**Giving Emotion Its Due: An Ethically Based Approach to Pathos in Argumentation**

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Selections from “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” by Martin Luther King Jr.

**Selection 1**:

(22) Now about injunctions: We have an injunction and we’re going into court tomorrow morning to fight this illegal, unconstitutional injunction. All we say to America is, “Be true to what you said on paper.” If I lived in China or even Russia, or any totalitarian country, maybe I could understand some of these illegal injunctions. Maybe I could understand the denial of certain basic First Amendment privileges, because they hadn’t committed themselves to that over there. But somewhere I read of the freedom of assembly. Somewhere I read of the freedom of speech. Somewhere I read of the freedom of press. Somewhere I read that the greatness of America is the right to protest for right. And so just as I say, we aren’t going to let dogs or water hoses turn us around, we aren’t going to let any injunction turn us around. We are going on.

**Selection 2**:  
  
(32) Now, let me say as I move to my conclusion that we’ve got to give ourselves to this struggle until the end. Nothing would be more tragic than to stop at this point in Memphis. We’ve got to see it through. And when we have our march, you need to be there. If it means leaving work, if it means leaving school—be there. Be concerned about your brother. You may not be on strike. But either we go up together, or we go down together.

(33) Let us develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness. One day a man came to Jesus, and he wanted to raise some questions about some vital matters of life. At points he wanted to trick Jesus, and show him that he knew a little more than Jesus knew and throw him off base....[[1]](#footnote-1)

(34) Now that question could have easily ended up in a philosophical and theological debate. But Jesus immediately pulled that question from mid-air, and placed it on a dangerous curve between Jerusalem and Jericho. And he talked about a certain man, who fell among thieves. You remember that a Levite and a priest passed by on the other side. They didn’t stop to help him. And finally a man of another race came by. He got down from his beast, decided not to be compassionate by proxy. But he got down with him, administered first aid, and helped the man in need. Jesus ended up saying, this was the good man, this was the great man, because he had the capacity to project the “I” into the “thou,” and to be concerned about his brother.

(35) Now you know, we use our imagination a great deal to try to determine why the priest and the Levite didn’t stop. At times we say they were busy going to a church meeting, an ecclesiastical gathering, and they had to get on down to Jerusalem so they wouldn’t be late for their meeting. At other times we would speculate that there was a religious law that “One who was engaged in religious ceremonials was not to touch a human body twenty-four hours before the ceremony.” And every now and then we begin to wonder whether maybe they were not going down to Jerusalem—or down to Jericho, rather to organize a “Jericho Road Improvement Association.” That’s a possibility. Maybe they felt that it was better to deal with the problem from the causal root, rather than to get bogged down with an individual effect.

(36) But I’m going to tell you what my imagination tells me. It’s possible that those men were afraid. You see, the Jericho road is a dangerous road. I remember when Mrs. King and I were first in Jerusalem. We rented a car and drove from Jerusalem down to Jericho. And as soon as we got on that road, I said to my wife, “I can see why Jesus used this as the setting for his parable.” It’s a winding, meandering road. It’s really conducive for ambushing. You start out in Jerusalem, which is about 1200 miles—or rather 1,200 feet above sea level.[[2]](#footnote-2) And by the time you get down to Jericho, fifteen or twenty minutes later, you’re about 2,200 feet below sea level.[[3]](#footnote-3) That’s a dangerous road. In the days of Jesus it came to be known as the “Bloody Pass.” And you know, it’s possible that the priest and the Levite looked over that man on the ground and wondered if the robbers were still around. Or it’s possible that they felt that the man on the ground was merely faking. And he was acting like he had been robbed and hurt, in order to seize them over there, lure them there for quick and easy seizure. And so the first question that the priest asked—the first question that the Levite asked was, “If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?” But then the Good Samaritan came by. And he reversed the question: “If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?”

(37) That’s the question before you tonight. Not, “If I stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to my job. Not, “If I stop to help the sanitation workers what will happen to all of the hours that I usually spend in my office every day and every week as a pastor?” The question is not, “If I stop to help this man in need, what will happen to me?” The question is, “If I do not stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to them?” That’s the question.

(38) Let us rise up tonight with a greater readiness. Let us stand with a greater determination. And let us move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge to make America what it ought to be. We have an opportunity to make America a better nation. And I want to thank God, once more, for allowing me to be here with you.

**Selection 3**:  
  
(52) And they were telling me—. Now, it doesn’t matter, now. It really doesn’t matter what happens now. I left Atlanta this morning, and as we got started on the plane, there were six of us. The pilot said over the public address system, “We are sorry for the delay, but we have Dr. Martin Luther King on the plane. And to be sure that all of the bags were checked, and to be sure that nothing would be wrong with on the plane, we had to check out everything carefully. And we’ve had the plane protected and guarded all night.”

(53) And then I got into Memphis. And some began to say the threats, or talk about the threats that were out. What would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers?

(54) Well, I don’t know what will happen now. We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn’t matter with me now, because I’ve been to the mountaintop.

(55) And I don’t mind.

(56) Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will. And He’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over. And I’ve seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!

(57) And so I’m happy, tonight.

(58) I’m not worried about anything.

(59) I’m not fearing any man!

(60) Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!!

**Selection 4**:

And So I Stayed  
Jennie Willoughby

(1) The first time he called me a f\*\*\*ing bitch was on our honeymoon. I found out years later he had kicked his first wife on theirs.

(2) A month later, he physically prevented me from leaving the house. Less than two months after that, I filed a protective order with the police because he punched in the glass on our front door while I was locked inside. Just after our one year anniversary, he pulled me naked and dripping from the shower to yell at me.

(3) Everyone loved him. People commented all the time how lucky I was. Strangers complimented him to me every time we went out. But in my home, the abuse was insidious.

(4) The threats were personal, the terror was real, and yet I stayed.

(5) When I tried to get help, I was counseled to consider carefully how what I said might affect his career. And so I kept my mouth shut and stayed.

(6) I was told, yes, he was deeply flawed, but then again, so was I. And so I worked on myself and stayed.

(7) If he was a monster all the time, perhaps it would have been easier to leave, but he could be kind and sensitive. And so I stayed.

(8) He cried and apologized, and so I stayed.

(9) He offered to get help and even went to a few counseling sessions and therapy groups. And so I stayed.

(10) He belittled my intelligence and destroyed my confidence, and so I stayed.

(11) I felt ashamed and trapped, and so I stayed.

(12) Friends and clergy didn’t believe me, and so I stayed.

(13) I was pregnant and so I stayed.

(14) I lost the pregnancy and became depressed and so I stayed.

(15) Abuse is indifferent to education level, socioeconomic status, race, age, or gender, and no one can ever know the dynamics of another’s relationship. My cycle continued for four more years. Afterward I let go and welcomed the hard work of healing and forgiveness. My experience made me stronger and able to love more deeply, but my heart breaks for him. In the end, who was the real victim of his choices.

1. The recording of the speech has a gap here. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. More accurately 2,474 feet above sea level. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. More accurately, 846 feet below sea level. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)