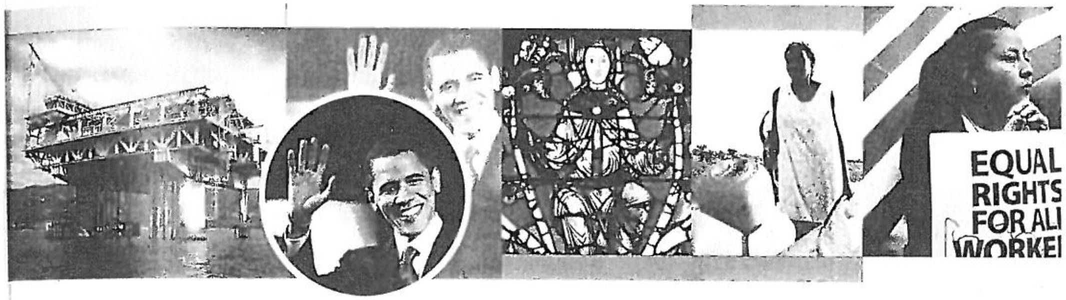
# 4

# Arguments Based on Facts and Reason: Logos



SPOCK: Logic and practical information do not seem to apply here.

McCOY: You admit that?

SPOCK: To deny the facts would be illogical, Doctor.

—from *Star Trek* episode "A Piece of the Action"

When writers need to persuade, they usually try their best to provide readers with good reasons to believe them. When the choice is between logic and emotion, many of us will side with *Star Trek*'s Dr. McCoy rather than the stern Mr. Spock. Most of us respect *appeals to logos*—arguments based on facts, evidence, and reason—but like the good doctor, we're inclined to test the facts against our feelings and against the ethos of those making the appeal. Aristotle, among the first philosophers to write about persuasion, gives us a place to begin. He divided proofs based on facts and reason into two kinds—those derived from what we call *hard evidence* (Aristotle described these as *inartistic appeals*—facts, clues, statistics, testimonies, witnesses) and those based on *reason and common*