Thoughts on Moving Philosophy, 'Outside'

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Introduction

In considering future possibilities for Community Philosophy, we might reflect on the diversity of stimuli used to initiate dialogue. Typically, these stimuli are 'introduced' to a group, by the facilitator. In this sense, the facilitator has a good deal of control as to what that stimulus is and, to some extent, how it is received. As such (and as argued earlier in this volume in my chapter 'Community Philosophy and Social Action'), there are questions about protecting the process of philosophical enquiry from manipulation, and these questions deserve attention. I also argued that the settings and spaces in which philosophical enquiry takes place exert varying, and sometimes extraordinary, levels of influence on how the process of philosophical enquiry pans out. This includes whether or not social action occurs. In seeking to escape from these constraints, we might consider the possibility of escaping, quite literally, from the spaces and places implicated, thereby lessening concerns about manipulation. What if we were to trust to the wider world to provide the stimulus for our enquiries? The logic then is to consider spaces and places beyond the building-based settings typically inhabited, so often 'inside'. What if public philosophy took place *outside*?

That said, care is needed to resist interpreting 'outside' too narrowly, in terms of 'outdoors', and implicitly then 'The Great Outdoors'– with all the connotations of outdoor and adventure education that has: beloved of some, but hated by others. To talk of 'outside' (in preference to 'outdoors') is to articulate something altogether more accessible, which is

a theme I also laboured in my chapter on social action. In its stead, simply stepping outside the buildings that so many of us inhabit for great swathes of our lives, creates the potential to come into contact with myriad stimuli. This also means such stimuli are more likely chosen by the group, rather than the facilitator; which does seem important. Hence, the urban environment, with its roads and streets, and the fringes of towns and cities, become as valuable a trigger for thinking as that that lies beyond, whether the countryside or hills and mountains.

And to 'step out' is surely to walk, a universal activity if ever there was one, and accessible to all but a small minority. Furthermore, few, if any of us, are without cultural references to walking, and, intriguingly, references that invoke the capacity of walking – outside – to stimulate thinking. Consider the many who say: "I'm going for a walk to clear my mind"; for them a simple 'trip round the block' will often do. Or as Gros puts it, invoking Thoreau's ideas: "Walking, as they say, 'empties the mind'. In another way, walking *fills* the mind with a different sense of purpose." (2014: 97). Indeed, many philosophers, way back to the Ancient Greeks, have made reference to walking. We have then a veritable history to draw upon that provides stimulus for philosophical enquiry 'outside'. Indeed, there appears to be great potential in combining walking with philosophical enquiry, and as such, this practice deserves further scrutiny.

Walking Technologies

We might start by considering the many 'walking technologies', the ways in which walking is used for a wide variety of purposes. For example, there has been a growing interest in walking for health reasons, whether to aid weight loss and counteract obesity, or for the general promotion of physical activity and wellbeing (Public Health England, 2017; HM

Government, (2018). Walking is now also 'prescribed' by General Practitioners and other health care professionals to mitigate social isolation and support improved mental health (France et al., 2016; South et al., 2017). It is pertinent again to note that walking becomes a proxy for being outside, and that this is valued as much as the physical act of walking, a view routinely articulated in not just the narrative of 'social prescribing' but 'Green Prescribing' (Bloomfield, 2014). Very often, the suggestion is also to walk with others; it's presumed that walking together supports talking together, with all the benefits that has. There may be more; in my experience, influenced by work with French street social work colleagues, I've come to value walking with others in a deeper way: as an expression of solidarity. Likewise, those with a similar job in Spain speak of acompañamiento, or accompaniment. Think of the symbolism of being 'alongside', and 'side-by-side'. And Fanon (2004: 238): "[W]hat we want is to walk in the company of man, every man, night and day, for all times"; in his advocacy of a decolonised psychology where the emphasis is on dialogue, mutual respect, and the empowerment of the those marginalized.

That this contests the value commonly ascribed to 'face-to-face' conversations seems, again, significant: I remember well having to discuss sensitive issues with the young people I worked with, and how many said very little when sat on the other side of a desk. Few resisted my suggestion that we might walk together; and when we did they invariably talked. It is as if walking with others renders it a political act.

Many others have recognized that walking together supports talking together. In the corporate world, 'networking' has morphed into 'netwalking'[i], and become a means to build and develop teams. 'Walking meetings' are increasingly common. Pared back, walking in and of its self seems to constitute a stimulus for conversation; which is where its resonance

for public and community philosophy comes in. It's worth noting also that science appears on its side; there is growing evidence that when we move there are cognitive benefits, arguably that we think better (Suzuki and Fitzpatrick 2015). Suffice to say, walking is easily co-opted into a wider contestation of the Cartesian Dualism; that an inter-relationship between mind and body *does* exists.

