
AN ENLIGHTENMENT “EXPERIENCE” AND PLATO’S PARABLE OF
THE CAVE: REFLECTIONS ON A VISION-QUEST GONE AWRY.

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This essay was conceived as an experiment that was brought about by an unpredictable set of circumstances. I found myself being challenged by a student within my classroom to go on what he called a “vision-quest.” I accepted the challenge. What follows is an account of both this experience and my attempt to impose structure and order and meaning onto what was a messy and chaotic event. I am quite certain none of this would have occurred had I not been teaching the parable of the cave under the aegis of the “personal essay.” The essay is thus an experimental homage to this genre of writing.

PART ONE: HOW THE VISION-QUEST CAME ABOUT

The story of my “vision-quest gone awry” begins ten years ago as I was teaching an undergraduate course in philosophy of education. I started the course by having students read Plato’s Parable of the Cave. It is commonplace to say that the parable of the cave means a lot of things to a lot of different people, as do Plato’s writings in general. Some noted commentators blame Plato for laying the philosophical groundwork for some of the twentieth centuries’ most egregious totalitarian political orders.¹ In contrast to this understanding, when I was introduced to Plato in graduate school, he was framed above all as a moral ironist, not an unproblematic figure perhaps, but also not someone who should be so tightly implicated in the horrors of the 20th century.² Julia Annas surveys these wildly different interpretations: “Plato has been seen as a revolutionary, a conservative; a fascist, a communist; a fiercely practical reformer and an ineffective reformer.”³ I believe we should regard the contested status of Plato’s legacy as one of its most appealing features. Specifically, as an enlightenment trope, the parable of the cave has value and endures because it opens up multiple and conflicting interpretations of “enlightenment” and what it means for humans to be educated.

The chief pedagogical value of the parable for me lies not only in its capacity to initiate conversations about the possibilities and perils of

¹ Perhaps the most influential exponent of this type of anti-Platonic prejudice is Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies: The Spell of Plato. Volume 1* (London: Routledge Books, 1945/2002).

² See, for example, Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

³ Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 1.

transformative education, but also about what it means to draw out the capacities to learn. Indeed, the very principle that education ought to be more concerned with drawing out various human potentials than with simply depositing information into students owes its origin to Plato.

The parable introduces a conceptual framework for clarifying how teaching as an “art of conversion” can be made to bring about what Plato calls enlightenment. Few conceptual models can match the parable’s ability to map the conflicted dynamics of soul transformation. Plato’s introduction of the appearance/reality and becoming/being binary oppositions invite us to pose questions about what is real and what is not, what are genuine desires and beliefs as against those desires and beliefs implanted in us by official others. The parable directs would-be liberators to investigate that region of the psyche where desires to know are created or destroyed, where education becomes either an instrument of liberation or of discipline and control. Each semester, I have students write a “personal essay” about the ways in which Plato’s enlightenment metaphors, including the metaphors of resistance to the enlightenment attitude, might help them illuminate significant turning points in their life’s journey.⁴ I believe this genre of writing is conducive to the project of stimulating students to “do philosophy.” First because it is rooted in one’s personal experience, and secondly, because its distinctive style privileges the qualities of contradiction, paradox, ambiguity, irony, satire, self-confession and critical self-analysis. As a form of artistic expression, then, the personal essay lends itself to philosophical speculation.

I ask students to focus attention on those threshold moments in their lives when they overcame an illusion or condition of ignorance. In a shameless assertion of my pedagogical authority, I suggest to my students that they should not, for example, write about how they came to grips with the noble lie of Santa Claus, although this would fulfill the formal requirements of the assignment. Rather, I ask them to speak to the evolving *phenomenon* of illusion as it has evolved throughout their lives in order to test the viability of Plato’s schema for clarifying their respective experiences. While some papers oversimplify or even mangle Plato’s fine theoretical distinctions, as is often my misfortune, with few exceptions students produce insightful and sometimes shocking testimonies. I find it particularly gratifying to read essays that creatively adopt the appearance/reality motif as a means for re-interpreting past events in their own lives. For instance, I’ve seen the motif used to re-interpret incestuous family relations, agonizing divorce scenarios, instances of religious hypocrisy, discoveries of drug addiction, analyses of public school inequality and, perhaps most frequently, stories about the illusory character of romantic love. I’ve read politically oriented essays in which the question of who gets to say they are

⁴ For a rich introduction to this genre of writing, see Phillip Lopate, *The Art of the Personal Essay* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995), xxiv-liv. I am indebted to Bill Ayers for bringing Lopate’s book to my attention.

