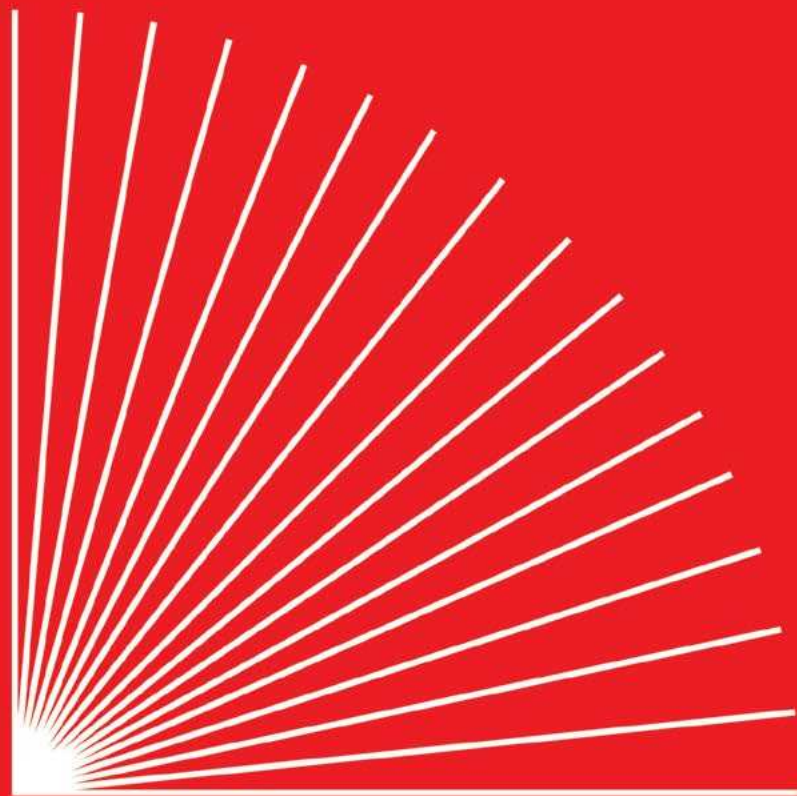


A cura di
Laura Candiotta e Francesca Gambetti

IL DIRITTO ALLA FILOSOFIA

Quale filosofia per il terzo millennio?



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DIRETTORI:

LAURA CANDIOTTO (University of Edinburgh)
e LUIGI VERO TARCA (Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia)

COMITATO SCIENTIFICO:

FRANCESCA BREZZI, Università Roma Tre, Società Filosofica Italiana
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STEFANO MASO, Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia, Società Filosofica Italiana
MARÍA CARMEN SEGURA PERAITA, Universidad Complutense de Madrid

A cura di
LAURA CANDIOTTO e FRANCESCA GAMBETTI

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QUALE FILOSOFIA PER IL TERZO MILLENNIO?



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Artes Liberales: Philosophia Advancing Humanitas

Christopher Ulloa Chaves

1. Introduction

Pier Paolo Vergerio (1370 – 1444) stated many centuries ago that “the rest of the arts are called liberal because they befit free men, but philosophy is liberal because it makes men free” (Gamble 2008, 313). It seems that, according to Vergerio, philosophy’s fundamental and practical nature offers the potential to, at least, initiate the emancipation process for citizens living in the free society. In the contemporary sense, philosophy is a core area of study, while also integrated within the larger liberal arts curricula designed to educate the free citizen in order for her to operate within free institutions, and by extension a free society.

Philosophy has been formally defined as the love of wisdom, but Pierre Hadot (2004, 55) also posits that it facilitates a search for truth and informs a certain way of life, usually afforded to a free democratic citizen. The free citizen also can be born with inalienable human rights or those bestowed upon him by the state; but, these rights cannot secure and advance human well-being without *perfectibility*, that is, the equal opportunity to develop oneself throughout life (Rousseau 1992, 158). Thus, through the tools of perfectibility, such as philosophy and its progeny a liberal arts education, the person, as a consequence, engages her life with greater freedom of action, meaning she is less encumbered by the chains of unfounded ideas, bigotry, fear, ignorance, or particular selfishness; he or she has greater cognitive, psychomotor, or spiritual freedom in the world, while recognizing their responsibilities to the human community.

