

Teaching Philosophy and Doing Philosophy in the Space of Play

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Introduction

Dear friends, I am a professor of philosophy and have been teaching philosophy more than 30 years. In 1992, I started to do philosophy with children using my own methods. I had known nothing about Lipman's curriculum. I based my method only on my university experience and philosophical education, trying to do something unofficial and useful for children. That's how "Philosophical Games for children and adults" appeared. It was my first program in philosophy with children. When I discovered Lipman's work and the world practice in P4C, I was surprised by the very similar points of our programs despite some differences. I started to use Lipman's term, "doing philosophy" as opposed to "teaching philosophy." The differences and similarities between both of these pedagogical practices became clear to me as I worked with university students and with children. What's the basic platform of deference between doing philosophy and teaching philosophy? I believe that it is the difference between the philosophical styles of Socrates and Plato. I will try to make that argument in what is to follow.

It is traditional "to do philosophy" in P4C and other forms of practical philosophy, and "to teach philosophy" at university and high school. There are many cross-points between doing and teaching philosophy, but the main cross-point is "*philosophizing*." If we present philosophical concepts to our students, we give them the result of great philosophers' philosophizing. If we involve our student in philosophizing, we make them "philosophers." Who is a Philosopher? In my mind he or she is a person who looks for wisdom (motivation); who could be surprised (the pushing); who thinks reflexively (the way). In other words, philosophizing is a process of thinking, and philosophical concepts are a result of philosophizing.

I understand philosophizing as a certain way of thinking. I do not take the age differences into account. If philosophizing is a way of thinking it could be used by grown-up as well as by children. From this perspective, any person who starts philosophizing becomes a "philosopher", one who is interested in the essence of things. Another point is that philosophizing is a kind of play, like "language games," which was suggested by Wittgenstein. We will explore play and language games in what is to follow.

1. Doing Philosophy and Teaching Philosophy

1.1. Philosophy and Philosophizing

The epistemological status of philosophizing can be defined by comparing it to the term “philosophy,” which could be understood widely.

For example:

- all learning exclusive of the technical
- pursuit of wisdom
- search for general understanding of values and reality by chiefly speculative means, an analysis of the grounds and concepts expressing fundamental beliefs
- a system of philosophical concepts
- a theory underlying or regarding a sphere of activity or thought
- the most general beliefs, concepts and attitudes of an individual or group
- knowledge of things and their causes, whether theoretical or practical
- the system which a person forms for the conduct of life
- research into mysteries
- art of questioning

This is a very short list of existing definitions of philosophy.

The term “philosophy” is often used in a synonymic way with the term “metaphysics,” coming from Aristotelian philosophy. So, the main topic of Kant’s “Critique of Pure Reason” is the possibility of metaphysics, understood in a specific way. Kant defines metaphysics in terms of “the cognitions after which reason might strive independently of all experience,” and his goal in the book is to reach a “decision about the possibility or impossibility of a metaphysics in general, and the determination of its sources, as well as its extent and boundaries, all, however, from principles” (Kant 1998, p. 101). Kant’s position is based on the certainty that philosophy could only be looking for The Truth, but it will never reach The Truth. That is why there are many philosophies, and none of them is correct. So, how can we teach philosophy? If every philosophy gives us an original world view and we will never recognize any of them as a true theory, it seems to follow that we should never ask students what they know as the correct answer, but, rather, we can ask them what they think. This could be characterized as turning from teaching philosophy to doing philosophy. Kant adds that the philosophical writer, or teacher of philosophy is not to be regarded as the paradigm of judgement but he/she “should be taken as the occasion for forming the student’s own judgement. What the pupil is really looking for is proficiency in the method of reflecting and drawing inferences for himself” (Kant 2015, p. 107).

So, the nature of philosophy is different from other types of knowledge; in philosophy there is no common standard for following ideas one by one. That is why Kant supposed that we could not teach philosophy, but that we could teach philosophizing. He made a distinction between philosophy and *philosophizing*. Philosophy is opinion, and philosophizing is a way of founding it.

Let us compare.