“enlightened” and who does not is the main question that is interrogated. What never ceases to amaze is the diverse ways the parable is adopted to critique the power relations both in their own lives and in American society.

One September day I called on a student (we’ll call him “Dan”) who had written an account of a so-called “vision-quest” that he had recently experienced. In the paper, Dan compared his vision-quest experience to Plato’s concept of *periagoge*, the “turning around” of the soul from the realm of becoming to that of being.⁵ This was no mechanical adoption of Plato’s conceptual framework. Dan’s essay lent experiential insight into the turbulent and sensuous dynamics of psychological transformation. When I asked Dan to discuss his essay he proceeded to tell a remarkable story about his rite of initiation or coming-of-age story. At one point, he described how he had “bawled his head off” for hours. He also spoke emphatically about how none of us really knows “how big a day is.” Dan was right—how often do we think about how big a day is?

Toward the end of our discussion, I said something bland to the effect that “perhaps all of us should go on one of these vision-quests.” Quickly, he replied, “If you want to go on one, I can arrange it in a week.” Did I really hear that? Well, I said, “this offer sounds very interesting, Dan, but I couldn’t do it now because your vision-quest took place in a remote wilderness area.” “No,” he said, “it happened in Paw Paw, 15 miles southwest of here.” With no hesitation, he posed the question again: “Professor Burch, do you want to go on a vision-quest next week?” I scanned the room: 25 sets of eyes turned toward me, politely but intently waiting for my response. I stammered, “. . . a . . . sure . . . , I could do that.” Everyone burst into applause. Clearly, I had said the right thing. But later that day, doubts emerged. I couldn’t help wondering—What the F have I gotten myself into?

It turned out that Dan’s father was a farmer in the Southwest corner of the county. Somewhere in the middle of that forest would be my spot, on the bank of the stream. The next step was to learn the rules and ethical code of conduct that’s supposed to guide the vision-quest experience. In a curious reversal of our official roles as “teacher” and “student,” Dan was now instructing me on the importance of the rules and how they had to be strictly followed for the vision-quest to reach its maximum educational potential.

Since the vision-quest included a four day fast, I could only bring 4 gallons of distilled water and a sleeping bag. There was no food, no reading, no writing pads, no pens or pencils, no labels on anything. The water jug labels had to be removed. The small patch on the sleeping bag indicating “washing instructions” had to be snipped-off. Dan said the idea was to “snip away” all

⁵ For a concise discussion of *periagoge* in the context of the Parable of the Cave, see Eric Voegelin, *Plato* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 115.

artifice from life, so that it would just be you and Nature, with all possibility of diversion removed. Another rule was that you couldn't wander more than 30 feet from your designated spot; Dan also told me there was a prohibition against campfires. He said, in so many words, that the point of the vision-quest was to enable the breaking down of one's rational, "thinking" character-armor as a precondition for experiencing experience itself, unfiltered by words, concepts, and other paraphernalia of civilization.

Before Dan walked me through the basic tenets of the vision-quest, I was already dimly aware that the tradition grew out of Native American culture and was practiced as a rite of initiation into adulthood. I remembered reading certain passages in the 1970s about the mystical effects of ingesting "psychedelic" mushrooms. The perceived connection between the vision-quest and the psychedelic lore of the '70s counterculture had a soothing effect. I told myself that the vision-quest was going to be relatively easy, not unlike taking mushrooms on an Indian Summer day in a beautiful and magnificent forest. I could deal with that. I didn't realize at the time, however, the idiosyncratic "logic" that I invoked to help impose a familiar image onto the future, while dressed in the garb of rationality, actually represented one of the premier illusions I took with me into the wilderness.