In the contemporary age, the claim of having a “right” to philosophy seems to suggest that the intellectual benefits it offers should be extracted from the ivory tower and re-extended to the common citizen operating at the street and organizational levels; for the purposes of perfectibility, all human beings should have a right to access and understand the multi-faceted discipline of philosophy as the fundamental key curricula of the *artes liberales*. Indeed, implemented in the right ways, philosophic concepts advance the transcendent goals of truth, beauty, and goodness through important Socratic dialogical and dialectical rules of engagement.

Assuming that persons are interested, or even prepared, to engage in philosophically-informed learning and concrete practices is to take for granted that a formal or informal liberal education curricula is culturally enshrined and has been experienced by a country’s educated citizens. Historically, it has been true that only a few have benefited from a liberal arts educational process; most citizens are trained only for a job, while the elite are afforded both training and education to engage in the comprehensive work of life.

By extending and implementing the abstract concepts of philosophy into a world of diverse concrete ways of living, philosophical engagement potentially also facilitates human and technical progress by informing and applying what are called “best practices.” Philosophy has been described in many ways, but one of its key essential roles in the free society is to inform never ending positive change in human lives, operating systems, or entire institutions. In fact, practical *philosophia* advances a Socratic objective of translating abstract ideas down from, as it were, the clouds or our private minds, and into the concrete personal lives of common and elite individuals.

But, what does this mean in concrete practical terms? Practical philosophy can be the conscious process that enables a search for our own truth; a facilitation process which informs creative imagination to improve a technology, an organizational process, or a certain way of life; and, used to develop humane and compassionate values which, when applied practically, can secure more benefits, social protections, and just experiences for all sentient beings, while helping us deal with new injustices which constantly emerge in the world. More specifically, a practical philosophical process, presents an opportunity to translate the abstract concepts of academic philosophy into more concrete terms and concepts such as thinking critically, thinking creatively, and thinking ethically.

2. Thinking Critically

The search for truth, engaged within important dialogue or a scientific laboratory, requires the aid of critical thinking tools. Thinking critically, herein defined, is the ability to analyze and evaluate new data, information, and the assumptions that underpin what we think we *now* know. Rooted in the reasoning tools of philosophy, thinking critically is a practical process for determining for ourselves that the

information or knowledge we are considering or analyzing is trustworthy, relevant, or timely and can inform what we could consider as credible “truth.” The ability to accomplish this search for philosophic or scientific truth requires definite terms and accompanying concepts that guide our minds during the search about what may be true, relevant or not when, for instance, a medical doctor conducts her examination of a patient. This search for scientific medical truth is informed by criteria such as: *clarity*, precision, relevance, accuracy, depth, breadth, logicity, and significance (Paul & Elder 2009, 8). So what does a philosophically-informed Socratic dialogue between a doctor and a patient look like?

With regards to clarity, the doctor may ask the patient’s parent to explain or define a certain term they are using to describe an injury, use an analogy to describe a condition, or use a simple example to clarify what might be their child’s sickness. When it comes to *precision*, the doctor may ask questions to better understand the child’s sickness by inquiring about specific symptoms it is experiencing such as coughing, sneezing, body pain, body temperature, or when the nausea first began. To apply the criterion of *relevance*, the doctor will ask the parent to provide her only with data and information that closely relates to what, where, and when a sickness seemed to begin in her child.

At this point, the doctor forms a hypothesis which suggests that the child patient, based on the evident symptoms, may actually have a flu, not a simple cold. She will apply the criterion of accuracy to confirm or deny her hypothesis by conducting independent laboratory tests. As the doctor and parent engage in this search for scientific truth, the patient’s parent must also be willing to ask questions which apply the criterion of *depth*; simply stated, the doctor’s answers to the parent must reflect a depth of knowledge and understanding relating to the examination, results of the laboratory tests, and the fact that the results show that the child is suffering from a high fever. Also applying the criterion of *breadth*, the parent should expect that the doctor’s answers make reference to other relevant medical opinions about what the symptoms for flus are, and how to treat them.