Teaching philosophy

1. Translate information about philosophy and philosophers
2. The way of development is evolution and increase of knowledge
3. The result of development is knowledge
4. The way of evaluation: student have correct information about the subject (objective criteria)

Doing philosophy

1. Thinking together
2. The way of development is evolution of cognitive skills: questioning, conceptualizing, interpreting, analyzing
3. The result of development is “good thinking”
4. The way of evaluation: (subjective criteria)

Certainly, the above is a very simplified outline of differences, but it allows us to see the problem in the sphere of philosophical education. What do you want to do as a new philosophy teacher? If you want your students to know the names of philosophers and learn by memory some aphorisms and to remember the main texts, then you are closer to “teaching philosophy.” If you want them to think philosophically, then you need to help them to “do philosophy.” Doing philosophy has a background in our mind. If we believe Kant, we should recognize the existence of “metaphysical addiction” which pushes us to find answers to eternal questions, such as: What is freedom? What is knowledge? What is God? If all of us have a metaphysical addiction, it seems to follow that everyone can be a philosopher, that everyone has the possibility to philosophize.

Karl Popper makes a similar claim when he says “All men and all women are philosophers” (2012, p. 17).

If people are not conscious of having philosophical problems, they have, at any rate, philosophical prejudices. Most of these are theories which they take for granted: they have absorbed them from their intellectual environment or from tradition. Since few of these theories are consciously held, they are prejudices in the sense that they are held without critical examination, even though they may be of great importance for the practical actions of people, and for their whole life (Popper 2012, p. 17).

So, according to Popper there are two criteria to being a philosopher, which allow everybody to be one: *philosophical prejudices*, and thoughts about life and death.

Let us think of the difference between having a philosophy and doing philosophy. Virtually everyone “has a philosophy” in the sense that we have many basic beliefs about the world and ourselves and use certain key concepts to articulate those beliefs. Many of us initially come to thus “have a philosophy” (or elements of several philosophies) often only unconsciously, or by following

"what's obvious" or "what everybody knows", or by adopting a view because it sounds exciting or is intellectually fashionable.

"Doing philosophy," on the other hand, is a self-conscious unearthing and rigorous examination of these basic beliefs and key concepts. In doing so, we try to clarify the meanings of those beliefs and concepts and to evaluate critically their rational grounds or justification. Thus, rather than having their heads in the clouds, philosophers are really more under the surface of their thinking, examining the structures that support – or fail to support – that thinking.

1.2. Philosophizing as a Kind of Thinking

Philosophizing is always thinking, but thinking is not always philosophizing. What kind of thinking is philosophical thinking? Based on Kant's and Popper's ideas we may say that it is thinking (a) "about" and thinking (b) "by":

- (a) **About** life and death, love and hate, happiness and unhappiness, justice and injustice, and so on. In other words, it is about traditional philosophical concepts. For example, if I think about my morning exercises trying to choose the best ones, I stay in an everyday life thinking space. If I start to think of why I need them? For health. What is it? Why it is important to be healthy? What does it mean to be healthy? – I jump into philosophizing, because the object of my thinking is a common thing.
- (b) **By** philosophical skills: argumentation, interpretation, conceptualization, questioning and others. For example, it is not enough to say that all people want to be happy, I need to give rational arguments, based on knowledge, understanding, and vision

Returning to Kant let us remember his famous essay "What Is Enlightenment?" Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed nonage. Nonage is the inability to use one's own understanding without another's guidance. This nonage is self-imposed if its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in indecision and lack of courage to use one's own mind without another's guidance. *Dare to know! (Sapere aude.)* "Have the courage to use your own understanding,' is therefore the motto of the enlightenment" (Kant (1999). p. 11).

So, the aim of philosophizing is to make a person capable of having a philosophy, to be free in choosing his or her own position. "Teaching philosophy" could be defined as understanding, with another's guidance. Only "doing philosophy" gives a human the possibility of using one's own mind without another's guidance.

1.3. What about Truth?

Philosophizing is always existing in the space of language, like all other human intellectual activity. The classical tradition of thinking requires strong compliance between terms and concepts. This compliance establishes relations of identity between terms and concepts when it comes to definitions and finding analogies. However, the practice of human reasoning and cognition is far from the ideal image created by classical science and philosophy. In my mind, it is consistent with the transformation of the concepts of Truth through the ages. For philosophers from ancient times to the present day the Truth either exists or does not exist, but it does deal with objective reality. Descartes, for example, deeply believed in the Truth. Kant supposed it was limited by knowledge but quite real

too. Even those philosophers who declared the impossibility of reaching the truth (Berkeley and others) perceive the Truth like a reality.

