

A Philosophy for Thinking: Some Considerations

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The title of the essay by Yolanda Garcia Pavon and Pablo Flores del Rosario might seem to be a repetition or nothing less than a tautology. For that reason, it deserves to be commented upon and critically explained. By stating that a philosophy for thinking is needed, Garcia Pavon and Flores del Rosario perhaps wish to say that there is a philosophy for thinking, and another for non-thought? Would not philosophy itself make one think? Is not the end of thinking the very act of creating philosophy?

What both authors really wish to underline is the profound problem of teaching philosophical subjects throughout the world, in Mexico as well as in Italy. The first risk is, in fact, a type of scholastic teaching of philosophy that is very common in upper division courses, in which there is little participation and which forces the student to acquire philosophical knowledge through passive means, to the point of voiding any positive effect on the person and on the scholastic group. Having dedicated myself to social sciences and to the philosophy of education, it is regarding this second aspect that I would like to present my own findings.

I find the expression “philosophy as a relational space,” used by the two scholars, to be particularly beautiful. Aside from being studied and memorized, philosophy has to be practiced as an intellectual exercise for students to develop those human qualities that improve civil coexistence. Learning philosophy in school is not merely an individual action for the students, but an opportunity for collective growth. To discuss with others the paradoxes, the antinomies, and the dilemmas of logic and philosophy, to find new metaphors and analogies, to establish new connections and allegories, to discuss the conjectures of philosophers of the past on ethical theories, or simply to draft new models, and, in this way, to understand their relativity and their perspective are mental, linguistic, and rhetorical activities that, at the individual level, help stimulate intelligence and form a critical personality, while at group level, these improve profound communication with others and open new possibilities for solutions to conflicts that are created naturally.

Based on these premises, I consider advantageous a proposal to set up ludic laboratories where students may practice the arts or, if you wish, the philosophical techniques indicated by Garcia Pavon and Flores del Rosario. These labs would teach students how to question, formulate hypotheses, search for similarities, recognize the relationship between cause and effect, assume critical perspectives, formulate models and metaphors, and find arguments. These labs would become an integral part of teaching the main trends of the history of philosophy. Furthermore, in these labs, I would allow students to practice the classic methodologies of philosophical and scientific research, such as deduction and implication, inducement, cause, Popper’s falsification approach, dialectics and the creation of double-speak, as well as methods of classic rhetoric (such as *inventio* and *dispositio*).

Although not really philosophical, they help formulate new ideas and new arguments, and will probably bring about discussions among the students, almost as if they were theatrical presentations or role-playing games.

The other risk is that students may not acquire an adequate understanding of the evolution of philosophical thought and they may not be able to place philosophical theories within the proper historical context and, as a result, may not know how to recognize the innovations in more traditional theories. For this reason, during philosophy class, students would have to refer to historical atlases to understand the theory's or the author's social-historical context. Such historical reference allows students to recognize the social and political changes of that period and the ideas' diffusion during the centuries.

In conclusion, the proposal of Garcia Pavon and Flores del Rosario to reform the teaching of philosophy suggests that philosophy must become, more and more, a vital and participatory relational space. Nowadays, this is a proposal that is more and more important in our Western societies. These societies are formally organized into democratic governments, yet demonstrate that they are hostage to oligarchic logics enforced by economic lobbies and bureaucratic-administrative system, while citizens are excluded from social power sharing. Students of a participatory, historically-informed philosophy will become citizens capable of exercising of a particular socially-active rationality. They will develop a more critical mentality and will be able to make themselves heard, to lay claim to necessities and to control authorities that exert power over them. In this way, philosophy could come back to be an exercise of freedom.