

## **New Philosophy is Actually Old Philosophy: Slow Philosophy as a Preoccupation towards Love of Wisdom**

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Michelle Boulous Walker, *Slow Philosophy, Reading against the institution*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017, pp. 336.

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A handful of philosophers have judged that in the current way in which scientific activity is undergone, philosophy cannot integrate itself. This should not be the case just because someone has to deal with the issues of thinking in the speed and with the bureaucracy to which science is subject.

Michelle Boulous shows a particular interest in this issue in her book, and wonders at every step at what the institutionalization of philosophy has taken away from these profound and important concerns of man. She militates for a *slow* philosophical activity, one that came along and developed with the thinkers of old, hence it would be an old philosophical system that nowadays would be considered a new one in the spectrum of contemporary philosophical concern. Starting with the preface, she wonders how, in today's age, we relate to simple acts of existence, such as seeing, listening, speaking, or reading.

What does reading, or any kind of thinking activity, mean for us today? It is one of the questions the author insists on in her book. She is interested in exploring the interconnections between philosophy and slowness, as they can

provide us with valuable ways of asking questions regarding what philosophy has become today.

Thinking, reading, or judging are all activities that take time, hence they are slow processes. Michelle Boulous wants to explore how slow reading allows philosophy to embrace a certain degree of complexity within an institutional context dominated by speed and efficiency. Her main argument is that slow reading restores "the relevance that the instituting moments no longer hold". Or, better said, that slow reading is an alternative to the institutional reading that is being practiced today in our culture, a culture that is largely dominated by efficiency, speed, and a general sense of hurry. The book itself is divided into a preface, an introduction, six chapters, and the conclusion. This structure testifies to the author's preoccupation with the delimitation of institutional philosophical activity and embracing life as a way of life.

In the introduction, Michelle Boulous firmly believes in the dichotomy of what she names „the complex interplay between the instituting moment of philosophy“, as a love for wisdom, and „the instituted structure of philosophy“, as a need for knowledge. By doing so, the author describes how philosophy as a way of life has gradually undergone philosophy as a desire to know. In the introduction the author also describes how the philosophical practice of slow reading can revitalize the institutional work in which philosophy is currently enclosed.

In the first chapter, the author's interest is to polarize the attention of the reader between the instituting moments and the instituted structure of philosophy, as well as to the relation between the two. She offers Michele Le Doeuff's work as an example on how important a transformative work of wisdom, such as the habit of reading, is in the process of shifting the mental paradigm from one stage to another. Her interest in this chapter is to explore slow reading as an attentive rereading, rather than a speed reading, as an open reading rather than a closed one, and ,last but not least, as a field of adventure where you explore ambiguity and contradiction, rather than a desire or a need to know. She argues that the *love of*

*wisdom* can inaugurate a transformative relation, a way of life that truly binds the philosopher to philosophy.

In chapter two, the author's main objective is to describe essayistic activity as a form of slow reading. Essayistic reading can create a perspective of non-systematic philosophical activity, and it is a way to resist the limiting gesture that holds philosophical activity on a need-to-know basis. She further explains how essayistic reading waives the need for certainty and comprehension. Furthermore, on this particular matter, she offers Levinas' work and Adorno's work as good examples for understanding her point of view. For Levinas, it is advised to accept that in Western philosophy the paths which lead to a patient attitude, and an ethical attitude respectively, were practiced.

The author will prefer the path of Levinas' patient attitude. In agreement with Levinas, Michelle Boulous believes that one's ability to practice honest and benevolent reading offers a sufficient reason for the existence of an ethical responsibility towards the text. As for the reference to Adorno's call to resist the system, Michelle considers it to be useful because, in her opinion, reading in an essayistic manner offers the possibility of acquiring the skills of slow reading and ethical reading. The institutionalization of philosophy constrains it to be a wonderful commitment to life, to be a way of life assumed by the individual, chosen over the desire to know, in this case the act of thinking becoming a mere instrument.