Modern philosophy tends to discuss the problem of The Truth in the context of *thinking* and *language*. For Wittgenstein, for example, the Truth is only a language construction which could be called a *game*. Close to the position about The Truth we find in postmodern philosophy (Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, Richard Rorty and others). In this way of understanding The Truth, we put it into the language and claim the position of relativity of The Truth, which means the full freedom of opinions about every concept. This kind of mental orientation gives us the wild space of philosophizing, using philosophy not for finding The Truth but for making ourselves.

In my opinion, this position is closer to the everyday practice of thinking. We do not use strict analogies to understand and explain something. Language creates many forms of understanding and explaining the processes and phenomena around and inside us. Philosophizing is aimed at understanding reality by language. Doing philosophy, we try to make the meaning of words clearer. When teaching philosophy, we interpret the words of philosophical texts and try to make a philosopher's thinking clearer.

Philosophical thinking, as I said before, is immersed in language and all our definitions and philosophical issues are founded in language with language games as Wittgenstein called them (Wittgenstein, 1958a, p.32). Language games are the way of creating language as it is, according to Wittgenstein. Why is it a game? In my opinion, it is a game because *there is no one single way of speaking, understanding and thinking, there are no strong rules of interpretation* because language creates the *reality of meaning*, which often does not correlate with physical reality and always includes an element of imagination. Language games are skills of understanding in the context of philosophizing. "And this is true. – Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all, – but that they are related to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all 'language'" (Wittgenstein. 1958, p. 31).

1.4. Philosophy for Children

When talking about philosophizing as a type of thinking it is important to remember Lipman's term "good thinking". It is very close to the term philosophizing with a focus on the quality of thinking. Philosophy for Children (P4C) is one of the philosophical practices aimed at the development of *good thinking*. In Lipman's opinion, *good thinking* is the aim of education and critical and creative thinking are indispensable parts of good thinking (Lipman 2003). He wrote: "As we urge to 'teach for thinking' we cannot lose sight of the fact that what we have in mind is good thinking. But how do we identify good thinking?" (Lipman 1995, pp. 37-41). He further suggests that criteria of good thinking involve judgment, reasoning, being strong, relevant and reliable. Another marker of good thinking is the *ability to question*. By asking questions, the child learns to design the concrete concepts connected with the development of the subject world by means of the language of concepts, senses and abstraction. A very important marker of good thinking is *reflexivity*. As we see it is quite difficult (if not impossible) to define accurately the concept of *good thinking*. We could only describe it by some of its characteristics (e.g., logical, creative, open, etc.), making specific semantic space of good thinking as Lipman did. Good thinking could be described as philosophizing, which has not only rational but irrational components.

The rational background of critical thinking is critical philosophy, as defined by Kant. The critical way of thinking is not the way of negotiation, but the way of analyzing, and philosophy is the art of thinking but not the possibility of getting The Truth. That is why he claims in *The Critique of Pure Reason* that it is impossible to teach philosophy, as we said before. If it is only possible to teach philosophy in terms of “philosophizing,” – as a kind of training of our rationality – then *teaching philosophy should be doing philosophy at the same time.*

1.5. Bringing “Doing” into “Teaching Philosophy”

If we have university or high school philosophy courses, then, we should combine them with information about philosophers and doing philosophy. Every philosophical theory is a result of thinking of a philosopher. If we cannot involve students in this process of thinking together with studying a philosopher, we cannot help them to understand the main ideas and therefore to know them. For example, I can ask a student to describe building or creating a tree from the position of Democritus’ atomistic theory. It is also interesting to introduce philosophical debates from the middle ages to inform students about traditional philosophical problems from the standpoint of nominalists or realists, using not only the arguments employed by these traditions but also inviting students to create new ones. Or one could divide the class in two teams and start a debate focused on a topic, like: *How many angels will fit on the tip of the needle?* Debates like this can be a good exercise for the training of argumentation. One should have strong guidelines for these types of activity, like in every game. This kind of activity can be useful, informative and fun.

The next example. This exercise could be used in a university course as well as P4C. It is possible to present the topic of Socrates to every age and discuss the problem of justice. One can introduce the problem as follows: How can you identify – what is just and what is not? For example, a man has stolen a loaf of bread and was imprisoned – is it just? What if he has stolen the bread because he could not buy bread to feed a hungry child? Can one and the same thing be just and unjust simultaneously? If we take war – is it just? Does what is “just” and what is “right” define the same thing?

