

NOTES TOWARD A METAPHYSICS OF WONDER:  
APPRECIATIVE REFLECTIONS ON LEONI HENNING'S  
*O PRAGMATISMO EM LIPMAN E SUA INFLUÊNCIA NA AMÉRICA LATINA*

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Abstract:

"Notes toward a metaphysic of wonder" is the outcome of a "Reciprocal Inquiry" in which Leoni Henning and I participated. In our correspondence, we moved very fast: I thought each of us surprised the other. As a result, I found myself writing about astonishment more elaborately than I'd intended to. Before long I was involved not only with wondering but with awe and bewilderment and amazement, and eager to connect it all with philosophy in Latin America. So these "Notes..." are just a foretaste of what I hope will someday be a more extensive article, but which is only hinted at in the present version. Leoni Maria Padilha Henning's thoughtful and informative paper, "Pragmatism in Matthew Lipman and its influence in Latin America" is singularly helpful in showing the relevance of Philosophy for Children to Latin-American education. Indeed, the intellectual momentum it generates is a powerful invitation to other educators and scholars to take up the issues where she leaves off. I'd like to take up just one of these issues, one that, on the surface at least, seems to be particularly unpromising. I'm referring to the near-unanimity that exists among scholars with regard to the tradition, descended from Aristotle, that philosophy begins in wonder. My intention is not to attempt to refute this claim, but to show its complicity in defending the traditional non-reflective paradigm of education, which has sturdily resisted the introduction of philosophy into the schools, just as it resists the conversion of the classroom into a community of inquiry. With the proper pedagogy, philosophy can readily be taught to children, and the teaching of philosophy for children can readily be taught to teachers. It is not essential that wonder precede philosophy: it can just as well follow it.

Keywords: Wonder; Philosophy for children; Latin America

Notas para uma metafísica do assombro: reflexões sobre *O pragmatismo em Lipman e sua influência na América Latina*, de Leoni Henning

Resumo:

"Notas para uma metafísica do assombro" é o resultado de uma "investigação recíproca", da qual Leoni Henning e eu participamos. Em nossa correspondência, nós mudamos muito rapidamente: Eu penso que cada um de nós surpreendeu o outro. Como resultado, encontrei-me a escrever sobre o assombro de maneira mais elaborada do que eu pretendia. Em pouco tempo eu estava envolvido não só com o assombro, mas também com a admiração, a perplexidade e o espanto, e ávido para ligar tudo isso com a filosofia na América Latina. Portanto, estas "Notas..." são apenas uma mostra do que espero que algum dia venha a ser um artigo mais extenso, aqui apenas insinuado. O artigo,

reflexivo e informativo, de Leoni Henning: "O pragmatismo em Lipman e sua influência na América Latina" é singularmente útil para mostrar a relevância da Filosofia para Crianças na educação latino-americana. Na verdade, o impulso intelectual que ele gera é um poderoso convite para outros educadores e estudiosos para assumirem as questões que ela deixa em aberto. Eu gostaria de me ater a apenas uma dessas questões que, pelo menos na superfície, não parece ser particularmente promissora. Estou me referindo à quase unanimidade, existente entre os estudiosos no que diz respeito à tradição, iniciada em Aristóteles, de que a filosofia começa com o assombro. Minha intenção não é tentar refutar essa reivindicação, mas mostrar sua cumplicidade ao defender o paradigma tradicional não-reflexivo da educação, que tem resistido vigorosamente à introdução da filosofia nas escolas, como resiste à conversão da sala de aula em uma comunidade de investigação. Com a pedagogia adequada, a filosofia pode ser facilmente ensinada às crianças, e o ensino de filosofia para crianças pode ser facilmente ensinado aos professores. Não é essencial que o assombro preceda à filosofia: ele pode muito bem sucedê-la.

