

On the Very Idea of “Reinstating Emotion in Educational Thinking”

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reinstate — to instate again; restore to a former condition, position

instate — to put in a particular status, position, or rank; install. 2) obsolete — to endow;
invest (to confer on or upon).

endow — to give, provide

confer — to give, to bring together, converse

put — to push, thrust, sting, goad, drive, impel; to cause to be in a specified or understood position; to direct with steady attention; to impose

install — to place in an office, rank...with formality or ceremony; to establish in a place or condition; to fix in position for use.¹

To begin with, I must say that I am startled by the title of this paper, which poignantly suggests the manner in which “emotion” is to be written up, is to be named and installed, or, better yet, restored to its proper place, educationally speaking. One might go so far as to say, the imposition of this epitaph — “reinstating emotion in educational thinking” — weighs upon me, so much so that, to all appearances, I will only vaguely approach and touch upon the text’s argument, which, even today, many might suppose is the very body of a philosophical paper. I do not agree with this.

“Reinstating emotion in educational thinking.” Such a title, I take it, calls for sallies, which may appear unusual in this setting, because at best they are slanted or indirect in their meaning, merely asides to what Marjorie O’Loughlin believes is at issue. I quote her: “The question I want to raise here is: Why has emotion or affect remained discursively submerged in education?” The question is raised upon the subtitle: “the nature of the ‘problem.’”

So, why has “emotion” remained discursively submerged? What is the nature of the problem here? And further, how might one who writes ever come *face to face with a problem*? Here I allude to Jacques Derrida’s arresting reminder,

Problema can signify *projection* or *protection*, that which one poses or throws in front of oneself, *either* as the projection of a project, of a task to accomplish, *or* as the protection created by a substitute, a prosthesis that we put forth in order to represent, replace, shelter, or dissimulate ourselves, or so as to hide something unavowable — like a shield (*problema* also means shield, clothing as barrier or guard-barrier) behind which one guards oneself *in secret* or *in shelter* in case of danger.²

Given all of Derrida’s clues, my thinking runs as follows. Does the title “Reinstating emotion in educational thinking” reveal the task O’Laughlin calls on us to accomplish? I believe that it does. But as well, I believe that the concept of “reinstating” is a prosthesis, that is, the viewing of a claim which is unavowable in these terms, in terms of a philosophy of the concept. The unavowable claim concerns what moves us without our knowing why; it concerns the question of pathos or the patho-logical” (which in its Greek root denotes “suffering discourse”). The conception or setting of the author’s task, the conception or posing of a problem, is, I believe, more or less the death of this claim. In other words, the concept is like a shield; on the one side

of it, we are safe and protected; on the other, lies chaos and old night. On the one side of it, we know ourselves to be masters; on the other, we are mastered. Thus, as Maurice Blanchot writes,

The meaning of speech...requires that before any word is spoken there must be a sort of immense hecatomb, a preliminary flood plunging all of creation into a total sea. God had created living things, but man had to annihilate them. Not until then did they take on meaning for him.³

Blanchot's idea of the power of speech is Hegelian, to be sure: "The being which negates the given real dialectically also preserves it as negated — that is, as unreal or 'ideal': it preserves what is negated as the 'meaning' of the discourse...Hence, it is 'conscious' of what it negates." The conception of the world, the production of speech, is, he writes, "death, the amazing power of the negative, or freedom, through whose work existence is detached from itself and made significant."⁴

This is why I suggested just now that the title of this essay is akin to an epitaph: it is a tribute to what dies or passes away with us, in our speaking of it. But why do I think that this title, the concept of reinstatement, brings nothing to life again? Perhaps because the author speaks of *pathos* in the manner of one who work establish its place, what is more, in the manner of one who would install or fix it in a useful position, or a well-understood position, rather than keep it discursively submerged. Rather than write it off altogether. *Pathos* is (purely and simply) written up under the name of an "emotion." Whence my sally, "I am startled by this title" because I am taken aback by the force, the motivation, behind these few words, the strength of interest they express. One seeks as an author to reestablish something named emotion in educational thinking. To formally put into education. To make sense of it, make it educationally useful. More precisely, in trying to accomplish this task, one dares to bring two "subject-matters," say, two of a kind, together again, in the hopes that they will somehow, once again, find a way to closely converse — the subject of emotion and the subject of rationality. Or, to employ two of the author's terms, one dares to herald the subject of "practical consciousness" while in the company of the subject of "discursive consciousness."

In light of this, here is another sally: Plato attempted to "instate" the "problem" of "emotion" in Book I of *The Republic*. Bk I commences with Socrates' recollection of his descent to Athen's harbor in order both to pray and to sight-see at a new festival held in honor of a goddess named Bendis. Bendis is a figurative of Artemis, goddess of darkness and ambiguity, sister to Apollo. Socrates, of course, lives at the behest of Apollo, god of light and measure. Socrates tells us that he had just left the harbour and begun his ascent up the hill, across the river along a narrow causeway which let into the city, when he was accosted by certain young Athenians and a foreigner named Thrasymachus. Bk I is mainly about the close conversation Socrates and Thrasymachus have concerning the question of justice, how this good is conceivable. They are, I suggest, two of a kind, two sophists. But Plato sees them as quite different, at least at the time when they first meet: the foreigner, Thrasymachus, is a sophist; Socrates, the citizen, is a clever speaker who speaks the truth.

