

The Danville News
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"Glands Over Minds"
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Several weeks ago this column asked when hasn't knowledge prevailed, ultimately? History stands as witness. Ask Galileo. Ask Eratosthenes who two hundred years before Christ calculated the circumference of the earth, only off by 15%, but then he relied on the geometry of measuring shadows in Egypt. Ask those who argued that lights in the sky were lanterns. Ask the physicians who dismissed the study of bacteriology. The list is long.

There's an equally valid view that asks: When haven't the classical liberal humanistic worldviews and causes become mainstream, ultimately? Ask the abolitionists. Ask Truman integrating the US military. Ask your nephew, niece, son, or daughter who feels confident enough to come out of the closet. Ask the pastor about communion tokens. The list is long.

Progress is hard fought and hard won. Its enemy isn't reason, it is emotionalism. Passions and feelings can be wonderful experiences the same way other forces of nature can be wonderful: heat, rain, fire, ice, wind. Yet heat can kill crops. Rain can flood. Fire can burn down a neighborhood. Ice can freeze us to death. Wind can whip into a tornado. Passions are wonderful, transporting, but when reckless, unchecked, passions act like an untrained Pit Bull. Natural passions, affections, senses, emotions, the inclination of the heart ("I second that emotion") are potentially beautiful; When threatened they can become cruel, manipulative, where means justify ends

Do we endorse the purging of emotions? No, indeed. Pity the person who lacks feelings, pity the incessantly, persistently rational hard-hearted person. Pity more so the emotional persons lacking common sense. Beware them, they are clever at justifying wrong behaviors.

The problem before us and our nation, indeed, our world, is how sensitive emotions are easy triggers. A master of angry emotion was Joseph Goebbels, Adolph Hitler's chief propagandist. Goebbels said how "the truth is the greatest enemy of the State." He knew something about manipulating emotions. These emotions get more intense when it feels deeply personal, as if the world is personally attacking you. So, you attack back, as if the disagreement was a poll on their love and respect for you. When based on facts, bridled anger (turned into indignation) has a chance of dousing the flames, when not, it fans them. What is the violence reported today, what is all the shouting we hear today – from school boards to protests to congress to tabloid media -- but unleashed emotions lacking reason and sense?

Feelings, someone wise once taught, are simply signals, similar to lights on a dashboard. What matters is how you react to these signals. What are they telling you about you? Can you then be grateful for negative and harmful feelings because then you can master them, employ them in positive directions? From Christian writer Gary Smalley: "These feelings reveal to me my self-centered emotions sprung from an irresponsible self-centered nature. They tell me I am worried that I'm not going to get my cup filled, I am expecting my life from other people and things, that what I really am doing is that I am using things and people to fill me, to serve me."

If feelings are all that motivates us, rules us, stirring up our glands rather than our minds – our guilt, our anger, our fear, our resentment, our insecurity, our loneliness, our worry of being found out, our hurt

feelings, our need to feel happy – then people can be taken where they don't really want to end up. History judges us. "Pressing milk produces curds, pressing the nose produces blood, pressing anger produces strife" [Proverbs 30:33].

Preacher Jonathan Edwards warned: "The will is determined by the stronger motive and the will soon is followed by the body." Have you ever been part of a mob? It is a most unpleasant experience, afterwards. Which will be the stronger motive in our life? Which is the stronger motive upon our will? For we are not our feelings. Instead, we are what we do with our feelings.

Emotionalism without reason can leave us even celebrating liars and cheats. Weren't we taught that cheaters never prospered? Imagine a track meet where officials get to set new rules for the other track team – they must throw a heavier discus, the runners must run in high heels and Oxfords. Imagine where track and field referees dislike the conclusion of the race and decide to award the points to the second place finisher. The analogy might be obvious: will last year's secure election be our last?