Palavras-chave: Assombro; Filosofia para crianças; América Latina

Notas para una metafísica del asombro: reflexiones sobre *El pragmatismo en Lipman y su influencia en América Latina*, de Leoni Henning

Resumen:

"Notas para una metafísica del asombro" es el resultado de una "investigación recíproca", en la que Leoni Henning y yo hemos participado. En nuestra correspondencia, nos movimos muy rápidamente: Yo pienso que cada uno de nosotros sorprendió el otro. Como resultado de ello, me encontré escribiendo acerca del asombro de una manera más elaborada de lo que pensaba. Pronto me vi involucrado no sólo con el asombro, sino también con la admiración, la perplejidad, y el espanto, y deseoso de conectarlo todo con la filosofía en América Latina. Por lo tanto, estas "Notas ..." son sólo una muestra de lo que espero algún día sea un artículo más largo, pero que sólo se insinúa en esta versión. El artículo reflexivo e informativo de Leoni Henning, " El pragmatismo en Lipman y su influencia en América Latina" es particularmente útil para mostrar la importancia de la Filosofía para Niños en la educación latino-americana. De hecho, el impulso intelectual que el genera es una poderosa invitación a otros educadores y estudiosos para que asuman las cuestiones que ella deja en abierto. Quiero atenerme a una de esas cuestiones que, al menos en la superficie, parece no ser muy prometedora. Me refiero a la casi unanimidad que existe entre los estudiosos con respecto a la tradición, que tuvo su inicio con Aristóteles, de que la filosofía comienza con el asombro. Mi intención no es tratar de refutar esta afirmación, sino mostrar su cumplicidad con la defensa del paradigma tradicional de la educación no-reflexiva, que tiene una gran resistencia a la introducción de la filosofía en las escuelas, e igualmente resiste a la conversión de la clase en una comunidad de investigación. Con una pedagogía adecuada, la filosofía puede ser fácilmente enseñada a los niños, y la enseñanza de la filosofía para niños puede ser fácil de enseñar a los maestros. No es esencial que el asombro preceda a la filosofía: el puede muy bien sucederla.

Palabras clave: Asombro; Filosofía para Niños; América Latina



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Matthew Lipman

I

What follows is a series of comments on Leoni Maria Padilha Henning's article, "O pragmatismo em Lipman e sua influência na América Latina" published in this issue of *Childhood & Philosophy* from which I've previously read an English translation by the author. These remarks of hers were based on her as yet unpublished dissertation, *Lipman Educator* (2003). In discussing her treatment of the topic of *wonder*, I find myself continuing a reciprocal inquiry which began a year or two ago. Since Aristotle first put forth the notion that philosophy begins in wonder, and since the Philosophy for Children curriculum treats that notion only cursorily, the reflections that follow are based primarily on her article.

Leoni Maria Padilha Henning's thoughtful and informative paper, "Lipman in Latin America: Contributions to the Educational Field and Applicability of the New Approach," is singularly helpful in showing the relevance of Philosophy for Children to Latin-American education. Indeed, the intellectual momentum it generates is a powerful invitation to other educators and scholars to take up the issues where she leaves off.

I'd like to take up just one of these issues, one that, on the surface at least, seems to be particularly unpromising. I'm referring to the near-unanimity that exists among scholars with regard to the tradition, descended from Aristotle, that philosophy begins in wonder. My intention is not to attempt to refute this claim, but to show its complicity in defending the traditional non-reflective paradigm of education, which has sturdily resisted the introduction of philosophy into the schools, just as it resists the conversion of the classroom into a community of

inquiry.

Thus Henning writes:

“As one of his basic ideas, Lipman tries to rescue astonishment from the historical tradition of philosophy, which people have to cultivate in a world that sometimes seems chaotic, other times wonderful or amazing. In Latin America’s case, for example, this astonishment in relation to what seems disorganized or different could result in an attitude of openness and understanding the society in a way that could facilitate judgments based on criteria and sensitive to context. Seeing wonder as the main characteristic of philosophy, that is, to ask questions when confronted by what appears astonishing, Lipman emphasizes its role in improving dialogue, helping people investigate seriously and wisely what the possible solutions of their problems might be and also, to think creatively through the richness of alternatives and possible worlds.”

Henning thus concludes, and I agree with her, that the main characteristic of philosophy is its “asking questions before what appears astonishing.”

