Comments on Fernando Vasquez Barba *How philosophy should be done: A research on the practice of philosophy and its method*

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This is an ambitious project devoted to the study of philosophical method. After an introductory chapter, the thesis begins with a chapter that problematizes philosophical method as a topic to be investigated. Then follows a chapter surveying come of the contemporary debate over philosophical method. In the core of the thesis (chapters III and IV), Vasquez Barba approaches this topic from two angles: a historical examination of three case studies in philosophical method – Plato, Descartes, and Russell – followed by an application of the analysis of metaphor draw from cognitive science. A brief concluding chapter draws out lessons from the previous chapters.

As I make it out, Vasquez Barba's principal thesis is bold and interesting: while what these philosophers *say* about what they're doing in delimiting philosophical method doesn't in fact track the philosophical methods they *use*, we can use a theory of the role of metaphor in communication so as to illuminate their actual methods, and (perhaps?) to thereby suggest a general philosophical method.

On the whole, I thought the thesis was well-structured, with a philosophically interesting topic and a good grasp of the literature it draws on. In my comments, I will focus on the material I thought was most in need of criticism. To be clear, none of these criticisms are submitted as necessary changes.

Please refer to the accompanying annotated thesis for reference.

Overall, I have some general reservations about some of the claims the author makes. There are a number of times when attributions are made to other philosophers without referencing sources (e.g. at pp.18, 19, 85, 87, 115, and 121). In other cases, the author makes claims that are stronger than he gives reasons for (e.g. pp.35, 39, 55, 58, 81, 100, and 118).

I also wish there was more telegraphing of where the thesis is going. The Introduction mentions cognitive linguistics and conceptual metaphor theory, then it is mentioned once more at p.45, before being introduced at the end of chapter 3 and made the focus of chapter 4. Some up-front discussion of what conceptual metaphor theory is, and of the role it will play in the dissertation, together with a periodic reminder of that role, would go a long way toward communicating what you are up to. And sometimes I found myself wondering what a particular passage meant or was getting at, when that issue was cleared up a few pages later. Some forward referencing to these elucidations along the way, and an indication of the things you're taking for granted and presuming for the moment, would also help your reader follow along.

I was also struck by a structural oddity that makes the project look incomplete or disjointed. You look at the notion of philosophical method in Plato, Descartes, and Russell in chapter 3, and yet in chapter 4 you look at the notion of metaphor in Plato, Descartes, and Kant. So far as I could see, there is only a brief discussion of Kant in chapter 1, followed by scattered references to him (and no discussion of his views) until he replaces Russell in chapter 4. And

there is no signaling that this replacement is coming. It strikes the reader as odd, and makes it seem like there are two different projects in play.

The substitution of Kant for Russell is all the more odd as Russell has a chapter in *Human knowledge: Its scope and limits* devoted to analogy, which, as I indicate below, has much the same structure as metaphor. It would thus seem more than appropriate that Russell's views should be under discussion in chapters 3 and 4, as are Plato's and Descartes'. At the very least, I think there should be some discussion of why Russell is replaced with Kant in chapter 4.

Despite this criticism, I found myself agreeing with the author at points, and I was impressed by the guiding thread of mathematical knowledge as a basis for the notions of philosophical method that Plato, Descartes, and Russell each in their own way advocated.

What follows are comments on specific passages.

P.6, first two paragraphs of the Introduction: I would like to see a clear statement of the problem that is supposed to be addressed by this research. The Introduction is currently less than two pages, but in the Introduction you have the chance to hook your reader with a clear sense that there's a pressing issue to be addressed, an overview of the conceptual tools you'll use to take on that issue, and a justified conviction that the subsequent chapters will address it well. I also think it would help to give some sort of roadmap (if you'll pardon the pun on "method") for the rest of the dissertation.

P.11: "In other words, given such lack of consensus, even if a student is told that the activity she is being introduced to has to do with analyzing bits of language, she might be still left disoriented as to how to proceed. She might pick up a couple of standard authors in sympathy with her inclinations and learn how to 'philosophize' by way of exemplar cases within the analytical tradition. However, it would cast doubt on the need for having philosophy among the academic offer of any educational institution, since assisted training seems to be dispensable."