Two students can read Plato’s text about justice, each playing a different role:

Socrates. Tell me, please, what do you feel is just: to tell the truth or to lie?

A friend. Of course, to tell the truth.

Socrates. Then what is just: to mislead or to avoid it?

A friend. For sure, to avoid misleading is just.

Socrates. Later on, what is just – to do harm or to be helpful.

A friend. To be helpful.

Socrates. Consequently, to tell the truth, to avoid misleading and to be helpful is just, but to lie, to do harm and to mislead is unjust?

A friend. Undoubtedly! May Zeus be with us!

Socrates. Does the same apply to the enemies?

The question becomes the first step of discussion. We ask students to give the answer (yes or no) and provide an argument. We write every argument on a piece of paper. After that, we ask somebody to make a classification of arguments. We work together to group the arguments into different types. Then we organize a team for each group of arguments. Every team is assigned the task

of continuing the dialogue and presenting it as a “new film about justice.” Each participant could be an actor, producer, writer, etc. Each group has a limited amount of time to complete the assignment. The lesson ends with the performance (dramatization) of the film.

As you can see, this example connects cognitive, creative and moral aspects of philosophizing with the background of philosophical knowledge (Plato’s dialogue on justice).

The first step (questioning) is aimed at stimulating moral thinking.

The second step (reading Plato’s text) is aimed at demonstrating Socrates’ method and stating the problem of Justice.

The third and fourth steps (argumentation and classification) are the elements of traditional logical work.

The fifth step (creating), involves students forming their own concept of justice by making moral choices. All these kinds of thinking use the principle of family resemblances: we find out something in common in different scenes or aspects of the argument. We have no correct answer, but we nevertheless want to reason about our position. We can choose a different logic of thinking and defend what is common, so that we will have different families (perspectives) of the same things.

Thus, philosophizing can exist in many forms – in rational texts, essays, art, poems etc. We philosophize by looking for answers to our questions and testing the opinions of different people – philosophers, poets, children, just as Socrates did.

That is why, it seems to me that doing philosophy implies a Socratic style of philosophy. Let us remember that Socrates never wrote anything and declared his lack of knowledge (I know that I know nothing). This is very different from Plato. The latter wrote more than 30 books in which he presented his own philosophy with the certainty that it was a correct worldview. So, the Platonic type of philosophy is based on knowledge, which could be transmitted to other people (teaching philosophy). But the Socratic type is based on lack of knowledge – questioning (doing philosophy). But the irony of the situation is that Plato wrote almost all his papers in dialogue form, with Socrates as the main character, and almost all that we know about Socrates we know from Plato. It demonstrates the unity of teaching and doing philosophy one more time.

It is a pity that there are people involved in philosophical practice or teaching philosophy who ignore one of these two sides. I have met P4C followers who have assumed the idea that *I know that I know nothing* belongs to Lipman (rather than Socrates) and that it had been initially presented by the character of Elfie. At the same time, there are a lot of boring philosophy teachers at schools and universities who know about Socrates but have never tried to use his methods.

2. Philosophizing as a Form of Play

Philosophizing is a *play with meanings* or a *game about concepts*. Take the classic example of a game: chess, football, poker, etc. What is a game? How do we decide if *this* is or is not a game? Why is this a game but that *is* not? And so on. If these are all games, do we want to say that they must have something in common? *Is there anything in common between football and philosophy?* But what would it be? If we try to make a definition or find out the background of our understanding, we will start to philosophize. That is what we do in the community of inquiry, *we play with the meaning of words*, and we exist in the “house of being” (as Heidegger puts it) by way of language.

2.1. How Can Children Philosophize

Being in play is outside of daily, mundane being. Philosophy has its root in everyday being, but raises our mind above it like play. The kinship of play and philosophy makes philosophy not a stranger in the world of childhood, where play is a total activity. Every child is a player. All children create their own world in their minds with language. In this sense, every child is a creator, much like the classical Demiurge of ancient philosophy who constructs the world by playing. So, children's philosophizing is an organic process of the development of thinking.