And then there are the geographers, who, within so many sub-disciplines, have long since recognized the value of walking as a tool for research, as a means to find out more about people and the spaces and places they inhabit. Importantly, they've realized that walking with others, say, residents of an area, enables understanding it through 'local' eyes - which chimes again with philosophical enquiry – as a form of participatory research. I did this as a new street-based youth worker; I asked young people to guide me around the estates they lived in. This helped enormously in my community profiling activities, in understanding and contextualising where folk were 'coming from'. This elicits a further memory, of walking with children, whose pace is often extremely slow. And yet, committing to walk at their pace means we see things that ordinarily we wouldn't, and understand time differently; together illuminating understanding of place.

Psycho-geography particularly resonates with such philosophical endeavour; where walking is deliberately constituted as a process of de-familiarisation, and research is conceptualized (as in the French *chercher*) as searching. This encourages experimentation and ultimately the potential of re-thinking; thoughts and opinions are revealed as merely habitual, re-evaluated and removed. For Guy Debord (1956) and other Situationists walking helped 'express not subordination to randomness but total insubordination to habitual influences' (ibid); it becomes an *active* effort to change perspective. Walking becomes a *dérive*, or 'drift', playful and yet purposeful attempt to consider the influence of the

environment on how we think and behave, and capable of 'provoking sharp emotional reactions' (ibid.) – stimuli, if you like, for enquiry, into things other than the taken for granted. Conversely, we might deliberately aim to 'problematize' the world (Freire 1970), critiquing the very things we do take for granted and assume inalienable. Therein, walking becomes a means to come into contact with, and develop, new ideas, particularly when (in the form of the *dérive*) there is an intention to head off in new and unpredictable directions, with the aim of opening up new forms of awareness. Henry David Thoreau's (1862) notion of 'sauntering' resonates also; walking, without a particular purpose, both physically and metaphorically being (and moving) 'off the beaten path', *sans terre*: without a particular home. And happy to be so, given the thoughts it inspires and the quality of the dialogue that ensues. In this sense, walking, when combined with enquiry-based philosophical practices, become propositional – capable of showing us new ways of thinking, acting, being and becoming.

Walking as a Philosophical Proposition

Conceptualising walking as a propositional activity, and a philosophical one at that, constitutes it as capable of suggesting – proposing – to us where we might go, both physically and philosophically. Walking then becomes an embodied philosophical practice. We might look to 'sense walks' and Synesthesia[ii] walks, which deliberately encourage a focus on a specific sense, in recognition that (for example) a particular smell can trigger, say, thoughts of times past. Thereafter, a walk leader with philosophical inclinations might use the idea of Synesthesia to ask participants to describe what they hear as if it were a smell. This use of a linguistic descriptor from a different sense modality can spark creative thinking and nourish dialogue. And connects again with the idea of walking as de-familiarization. As

Bradotti (2013: 88-89) says, involving 'the loss of familiar habits of thought and representation in order to pave the way for creative alternatives'; in finding ways of ways of knowing and communicating through movement, new modes of subjectivity are generated, and we learn to think differently. Our experience of moving symbolically resists pre-determination, contests the idea that thought is already *realized*. It keeps assumptions at bay. In a Deweyian sense, it becomes uncertainty-appreciative; which, surely, all good philosophical practice strives to be. Methodologically then these propositions connect actual experience with *what could be*: they are also *speculative*. Again, this impacts on our understanding of philosophy as a form of politics; when we think of *what could be* there is the potential to break out of conformity, to destroy order, to think in non-binary ways: 'walking becomes a "lure for feeling" (Whitehead, 1978: 25) that can pave the way along which the world advances into novelty' (ibid.: 187). Walking, in this sense, is steadfastly *not* technical, something we are *instructed* in doing; it becomes something related to the *unforeseen* – we're never quite sure what will happen. Which, again, makes it an ideal medium for philosophizing. We might think of this as of the "flight of an aeroplane" (ibid.: 5); as walkers we have a starting point, a point we see or observe from; then, as we move, we 'take flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization' (ibid.); and then we land again, having been stimulated to reflect / think again. 'Such thought supplies the differences which direct (static) observation lacks' (ibid.).

Walking as Community Philosophy: Examples from Practice

How to turn all this into practice? How to connect public and Community Philosophy with walking? Firstly, there is a need to embrace a community dimension, to realise that in all that has been said thus far there is more to be had from the stimulus of walking if it takes

place in a social context, where experiences and the ideas that flow from them can be shared in support of mutual learning.

A specific intention of my own work has been to bring people together who don't know one another, or at least not very well, to walk, and talk, together. The aim is to create, or further develop, a community, even if only for the duration of the walk, albeit ideally into the future (see especially activities in the context of support for 'community cohesion'). This makes walking and thinking a collaborative affair; what's created is a product of our 'entangled inter-relating' (Barad 2007: ix). And we, as individuals, are also shaped by this: our actions, our agency, are a product of the same entanglement. And this adds to the sense that this is also a political act: entangled practices are *productive*: 'different *intra*-actions produce different phenomena' (ibid. 58).