PART II: THE VISION-QUEST AND ITS SEQUEL

On a Thursday morning at 4:00 a.m., Dan and I crossed the shin-deep water of the stream and went to my designated spot. He wished me luck and said he'd be back on Monday morning. I slept a couple hours and awoke with the sun. I broke the 30-foot rule in less than 30 minutes. I wandered around about 100 or 200 feet from my spot to where there was a clearing in the forest. I liked to sit there because I could see more sky and more forest. After five or six hours, I became profoundly bored with my patterns of thought. Almost as an escape from these revoltingly familiar musings, I was forced into a posture of meditation. I would sit on the edge of the clearing and chant, ...*Shabb-o-na, Shabb-o-na, Shabb-o-na*... I chose this mantra in honor of Chief Shabbona (1775-1859), the esteemed leader of the Potawatomie nation; indeed the spot where I sat was once Potawatomie land. The repetition of this cadence seemed to work in slowing down the parade of words and concepts that were beginning to look like so many crossbars fortifying my own dismal prison-house.

As Dan said earlier in class, few of us realize how big a day is. Now I was beginning to see what he meant. To really know how big a day is we would have to pay attention to every one of its moments, from sunrise to sunset (to say nothing of the night's moments). Like most of us, I've never come close to being present and awake to every moment in every day. In 14 hours of daylight, for example, there would be 50,400 seconds to pay attention to. In the vision-quest experience, time itself almost stops: one day's passing *feels* like a month, and four days' *feels* like four months. As you can imagine, by the time the sun started to set, I was vastly relieved. At last, sleep!

Starting at dusk, however, Nature intervened to disrupt my plan. The insect, animal, and bird noises increased to such intensity that their shrieking pitch was deafening. I couldn't escape the sudden realization that the forest was crawling with raccoons, foxes, possums, muskrats, skunk, deer, owls, bats, snakes and god knows what else. In the days leading up to the vision-quest, not once did I consider “what the night brought” could present a potential difficulty. As darkness filled the woods, a vague dread crept through my body. My expectation of having a tranquil night had given way to the gnawing realization that out here, I wasn't in control of things. It was with this realization that I broke another rule, or rather, two rules. I had taken a small Bic lighter with me, but as a guilty concession to the rules I knew I was breaking, I pulled the sticky label off. Next, I sparked up a campfire in what amounted to a futile attempt to reassert control. Actually, I think its fiery glow drew more attention to me than I wanted. But in the short term, the flickering flames and aroma of burning wood calmed my rattled nerves.

Toward the end of the second day, my hunger intensified, but then to my surprise, it abruptly evaporated. In place of hunger, an unprecedented fatigue rolled in like a massive tsunami. Only a few days earlier, of course, I had looked forward to the prospect of thinking long, spiritually-insightful thoughts. Now, however, that presumption was exposed as another “shadow on the wall,” the latest addition to my expanding inventory of illusions.

Any fast puts one in a caloric free-fall. The energylessness that accompanied this free-fall eliminated any expectation I had of “thinking” in the sense that we commonly understand the term. Indeed, the image of a “beached whale” comes much closer to describing my condition than would the image of Emerson's “Man Thinking.” Each night as I grew wearier, I became preoccupied with the fear that all sorts of animals were bearing down on me. It was too shadowy and windswept in the forest to see these creatures, but I knew they were there. I could hear the dry brush crackle as they moved around. During the third day, I made a point of searching for a stick, one whose shape and density would serve well as a weapon of self-defense. I didn't feel comfortable thinking in terms of “weapons” and “self-defense,” but I suppose the desire to survive outweighed the realization that I was subverting the spirit of the vision-quest ethos.

Having abandoned what I considered to be the loftier philosophical goals of the vision quest, the only thing left to do was to soldier on. I must have fallen asleep because I was awakened by the same thrashing sound of the brush that unnerved me in previous nights. Now, to my horror, I was being circled by what sounded like a pack of coyotes. They were moving in a circular pattern off to my right, about 15 yards away. I could hear their muffled growling sounds, and there were several of them. These were guttural sounds, not growls exactly, but close enough. Were these creatures in pre-attack mode? Or were they simply checking out a new stranger in their midst? I was sweating and my

heart was pounding. I gripped my stick-turned-tomahawk. I could imagine the headlines of the local paper...“NIU professor mauled by hungry coyotes”...

