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*BADIOUIAN PHILOSOPHY, CRITICAL
PEDAGOGY AND THE K12: SUTURING
THE EDUCATIONAL WITH
THE POLITICAL*

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Abstract. This paper addresses specific concerns that emerge as a consequence to the current educational reforms in the Philippines. These concerns are philosophical and pedagogical. The philosophical concern underscores the importance to situate philosophical thought within concrete historical conditions. In this way, philosophy does not only become a pure abstract enterprise, but an intellectual struggle at the service of historical novelties. I propose a philosophical paradigm that values collective practice at the service of truth. As new situations demand new interpretations and contextualization, I shall also employ a philosophical discourse and practice not only contemporary to, but also one of the bests of our times: the philosophy of Alain Badiou. The pedagogical concern elucidates the political nature of education, which is what Critical Pedagogy argues essentially. This paradigm puts importance above all on the role critical knowledge and collective practice plays in the educational and socio-political arena. The critical pedagogy which I propose is not far from the emancipation politics also embedded in Badiouian Philosophy. Hence, there is a connection between the kind of philosophy I propose and the pedagogical paradigm I present as an alternative. From the philosophical and pedagogical arguments presented, I shall argue for the need to rescue education from the influence of neoliberalism. The resistance necessitates the movement of the collective through the agency of the teacher-militant.

Keywords: Philosophy, critical pedagogy, politics, democracy, truth, neoliberalism

Introduction

The current reforms to the Philippine educational system open new and difficult challenges. For one, they raise the issue of what

pedagogical paradigm/s be utilized not only to deliver quality instruction but also to raise the consciousness of Filipino learners. The latter needs to be underscored since Philosophy and also the Humanities and the Social Sciences are primarily committed to this call. In the case of Philosophy, the discipline receives a new appreciation under the current educational reforms. Philosophical studies are already integrated in the elementary education, junior, and senior high schools.

The integration of more Philosophy courses to the entire educational curriculum could be a positive gesture. But two central concerns arise out from the current educational reforms. First is related to philosophy. There is the need to situate philosophical thought within concrete historical conditions. In this way, philosophy does not only become a pure abstract enterprise, but an intellectual struggle at the service of historical novelties. Especially in the case of high school and college students, I propose a philosophical paradigm that values collective practice at the service of truth. Marxist discourses and critical theories have been faithful to this endeavour. But as new situations demand new interpretations and contextualization, so I shall also employ a philosophical discourse and practice not only contemporary to, but also one of the bests of our times: the philosophy of Alain Badiou.

Second is concerned with pedagogy. As the etymology of pedagogy suggests, it is “to lead a child.” But this “leading” do have political implications. At the outset, I will argue for an alternative educational paradigm under the name of Critical Pedagogy. This paradigm puts importance above all on the role critical knowledge and collective practice plays in the educational and socio-political arena. It essentially treats education as political (Giroux, 2009). The concept of critical pedagogy which I propose is not far from the emancipation politics also embedded in Badiouian Philosophy. Hence, there is a connection between the kind of philosophy I propose and the pedagogical paradigm I present as an alternative.

Although criticized by various sectors in the Philippine society, the K-12 was still implemented. The task now is to use the K-12 for the intensification of analytical and critical thought. This task will prevent the danger that many feared: that the K12 would simply become a

neoliberal globalization's means for the production of more market/industry-oriented yet cheaply paid technical workers devoid of critical thought.

Philosophy and Truth

Philosophy for Alain Badiou is not a discipline independent or abstract from concrete historical situations. It does not create philosophical claims simply based from abstract speculative thinking. Rather, he argues that philosophy is a result of these four conditions or truth procedures: science, politics, art and love. Philosophy is conditioned by scientific advances and innovations, political upheavals and conflicts, artistic productions and creations, or amorous encounters of man and woman.

