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Getting emotions and politics right. Do we need a new emotional deal?

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Abstract:

The "affective turn" has reached political reflection. Mainly due to the influence of the neurosciences, it had previously shaken psychological, and even economic studies. What we lacked was its proper translation to politics. The triumph of populism, the advent of post-truth politics and the increased influence of social networks have prompted us to deal more systematically with this "dark side" of democratic reality.

This is not entire new. Feminist and other studies had already brought to light that semi-submerged continent of the affective, which coexisted with what was dominant in contemporary political science, the reduction of all political behavior to the formalisms of rational choice theory. Now we are well aware that we can no longer maintain the rigid distinctions between *thinking* and *feeling* or reason (*logos*) and emotion (*pathos*). Today we know very well that this fundamental difference with which we operated has finally given way to a different evaluation of the problem of cognition and the roots of human behavior. The ways in which one or the other quality overlap in current democratic politics are complex, varied and wide-ranging.

At least since the tradition of political romanticism emotions were always present in political discourse and practice; it's not that we ignored them or that their renewed presence in the public sphere caught us by surprise. Nevertheless, today we have the impression that the genie seems to be coming out of the bottle. We are, in effect, in the era in which "felt reality" begins to replace factual reality, in which social networks are full of negative passions -hate, fear, resentment- and overlap in different ways. It is precisely through this unchecked and ubiquitous presence of virtual neo-emotionality that populism has gained its strength.

Still, the problem is not emotions as such. They do also fulfill a decisive role in fostering emancipatory social movements, in promoting justice and empathy with the worst-off members of society. And emotions are unavoidable. As Hobbes already observed, political language is mainly a "language of the passions". We must always count on the interference of affections, which, like almost everything in humans, are ambivalent: "There are emotions behind the struggle for freedom, but also behind the attempts to suppress it" (M. Arias). Here is where we have the problem, in this ambivalence.

So, how do we get emotions and politics right? Where do we have to operate in order to reach "a new emotional deal"? How does it affect civic education? Without discounting other lines of analysis, I would propose to focus on these three broad topics:

- 1.- The restructuring of the public sphere and digital democracy: What is favoring this new reign of the emotional?
- 2.- Post-truth or "tribal epistemology": How do feelings interfere with factual reality?
- 3.- Deliberative democracy versus technocratic government and emotional politics: Do we have the means to counteract both experts and populists?

