

Commonsense, Coercions of Logic, and the Death Drive: Responding to Reviews of *In Search of Responsibility as Education*

Panel presenters:

Presenter 1: **Hannah Spector** (Penn State University at Harrisburg)

Presenter 2: **Brian Casemore** (George Washington University)

Presenter 3: **Marta Estellés** (University of Waikato)

This panel takes up the 2024 AAACS call for alternative session formats for its annual conference: the book review panel. Taking a slightly different approach to the book review format, the presenters generate new lines of thought related to a book review symposium in press at *Studies in Philosophy and Education* on presenter 1's 2023 book publication with Routledge's Studies in Curriculum Theory Series.

Presenter 1 opens the conversation by addressing a thematic taken up by three reviewers of her book: The emphasis that the author places on commonsense in different contexts: *Reviewer 1* expresses “utter perplexity...about those leading climate harming industries and their relentless commitment to the destruction of the planet.” She asks: How can we make sense of a spiral of self-destruction that puts humanity and the planet in peril? She suggests that a psychoanalytic reading of this spiral may be more productive than the author's philosophical one. In another line of thought, *Reviewer 2* is skeptical of appeals to commonsense in the U.S. educational context as “our post-colonial nation is too marred by racism and unfettered capitalism” to surmise that anything could be understood *commonly*. She points to commonsensical market-based solutions that seek to save ‘failing’ public schools, which “build upon the logics of racism.” In a third line of inquiry, *Reviewer 3* questions what she sees in the book as “the vindication of cultivating...common sense” on current events that have a “polarizing tendency.” This critique of the author's work gets developed when *Reviewer 3* argues that “attempting to...sense the supposedly nonsensical” of populist politicians and the “present pathologies of political and social life” might be a more fruitful undertaking than maligning these pathologies. The book review lines of inquiry will be used as a platform for this panel presentation.

Presenter 2 explores a psychoanalytic reading of the spiral of self-destruction, considering Arendt's critique of psychoanalysis as oriented to the “monotonous sameness and pervasive ugliness” of interiority (quoted in O'Byrne, 2020, 178). As “the ugliness of the psyche signals *its* refusal to be known,” a psychodynamic of opacity and self-certainty in the “cultivation of *sensus communis*” is made available for interpretation (O'Byrne, 2020, 179, 195). The cultivation of commonsense may require ongoing, self-reflective negotiation of the “constitutive ‘too muchness’ that characterizes the psyche” (Santner, 2001, 8), such that psychical excess—that is, “nonsensical” self-destruction—is not grasped as a “stumbling block...to be overcome in...[an egoic] transfer to transparency, but encompassed in a respect for mutual forms of opacity” (O'Byrne, 2020, 197).

Presenter 3 continues with the discussion on a curriculum of commonsense using Bourdieu's (2000) understanding of this concept as “a stock of self-evidences shared by all, which...ensures a primordial consensus on the meaning of the world, a set of tacitly accepted commonplaces which make confrontation...possible” (98). This *corpus* of deeply held assumptions is not a coherent set of knowledge, and it operates at a deeper level than other contested (e.g., neoliberal) or ‘evidence-based’ (e.g., scientific) ideas. Under this prism, the

nonsense of self-destruction can be understood as a counter-logic to other commonsense conventions (e.g., ‘life keeps going’; ‘time fixes everything’). This understanding of commonsense opens possibilities for its curricular critique (*Reviewer 2*) and for finding common grounds with those pathologized as ‘nonsensical’ (*Reviewer 3*).

References

Bourdieu, P. (2000). *Pascalian Meditations*. Stanford University Press.

O’Byrne, A. (2020). The ugly psyche: Arendt and the right to opacity. *Research in Phenomenology*, 50(2), 177–198. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15691640-12341446>

Santner, E. (2001). *The psychotheology of everyday life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig*. Chicago University Press.