Philosophy is an aftermath. Unlike the classical understanding of the priority of the discipline, philosophy comes secondary. Hence, the existence and the future of philosophy relies "on its capacity for progressive adaptation to the changing of its conditions" (Badiou 2012b, 3). Philosophical thought is possible only after every historical event that changes the orientation or paradigm of (scientific, artistic, political and amorous) thought.

One important condition for philosophy's existence is democracy. Through democracy, opinions and ideas can freely proliferate without the fear of censorship or suppression. This situation implies the axiom of the equality of intelligences (Badiou 2012b, 27) which guarantees that anyone can be a philosopher. At the initial level, philosophy, through democracy, does not discriminate since the task to think is open to all. The validity of a philosophical declaration does not rest on the position (whether a university professor or a proletariat) of the speaker, but on the content of what is declared (Ibid., 27). However, the equality of intelligences never leads to or promotes the equality of opinions. Some "opinions" or ideas are far more superior compared to others that possess less or no validity or truth at all. As Badiou suggests, "we must follow Plato in distinguishing, first, between correct and mistaken opinions, and, second, between opinion and truth" (Ibid., 28). Hence, ideas must be differentiated as to the truth that they express. This is the reason why Badiou contends that, contrary to the sophists, philosophers must declare that there are

eternal truths (Badiou 2008, 11; Meillasoux 2011), and that “philosophy is the site of thought at which (non-philosophical) truths seize us and are seized as such” (Badiou 2008, 13).

What needs to be immediately clarified here is that philosophy does not produce truth since prior to it “there are (already) truths” (Badiou 2007, 340). These truths are produced through scientific experiments, artistic articulations, political movements, and amorous declarations between man and woman. But the proclamation that “there are truths” is far from suggesting a relativist conception of truth since the said proclamation presupposes the category of the Truth. The Truth, as “the central category of any possible philosophy” sustains philosophy (Badiou 2008, 8). Philosophy *operates* on the basis of non-philosophical truths which seize it and which it seizes. The sophists of the old rejected this category in exchange of relativism and subjectivism (Stumpf 2003, 31-34). This rejection is the very reason why long before, the ancient Philosophers Plato and Aristotle had already criticized the sophists and the kind of thought with which they base their discourses (Schreiber 2003; McCoy 2008) in order to save the Truth and philosophy. Perhaps, contemporary philosophers are also called to the same vocation.

The category of the Truth simultaneously expresses two concepts: plurality of truths and their epochal compossibility. Truths are plural since they are produced by varied conditions. However, through the shelter provided by philosophy—or through philosophical thought—non-philosophical truths are compossible throughout “time” since, as *eternal*, they are “capable of traversing the particularity of an epoch, of a milieu, of a language game” (Meillasoux 2011, online). As Badiou clarifies, “the Truth simultaneously designates a plural state of things... and the unity of thought” (Badiou 2008, 11). But how are truths produced?

The emergence of truths depends solely on a *rupture* against the normal/natural state of the situation. It is conditioned by both an *Event* (see Badiou 2007, 178-183, 187-190) that subverts the law or the structure of the situation in order to create a new possibility (Badiou, 2013), and the *Fidelity* “of subjects that attempt to investigate their world in light of”(Meillasoux 2011, online) the Event. These are the subjects “seized” or, as Meillasoux (2011, online) describes it,

“captivated” by the truth of the event. The scientists, artists, militant activists, and lovers produce truths as they endeavour to proceed against their “natural” (or the normal, given, routinary, possible) situation. The subjects, finding that the situation is simply characterized by opinion, boredom, rigidity, oppression, corruption and/or egotistic sexual gratification, rebel against the situation and work on an initially *impossible* project but which will later change the situation. Hence, truth is not something presented but an operation: an active (or Badiou would sometimes use “militant”) operation of subjects bound by fidelity to the event in order to construct, not simply a new, but a changed situation. It could also be said that “truths begin as the immanent subtraction to *what there is*” (Chatterjee 2014, online). Badiou further clarifies that “the all-powerfulness of a truth is merely that of changing what is, such that this unnameable being may be, which is the very being of what-is” (Badiou 2007, 343).