## II

What, we wonder, are the sources of philosophy? Not sources, Aristotle tells us: source. It has but a single source: wonder. *Philosophy begins in wonder.*

Now philosophy can be best understood as dialogue, and it is out of dialogue that it emerges. Therefore we would expect the relationship between wonder and philosophy to be dialectical (just as we would expect *Becoming* to be produced by the dialectical relationship between *Being* and *Non-Being*.)

But to produce philosophy, wonder must be polarized. There is wonder, and there are wonders. It must be understood as the wondrous, comprised of mystery and problematicity, awe and appreciation, stupor and sensibility.

When wonder occurs, it is due to the fact that the road ahead is being



divided into a steadily widening path and a steadily narrowing path. The awesome widening path in time obliterates all the details of its existence: one's relationship to it moves in the direction of the mystical, while the narrowing path moves in the direction of the scientific. It is out of the dynamic, explosive relationship between these two movements, that thinking is generated.

The acknowledgement that wonder has a role to play in education has always been a grudging admission. It's connection with thinking has been continually overlook, and so has the connection between education and philosophy. Children are expected to learn, and at most to understand, but they are generally not expected to think, let alone think for themselves. Yet the cultivation of thinking lags behind virtually every other aspect of children's education: it is simply not taught. And even when it *is* taught, the effort is seldom to liberate the child's judgment, imagination, compassion, friendship and a host of other components by means of which the child might be able to master his or her educational situation. The child has only that pathetic, persistent "why?" as well as, somehow, the consciousness that he or she is on the right path, the one which, if taken, leads in the direction of inquiry. Unfortunately, the tradition of normal, non-reflective education seeks to preserve the notion that genuine questioning, the probing of experience, is to be reserved for those in positions of authority.

### III

For Henning, the chief characteristic of philosophy is its persistence in asking questions in the face of stupefying bewilderment. It is in this sense that questioning can be justified as the basis of all inquiry. The historical tradition of philosophy has to be cultivated even if it appears to be, at times, chaotic or, on other occasions, amazing nonsense. Philosophical ideas may be imprisoned, but philosophy can explode the doors off these prisons by means of liberating ideas

like difference and openness, or like alternatives and possible worlds, or like the need for criteria and for sensitivity to context.

Philosophy does begin in wonder when that wonder is already showing signs of becoming articulated, of becoming heterogeneous, of possessing a unique and characteristic quality whose presence directs the investigation. This quality, which Santayana calls "essence" and which Dewey and Bosanquet call "tertiary," permeates and drenches each and every situation in a unique and induplicable fashion, for each quality is what it is and not something else. Each situation guides the inquiry into itself by means of a quality like Peirce's Firstness, which is the spoor that conducts the hunter to his quarry, and to inquiry to its resolution.

#### IV

Indeed, not only does our astonishment or wonder often fail to lead to inquiry, but it often fails to produce the questioning it claims to generate and foster. It may do this by numbing the minds of the children who have been exposed to philosophy, convincing them and their parents that philosophy is hopelessly beyond their reach, or by dumbing down or paralyzing their recourse to their own intelligence, demonstrating that philosophy must always remain unintelligible to them.

It is only a short step, if it is a step at all, from wonder to astonishment. Henning sees in *Philosophy for Children* a proposal that the model of the child, now unidimensional because interested only in playing and consuming, be replaced by the model of "an intelligent child who likes to reason." "In fact," she adds, "in a world of violence, injustice and other serious social problems, philosophy can be an important instrument for children in the sense of helping them to make their judgments adequate, adequate given what they have to cope with in their environment."



## V

If philosophy facilitates the emergence of the child as a reasonable being, it is not philosophy as a particular set of ideas, derived from this or that philosopher's system, with which the child can resist or attack the parents, the family, the school, the economy. It is instead philosophy as a methodology of procedures, employed in the formation of communities of inquiry.

Thinking thus emerges out of our astonishment at the stupendous, out of our amazement at the bewildering, out of the vast, monolithic oneness at which we marvel. But we also marvel at the multiplicity of things, we are insatiably curious as to their variety, at where they come from and where they lead.