One of the pivotal events of their meeting is when Thrasymachus lunges out at Socrates like a "wild beast in search of prey." The awfulness of the sophist's

appearance, the throe of what he utters, momentarily takes Socrates aback. He shrinks in the face of the sophist's outburst, is "struck with amazement" but still manages (somehow) to fling a gaze back at Thrasymachus, and thus star his beastliness down. "I think that if I had not looked at him before he looked at me, I should have been struck dumb."⁴

Now, it is the gaze of Socrates, I believe, which catches Thrasymachus out in the end. It is by way of that gaze, by way of its remarkable philosophical style, its bold determination to stop and look, to set upon whatever finds harbor there, down there in the Peiraeus, that Plato's Socrates apprehends the elemental threat of wild fire, the impudent challenge and vehemence of free flowing passion.

Clearly, it is not enough to please with it, for it is clever. Instead, one must attend to it in such a manner that it calms down, takes a more tempered, manly shape, achieves if nothing else, a better focus. The gaze of Greek husbandry meets its other in such a way that the latter becomes somewhat conversant rather than simply ruse and outrageous. Nevertheless, something dies when conquered by the yoke. The gaze of irony confronts a wild beast, leads him up and out of the harbor and into the city. Socrates' way, the way of the concept, serves to represent the death, the negation, of what flows freely. Wherefore Socrates' claim at the end of Bk I: "I know nothing.... I have been a glutton. I have feasted on what moves you, Thrasymachus, and still, I know nothing." When Plato sees a Thrasymachus he sees only a problem — something that needs to be solved because it is a danger to the citizen. In a word, the sophist is subject to his emotions. According to Plato, emotion ought to be instated, ceremoniously incorporated into the body of Socratic thinking, into the subject of discursive consciousness. Emotion must come under the rule of reason.

Now, after reading her essay, I have no doubts that O'Loughlin believes she is against Platonic sorts of instatement. She decries curricula which ensure that "emotion remains firmly subordinated to the operation of a quite narrow account of rationality." She decries theories and practices which feed the "fetishism of abstraction." She decries the awful yearning to transcend the "dimension of practical consciousness." Nevertheless, I am left with a clutch of questions. For instance, how does one come to an understanding of what is "beyond feeling or affect," say, the "frequently conflicting longings of the body?" More precisely, what does one mean to say with "deep emotion": or, then again, "practical consciousness?" What does one mean to say with terms such as "felt opinion," "self-feeling," "material activity," "embodied experiences," "embodied emotionality?" What is more, how does one publicly, civically, recognize the difference which matter? How does one assist another to "get at... 'emotion's body' ... as a totality, (as) a feeling, mobile complex of lived bodies, intentional value, emotions, and affects of a 'self'" (Is this what Nietzsche shows us?)

One last sally: O'Loughlin has spoken loosely, too loosely, I think, of "reinstating emotion" in educational thinking. It is true, this is a text whose words are running fast and loose and ambiguously. The body of her text is not exactly a text, at any rate, not exactly a philosophical one. It is rather a text which evinces the "frequently conflicting longings of its author's body." It is a well-titled (and richly subtitled) text

but the terms of its arguments know nothing, prove nothing, speak of nothing. And yet, I find that *they utter everything that is utterly true*, just as Blanchot says,

Speech is not sufficient for the truth it contains. Take the trouble to listen to a single work; in that work nothingness is struggling and toiling away, it digs tirelessly, doing its utmost to find a way out, nullifying what encloses it — it is infinite disquiet, formless and nameless vigilance. Already the seal which held this nothingness within the limits of the work and within the guide of its meaning has been broken: now, there is access to other names, names which are less fixed, still vague, more capable of adapting to the savage freedom of the negative essence — they are unstable groups, no longer terms, but *movements of terms, an endless sliding of “turns of phrase” which do not lead anywhere*.⁵

In turn, I have taken the trouble to listen to a single title and this because something (pathetic) struggles there within the place, if you will, of its nomination, something which digs at me, startles me, brushes me away. For the title effects, I think, what the later Nietzsche calls the “imposition of Platonism,” the rule of the concept of Idea. As a title it honorably seeks to invert, he might say, but nonetheless it remains ill with the history of metaphysics. To sum up, the title O’Loughlin has chosen belongs to a metaphysical tradition of educational thinking, a tradition prefigured in the gaze Plato’s Socrates gives to pathos, a gaze, a dialectic, which attempts to corral the pathological, the interminable sliding of turns of phrase, turns of bodies, which do not lead anywhere. *How does one begin to instate that in educational thinking?*

1. *Webster’s New World Dictionary* (New York: Merriam-Wester, 1962).

2. Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 11–12.

3. Maurice Blanchot, “Literature and the Right to Death,” in *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays*, trans. Lydia David and ed. P. Adams Sitney (Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1981), 61.

4. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. A.D. Lindsay and ed. Terence Irwin (London: J.M. Dent, 1992), 336d.

5. Blanchot, “Literature and the Right to Death,” 45; italics added.