That is why when couples are truly in love, they go beyond their individual usual routines and start doing things they formerly thought to be impossible. Later, they begin to see and construct the world not from a selfish egotist perspective, but already from the vantage point of the Two who are bound to be tenacious through their act of fidelity. They remain faithful to the truth of their Event-encounter, which was formally declared in their vow: *I will love you forever*. There is somehow a change of lives, a conversion of the Two. The couple’s love “invents a different way of lasting life” (Badiou 2012a, 33). In the same vein, the militant activists, seized by the truth that genuine politics is always emancipatory, organize and make themselves as a powerful collective that shatters the power of the State and the ruling class in order to construct an egalitarian social setup. The political subjects struggle militantly even still within the old reactionary situation. Furthermore, this decision demands “the organisation, the harsh struggles, the sacrifices... discipline and prolonged work to find the strategic means to victory” (Badiou 2012b, 34).

The eternity of truths is manifested in their capacity to be recreated in new historical situations. Hence, truths are “impossible to reduce to any relativism” (Meillasoux 2011, online). But this is also far from concluding that truths are simple repetitions of past achievements or failures. On the contrary, the emergence of truths

produced by events paves the way for a rebirth of history, thus opening up a novelty which has never taken place in any temporal period but which, paradoxically, is founded from an eternal truth. This is also why truths are historical (Ibid.) because they are not transcendent; they emerge and are being operated on or acted upon in concrete historical events. This is Badiou's point when he said that "in philosophy, we have something invariant, something of the order of a compulsion to repeat..." (Badiou 2012b, 13). Philosophy acts upon a truth which insistently and repetitively operates throughout particular epochs. That genuine love, for example, is not a mere sexual fetishism is a truth creatively produced eternally throughout the history of amorous encounters; that emancipation is the core of every genuine politics has been infinitely actualized from slave rebellions, to bourgeois revolutions and communist constructions, and lately in the numerous "global popular uprising" which Badiou describes as a signal for a rebirth of history (Badiou 2012c, 5). Genuine love and politics have long been conditions that provoke philosophical thought.

Philosophy operates upon the production of non-philosophical truths. The philosopher should then actively observe and reflect the changing of his/her conditions. This was the case, for example, of the philosophies of Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Whitehead, Hegel and Nietzsche, being conditioned by the sciences (Badiou 2012b, 24). Here, we can also see the logic why the likes of Plato, Marx, and Rizal emerge due to the concrete political crises which strongly conditioned their philosophies. The more active the conditions are, the more philosophers emerge. From a political perspective, Badiou elucidates the matter: "wherever a human collective is working in the direction of equality, the conditions are met for everyone to be a philosopher" (Badiou 2012b, 37).

Education, Politics and Philosophy

Three important concepts from the preceding section have important educational implications: the equality of intelligences, democracy, and truth. From these ideas, I shall construct a Critical Pedagogy that will enlighten the nature of our K-12 and therefore avoid the dangers it inherently possesses. I will argue that through this

pedagogy, more critical thinkers, if not philosophers, be brought out from the womb of our educational system.

The equality of intelligences implies a democratic character of education. The notion of democracy is of two modes: democratic educational space (or the micro level), and democratic socio-political space (or the macro level). The former means that all are equal in any educational space (I would not limit this to a classroom). No one can, at the initial level, claim superiority above another. There must be this educational space which encourages all voices and discourses to be recognized and registered. Therefore, at this level, there simply is tolerance.

To be recognized means that a discourse or subjectivity is appreciated as existing. To be registered shows that the recognized discourse or subjectivity is on par with all the other recognized. The registry of discourses and subjectivities affirms that there are *other* discourses existing in plurality. This is similar to the postmodernist possibility of accommodating the plurality of narratives and discourses (Aronowitz and Giroux 1991, 69). Also, Dewey pointed this out long before when he said that “there must be a large shared undertakings and experiences” in order to prevent the danger that what “educate some into masters, educate others into slaves” (Dewey 2001, 48).