I wonder how others would have reacted to my predicament. No doubt, for his part, Dan would have advised me to relax, take a few deep breaths, and put away the silly stick. Yet, the option of waiting to see what the coyotes might do next never entered my mind. So, while the coyotes continued to run in a circle with their strange muffled sounds, I tightened my grip on the modified tomahawk, aimed carefully, and let loose as hard as I could in their direction. I heard a *Thud* and *Yelp*. They scampered away. I breathed a sigh of relief. I also felt a sudden stab of guilt. The “thud” and the “yelp” are burnished in my memory. In that instant, I felt I had committed an offense against the natural order of things. I had violated something but whatever that was, it was vague and ill-defined. In taking that action, had I blown the purpose of the vision-quest? Had my “unethical” campfire brought the coyotes to my location? Perhaps my furry visitors meant no harm. Perhaps I was witnessing the coyote version of a welcoming committee.

In those final hours my “thinking mind” had indeed been dethroned, at least for a brief time. I was sleep-deprived, food-deprived, deprived of familiar routine, deprived of human contact. The truth is that my four days under the symbolic bodhi tree in Paw Paw, left me feeling more like a ragged Neanderthal than an emergent Buddha. Dan appeared from out of the forest mist at about 5:00 a.m. I was unusually grateful for the sheer fact of seeing another human being. I was cold, wet, exhausted, hungry, but alive. We proceeded to the local diner: down went the eggs, pancakes and coffee.

Unless I was hallucinating, upon entering class that morning, the atmosphere was carnivalesque. It was a triumphant homecoming. Everyone seemed impressed by my “heroic feat” done in real time. I must admit, I felt a little like Odysseus returned—if only for 15 minutes. I didn’t tell Dan or the students about my transgressions of protocol. Nor did I tell them anything about the violent action I took against the coyotes. The fact that I took up the challenge and returned seemed enough for my students. In retrospect I probably acted un-Socratically in not being more forthright with Dan and the students about the chaotic events that had transpired. I probably wanted to keep my status as an unambiguous hero intact. If I had been more candid, the parable of the cave and the motif of enlightenment might have taken on a different set of meanings, for them and for me.

Once my gut was full and I got some rest, the ordeal with the coyotes was quickly forgotten. It was replaced, to my surprise, by a swelling undertow of quiet euphoria (etymology *Gr.* “good feeling”). This feeling of well-being was like an alien presence never before experienced, a feeling that lasted about four days. It is impossible to describe this state of being without sounding ridiculously cliché. I felt strangely “cleansed,” I felt a “lightness of being.” If before I had *thought about* the meaning of enlightenment in an intellectual and

political sense, now I was *feeling* enlightenment experientially. Based on this euphoric state of being, particularly coming so quickly on the heels of my reduction to an existence of brute physicality, I can’t resist speculating that this general category of experience is what Plato was trying to approximate conceptually when he inaugurated the being/becoming continuum and equated the realm of being with the Idea of the Good.

In short order, I jumped back into the delicious sensorium that is American culture. The memories, images and feelings of the vision-quest faded from my awareness with astonishing speed. Today, however, when I make a point of reflecting on those distant September days, I have come to regard the memories as founts of philosophical opportunity. On those occasions when I decide *not to forget* and consider the experience as a whole, I tend to initiate inner dialogues with myself in which I recognize anew how easily my own emotional investments and patterns of thinking can become entwined in illusion and deception. One question that continues to attract my attention is this: Was my post-vision-quest euphoria really an “alien” presence, as it surely appeared, or would it be more accurate to say that the real alien presence was, or is, my everyday mundane consciousness that drowns out the recognition of a sublime interior possibility?

PART III: THEORIZING THE VISION-QUEST & THE PERSONAL ESSAY AS
AN INSTRUMENT OF “DOING PHILOSOPHY.”

Whenever I think through the educational implications of the vision-quest experience, I invariably return to the Platonic principle that “all learning is a remembering.”⁶ Plato’s underlying assumption is that our previous lives have left traces of images of wholeness that we once “knew” and that re-connecting to these traces is tantamount to turning toward the realm of being. According to Plato, only in *remembering* that which has been wittingly or unwittingly repressed from our conscious awareness (the presence of the realm of being) can we learn to ground the conduct of our lives *in relation to* this very recognition. It is precisely this internal (re)cognition of an erotic image of psychic wholeness that Plato wants us to reconnect with as the best basis for creating just people and just societies.