Another response to this problem is to conclude that philosophy is defined by content and not method, and to see the importance of educational institutions as mechanisms for helping to study that content, rather than as institutions that confer technical knowledge of an established social role like "doctor" or "accountant". Going forward in your research, it's perhaps worth considering whether that approach is viable, and what happens to the notion of "method" on such a view.

p.13: "In this sense, we maintain that argumentation is undeniably quintessential to philosophical methodology and what makes an argument characteristically philosophical must be found in its development (in the process): the claims it puts forward, the grounds offered to accept or reject it and to what it is conducive."

I found myself wondering why this wasn't enough to define a notion of philosophical method. As I make it out, you end up endorsing something like this in the end. It would do you good to discuss that eventual resting point here.

P.25: I don't see what the criticism of Collingwood is supposed to be here.

Through p.28 you discuss philosophical method in Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, but you never mention the passage from section 309 when he says that he sees his aim as helping the fly find its way out of the bottle. That would seem to pretty clearly bear on whether he has a proposal for philosophy's method.

P.31: "Rorty thought that when a person is being introduced into a particular field, a sufficient exposure to some type of literature and education is enough to ensure it to meet some theoretical models, topics and a certain type of vocabulary, on which much his or her work as a professional in a particular field will depend."

This seems important and worth addressing. Why can't this be enough to define a philosophical method, so that philosophy becomes something like literary criticism of a literary tradition (which, I take it, Rorty was proposing).

p.39: "even scientific theories, in many cases originate from subjective hunches, subsequently turned into to-be-proved hypothesis, which, in turn, are no less subjective, given its lack of confirmation."

But scientific hunches can be empirically tested, and whatever subjectivity is involved there it seems unlike the subjectivity involved in many philosophical hunches. At least, you've said nothing to show that this common-sense difference isn't in place.

Also, at the bottom of this page you endorse the claim that philosophy cannot be noninstitutional. So that keeps Hume, Spinoza, and Kierkegaard from doing philosophy?

P.49, at the end of the first section of chapter 3:

I found the discussion in this section very helpful in setting up your approach to the question of how to determine what a philosophical method is, by using the tools of cognitive science to look at specific cases of philosophical method.

However, up to this point in the document I did not have any idea what role cognitive science was going to play, and cognitive linguistics was only mentioned at the very beginning. It would help your reader to see what you're up to if you could include an earlier discussion, if only in outline, of what cognitive linguistics is and how you will use it. Say in the Introduction, or in chapter 1.

Pp.59-62: There are some interesting criticisms of Plato here, but I would appreciate a more detailed articulation of the reasons you think those criticisms get a grip on Plato's views.

P.99: This sounds like analogical reasoning, which was the subject of intense research in the philosophy of science from Mary Hesse's work in the 1950s to contemporary figures like Paul Bartha. As in metaphor theory, in analogical reasoning there is a source domain and a target domain, where inferences about the way the latter works are made on the basis of an antecedent understanding of the former.

In the future, I encourage you to look into analogical reasoning as a way of relating your views to some of the work that's gone on in theory-construction in the philosophy of science (see the citations at the end of this document).

P.108 "These ways of conceptualizing methods are not consistent at all. Conceptualizing methods as objects we can manipulate, devise to perform a particular task seems to be

incompatible with moving along a path. However, the metaphors listed above, namely a method is a machine/tool and a method is a path/road show the metaphorical organization of the concept of method, pointing, at the same time, to and providing understanding of different aspects of the same concept, that is to say, these two metaphors have different purposes. On the one hand, the metaphor a method is a machine/tool emphasizes functionality, goal or purposes, how it is organized or designed on the other, the metaphor a method is a road/path highlights directionality, progress, goal or purpose.

Indeed, we can get a single consistent image of that would make such metaphors compatible with each other."

The sentence that opens this quotation and the sentence that closes it appear to be contradicting each other, and I don't see why the first sentence has any plausibility. Metaphor is by its nature a figurative process for making and evaluating claims. And it is typical of figurative claims, as opposed to literal ones, that they cannot be taken as true simply as they are stated. Consequently, different metaphors about a single subject matter may be consistent even where they cannot both be literally true.

Despite my reservations and critical comments, I recommend the submitted dissertation with the tentative grade of pass, and I recommend that the title "Ph.D." is granted to Fernando Vasquez Barba on the basis of this Ph.D. submission.

Sources on Analogical Reasoning

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