LOVING DEMOCRACY AS A PEDAGOGICAL PROBLEM: THE CRISIS IN CIVIC EDUCATION AS A FORGETTING OF EROS

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While the project of consolidating democracy into a durable and highly esteemed value in American culture has always been difficult to sustain, especially within the public schools, the struggle now assumes the character of a grave and inescapable need. Given the authoritarian and fascist resurgence across the globe, democracy and its accompanying values seem in retreat both abroad and in the United States.[1] One telling index of this national retreat is that a critical mass of Americans, nearly half the electorate, have embraced the illusion of Donald Trump's Big Lie that he won the 2020 presidential election, and "by a landslide" no less. This preposterous claim can usefully be interpreted as an instance in which all too many Americans have developed a passion to ignore what might be called reality, the truth, and the rule of law.[2] Perhaps one way to frame the upcoming 2024 election is to view it as the momentous point at which Americans shall decide who and what they affectively love more: Donald Trump or the principle of democracy.

The argument here is that the core problem with American democracy today is that not enough people in the country genuinely love democracy, especially young people. This lack of affection means they are disconnected from democracy's moral and spiritual essence. This emotional disconnection can be interpreted as the ultimate source of the nation's democratic malaise. One significant cause of this felt disconnection from democracy, arguably, is that not enough Americans could be said to "know" what democracy is in the first place. A false, externalized image of democracy is something impossible to love. So, the first step, preliminarily, would be for teachers to worry less about teaching *about* the democratic procedures and to pay more attention to how their students might learn to *be* democratic. Even if this fundamental Deweyan aim was met, however, democracy would still be conceptually orphaned without a corresponding love concept. To recover a viable sense of democracy's moral and spiritual essence, I contend, we need to think about furnishing democracy with a

[1] While the literature on this subject is growing fast, two key works are relevant here: Steven Levitsky & Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die,* New York: Broadway Books, 2018; and Sophia Rosenfeld, *Democracy and Truth: A Short History*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019.

[2] For a superb overview of the ways in which ignorance operates in contemporary times, see Jennifer Logue, "Teaching Ignorance: On the Importance of Developing Psychoanalytic Sensibilities in Education," *Philosophical Studies in Education* 50, no. 3 (2019): 105-114.

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love concept, such as Eros.[3] Certainly, Trumpism as a cultural phenomenon reflects no lack of affectation and emotional power in relation to a certain set of values; the problem is that Trump lovers are patently detached from any recognizable democratic values or aims.

With this background in mind, the first section of the paper develops a "Socratized Eros" as a form of love uniquely suited to promote democratic forms of cultural life. By employing three key Platonic heuristics, I further outline what it would mean to integrate a concept of Eros into contemporary pedagogical practice. In the second section, I draw upon a set of democratic theorists to highlight specific moral and spiritual dimensions of democracy. A synthesis of these thinkers' insights permits us to reconfigure democracy as a secular religious project in need of an erotic love discourse. Finally, I utilize the Eros concept and the appearance-reality distinction in Plato's allegory of the cave for the purpose of reinterpreting the Declaration of Independence as a journey of civic transformation.

SOCRATIC EROS AND THE NECESSARY "CORRUPTION" OF YOUTH

To meet the challenges posed by democracy's crisis of legitimacy while also recovering a sense of Eros, I suggest that teachers should consider tapping into the West's critical philosophical origins strikingly expressed in three of Plato's dialogues: the *Apology*, the allegory of the cave in the *Republic,* and in Diotima's tutelage of Socrates in the *Symposium*.

I want to suggest that Diotima's oft-cited ladder of love, whereby "she"[4] describes to Socrates the progressive education of ever higher expressions of Eros—from loving one beautiful body to loving all expressions of physical beauty, to "pregnant souls" giving birth to beautiful ideas about social justice, finally to the idea of the good itself—provides a blueprint that maps the psychic terrain of transformation which Eros is known for eliciting. Surely Plato understood as well as anyone that the energies of Eros manifest in human beings could also "go south," as it were, in calamitous and destructive ways. If "educated" in the right way, however, Eros is theorized by Plato as the power and energy that magnetically draws us ahead toward images of the good, the true and the beautiful. This is why Socrates remarks in the *Symposium* that "human nature will not easily find a better helper than Eros."[5]

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[3] I made this argument decades ago yet it still merits further development given new threats to democracy. Kerry T. Burch, *Eros as the Educational Principle of Democracy*, New York: Peter Lang, 2000.