I want to speculate that the Platonic principle that binds our deepest learning to memory recovery is surprisingly compatible with John Dewey’s concept of what constitutes an educative experience. Given Dewey’s animus against Plato and his conceptual repertoire, any discussion about the relationship between this Platonic principle and Dewey’s theory of educative experience is conjectural and tentative.

⁶ Direct references to this principle can be found in *Meno* (81d-e) and *Phaedo* (75d-76a-c).

As is well known, the prime criterion Dewey invokes for distinguishing “educative experiences” from “mis-educative” ones is whether any given experience results in new questions and lines of inquiry that are themselves capable of minting new forms of experience. On the negative side, Dewey observes, “any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience.”⁷ Educational experiences are mis-educative when they are not connected to one’s lived-situation, and even if they are “remembered” in some sense, such memories often take the form of a complex of internalized resistance. Dewey explicitly links mis-educative experiences to an absence of remembering: “there is no before or after to such an experience; no retrospect nor outlook, and consequently no meaning...To learn from experience is to make a backward and forward connection between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence.”⁸ In looking back upon my vision-quest experience in order to “make meaning” out of its kaleidoscopic images, I am struck by how closely the experience aligns with Plato’s and Dewey’s notions of what constitutes an educational experience. For although I “had” the experience a decade ago, through the faculty of memory recovery, I can still participate with and learn from “having” those same experiences today.

I remember the naïve preconceptions that I unknowingly carted with me into the wilderness and how each one proved illusory; I remember the powerlessness of losing control of events in “nature” in ways I could never have anticipated; I remember the wild desperation I felt when I thought that my life was in jeopardy; I remember the joy at seeing another human being and at the prospect of reconnecting to a human community after what seemed like months of solitary isolation; I remember how a sense of both the heroic and the fraudulent were uneasily alloyed within as my students welcomed me back to class. And I remember the euphoria that swept through my body soon after my return and how it faded away as mysteriously as it had arrived. Each of these memories carries with it a host of difficulties, tensions, and questions. As historians of our own psychic biographies, this species of remembering is fecund. I would like to think that working through these memories and reflecting on them have kept me more alert to my propensity for illusion, narcissism and hubris. I would further conjecture that my vision-quest experience revealed the depths of the fallacy of radical individualism, that is, the fallacy that human beings can somehow live outside and apart from society. We cannot! The extreme and “unnatural” isolation of my wilderness adventure

⁷ John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Touchstone, 1938), 25-31.

⁸ John Dewey, “Experience and Thinking,” in *Democracy and Education* (New York: Free Press, 1916), 140.

suggests to me that the ideology of radical individualism is not only a myth but a powerful fantasy, albeit a useful one for legitimating the capitalist imaginary.⁹

In fleshing out the conceptual affinities that link the vision-quest experience to the enlightenment ideals of Platonic philosophy, recall that Dan’s essay, and his story-telling in class, resembled key aspects of my own vision-quest experience. In both essays, the vision-quest was readily interpreted as an “ascent” out of a cave of illusion (becoming) toward a previously unperceived recognition of a luminous interiority (being). Obviously, in both cases, the fleeting “glimpse” into the realm of being afforded by the vision-quest was the consequence of denying the body nutrition, sleep and human contact. I don’t want to pretend that the luminous interior presence each of us reported feeling was the culmination of a long-term regime of philosophical study, as Plato envisioned it. Yet, despite this significant distinction, the theoretical scaffolding Plato erects to conceptualize what for him was an unknowable reality—the becoming/being and appearance/reality binary oppositions, the “turning around” of the soul, and as we shall see, the crucial task of “learning to let go”—all lend a remarkable degree of intelligibility to the vision-quest experience.

Arguably, Plato’s use of the enlightenment or ascent symbolism in Book VII of the *Republic* is expressed even more cogently in the *Symposium*. In that text, the affinities between the vision-quest experience and Platonic philosophy can be brought into relief by examining the radical epistemological challenge Diotima issues to Socrates. Diotima, the only “woman” or for that matter, the only person ever placed in a position of moral and pedagogical authority over Socrates, voices reservations about his capacity to grasp the “final mysteries of love” (love/*eros* as the desire to connect to a perceived Good).¹⁰ For Diotima, Socrates’ ability to grasp the mysteries of *eros* depends entirely on whether he can “learn to let go in the right way.”¹¹ This strategically placed concern about Socrates’ deficient ways of knowing raises at least two questions. First, how are we to understand *what* exactly is supposed to be let go of, and secondly; how to let go in the *right way* as opposed to other ways?

