



A Whale-Bus

PROGRESS? HOW PATHETIC!

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Imagine pulling into your local farmer's co-op, where hippies, "traddies," and other divergent elements of our modern melting pot all coalesce in the interests of health, localism, and fresh asparagus.

You park your dinged-up Ford Explorer, bedecked with rear-view Rosary and other ostentatious sacramentals, in the only available parking spot. As you exit the vehicle, fumbling with your keys and shopping list, you notice that the Prius you've inattentively parked next to is so adorned with adhesive political messaging that it looks like a leftist bumper-sticker emporium: icons of Marx and Che keep company with "I Support Planned Parenthood," "Coexist," and "I'm Non-Judgmental and I Vote!"

There must be more than a dozen decals, simultaneously assaulting your intellect and senses with offensive thoughts and substandard graphic design. The chaos is getting to you. Then, as if guided by preternatural help, your eyes land on a sticky slogan you've never before seen, and it helps to contextualize all the others, for it reads: "MY *PATHOS* RAN OVER YOUR *LOGOS*."

Alas, there is order amid the chaos!

It is my contention that the progressivist spoils rhetoric by giving *pathos* rather than *logos* the central position among the rhetorical appeals, and the effect of such an inversion is dangerous, for emotion unhinged from reason is like powerful wild horse infuriate with passion.

If we extend our simile by incorporating the mob mentality and a dastardly provocateur, then we have a cautionary parable about a madman instigating a stampede, with all its potential for death and destruction.

But let me back up and give some of the principles that govern the subject under consideration.

According to Aristotle, in any given rhetorical situation, the rhetor has three "appeals" he can make to his audience: *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*. Simply explained, *logos* is reason, *ethos* is character, and *pathos* is feeling.

Because *logos* pertains to the subject matter, *ethos* to the speaker, and *pathos* to the audience, the first

appeal has more of the nature of objectivity to it, while the others are necessarily subjective as they pertain to persons — though, of course, standards of ethical goodness are objective, and standards of beauty that can move the human heart are not entirely arbitrary.

Because he joined rhetoric to logic — whereas Plato joined it to mercantile pursuits! — Aristotle's approach to rhetoric is very *logos*-centered. We can understand Plato's mistrust of rhetoric as the notable rhetors of his day, the sophists, were responsible for the death his mentor, Socrates.

And this illustrates why rhetoric ought to be joined to *logos*, for without having acquired the art and science of right thinking, one ought not to pursue the art of persuasive speaking: the reason why is obvious; in addition to the sophists, history presents us with a rogues gallery of despots and charlatans who moved men to mischief by the clever use of speech.

Aristotle would have preferred that the rhetorician stick to reason, but he conceded that the other appeals were necessary. Man is a "*pathetic*" being, he acknowledged, meaning quite literally that we have feelings. Because of this, feeling must be incorporated into rhetoric, but not given the centrality that belongs to reason.

The three rhetorical appeals have an affinity to the three transcendentals: *logos* corresponds to truth, *ethos* to goodness, and *pathos* to beauty. Far be it from me to downplay either pathos or beauty, but certain beauties have been known to turn men's heads away from reason, which accounts for the more decadent aspects of [romanticism](#).

I make no claim to understand the theology of [Hans Urs von Balthasar](#), but I do know a little about his heretical leanings, including not only his eschatological "hope" for an empty Hell, but also his bizarre Christology concerning Our Lord's [descent thither](#).

Von Balthasar is sometimes called the "theologian of beauty," as he apparently wrote a great deal about it in his theological tomes. But if my understanding is correct, he did with this third transcendental precisely what we ought not to do with it: untether it from the other two, or — probably more accurately — he put it in the lead position over the others.

Without truth, beauty can mislead us, leading us to find her in what is contrary to the law of God, and therefore contrary to reason, to *logos*. To give an obvious example, God made the female anatomy to be beautiful to the male, and this is no bad thing.

Beauty is the *splendor ordinis* (splendor of order) or the *splendor formae* (splendor of form). Speaking abstractly and dispassionately in purely aesthetic terminology, one may note that there is a more perfect proportionality, or order, in one or another specimen of the female form, yet we must ever be mindful of the words of Our Lord: "whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:28).

The undeniable *logical truth* of that statement, and our obligation to conform to it for the sake of *ethical goodness* lead us to discipline (yet not destroy) our pursuit of the *pathos* of beauty.

Saint Augustine rightly called God the "beauty ever ancient and ever new," but when Saint John set out to speak of Christ's eternal generation, the Holy Ghost gave him to use the word *logos*, not either of the Greek words for beauty, *kallos* or *hōraios*.

There was a primacy to *logos* in the best of Greek thought, and that concept ripened in the Hellenized world so that, "in the fulness of time" (Gal. 4:4) it would be there as a personal, proper name of the Second Person of the Trinity. We can adequately appreciate His beauty only when our reason has been elevated by grace to know Him and our will has been moved to love His goodness.

From the high-brow heterodoxies of the ex-Jesuit von Balthasar, let us move to the lowbrow journalism of the popular still-Jesuit, James Martin, who loves to extol [false mercy](#). What Christian virtue is more beautiful than mercy?