The acts of recognition and registration entail a seemingly passive process of acceptance and enlisting of thoughts. The passivity is based on the fact that ideas, at the level of subjective enunciation, *should still be left unchallenged*. Though passive, this educational process is not similar to the banking model of education which simply is an educational imposition and does not treat subjectivities as starting points of a problem-posing education (Freire 2000, 80 & 84). Hence, the passivity of the process is already enough for initial subjective empowerment, a process that already avoids what Dewey warns as enslavement.

However, no opinion, much more an idea, should be left unchallenged. Genuine educational *activity* is all about challenging ideas. Ideas challenge ideas not in order to give way for domination but for validity, and much more truth, to emerge. Initially democracy *is*, so that ideas could be registered and rational argumentation could take place. Eventually, democracy *is not*, for ideas have to be subtracted

from the plain equality of opinions (common in a “democratic” or liberal environment) in order to give way for truth or philosophy. Badiou reiterated what Plato had long before argued: philosophy is far more important than democracy (Badiou 2012b, 30).

In other words, difference or otherness must not just simply be respected. Tolerance, as Žižek sees it, is actually “an ideological category” (2009, 119). Indiscriminate tolerance or respect diminishes if not obscures critique. Political differences, for example, are treated as something given or natural and so has to be respected and tolerated. What is obscured is the reality that such differences are “conditioned by political inequality or economic exploitation” (Ibid.). Beyond respect and indiscriminate tolerance, there must be critique. This process resembles what Marcuse calls as “discriminating tolerance” (Marcuse 2005, 89) so that indiscriminate “freedom of expression” is curbed. This is also why Mao condemns liberalism since it “rejects ideological struggle” and “stands for unprincipled peace” (Zedong 2007, 103). Philosophy is never at home with peace. It is in an ever exodus because of dialectics.

In this educational process, critical knowledge is essential; it commences the process and it is itself the process’ goal. This is precisely what McLaren describes as critical knowledge which is “persistently open, disclosive, incomplete and open-ended” (McLaren 2000, 186). If we have to characterize a critical knowledge, it is its persistence to disclose. It may be the case, for example, that postmodernism, in some of its versions, wills to empower the marginalized other but also fails to engage in “the important issue of what social conditions need to exist before such groups can actually exercise forms of self and social empowerment” (Aronowitz & Giroux 1991, 73).

There is the importance, then, to disclose the concrete and crucial relationship between difference and otherness on the one hand, and power and class on the other. Hence, in order to be genuinely political, one cannot get rid of the concept of binary oppositions which will paradoxically create a strong solidarity united by a common cause. Since democracy must give way for truth, so also individuality must give way for the *collective*. This is so because in genuine politics, which is rare, the collective is truth (Badiou 2008, 150). Žižek (2009, 133)

developed a better formula for this collectivization: in spite of our differences, we can identify the basic antagonism or antagonistic struggle in which we are both caught; so let us join in our *intolerance* and join forces in the same struggle. This is one big political act within a specific educational space. This act is possible through the emergence of a figure capable of suturing the educational with the political. I term this figure, the teacher-militant. The teacher-militant, as an agent of the collective, makes possible “the rise of universality out of the particular lifeworld” (Ibid., 129).

The democratic conception of education at the socio-political level situates education within a bigger arena of class and economic conflicts. On the one hand, it is a subversion against the neoliberal drive of an ever commercialized and deregulated education (see Mok 2006, 2; Villegas 2007, 27) perfectly articulated by President Aquino’s 2011 Budget Message (Aquino 2010). The authenticity of the K-12 as an educational reform can be validated if it *first* addresses the fundamental problem of the low, if not decreasing, state subsidy to education which only amounts to lower than the UNESCO-prescribed 6% of the country’s GDP. Even the P336.9 billion budget for the Department of Education (DepEd), the agency’s biggest budget ever since, still does not follow the constitutional provision that mandates the priority of education in the annual budget appropriation, as an enormous amount of P791.5 billion is allotted for debt servicing (Umil 2013, online). Even State Colleges and Universities (SCUs), despite the minimal budget increase in 2013, still suffer inadequate subsidy as state funding only amounts to only 68% of the required SCU funding (Umil 2014, online).