## VI

And so Aristotle is right to see wonder as the ground of both religion and science, both of which are succeeded by thinking—philosophical thinking in particular. Such thinking gives rise to authoritarian forms of pedagogy, from which the pedagogical aspects drop away, leaving only the authoritarianism. Authoritarian educators seek to retain what is stupendous and stunning about wonder, leaving students intellectually paralyzed and bewildered.

The authoritarian use of wonder is recounted by Hannah Arendt, in her book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. When critics of the Nazis would denounce the extermination of not just thousands but millions of people who had been classified as “superfluous populations.” the German Minister of Information, Dr. Goebbels, would denounce such reports as “fantastic enormities.” In other words, the concentration camps and death chambers were depicted as awesome and stunning, too huge to be believed. The critics' reports were nothing but enormous fabrications. Anyone capable of making such enormous but false claims, the Nazis suggested, was fully deserving of being sent to a concentration

camp.

Aristotle's contention that philosophy is born in wonder therefore has to be corrected: what is born in wonder is not just philosophy, but all the wonders capable of being thought. The risk entailed by the divided approach to wonder is that astonishment can be paralyzing: faced with forces that are amazing and astounding, many people throw their hands up in defeat. Authoritarian teachers intimidate their students by painting the knowledge establishment they represent as overwhelming. If it can prove itself fantastically huge, it need not prove itself right.

Perhaps it should be said that while those who are steeped in wonder often give birth to philosophy, wonder should rather be described as giving birth to thinking, and it is thinking which in turn gives birth to philosophy. If then it is thinking that, in a broad metaphysical sense, gives birth to philosophy, then thinking should be conceived multidimensionally rather than unidimensionally. They can be referred to as *styles of thought*, and they can be given such names as *critical thinking*, *creative thinking*, and *caring thinking*.

To the special relevance of *caring thinking* to wonder. In *Thinking in Education*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, I contended that critical thinking alone cannot be entrusted with responsibility for the making of our moral judgments, because the principles of critical thinking (e.g., precision, consistency, coherence, etc.) are too slight to be given such heavy responsibility. Caring thinking is involved wherever there are questions of value, or matters of importance, contesting with one another. This is why, earlier in this paper, I used the illustration of the Nazis, to show how the vast projects they carried out to torture and destroy human beings by the millions gave their activities, to their followers, a kind of moral grandeur. Only caring thinking has command of the values that must be taught, in the caring classroom, whatever the scale or proportions of the suffering involved.

What both Henning and I agree on (not that, as far as I can tell, we





disagree on anything) is that educators who reject Philosophy for Children on the grounds that children are incapable of philosophical thinking are usually responsible for having cultivated that incapacity in the first place, whereupon they play up the mystery, the difficulty and the wondrousness of philosophy, especially for children. But with the proper pedagogy, philosophy can readily be taught to children, and the teaching of philosophy for children can readily be taught to teachers. It is not essential that wonder precede philosophy: it can just as well follow it; as often happens when parents observe philosophy being done by their own children.

END NOTES

1. Hannah Arendt, "Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government," *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (July, 1953) 303-327.

Hannah Arendt, "The Concentration Camps," *Partisan Review*, July, 1948, pp. 743-762.

monarchy	-	honor
tyranny		fear
republic		virtue
conformitarianism		anxiety
totalitarianism		terror (loneliness, uprootedness, superfluosity)

Analogy:	Philosophy	Wonder
	Science	Curiosity
	Religion	Awe

2. One way of taking a closer look at this layout of skills, is to consider how these skills are employed in the understanding of a text or in the appreciation of a story. An example of such a spread sheet might look like this:

Communication Skills

Reading                      Listening  
Writing                      Speaking

Styles of Thinking

Critical  
Creative  
Caring

Thinking Skills

Doubting                      Reasoning                      Translating  
Deliberating                      Judging                      Interpreting

Inquiry Skills

Doubting                      Generalizing  
Questioning                      Exemplifying  
Deliberating                      Hypothesizing

Modes of Judgment

Making  
Saying  
Doing  
Feeling

Ordering Skills

Classification  
Definition  
Conceptualization