We all love mercy; we all *count* on it. Inasmuch as we have received grace, we have received mercy, and we ought to show it to others, as is manifest from Our Lord's [parable of the unmerciful servant](#) and the fifth Beatitude. Our Lady is the Mother of Mercy, the saints were all agents of divine mercy.

Yet, the beautiful appeal to mercy can, in the mind of one bereft of *logos*, be perverted into something contrary to reason; it can and often does become an invitation to moral libertinism that also contradicts *ethos*.

Hence James Martin's nonstop cheerleading for unnatural sins of lust and the people who commit them. Frequently, his defense of the unspeakable is couched in terms of an emotional appeal to stop being "mean" to homosexuals, for doing so is not merciful.

Tugging at the heartstrings of his readers by showing how cruel "anti-gay" people can be, he elicits sympathy not only for persons who are allegedly being abused, but also for the cause for which they stand, which is itself inherently mortally sinful.

See [this Twitter thread](#), for example, which includes a real gem: "LGBT issues seem to bring out the mean in people, too." I replied to this (in a non-mean way) by saying, "Let's take a balanced approach in our analysis. Vice, in general, tends to bring out the worst in people. Some have even been saying mean things about Jeffrey Epstein" — which raises the ethical question as to whether it is even possible to be "mean" to a #MeToo villain.

Following Martin's method, if I were a Nazi and wanted to defend my cause, I could say how mean the Communists are to our people. I could conversely argue in favor of Communism by showing how mean Nazis and "Fascists" are to us. (A "Fascist," by the way, is generally anyone that the speaker does not like).

Amid all the positioning for superior victim status, questions of truth and falsity, good and evil get set aside, which plays into the progressivist cause. *Pathos* is the most useful defense for the indefensible.

James Martin recently retweeted [the tweet](#) of one Michael Bayer, who announced a new "ministry for LGBTQ+ people," called "Affirmed," wherein, "every person is affirmed as made in image of God, called to deeper relationship with Jesus, and invited to share their gifts" (I note in passing the progressive aversion to definite and indefinite articles, those perfectly innocent parts of speech).

There is here an appeal to mercy, to *affirm* people. Affirming *people* is good, right? But do we affirm wife-beaters, serial adulterers, pederasts, racists, drug-dealers, gun-runners, and mercenary capitalists who defraud workers of their wages?

These people need mercy and affirmation just as much as the others, right? But they don't fit into the progressivist narrative, which is very selective in identifying recipients of mercy. And what of that work

of mercy, "admonish the sinner"? Perhaps "Affirmed" should have its name changed to "Admonished."

The *pathetic* progressivist approach to mercy has been further augmented and institutionalized since the publication of *Amoris Laetitia*, which offers a "forgiveness" and mercy that are distorted, house-of-mirrors simulacra of the genuine items.

While Christian forgiveness and mercy are supernally beautiful things, there is something ugly about the habitual adulterer, with no purpose of amendment, being welcome to receive Holy Communion.

Grace heals hardened sinners (if they cooperate, which is part of the pure mystery of grace and free will), but the notion of God overlooking ill will and impenitence flies in the face of the Gospel: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings [beautiful image, no?], *and thou wouldst not?* [Ah! But the beauty is stifled by the ugliness of ill will!]" (Matt. 23:37).

In the next verse, we are told what was to happen: "Behold, your house shall be left to you, desolate," which prophesy [was brutally fulfilled](#). (There will be a beautiful ending, though; when its people respond to grace, Jerusalem [will return to Our Lord](#): "For I say to you, you shall not see me henceforth *till you say: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord*" [Matt. 23:37]).

There is a profoundly unChristian aesthetic in the image of the hardened sinner who will not let go of his sins being *unconditionally* embraced by God. Would it not be cruel for the Good Shepherd to feed his wayward sheep with food that would harm or even kill them?

Yet that is what happens when the person in mortal sin receives Holy Communion. The shepherd who knowingly gives Holy Communion to his adulterous sheep poisons them by allowing his flock to eat and drink judgment to themselves and become guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord (cf. [1 Cor. 11:26-30](#)).

Cardinal Burke, the Darth Vader figure in the progressivist *legendarium*, recently made an excellent point regarding the canonically mandated denial of Holy Communion to pro-abortion politicians, [telling Martha](#)

[MacCallum](#), "It's not a punishment. It's actually a favor to these people to tell them don't approach, *because if they approach, they commit sacrilege*" (my emphasis). There is *logos*, and *ethos*, and *pathos* — all in good order.

But the inverted mercy of the progressivists is profoundly *unmerciful*, which fact probably betrays its actual origins.

Seventy-two years ago, Brother Francis gave a name to this wrongheaded prioritizing of *pathos* over *logos* in Catholic thinking: "[Sentimental Theology](#)." And when the sentimental theologian enters the domain of rhetoric, he becomes terribly *pathetic*, and we must not fear subjecting his *pathos* to the careful judgment of *logos* — even if we don't have to make a bumper sticker about it.

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The [photo](#) shows, "The Whale Bus," a view of life in the 21st-century, as imagined in 1899. Drawing by Jean-Marc Côté.