In chapter three, Michelle uses Irigaray's work on love and wonder in order to build an open-ended opus of essayistic reading. She argues that this term provides, among others, practical strategies that the reader can incorporate. Moreover, she even adds to Irigaray's work by saying that love and wonder open us to a stranger, and even to otherness. The attitudes of love and wonder are intertwined in a contemplative relation with the actual text of the book. This relation is open to different interpretations and there are many ways to understand it. "Wonder involves rest and contemplation, a kind of temporary withdrawal that is simultaneously active and passive". It is an interval that allows us to contemplate the otherness of our encounter, and to resist acceleration. An ethics

of wonder offers possibilities to experience the other in a new, different manner from how we imagined them to be. She is convinced that both love and wonder have the power to create an open intersubjective relation, which would be far more generous for a future philosophy that would re-engage the instituting moments of philosophy in practical ways.

In chapter four, Michelle continues to insist on Irigaray's work, this time to emphasize what it means to practice a form of attentive listening. Michelle claims that listening is "a way of thinking differently about how we read"; in fact it is about the ability to speak with another. Intersubjective exchanges are provided if readers are open to accept that listening is more important than reading in regards to common understanding. In Michelle's opinion, listening has the function to provide a context to proximity by bypassing instituted philosophy and building a bridge between instituting moments of a love of wisdom and philosophy as a way of life. If we are to read her words carefully and have the required patience to listen to what she says, Michelle believes that this bridge would strengthen the dialogue and, implicitly, the relationship we have with the other, because it is from this type of relationship that beneficial outcomes for the community may appear. Here the important role of philosophy is signalled: it allows us to listen and be engaged, and moreover, it allows us to pause patiently until some form of knowledge emerges, or until we can truly discover out other. Sitting patiently and waiting allows the workings of our minds to fully rise up. Therefore, the patience to listen carefully offers the possibility of an open exchange between ways of listening that are not a matter of common understanding, but a matter of different opinions, ideas, and perspectives.

In chapter five Michelle returns to debate the link between slow reading and love by using Simone de Beauvoir's work, entitled *The second sex*. She argues that in this case an interconnection between love and text exists. If we are to accept Beauvoir's opinion on romantic love as a flow, we can then say that such a thing as romantic reading exists, and it helps putting us in an authentic experience with the text itself, helps us to be close to the text, and it also offers the possibility of a mature and open-ended approach. "An authentic or genuine

reading would regard the text as being an *other*, independent, yet it would see itself as connected to, and in a positive relation with what it reads”. What she calls authentic reading is actually the type of reading that perseveres in the detriment of institutional reading. Romantic reading is the one that puts us in an authentic text, with applications in reality. Thus, authentic reading is an exercise of a type of attention that occurs in a similar way to the process of maturation. This is not a fast process by any means, as it takes a significant amount of physical time and it also requires the spontaneity of a romantic love.

In chapter six, Michelle explores the practice of slow reading as an approach to intimacy and genuine love. She argues that an understanding of the text is not acquired with speed alone, it has to be grasped patiently, and when it is obtained in that manner, it can make us believe that reading is a process of transforming ourselves from one existential state to another. To read, and then understand what you are reading, you need to have an intimate relationship with the text, one in which you show wholehearted love and kindness. Here is how, the author concludes, the importance of the philosophical practice of love of wisdom “can be the source of transformative relations, and this idea is evident in the in the practice of intimate reading”. From here on out, reading will establish an ethical relationship between one another precisely because, with this intimate practice with the text, any individual can learn to have the necessary patience in the process of knowing the *other*, whether it is a text or another person. All these processes need time in order to form a foundation for thought-based activities, hence a hefty price is put on reading slowly and on the philosophy of wisdom.

First of all, this book has the merit of posing the problem of philosophical activity as a whole, and, secondly, it provides an attempt to reconsider certain biases and / or judgements by giving time to reading as an implicit philosophical activity. It can be considered a gesture of benevolence on behalf of the author, who puts her entire text as a gift for the philosophy of wisdom, a philosophy which can be released from the domination of the institutional conditioning it is caught in.

Michelle Boulous is worthy of praise for contributions in the field of comprehensive understanding of the importance of reading slowly. Reading slowly involved intensity, increased attention, and a qualitative focus on the ideas of a text. Reading slowly matters because through it you can perfect certain practices through which philosophy can be rediscovered. Slow reading entertains the idea of a philosophy based on wisdom, aimed at restoring philosophical potential to the community, and it also ensures that philosophical practice does not become irrelevant, or merely a preoccupation of select academic groups.

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