

Rocha, S. D. (2015). *Folk Phenomenology: Education, Study, and the Human Person*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers. Pages: 150. ISBN: 9781498220842 (Paperback)

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In the book *Folk Phenomenology: Education, Study, and the Human Person*, Samuel Rocha discusses the topic of education from his unique position as a philosopher of education. Many social science researchers usually treat phenomenology as a “theoretical framework” or a “predetermined method” (Rocha, 2015, p. 5), instead, Rocha defines phenomenology as “nothing more or less than a way to imagine the real” (Rocha, 2015, p. 15). In his view, phenomenology is actually a way to re-conceptualize being within eros. Eros, as Rocha notes, “does not submit itself to interpretation” (Rocha, 2015, p. 24) and “it is a question of being as opposed to meaning” (Rocha, 2015, p. 24). To imagine the real within eros means that people should not “separate our communal and social life from our innermost thoughts, feelings, and desires” (Rocha, 2015, p. 62).

Rocha notes that his study is greatly influenced by William James, especially by James’ pluralistic method (Rocha, 2015). Rather than instill theory into one’s mind with brute, logical argumentation, James simply encourages people to “wait until you arrive there yourself” (James, 1936, p. 160). This realistic approach to philosophy, combined with James’ religious sensitivity, inspires Rocha to develop a folk iteration of phenomenology. James was hardly concerned with phenomenology or ontology, so it is an inspiring innovation to interpret phenomenology from this new viewpoint. The whole book provides useful ideas both for phenomenology and for education.

At the beginning of the book, Rocha points out that the problem of the modern scientific search for origins is that it often takes things “literally and unimaginatively” (Rocha, 2015, p. 2). Instead, his work aims to develop the most fundamental exploration of metaphysics. Rocha briefly outlines the development of phenomenology, from Husserl’s first transcendental reduction returning to “things themselves”, to Heidegger’s second reduction of “being”, to Marion’s third reduction in which “being” is reduced to “givenness”. He then attempts to extend the phenomenological search by developing the fourth reduction of “offering” and a trinitarian lens of being, subsistence, and existence. Rocha also organizes his educational theory based on the categories of this trinitarian lens: “Education is a way of being within Being [...] study is a way of subsisting [...] the human person is a way of existing” (Rocha, 2015, p. 40). In Rocha’s view, education moves beyond schooling and it should become an ontological matter. It should be a potential replacement for how we understand and interpret the world. To transcend the contemporary distortion of education and reality, Rocha suggests that we resort to art and love. Based on this understanding of education, a teacher should be a being that makes his or her offering in love and with love. As Rocha notes, “when a teacher is present, when there is being in love, even death is powerless in the face and eye of the offering” (Rocha, 2015, p. 7).

Before entering the topic of education, Rocha shows us a simple and seemingly superfluous conversation between himself and his son Tomas wherein Tomas protests that he is not a goose. This example unfolds a child’s insistence to unpack the very roots of our shared existential quest to find the meaning of our being. Rocha notes that when his son, Tomas, exclaims “I am not a goose!”, he is not only telling others what he is not, but also teaching his father “to

seek, sense, and see him as he is, to know him as an ontological, erotic trinity, complete within context (Being), among life forces (subsistence) and a material body (existence)” (Rocha, 2015, p. 21). It seems true that every person tends to resist being reduced to what we feel we are not. Tomas, as a little child, cannot name who he is, but his frustration with being called a goose points toward what Rocha calls an “erotic resistance” to “ontological disfiguration” (Rocha, 2015, p. 22). Such a fundamental resistance against the violation of our being forms the ethical and political imperative for Rocha. Rather than trivialize being, Rocha tries to theorize a new kind of education and practice of study that will offer a space and time for seeking being.

On the first topic of education, Rocha focuses on a contrast of being and knowledge. In his analysis, Rocha clarifies the concept of knowledge by distinguishing two Spanish verbs “saber” (to know-about) and “conocer” (to know). “Saber”, meaning “to know about something”, often references information or data, while “conocer” means to know “the knowledge of things themselves”. The crucial distinction between knowledge and information that Rocha implies is an ontological-epistemological divide in education. Education, according to Rocha, is not a way to “knowing about” information, but it is a search for the things themselves or the true knowledge. The search for the knowledge about things themselves or being, in Rocha’s view, cannot be a scientific procedure or an epistemological theorization. It ought to be an ontological and aesthetic endeavour into the heart of love, desire, and eros. In this process, we can find that these three elements, being, subsistence, and existence, all coexist within each other.

If teachers want to provide true knowledge-oriented education, it is better for them to show than to say. According to Rocha, “the poverty of using language to describe the ineffable – to say what can only be shown” (Rocha, 2015, p. 110) is a contradiction. This point reminds me that Heidegger (1982) has some similar distinction in his analysis about language. He distinguishes two different meanings of “saying”, “sagen” and “sprechen”. “Sprechen” means “to speak,” whereas “sagen” means “to say” – in the rich sense of saying/showing. The former represents embodied expressions, the description of or reflection on specific things; the latter is an ontological statement of being, a road to or the guideline of the true knowledge. The word sagen also indicates the nature of language (Maly, 2008). Faced with modern society’s increasingly powerful technological language, Heidegger calls for a return to the language itself, that is, pure language. A typical form of pure language is poetry, which is one of the best ways to express the presence of being. Rocha’s distinction between to know and to know about, and his statement that “art precedes metaphysics” (Rocha, 2015, p. 5) is consistent with Heidegger’s analysis of language and the argument on poetry. They both notice that science has largely failed in accessing the world of being and remind us of caring about the aesthetic backgrounds of our lives.