Next, the criterion of *logicity* demands that the doctor’s claims and treatment recommendations be based on evidence resulting primarily from her dialogical and scientific analyses of the child patient. And finally, the criteria of *significance* demands that the doctor and parent dialogue about what are the most important steps in properly treating a child’s flu. When humans are faced with the limitations in either healthcare dilemmas or current organizational realities, the creative imagination can aid in transcending human limitations to improve organizational culture and its operating systems.

3. Thinking Creatively

Creativity is often informed by prior or current exposure to the beauty of nature, a museum painting depicting the consequences of religio-fascist ideology, the

sounds of music, a powerful narrative in literature addressing issues relating to justice, love, or ethics. For instance, the Egyptians were inspired by the Papyrus plant to design and construct their long-lasting initiation temple columns; or Picasso's painting *Guernica* inspires greater peace efforts in the world by depicting the horrors of war; and, Rachmaninoff's piano concerto No. 2 in C Minor seems to conjure images of a time and place where Russian revolutionary struggles might have occurred. Movies also have advanced Socratic principles within the mental health professions. In the movie titled *Spellbound* (1945), starring Gregory Peck and Ingrid Bergman, mid 20th century psychoanalysis is described as containing a Socratic character; a process where "the analyst seeks to induce the patient to talk about his hidden problems, to open the locked doors of his mind. Once the complexes that have been disturbing the patient are uncovered, the illness and confusion disappear and the devils of unreason are driven from the soul."

In earlier ages, we see the power of literature informing how political power will be established, practiced, and improved. In East Asian civilization during the 5th Century BC, Confucius' *Analects*, based on Classical Chinese literature and dialogues with his students, improved State-run bureaucracies by emphasizing the necessity of merit-based staffing, ethics, and proper self cultivation on the part of the *bureaucrats*. In 4th Century BC Athens, Plato's Republic would serve to educate State leaders in the theory and practice of *statemanship*.

Since the Renaissance period, the humane arts and letters have had an important effect on overcoming human limitations of all sorts; literature, as a key discipline of an interdisciplinary liberal arts curricula, enables the creation of new realities, and often for human improvement. American literature would apply this idea to create "a more perfect Union." During the 19th and 20th century America, important fiction and nonfiction literature like Harriet B. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Upton Sinclair's book *The Jungle*, and Betty Freidan's *Feminine Mystique* would combine cognitive and affective imagery to inspire reflection and improvement in the social, legal, economic, and political realities of former Black slaves, the working poor, and the occupational opportunities for women. According to Nussbaum (1997, 109), "Interdisciplinary dialogue about literature takes a variety of forms... Many introductory courses in 'world civilizations' or 'western civilizations' bring philosophers together with literary scholars for discussion of central literary texts." Thus, there is potential now to put the interlocutors of the "ancient quarrel" to work on problem solving in the world.

Regardless of external influences, thinking creatively enables us to imagine a new truth, or its synonym concept *reality*, in the abstract or concrete world. Thinking creatively is a practical philosophically-informed exercise that is shaped by the philosopher's main tool: *the question*. How the creative process utilizes particular questions will largely determine how a new innovation in ideas and occupational processes can be developed and applied. Creativity for its own sake is important, but it also can be used to solve concrete challenges in the world; thus, creativity can

improve the human condition in diverse ways. For instance, the creative process can begin with the question, *how can we improve this patient's overall well-being?*, or, *how can the ecological protections in place be improved for the long-term?*, and, *how can this new computer software program improve our administrative processes?*

Using the example of “administrative processes,” the answers to this question can be produced by using the following sub-questions applied within an experiential learning process: What seems to be the current reality in the organization or operating environment? What do we think and feel about the current reality and its policies or processes? What laws, hiring practices, information sharing technologies, safety regulations, promotion policies, or organizational procedures can improve the current cultural or operational environment? And, what ethos or normative criteria will let us *know* if the recommended solutions are the most just ones for improving the current social, technical, or administrative operating environment? Applying these questions through this experiential learning process affords freedom of thought and freedom from the restrictiveness of requiring only *one* right dogmatic answer, but instead allows for *many* relevant right answers.