[4] Susan Hawthorne argues that Diotima was an actual woman and not simply a product of Plato's fictive imagination. See Susan Hawthorne, "Diotima Speaks Through the Body" in *Engendering Origins: Critical Feminist Readings in Plato and Aristotle*, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994) 83-89.

[5] *Sym* 212c. William Cobb, *The Symposium and the Phaedrus: Plato's Erotic Dialogues* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1986).

When Diotima's discourse regarding the psychic buoyancy of Eros is applied to the poetic drama in the allegory of the cave, we cannot help but note the cave-dwellers' erotic ascent from the shackles of illusion and ignorance toward the glimmers of light that symbolize the desire for knowledge and wisdom. We should also recognize that the escaped prisoner decides to return to his former oppressive domicile, despite clear risks to his life. The mortal danger the escapee is said to face upon his return to the cave is directly linked to his purpose for returning—to bring a philosophical orientation to those who've been habituated to an artificially contrived sense of reality. The escapee's return to the cave thus mimics Socrates himself wandering the streets of Athens prodding people to give an account of their lives. Not only did these fictional and historical events help launch the West's critical tradition, it also appears that the Socratic practice of philosophy reflects a highly admirable "therapeutic" form of pedagogy that could be implemented today (a theme developed in subsequent sections).[6]

To put the matter in uncomfortably brief terms, the appearance-reality distinction that Plato introduces in the cave allegory, coupled with the analytical distinction he makes in relation to an individual's transformation of consciousness from the realm of becoming to that of being, fit together conceptually through the binding agency of Eros. In Plato's theory, Eros serves to hold together (as a third term) the tension between appearance and reality, between the realms of becoming and that of being. In the erotic zenith passages in the *Symposium* (210a-212a), Diotima demonstrates how the questioning energies of Eros can be "educated" upward, toward a state of being in which persons desire connection to and identification with a perceived good. Similarly, in the cave allegory, Plato's *periagoge,* or "turning around of the soul" passage, represents a form of pedagogy that classicist Werner Jaeger defines as a "*spiritual ascent*."[7] Echoing this conception, we can interpret the movement out of the cave as an internal, psychic reorientation, whereby one unfastens their identifications to the appetitive or spirited domains of the psyche and turns around to refasten their identification onto the reasoning part of the soul. The intent here is to emphasize the centrality of Eros to Plato's theory of education *as* enlightenment, as a consciously chosen "redirection" of a soul's aim toward that which is perceived as truer and thus more desirable. Eros knows no completion, yet curiously relies on the *idea* and *feeling* and *yearning* for completion as one of its motive forces.

One of the most prominent features that links democratic culture to Eros is that both forms are ontologically constituted by the human capacity for questioning. Specifically, learning to question the meaning of things, learning to

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[6] For a wonderful yet largely overlooked interpretation of the "therapeutic" value of Platonic philosophy, see Robert E. Cushman, *Therapeia: Plato's Conception of Philosophy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1958/2007).

[7] See Werner Jaeger*, Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture,* vol. 2., *In Search of a Divine Centre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), 192.

judge and to choose and to make distinctions, represents a type of inquiry in line with the Greek etymology of *critical*.[8] Indeed, the promise of democratic culture lies in its seemingly built-in capacities for revision; or, put in slightly different terms, democracy's promise resides in its *moral stance* which privileges as desirable the human capacities for revision.

Cornelius Castoriadis, in his incisive interpretation of the wellsprings of democratic culture, points out that philosophy and democracy share the characteristic of being regimes predicated on questioning. He writes: "Democracy, by its name already, produces questions and problems. It is not accidental that its birth coincides with the birth of this limitless question that is philosophy."[9] Yes, by its name already democracy produces questions such as, who are the people? Who belongs to the people? How to conceive of power and organize it? A brief review of the trajectory of U.S. history tells us that such questions have played a generative role in transforming democratic ideals into tangible realities. Castoriadis clearly intends to celebrate democracy's etymology as a precious gift of perpetual renewal; he emphatically does not lament democracy's etymology for the sticky predicaments it always seems to pose. It is significant, in addition, that C.D.C. Reeve informs us that the noun *Eros* ("love") and the verb *erotan* ("to ask questions") seem etymologically connected.[10] To extrapolate on the conceptual affinities between democracy and philosophy as related cultural regimes of questioning, let us recall the indictment of Socrates for corrupting the youth of Athens.