If education is the mystery of being, then study is an “erotic subsistent force that allows no distinction between preparation and performance” (Rocha, 2015, p. 84). Study is important for Rocha because it can mediate between the wild openness of being and the existence of the human person. What Rocha wants to accomplish here is not to abandon our everyday understanding of study as some “study skills”, but to redeem it, or re-enchant it. He notes that “to study is more properly understood as to never stop taking lessons from everything, and to simultaneously perform and prepare during these abundant lessons” (Rocha, 2015, p. 86). This manifestation of study is basic for deeper ontological and erotic notions of study that Rocha searches for. This notion of study is beyond intentional volition, and is to some extent, beholden to fortune. Study can hardly be fully controlled by anyone’s will or intentional aims. Baby-talk and jazz are offered by Rocha as two examples of this kind of study. The eros of study

just comes from the baby or the music master's own willing to learn. Both of them concern the risks, desires, and love that are necessary to becoming something (a person and music master, respectively). These kinds of studies do not necessarily happen in the schoolhouse and they also challenge the traditional mode of school education.

In arriving at the final element of the trinitarian lens, Rocha takes us to the human person, whom he likens to the public school. The current education, termed by Rocha as "schoolvation", makes an assumption that human persons are first and foremost private individuals who have to become public citizens through schooling. This assumption is based on a neoliberal individualism to distort the human person into isolated individual and make it lose the connections with the world and others. However, according to Rocha, "...the human person already constitutes a public before entering the school or any other site of social relations" (Rocha, 2015, p. 100). The human person actually should be an ecstatic and erotic being fully entangled with the world. If teaching is found in the very fabric of the human person's existence as such, there should be "no ontological distinction between the existential reality of the human person and the teacher" (Rocha, 2015, p. 104).

The aim of being educated is to become the human person and the task of teaching should be animated by the eros of study. Teachers are then required to teach with love to gain the eros of study as well as to reduce the negative influences of neoliberal individualism. Rocha returns to love by using Marion (2007) to reimagine Descartes. He notes that "in other words, I do not think and therefore I exist, as Descartes would have it; I love and therefore exist and think and love again (and again and again)" (Rocha, 2015, p. 101). In this proclamation of love, readers can feel Rocha's courageous offering to phenomenology itself and his efforts to insert eros into the fray of the phenomenological and ontogenetic discourse of being. Eros exists in each element of Rocha's trinitarian lens and love is the being in which being, subsistence, and existence reside.

In the foreword, Pinar makes a great summary of the whole book: "Rocha's folk phenomenology provides passage from knowledge to understanding to love" (Rocha, 2015, p. xiii). Overall, Rocha's work is evocative and his discussions on education, study, and human person are crisp and clear. His steady defense of phenomenology against the psychological scientism is well taken. Folk Phenomenology brings us back to the beginning of things and inspires us to move the inquiry from the skills of schooling to the nature of education and knowledge. Another advantage of this book lies in the writer's way of writing. Rocha uses vivid examples from daily life to illustrate his ideas and opinions and tries to avoid elusive and obscure philosophical terms as much as possible, which makes the book interesting and full of humour compared with many other philosophy texts. A reader who knows very little about phenomenology, or even philosophy, would be able to understand the writer's inspiring ideas without much difficulty. In this sense, Rocha's phenomenology is really a "folk" one. However, the readers still need to keep in mind that the book is an ontological study. The readers do not have to abandon their everyday understandings of education and study, instead, they need to transcend these understandings and rethink reality more deeply and fundamentally.

There are still some questions that require further exploration. Rocha places eros in each element of the trinitarian lens and demonstrates that love is the being in which being, subsistence, and existence reside. This is a profound claim, and surely one possibility of reality; but is love truly the beginning of beginning? There seems not to be enough elaboration on the notion of love, and I suppose more analysis can be made on the relationship between eros and love. Additionally, as with many other philosophical inquiries, folk phenomenology seems idealistic and cannot provide much practical advice for teachers or policy makers. For example, according to Rocha, "The eros of study [...], can only come from those who are willing to love

that ghostly thing, eros, to sense its presence and let it show” (Rocha, 2015, p. 88). So how can the teachers make the students willing to love a ghostly thing and gain the eros of study? This seems rather difficult.

Teachers may feel confused about how to apply folk phenomenology to their practical teaching. Since Rocha discusses much on the role of art in showing the ontology of being, I believe that teachers can find some great teaching methods based on art and education. It is worth thinking about some art pedagogy that can encourage the students to think the world imaginatively and pursue the eros of study. All in all, *Folk Phenomenology* is a great book for teachers to rethink the nature of education, students to rethink the goal of study, and every human person to rethink themselves and the world.

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