A child starts to live in language as a player. He or she asks many questions starting with "What does it mean?" They play with words like a footballer with a ball. If they find out a good meaning, they will try to save it as one might save the rules of a game. They create concepts. Concept-creating, according to Gilles Deleuze, is a philosophy. Children are philosophers because they can recognize and feel meaning that could be called an "a priori way of understanding." For instance, if we want to make something clear for ourselves and other people, we often say a magic word "like". ("The sun is like an apple"; "The boy is like an angel", etc.). We try to find resemblances in different things. The ability to see that correlation, even if the things are very different (e.g. computers and stones) is a marker of philosophical thinking. Children do it easily because they do it while playing. Play allows them to exceed the bounds of everyday life and explore reality.

All children are creators. They construct their own world in their minds and imagination. Children's philosophizing is always a creative process. Young children come into the world free of cultural and social stereotypes. In this sense, they are freer than most adults. That is why children's philosophizing tends to be fresh, original, and imaginative.

Let us read some children's statements.

Anastasia (9 years old): "Freedom is when a man can live his own life, express his own thoughts"

Ksenia (11 years): "Freedom is a feeling of absolute control over yourself".

Serguei (14 years): "Mind is the ability of a man not to repeat his mistake more than two times. The first time man understands he made a mistake, the second time he understands not to repeat it again".

What do we mean by the word "creativity"? Creativity is the human ability to make something new, something that has not existed before. Creativity is the condition of human rationality. In existentialism, creativity is understood as a display of human freedom. The famous Russian philosopher Nicolai Berdyaev wrote in his book *The Sense of Creativity*, that human beings could exist in greatness and strength, as well as in nothingness and weakness only due to creativity. Creativity is the basis of human freedom. Creativity is not only an action, but also a feeling. A child feels him or herself as a creator, a demiurge philosophizing. He or she originates new senses of things via playing. So, children's philosophizing can be more successful and creative when it comes in the form of playing.

Vygotsky's idea of a high-level form of thinking, which develops together with language, allows us to realize the evaluation of thinking; it makes a person able to *give an original, her or his own, solution for any problem.*

2.2. How to Connect Doing Philosophy and Teaching Philosophy in the Space of Play

Philosophizing is a unique form of thinking having *rational* and *emotional* foundations. That is why it can be realized in many ways, paradigms, and logical forms. If we teach students to think, we

need to understand why. Philosophizing should not be transformed like in “the glass bead game” (Hesse, 2002). It is needed for making choices and decisions. The most difficult choice of our life is a moral choice. Thinking can help us to do it in harmonic unity with reason and feeling.

So, to teach philosophy is not only to teach thinking but teach *morality* and *choice*. When talking of teaching morality, I do not mean giving strong rules of behavior. I mean only helping our students in making his/her own decision between **good** and **evil**. I suggest that my students read philosophical texts or quotes that deal with problems. It is not the presentation of a correct answer that is the focus but making a possibility for thinking. Usually I give opposing ideas and ask students to compare them. This is the main difference between my approach and Lipman’s principles of doing philosophy. I present the ideas of philosophers with their own names. I do not substitute the names of fictitious girls and boys. If, for example, we talk about an idea –*I know that I know not nothing*– I talk about Socrates. In the process of doing philosophy I often include elements of teaching philosophy (information), and in process of teaching philosophy I usually use the skills of doing philosophy.

Example. This exercise could be done by teams of 5-6-persons, individually or in pairs, with a preparation time of between 5-10 minutes. The students are assigned the following task:

1) To choose a known literary work which illustrates a given thought (sometimes I can ask students to play a mute scene from it in such a way that others could understand the represented work, using the positive potential of role play).

2) To explain why that piece was selected and what it means. For example, what is Kant trying to illustrate or explain when he claims: “*The consciousness of an internal tribunal in a man (before which his thoughts accuse or excuse one another) is conscience. Every man has a conscience, and finds himself observed by an inward judge which threatens and keeps him in awe...It follows him like his shadow, when he thinks to escape.*”

Conclusion

In summary, we should see philosophizing in general as a thought-provoking way of understanding the world, making personal choices and seeking meaning in life, all of which result from the stimulation of the mind. Doing philosophy requires different skills. Teaching philosophy allows us to be involved in the space of real culture and history. Principles of doing and teaching philosophy are not in conflict but complement each other. It is for that reason that I believe that all P4C educators ought to have a sound philosophical background.

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