On those occasions in which I have taught the *Apology* to undergraduates, I find that they are quick to see through the charge of "corruption" leveled at Socrates by Athens' official authorities. They realize there was nothing corrupt about Socrates walking around Athens asking everyone he met, rich or poor, young or old, man or woman, citizen or foreigner, probing questions about their lives. Upon reflection students also recognize the unfortunate fact that the five hundred jurors who condemned Socrates to death for having the audacity to question conventional truths, were not acting so much as democratic citizens, but rather as already corrupted Athenians untethered from democratic values. In crucial respects, it appears that the plight of Socrates in 399 B.C. is not unlike our own plight in 2024. Can democratic publics prove wise enough to value the spirit of questioning so that its practitioners are celebrated instead of reviled or murdered? Can teachers promote the spirit of questioning even if, by doing so, they cause "anxiety" in their students? Will a critical mass of Americans come to regard Trump's big lie as a dangerous shadow on the wall?

Although the word "Eros" is not explicitly stated in the *Apology*, I would submit that the Socratic ethic of "taking care of the soul," on prominent

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[8] "Critical," Wiktionary, accessed May 1, 2024, en.wiktionary.org/wiki/critical.

[9] Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Problem of Democracy Today," *Democracy & Nature* 3 (1989), 21-22.

[10] See C.D.C. Reeve, *Plato on Love* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2006), xix-xx.

display throughout the text, is itself a deeply erotic activity rooted in a spirit of questioning. As Michel Foucault and Cornel West have observed, this Socratic ethic, which includes being willing to give an honest account of one's life and beliefs, is an erotic activity par excellence. Below, West's image of the interrogation of self and society can be seen to inspire erotic ascents out of the cave:

> The Socratic love of wisdom holds not only that the unexamined life is not worth living (*Apology* 38a) but also that to be human and a democratic citizen requires that one muster the courage to think critically for oneself. This love of wisdom is a perennial pursuit into the dark corners of one's own soul, the night alleys of one's society, and the back roads of the world in order to grasp the deep truths about one's soul, society, and world.[11]

Here, Socratic pedagogy is framed as an inquiry whereby soul, society, and world are interrogated holistically. In short, taking care of the soul is not a solipsistic affair. It involves making judgements about one's relation to society and to the world. Such judgements are impossible to make absent some image of the good or truth to serve as a basis for judgement. In looking for ways to theorize Eros and to help educate its sublime powers in contemporary contexts, we might think about creatively adapting the Socratic pedagogy suggested here for the purpose of intelligently "corrupting" America's youth. That is, to create classroom situations in which our student's ideas and beliefs about themselves and society, through the practice of *parrhesia* (defined as frank speech and speaking truth to power),[12] are transformed into sites of discussion and critical analysis. Such processes of inquiry would go a long distance in establishing the experiential soil necessary for erotic expression and growth.

American Democracy in Need of a Love Discourse

When Jane Addams, in her book *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets,* theorizes the emotional and experiential lives of the immigrant youth in Chicago—describing their *questing,* their *yearning,* their *lambent flames of civic righteousness*, their *cargos of democratic aspirations*—she could have been referring to their expressions of, and capacities for, Eros.[13] But this omission is no criticism of Addams. Let's recall, in a similar fashion, that Dewey never once utters the word Eros in any of his writings; yet, as Jim Garrison tacitly recognized in his fantastic 1997 book, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching*, authors or teachers don't necessarily have to formally invoke the four

[11] Cornel West, "Putting on Our Democratic Armor" in *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism,* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 208. For a fuller account of *parrhesia* as a Socratic practice, see Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the College De France*, *1983-1984* (New York: Picador, 2008).
[12] West, "Putting on Our Democratic Armor," 209-110.
[13] Jane Addams, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 1909/2016).

letter word "Eros" to symbolically capture its manifestations, or to appreciate its virtues as a unique form of love.[14]

Yet, in my opinion, the *discursive* forgetting of Eros has had, and will continue to have, the effect of hastening its *experiential* forgetting, with severe consequences for whether citizens learn to love democracy or not.[15] There is no guarantee, of course, that if all teachers were equipped with a theoretical grasp of Eros—including a grasp of its emancipatory vocabulary centered around the spirit of questioning—they would thereby *necessarily* foster knowledge quests, and *necessarily* make education suddenly brim with new meaning for their students. A mere introduction to the concept by itself means little if it's not accompanied by further investigation and discussion. Still, I would much prefer that our young teachers come to know the Eros concept rather than not come to know it.