It seems then that in order for philosophy to continue adding humane value to the world, it also must return to some of its roots; this requires returning to a genuine commitment to informing problem solving efforts in the world through what I consider a seeming contradiction in terms namely *intellectual naivete*. A basic Google (12/12/2015) search of “naivete” yields the following formal definition as “a lack of experience, wisdom or judgement,... innocence or unsophistication”. I will define “intellectual naivete” as that human trait which balances a critical mindset with an open, nonjudgemental, and meek (teachable) attitude applied to a problem solving situation.

When faced with humans’ need to know, limitations, or issues of justice, the trait of intellectual naivete can be one of the most powerful of dialectical options when facilitating for creativity. Applying intellectual naivete does not mean that healthy skepticism is absent in our thinking and feeling faculties. Indeed, Socrates initiated a more transparent and powerful approach in his search for truth by being, or pretending to be, naive about an important issue in order to establish the best view or course of action given a certain dilemma. Indeed, it requires not false courage, but a humble Socratic search for truth often characteristic of a genuinely inquisitive child, who must learn new things to survive in the world. While Picasso extolled children’s imaginative powers, as arguably most are usually unencumbered by the complexities of adult life and increasing doubts about the world, he also argued in a Platonic sense that even for adults “everything you can imagine is real; indeed, many of our ideas we imagine stem from our innate creative genius. Chaves (2014), citing the Encyclopedia Americana, provides the following description of creative genius as a:

Personal force and energy of an extremely high order, usually leading to outstanding achievement.... Men and women of genius are vehicles for the transfor-

mation of society. They create the new forms in all the ways in which humans will and intellectual power may be expressed: in art, letters, mathematics, science, invention, exploration, economics, philosophy, religion, law, social institutions, politics, and war. Often in creating the new, genius downgrades or destroys the old (Chaves 2014, 161).

Indeed, Socrates feigned intellectual naivete while employing key questions in order to draw out this “personal force and energy” apparently resident in the human soul of others; key questions can trigger the extraction of the tacit creative ideas in our minds. Moreover, the case for consciously using ethical theory to inform creative organizational policies and design or engineering plans is one way to infuse important and relevant values into highly scientific, technical, and social systems.

4. Thinking Ethically

In order for critical and creative thinking’s power to be used to promote and sustain genuine human freedom and well-being, these two foregoing forms of practical philosophy should be informed by the other branch of theoretical philosophy: *ethics*. The American president Theodore Roosevelt once said that “To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to create a menace to society”; one need only recall the recent example of Martin Shkreli, former CEO of the pharmaceutical firm RetroPhin, who hiked the price of its new drug called Daraprim 5,000 percent to make this point. With regards to life-saving drugs, a pharmaceutical company’s scientists, finance, and marketing departments can collaborate by asking the following question: *how ought we to price and market a new drug which holds much promise for particular cancer patients?*

To begin answering this question, informing the consequent open dialogue can be utilitarian ethical theory, meaning that we make more drug design and market decisions with a primary intention to provide the greatest amount of well-being to the largest number of consumers; basically, the economy serving, first, long-term human needs, not humans serving short-term financial profit margins which can disappear when reacting to a competitor’s new drug or deception tactic in the marketplace. For instance, a case can be made that the recovery of research investment funds applied towards generating a new drug can be realized within a longer time-frame, so as to create greater access to the drug for the greatest number of needy patients, now through a lower price, instead of later when it’s too late; special patent protections and market access can be afforded to such pharmaceutical firms which place the appropriate ethical values ahead of short-term profit margins. Indeed, this requires that the West’s corporate boards assimilate more Eastern values about long-term profit expectations into the former’s financial markets and economic system and policies.

