Chapter 7

Conclusion

ABSTRACT

After a quick reminder of this project’s main objectives and their outcomes, this chapter considers the impact of a cross-disciplinary approach on education, arguing that it is not only a fruitful pedagogical method, but also a deeply enriching path for personal development, in the same way that mentoring and international journeys are. We also consider what we have learned about the way in which science, philosophy, and narratives are intricately connected. We make recommendations for further research, especially on the role of narratives and philosophy in other cross-disciplinary fields, such as culture, psychotherapy, and the challenges currently posed by technology. We encourage further exploration of the ways in which narratives may be abused to advance particular interests in various fields of public life. We end with a reminder of the prolific role of both stories and practical philosophy in the process of formative education (or personal development in general). Here, mentors and journeys have a key role, equivalent to that of internships in formal education.

WHERE WE STARTED

Here is a summary of what this project attempted to do, and why. The main objectives that we set ourselves were as follows:

1. To build a cross-disciplinary model of thinking, based on a combination of scientific views with experiential details (or ‘narratives’ from the real life).

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2. To emphasise the role of philosophy in this enterprise – where philosophy is understood as a practice (of dialogue and debate), rather than a theory.

The type of philosophy closest to this practical thinking is best illustrated by phenomenology and hermeneutics, which are at once, theory and practice. These are intertwined, almost like two facets of the same coin, in that phenomenology looks at the world through the lenses of consciousness’ intentionality towards what is perceived, whilst hermeneutics interprets what is perceived, at the same time as using a certain pre-understanding in that process of interpretation. It is a similar dialectics to that between Dasein and Being, in Heidegger (1927; 2005s).

In fact, Martin Heidegger is one of the three representatives of this type of thinking we have chosen to illustrate, with respect to the three cases we discuss in this book. The other two are 20th century European philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (incidentally, a student of Heidegger’s) and contemporary pragmatist Richard Shusterman. Each of them has their own hermeneutical method, which we sought to apply to our cases. The latter are real events, therefore by nature cross-disciplinary. The correspondences are as follows: in Section 1, we used a phenomenological approach to investigate a stroke’s impact on the mind/body problem, consciousness and the self; there we looked at contributions from neuroscience, psychology, philosophy and culture. In Section 2, we applied Gadamer’s notion of practical reason (phronesis) to the case of a change in law and Heideggerian hermeneutics – that is, an evocative method of uncovering the deeper truth lying underneath the surface of every artwork – to the life of artists inspired by their beliefs. The two cases discussed there (of a Balinese artist whose art is a direct manifestation of his beliefs, and of a Christian painter monk) are also good examples of what the neo-pragmatists refer to as an attempt to achieve an ‘artful life-practice’.

The Impact of Cross-Disciplinary Education and The Journey Metaphor

Arguing in favour of bringing together science, experience and education is not uncommon; nowadays, pedagogical methods and even whole curricula at both undergraduate and graduate levels insist on the value of inter-disciplinary approaches to otherwise disciplinary bound subject areas. What is unique to this particular attempt is the focus on the role of philosophy in bringing
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