I argue that Eros, understood as a kind of democratic moral and philosophical compass—or pedagogical North Star, if you will—can guide teachers to move in the right direction. And what direction would that be, one might ask? As was discussed in the previous section, a recovery of Eros would mean a recovery of the spirit of questioning and this, in turn, would mean a recovery of the critical importance of the etymology of education, "to draw out." That is, to draw out not finished pieces of knowledge, but to draw out a range of human capacities: desires to know, desires to connect to an image of wholeness, for example. For these reasons, then, a recovery of Eros would be directly connected to the privileging of philosophy, civics, the arts and humanities, as these curricular traditions specialize in drawing out human capacities for critical inquiry, for empathy, and for independent thought generally. These virtues are among Eros's stepchildren.

Significantly, Dewey recognized that not enough Americans loved democracy. In his 1929 essay, "A House Divided Against Itself," he takes up this absence of loving as a pedagogical problem. Echoing Addams' observation that "democracy no longer stirs the blood of American youth," Dewey identified the ideal of equality as the "genuinely spiritual element" of our tradition. Let's pause a moment on this point; namely, that the genuinely spiritual element of American democracy is equality, and that our democratic identity is tied to equality, to the extent to which we bestow value on it. Dewey notes that this spiritual element hasn't entirely disappeared, but

> …its promise as a new *moral* and *religious* outlook has not been attained. It has not become the well-spring of a new intellectual consensus, it is not (even unconsciously) the vital source of any distinctive and shared philosophy. It directs our politics only

[14] Jim Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997).
[15] This opinion is rooted in my book, *Eros as the Educational Principle of Democracy* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), which offers a genealogy of the eros concept, from ancient Greece to the present times.

> spasmodically, and while it has generously provided schools it does not control their aims or their methods (my emphasis).[16]

Dewey wants Americans to conceive of democracy as a secular religious project that contains corresponding moral and spiritual elements. However, he also recognized that the reality in the 1920s was that most Americans had internalized a mechanical, procedural, thin conception of democracy. This problem persists today with a vengeance.

Readers of this journal, no doubt, already recognize that Americans have historically been conditioned to "know" democracy as something *outside* themselves, an epistemic and curricular bias which a priori renders democracy a mere sliver of one's existence. For this reason, it's not surprising that most Americans fail to see that "being democratic" is as much a faith and act of devotion and "personal way of life," as it is for someone to be a devout Buddhist, Muslim, Methodist or Rastafarian. A religious life of course typically permeates a person's whole being—not mere slivers of it. Religions typically generate intense devotions and intense emotional commitments and, in doing so, constitute powerful meaning narratives.

Dewey observed that Americans have genuinely valued democracy "only spasmodically." Of course, valuing democracy on a spasmodic basis, as we see today, can only produce bleak and increasingly tenuous democratic futures. This recognition raises the question: *Why hasn't American democracy produced a meaningful love discourse to give point and direction to its moral and spiritual aspirations?* Democracy would benefit greatly if it had recourse to some species of love discourse, such as Eros, to lend intelligibility to its values and moral aspirations. Eros could give democracy the energy and passionate symbol of love that it needs, while democracy could give Eros the proper direction and moral compass that it needs.

If we want to increase the possibility that young Americans will develop lived *affections* for democracy, lived *affections* for the principle of equality, and lived *affections* for empathizing and learning from others, perhaps the time has come to reconfigure Eros as a first principle capable of uniting these vitally necessary aims. Eros is unique in its ability as a powerful concept and experience to traverse the inter-penetrated domains of philosophy, education, and democracy. These religious, spiritual, and erotic resonances of democracy were suggested by philosopher of education Boyd Bode in 1949, when he declared: "Democracy is to me a way of life and a *gospel for the salvation of the world*" (my emphasis).[17] Bode adds, in line with Dewey and others, that the moral element in democracy cannot be rooted in metaphysical claims, as conventional religious-based moralities, but primarily in an experimental, perpetually unfinished method for solving social problems.