Other ethical theories include the multifaceted concept of *virtue*. As virtue ethics focuses on a virtuous person as an exemplar to emulate, an organization can be considered an exemplar entity worthy of emulation due to its best practices in the marketplace, as those found in the socially responsible investment, or SRI funds categories. Best practices may include appropriate employee rights and responsibilities and manufacturing practices, but also procedures which, for instance, prevent a firm from over-promising on a product's benefits and features, while engaging in "bait and switch" tactics. Of course, thinking ethically can be that kind of analyses and evaluation that is inclusive, and intentionally excludes, or removes, information, knowledge, and outcomes that will disenfranchise humans, animals, and the ecological environment; while humans and animals are generally treated differently, ethical thinking tends to influence a way of thinking and feeling which places equal value on all sentient beings, especially when considering their potential for perfectibility. Moreover, an animal's ability to experience pain, pleasure or fear affords it legal rights' consideration, not simply because they can serve human interests; as a living being in the present world, the interests of all animals should always be considered.

While utilitarian ethical theory considers the consequences for a group's interests, protecting the rights of the individual through universal rules also should be a priority. Therefore, deontological ethical theory can posit the values that can influence the rules which protect the rights to healthcare treatment and medical records or workplace privacy; the consequent rules can reflect human concerns and preferences, legal protections, and technological considerations. Indeed, considering an evolving form of Hippocratic Oath, meaning that we do no harm to an individual patient's best interests, informs new progress while safeguarding timeless protections. While some of the foregoing ideas may seem a bit naive to many, in our constantly changing world we must always ask the question: *what must we continue to do to advance the humane universal ideas that infuse evolving wellbeing in the world?*

5. Conclusion

Philosophical theory and practice can teach us how to begin discerning truth from falsehood at a credible level for a certain moment in time, use questions to create efficient and beautiful improvements for human and technological environments around us, and posit the secular universal values which can inform what we *ought to do* regarding old covenants and new opportunities in the world. Indeed, philosophy has informed and formed many of the concrete concepts we now apply such as thinking critically (truth), thinking creatively (beauty) and thinking ethically (goodness) in support of diverse humanistic ways of living in the world which attempt to consider the interests of all sentient beings in the world.

But many do not want to drag the enterprise of philosophy out of its elite enclaves and into the dirty and hazardous gladiator arena of the non-academic world. There is safety and comfort being away from the unwashed masses whom we have refused, or failed to, engage as Socrates did so many centuries ago; we secretly surmise that there is enough danger among the sharp elbows attached to those we serve with within the ivory tower academy. And yet, the very foundations of the free society are constantly at risk when its citizens' base passions or egos, not our better angels, are appealed to by marketplace promotion strategies which turn human relationships solely into opportunities to make money, not serve human well-being. Moreover, aggressive human personalities masquerading as strong leadership traits in the political realm continue to appeal to the latent prejudices that humans harbor about their different neighbors to achieve undeserved leadership roles in society; indeed, the 20th and current century continue to serve as times in the Modern and Post-Modern Eras within which we still can anticipate the potential consequences of dangerous religious and political rhetoric and accompanying leadership styles.

Philosophically informed reasoning, meaning reasoning informed by evidence and ethical goals, infused within existing and emerging professions, including religious ministry, can do its part to prevent human folly and the practice of war that is so easy to resort to. If we fail to, we can reasonably expect to be faced with what Englishman W.K. Clifford asserted in his debate with William James during the late 19th century: "The danger to society is not merely that it should believe wrong things, though that is great enough; but that it should become credulous, and lose the habit of testing things and inquiring into them; for then, it must sink back into savagery" (Clifford 2013, 121).

Thinking critically about the irrational, ego-centric, or sadomasochistic human tendency to embrace injustice and pain in life and society can prevent the conserving of primitive and medieval practices which discourage humans from demanding and implementing necessary and creative progress in the world. Instead, the creative and ethical society can pursue the noble unselfish goals of decreasing pain, a metaphor for injustice in the world, and develop policies and enforceable laws which increase more pleasant realities for all sentient beings. Indeed, it takes hard work and interdisciplinary efforts for evolving positive change to take place; historically, however, the efforts on the part of elites has been to conserve the status quo and ascribe nobility to suffering and injustice in the world. Thus, philosophically informed reasoning, then, must be used to analyze and evaluate these negative forms of religious, cultural, and political manipulation applied to human beings and ask the questions which move humans at the street level to improve this world, especially in light of new data and knowledge.

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