Therein, 'Philosophy Walks'[iii] typically begin with a brief invitation to participants to say what appeals about the idea of bringing walking together with philosophy. These contributions, and other 'getting to know' activities, set the foundations for the walk to be a collaborative endeavour. Whilst trusting to the environment to stimulate discussion, use is often made of the many things philosophers have said about walking. Participants are frequently amazed (as was I when I started researching this connection), how many philosophers have invoked walking as a means to think philosophically. This tends to resonate with those present, who often express similar sentiments and desires, if not necessarily experiences. Such references can and often do act as powerful stimuli for dialogue, and, in their everyday nature, support participants' identification with philosophy.

Of these, Socrates' preference for encounters in the street (and the legacy of Socratic dialogue that has so influenced Community of Enquiry methodologies) is particularly apt. As is the significance of movement within the *agora* – a non-institutional,

public, space: literally, a ‘gathering place’ where conversations could take place. The Platonic dialogue where Socrates encounters Phaedrus, who convinces him to go for a walk in the countryside (this being the only dialogue in which we find Socrates outside of Athens’ city walls) consolidates the idea that Philosophy Walks can be take place in both urban and rural areas. In this, the experience of leaving the city unsettles Socrates, but nonetheless provokes him to leave behind his arrogant pitch: “You must forgive me, dear friend; I’m a lover of learning, and trees and open country won’t teach me anything, whereas men in the town do. Yet you seem to have discovered a drug for getting me out’ (Phaedrus 230d-e, in Verdenius, 1955).

Other philosophers employ the device of walking (again both physically and philosophically) to get ‘outside civilisation’, in order to garner different perspectives and think anew: Frédéric Gros (2014: 20) describes Friedrich Nietzsche’s belief that thinking actually necessitates walking as his ‘eulogy of the foot’. Indeed, Nietzsche proclaimed: ‘it is our habit to think outdoors’ (1974: 322).

Other stimulus I have used include Henry David Thoreau’s view, enshrined in his proposal of a ‘new economics’ (see, 1854/2016: ch. 1), that walking teaches us of the distinction between profit and benefit (which is surely an enquiry into values). In Gros’s account of Thoreau, walking produces ‘nothing saleable’ (2014: 89); nevertheless the benefit is immense.

More adventurous Philosophy Walks tend to take place in hilly and mountainous terrain. This creates the opportunity to connect with the origins of the word ‘summit’, which, quite literally, saw people walking to the top of a hill in order to gain a different perspective in and on their conversations and meetings.

Whilst Philosophy Walks are principally directed at those who are attracted to the

idea of walking and philosophizing *for its own sake*, wanting to 'stretch their minds as well as their legs' for personal reasons, and often for no more than the joy of the endeavour, the earlier analysis suggests a combination of walking and philosophical enquiry can have more specific aims. In this sense, walking can make a significant contribution to the process whereby Community Philosophy informs social action. Indeed, Philosophy Walks I've led with residents and the staff of a range of statutory and voluntary agencies have been used to research community needs and inform strategies to meet those needs. For example, the staff of a community housing association walked from its inner-city office, through residential areas they were responsible for, to the urban fringe and beyond. The diversity of environments stimulated reflection, enabled the team to 'take stock' of aims and purposes, and review and evaluate the work they were doing. Ultimately they were able to think critically and creatively about the organisation's future. Similarly, walking is found to have the capacity promote community development and community cohesion: the 'Step-into-Dialogue' Project in Kirklees works with the leaders of community organisations to support them in learning the practical and philosophical skills needed to lead walks with the communities they are engaged with, but also to bring members of different communities together to walk and talk together to aid that cohesion.

Concluding Remarks

It seems then, in considering future possibilities for Community Philosophy, the idea of 'moving philosophy', as in movement-catalysed philosophy – constituting it as an embodied philosophical practice has great potential. Rather than seeing walking as a novelty, perhaps it has the capacity to advance a new orthodoxy, in which the starting position for all philosophical activity is outside. Certainly there is a wealth of argument within the history of

philosophy, and valuable accounts from practice, that suggests this is precisely what we should do.

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[i] A quick internet search reveals numerous initiatives which use walking to promote discussion and networking. See, for example, TeamWalking: https://www.teamwalking.co.uk/. The Twitter feed @netwalking, and hashtag #netwalking, provide links to many more.

[ii] Synesthesia is a condition in which one sense (for example, hearing) is simultaneously perceived as if by one or more additional senses, such as sight. Other forms join objects such as letters, shapes, numbers or people's names with a sensory perception such as smell, colour or flavour.

[iii] For an account of a 'Philosophy Walk' see: Hallisey, N. *Solvitur* Ambulando, Country Walking Magazine, August 2018, Available at: https://www.teamwalking.co.uk/uploads/Walking%20Philosophy%20North%20York%20Moors.pdf, Accessed January 29th 2019.