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[16] John Dewey, "A House Divided Against Itself" in *Individualism Old and New* (New York: Promethius Books, 1929), 9.

[17] Boyd Bode, Address to the 4th Annual Bode Conference, Ohio State University, Summer 1949. I want to thank Tom Falk for bringing this passage to my attention.

Steven C. Rockefeller's magisterial volume on Dewey's religious faith and democratic humanism also demonstrates that his entire career can be regarded as an extension of the Socratic philosophical project. Rockefeller observes:

> Using a Platonic metaphor and adopting a characteristic prophetic perspective, Dewey described the task of philosophy in 1946 as "the act of midwifery": "There is no phase of life, educational, economic, political, religious, in which inquiry may not aid in bringing to birth that world which is as yet unborn.[18]

In this passage, Dewey does not attempt to explain, or name, the mysterious force that lies behind the reconstructive telos of "bringing ideas to birth." But were he to do so, he could have invoked Eros as that birthing force. Considering these myriad associations, then, it seems reasonable to advance the proposition that Eros can usefully be understood as a secular form of love intriguingly aligned with the democratic ontology of critical revision. One additional way of theorizing Eros in relation to democracy is to reference the critical theorists who authored the classic work, *The Authoritarian Personality*. After their exhaustive study of Americans in the cold war period, they wrote: "If fear and destructiveness are the major emotional sources of fascism, Eros belongs mainly to democracy."[19]

Since the opposite of *fear* and *destructiveness* may be construed as, say, *love* and *peaceful creation*, their formulation reinforces the revisionary features of Eros outlined in this essay. Reimagined along these lines, Eros can serve as a potent counterpoint to the dominant values upholding both neoliberal and fascist ideologies. Moreover, the recovery of Eros and its theoretical development as a first principle would help to stimulate and draw-out those sublime "cargoes of democratic aspiration" teeming in millions of our bewildered yet still buoyant youth.

An Eros-Informed Interpretation of the Declaration of Independence as a Journey of Civic Transformation

In a spirit of democratic experimentalism, the task in this final section is to explore the ways in which teachers might utilize Plato's concept of Eros for the purpose of interpreting anew the Declaration of Independence. Such a project is fully rooted in the Socratic self and civic interrogation that was previously highlighted and aptly described by Cornel West. As West contends, such a Socratic truth-seeking pedagogy would bring democratic benefits to both the individual and to the larger society. In what follows, I explore how the document's long second sentence—what Danielle Allen boldly called "the most

[18] Steven C. Rockefeller, *John Dewey: Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism*, (New York: Columbia University Press), 552.
[19] T. Adorno, E. Frenkel-Brunswik, D. Levinson, and R. Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.,1950), 976.

important sentence in American history"—can be rendered even more meaningful when viewed from an Eros-informed standpoint.[20]

Allen is correct, in my opinion, to identify this long yet elegant formulation as the most important sentence in United States history. It is accurately identified as such when we recognize that its five clauses have functioned cumulatively as the prime generators of democratic change within the American experience. Taken together, the clauses represent the democratic moral heart *and* experimental method bequeathed to the nation in ideal form. It tells Americans the ways in which they can go about putting into practice their marvelous democratic ideals, particularly when the government isn't putting them into practice through law or public policy. While most of us are passably familiar with the Declaration's words, this doesn't mean we have given sufficient thought to what Allen calls the "beautiful optimism" implicit in the philosophical and intellectual demands the document places on its citizens:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights; that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness—That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed; that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its Foundation of such Principles and organizing its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.[21]

For good reason, Allen insists that this sentence must be interpreted as a whole. *Not* to interpret it in this way would be tantamount to asserting a set of sparkling democratic principles but to do so as mere abstractions, as empty slogans, because they would be disconnected from the document's "critical action" clause. Here, the "alter and abolish" clause can be interpreted as the critical action component of the Declaration since it's the vehicle through which ideals written on paper are to be transformed into empirical realities. Allen emphasizes that this clause, sometimes dubbed the "right to revolution," assumes that citizens can and must make critical judgements about whether the government is acting in ways consistent with its stated purposes (that of securing the human rights and moral values expressed in the first clause). If citizens, upon critical analysis of their lived situations, determine that the government is not upholding those rights, or if the government says it's upholding those rights, but is judged not to be, those citizens are assumed to possess the power, capacity,