⁹ For this claim, I am indebted to Donald E. Pease’s psychoanalytic treatment of the “fantasy” of American exceptionalism in his *The New American Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2009). Far from seeing fantasy as a peripheral factor in the formation of state authority, he argues it is central to the life of nations and states, and that not all fantasizing runs counter to public, social being.

¹⁰ “Diotima’s” identity, whether real or fictional, is a matter of some dispute within Platonic and feminist scholarship. A useful review of literature on the controversy can be found in Cheryl Hall, *The Trouble with Passion: Political Theory Beyond the Reign of Reason*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 64-70, fn. 26, 141.

¹¹ See William S. Cobb, *The Symposium and the Phaedrus: Plato’s Erotic Dialogues* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 47/210a.

Plato suggests that we need to learn to “let go” of the overly rational dimensions of ourselves in order to permit the sensuous and erotic dimensions to be properly revalued and integrated into the negotiation of selfhood. As previously mentioned, this is a rough approximation of what the vision-quest experience is intended to achieve. It can be said that letting go of former patterns of knowing—undergoing an epistemic revolution—is the precondition for *periagoge*, or psychic conversion. The image of a psychic “letting go” can thus be viewed as the metaphoric equivalent of the “turning around” of the soul. Both metaphors frame the same educational purpose, which is to awaken the erotic and aesthetic dimensions of our being that have been repressed by the forces of social convention. The process of drawing out these latent potentialities is the “art of conversion” that Plato defines as the highest purpose of education. Here it is worth noting Wendy Brown’s argument that Plato theorizes the enlightenment moment as a consequence of a higher synthesis between the rational and the erotic dimensions of human being.¹² For Brown, Plato’s enlightenment theory is politically radical:

And for all of Plato’s railing against the appetitive or the desirous, the fanciful or the poetic, he does not and cannot jettison these parts of our being. Socrates and Plato must awaken and inspire precisely these dimensions of us because they are involved in a political struggle to loosen our engagement with the immediate world of necessity and move our minds into a radically different, imaginative domain. They must break the conservative hold of the present and incite us to envision an order of existence and values utterly unlike our own yet identifiably human and livable....Socrates and Plato know what many theorists of revolution after them may have inadequately appreciated: People are never moved to become revolutionaries through logic alone because it is not solely the reasoning part of us that feels and knows what is wrong with this world nor yearns for a different one.¹³

Regardless of how the rational/erotic synthesis is conceptualized and how these qualities and values might be educationally drawn out, we can assert that what is *not* “drawn out” are finished pieces of knowledge or information. What *is* drawn out is the development of “capacities to learn.” As teachers we try to create environments and situations in which the capacities of desire, interest, imagination, curiosity, wonder, creativity and critical indignation are stimulated (along with other potentialities).

¹² Wendy Brown, “Supposing Truth Were a Woman: Plato’s Subversion of Masculine Discourse,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Plato*, ed. Nancy Tuana, 157-180 (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 166-167.

I have argued that the personal essay is a genre of writing well-suited for drawing out these latent capacities. By awakening these capacities, education at its best becomes an agent of values formation in the service of human flourishing. The personal essay is thus a potentially useful vehicle for bridging the yawning gap that too frequently exists between the philosophical texts we teach and the personal lives of our students. This genre of writing permits students to identify and reap the harvest of their own contradictions. It encourages them to learn to give voice to their interpretation of events, to do philosophy in the sense of loving wisdom, but to do so by pursuing images of their own personal truths in an anti-systematic manner. Students are more likely to learn Platonic theory by connecting his vocabulary and symbolic inventory to their own lives than they would by writing about him “objectively” divorced from their own experience. Perhaps the ultimate justification for integrating the genre of the personal essay within the discipline of philosophy of education is that it offers students opportunities to “have” experiences that otherwise might have existed for them as inchoate or disconnected memories, but not as meaningful, educative experiences in either a Platonic or Deweyan sense.