On the other hand, if the task to think is open to all, i.e., *anyone can* become a philosopher, higher education should be legally guaranteed and, most of all, encouraged in a formal system of education. In the case of the current K12, out of the three tracks students may choose to specialize in their senior high, only one track encourages the pursuit of higher education. The other two tracks condition the idea of the senior high being the terminal education (for some Filipinos) since after graduating from these two tracks, students, *in principle*, are said to be employable as technical-vocational workers (Vital Legislative Achievements 2013, 3-4).

If the K12 is selective as to who can only proceed to the higher education, then this current reform will ultimately lead to an exclusivist approach to the task of thinking. It is exclusivist precisely because ultimately, those determined to be tech-voc workers are ordered to the technical, devoid of the intellectual. Prior to the K12's implementation, Cruz already conceptualized a college-not-for-all in order to address the mismatch between the industry and education (Cruz 2010, 113). This and similar other ideas which are inherent in the K12 follow the Hegelian model of an educational system that stratifies society and consequently privileges only a few (Dewey 2011, 36).

What has to be exposed here is the danger of an educational system that, subservient to local and foreign capitalist market and industry, primarily aims at producing semi-skilled yet cheaply-paid workers. Even the current Roadmap on Philippine Higher Education Reform (RPHER) of President Aquino is revelatory of an educational paradigm that devalues the production of intellectuals and highly skilled workers. Underscoring its five priority areas for job generation and economic development – and also avoiding duplicative programs already offered by Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) – RPHER mandates SCUs to offer courses/programs that answer the needs of these fields (alone): semi-conductor and electronics, Business Process Outsourcing, Tourism, Fisheries and Agriculture, and Infrastructure (Umil 2014, online). Two things can be inferred from this situation. The devaluing of humanities and arts, specifically liberal arts, in today's market-driven and profit-oriented society, and the State's gradual release of responsibility of maintaining courses other than those related to the five fields above, as these other programs are already passed on as a responsibility of PHEIs which, however, demand more expensive fees than the SCUs.

Democracy at the macro level is minimal if not obscure. There is only privilege but not democracy. Contrary to a democratic conception of education, there is only an elitist education. As guided by the college-not-for-all concept, and the neoliberal thrust towards privatization and deregulation, an elitist education rejects both the equality of intelligences and a democratic conception of education.

This situation must be resisted. In other words, there is a greater struggle of education on the socio-political level. At the micro level, the

possibility of initial democracy and eventual critique makes critical knowledge emerge. And since genuine critical knowledge is not anymore a discourse espoused by the individual intellectual, but rather as an idea that seizes a collective, critical knowledge must be used in order to achieve minimum and maximum goals: minimally, critical knowledge expands and consolidates more individuals; maximally, critical knowledge is expressed in concrete collective action.

The Impossible Dream

Education, at the socio-political context, is far from being democratic. There dominates a “philosophy” that already predetermines existences and structures society according to the rule of further profit accumulation. Political education, which is critical in nature, must not surrender education to the mechanisms of capital. Rather, the collective, as an expression of political education conditioned by the teacher-militant, works on a project which Marx has long before envisioned: to rescue education from the influence of the ruling class (Marx 2000, 259). Impossible may be the term used by the liberals to describe this process. Yes it is! But this impossibility, paradoxically, is pregnant with hope and optimism. This is the impossible with which the scientist, the artist, the lover and, adding a little emphasis, the militant activist had worked before, are working on now, and will work still in the future. This is the initially impossible that turned out to be novel scientific, artistic, amorous and political inventions. Before I finally end my paper, let me quote once again Badiou: “and though there exists a poetics of defeat, there is no philosophy of defeat. Philosophy, in its very essence, elaborates the meaning of saying ‘Yes!’ to the previously unknown thoughts that hesitate to become the truths that they are.”

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