[20] Danielle Allen, "How Americans Misunderstand the Declaration of Independence," Youtube, November 2, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AqiFMiQeXNQ.
[21] Danielle Allen, "Beautiful Optimism," in *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2014), 183-188.

and willingness to innovate novel cultural and legal forms to compel the government to harmonize itself with its founding principles. Social justice educators would therefore do well to explicitly design their pedagogies in ways that would exercise and cultivate those skills, values, attitudes, and moral capacities that the Declaration requires of its democratic citizens.

Put in slightly more philosophical terms, then, citizens are called upon to mobilize their capacities for critical judgement, especially in our digitalized and propaganda-infused social environments; they are called upon to make epistemic and moral distinctions between what is real and what is not, between what is right and what is wrong in relation to their personal and social worlds. In doing so, the Declaration asks citizens to exercise their philosophical capacities for wisdom and reason in order to give birth to new forms and to new ideas—all for the purpose of moving toward the vindication of the Declaration's promise. The activation of such high-level competencies are rather "big asks" for fallible and imperfect human beings, but the Declaration optimistically holds that we're up to it.

Based on this description, we can begin to appreciate how the core ethical challenges posed by the Declaration recapitulate in broad outline the core ethical challenges posed by the allegory of the cave. For within the cave's poetics, we first see the philosophy-inspired critical intervention of citizens in their inherited, illusion-laden worlds; we then see their subsequent disenchantment with this inherited world rooted in a newfound sense of truth, which we see is a necessary first step in being able to imagine their erotic ascents out of the cave toward images of a truer and better world. While "truth" is not explicitly mentioned in the Declaration, one's coming to have a sense of a truth is made profoundly implicit and necessary within its overall argument. In turn, the vital return to the cave could be likened today to symbolize individuals who display renewed commitments to actualizing the Declaration's first principles in public via the alter and abolish clause.

Let us further experiment with bringing the allegory of the cave into conversation with the Declaration, with special attention on the priority it places on citizens to act critically and creatively when reason demands.

We could speculate that the ideal of equality could be seen as the symbolic equivalent of Plato's Sun: A universal form which never waxes or wanes, and that ought to be contemplated and revered as the basis for a just, democratic society. Such contemplation, however, would eventually raise questions about how to define the scope and application of equality as a basis for making judgements about its status and role in American society. How should this abstract moral principle be institutionalized in concrete terms? Questions abound. For example, let's consider those individuals ensnared in the worst consequences of public-school inequality. Could we say that their unalienable right to the pursuit of happiness is violated, if their largely civic-less public educations transform them into de facto non-citizens, denying them the possibility of civic selfhood and thus impeding their pursuit of happiness? Or, if we were to examine equality from another angle, we might ask, does the

Electoral College, in its repudiation of majority rule, serve as a long-term guarantor of inequality? These questions and countless other open-ended thought exercises could represent opportunities to enhance our students' understanding of equality as a foundational moral principle. Engaging such questions in a sustained manner would likely produce a better crop of equality-literate and equality-conscious citizens. It would also likely have the effect of raising the symbolic currency of equality as a value. As young citizens are asked to contemplate the ideal of equality and to gauge whether, or to what extent, it is operative or institutionalized across the many fronts of American society, they will invariably confront the realization that the ideal falls short of actual reality in many, but perhaps not in all, dimensions of American life.

As young citizens encounter the contradictions that emerge when comparing the ideal versus the reality of equality in American society, such inquiries will tend to generate heightened states of internal tension. *These internal tensions are what propel new knowledge quests into existence*. If students were to experience the Declaration anew in this manner and attempt to make education out of the nation's now fecund contradictions and moral ambiguities—including how their own personal contradictions may be entangled with the nation's—the ignition of Socratic Eros would be at hand. Therefore, one advantage of adapting an Eros-informed interpretation of the Declaration is that it would encourage Americans to reframe their founding document as an invitation to embark on journeys of personal and civic transformation.