

PSYCHOLOGY FOR HEART AND SOUL

The language of feeling

Robert Sardello*



The extraordinary interview in this issue conducted by Richard House and David Kalisch with the great musician John McLaughlin prompts reconsidering feeling and its assumed meaning in Humanistic Psychology, for music is most centrally the ‘language’ of feeling.

For help, I turn to the philosophical poet, Novalis, an eighteenth-century mining engineer, mineralogist, prose writer, poet and mystic. Here is what I want you to hear, from his fairy tale, *The Novices of Sais*. I change here the wording, only slightly, to emphasize that Novalis is speaking of us all, even now:

Will we ever learn to feel? This divine, this most natural of all senses is little known to us: feeling would bring back the old time, the time we yearn for; the element of feeling is an inward light that breaks into stronger, more beautiful colors. Then the stars would rise within us, we would learn to feel the whole world, and our feeling would be richer and clearer than the limits and surfaces that our eye now discloses... Thought is only a dream of feeling, a dead feeling, a pale-gray feeble life. (Novalis, 2005)

The word ‘feeling’ bears no relation to ‘having feelings’, such as ‘I feel happy’ or ‘I feel like I could cry’. Feeling, in ordinary usage, concerns emotion. Feeling, as Novalis speaks of it, is akin to touch, as when we touch something, we feel it ... and indeed it feels us. Music is the immediate language of touch. Verbal language can be, too, if we speak the sensory immediacy of the union between oneself and the other, speak from within the spaciousness of the meeting itself, what ‘sings’ between us.

What ‘sings’ between two people in conversation is the world, nature, the earth, though not as we ‘know’ them through the mind or even through perception, which is always colored by concept. Language, as communion, does not go back and forth, from one person to the other. Its resonances, life, mood, qualities, color, depth, light, shadow, warmth, tone, movement, balance, smell, even taste, are the gift of the ‘between’, the source of true healing.

*Email: spiritualheart@heartfulsoul.com

Feeling is a divine/natural sensation, therefore simultaneously incarnate and spiritual. If we psychologists can learn to speak as nature speaks, we will find a true ‘talking cure’.

It is not that we talk about nature in humanistic therapy, nor do we have to do therapy in the literal presence of nature, but rather that we become present to the juncture-ing of body with world. Then we can feel the vibration of bodies in communion, like the strings of a harp, perhaps as the excitement of the guitar in the hands of John McLaughlin.

Notes on contributor

Robert Sardello is Director of the School of Spiritual Psychology and Spiritual-Earth Sanctuary. He lives in Texas and offers spiritual conversation centered in many themes throughout the world. He is author of 10 books, most recently *Silence: The Mystery of Wholeness and Heartfulness*. Website: www.heartfulsoul.com

Reference

Novalis. (2005). *The novices of sais* (Ralph Manheim, Trans.). St. Paul, MN: Archipelago Books, pp. 71–73.