

Diversifying Syllabi 2016 Text Summary and Teaching Tips

SECTION ONE: to be completed by presenter

Article/Essay Title: Introduction to *Maps for a Fiesta*

Author: Otto Maduro

Readability: Easy

Thesis: The acquisition of human knowledge in general—and the practice of philosophy in particular—is best understood as an ongoing process of constructing “maps for the party”: guides “for finding and opening pathways that will point us toward *the good life*, a life worthy of being frequently feasted with joy, pleasure, and gusto.” (3)

“all knowledge is an attempt to reconstruct our experiences mentally, of putting in order life’s ups and downs precisely to orient ourselves toward the good life...” (17)

Key Definitions:

Knowledge: “those efforts to order, comprehend, and elucidate how and why reality is as it is and works the ways it does.” (8)

Brief Summary:

This text offers a down-to-earth discussion of the nature of knowledge that is filled with rich and vivid examples and touches on the following topics:

- Moral epistemology
- Standpoint epistemology
- Active ignorance
- Intellectual virtues (e.g., humility)

The main goals of the text, according to Maduro, are:

- To become aware of the enormous influence that our experience has on our awareness of reality
- To appreciate and analyze the infinite richness and complexity of the experience of each and every human being and community
- To critically reflect on the impact of our experience on our consciousness—above all, in the least conscious and least agreeable aspects of that impact
- To arouse in ourselves a more pluralistic, respectful, open, humble, and critical vision of that which we recognize, value, and appreciate as knowledge

One of Maduro's central claims is that knowledge arises as a result of emotionally engaged living—i.e., as a response to suffering and joy. By situating the analysis of knowledge in this context, it becomes easier to understand how we actively seek and produce both knowledge and ignorance.

“Our life, our personal and collective experience, strongly influences our awareness—what we know and how we know it. Our experience also has an effect—and perhaps this is what is most important—on what we don't know and the way we arrange ourselves in order to remain ignorant of certain things and to deny, or justify, our lack of awareness.” (14)

When we actively produce ignorance in this way, we typically do so to protect our power and privilege. Thus, while there many forms and types of knowledge exist, in the context of social inequality, some forms of knowledge, are privileged while others are marginalized or repressed.

Maduro identifies several factors that strongly influence what we are willing and able to know and imagine (and what we are not):

- *Life's formative experiences* — the things we learn in order to survive become deeply ingrained in us
- *Life's joys and difficulties* — (see thesis) “...the good life also requires the ability to creatively appropriate pain as an intrinsic dimension of living.” (17)
- *Loving acceptance* — about childhood development: “The way we feel and define what is central in our lives... what most attracts and satisfies us, is something affectively conditioned, emotionally branded, and deeply influenced from infancy by our relations with other human beings.” (19) E.g., compare the experience of those who have known genuine affection, esteem, and respect throughout their childhood to those who have not.
- *Social norms* — we are constantly (re)producing social norms, often without knowing it

Thus, knowledge acquisition is a motivated social practice.

One virtue of this text is its ability to identify both the positive and negative aspects of certain features of our knowledge practices. For example, after noting that we tend to seek out the feeling of *certainty* and resist challenges to our assumptions and worldviews, he says: “The normal human tendency to look for and conserve truths can be healthy, indifferent, or destructive. It depends.” (26)

Likewise, Maduro notes that “our experience of *power* marks our knowledge or reality. Therefore, I would suggest that human beings tend to perceive reality—to mentally construct and know it—in a manner that seems to best contribute to maintaining, consolidating, and, if possible, increasing the power that we have already amassed up to this moment in order to satisfy and protect our interests.” (27) This, too, can be healthy, indifferent, or destructive.

Possible “Reading Reflection” assignment (e.g., for a moral psychology class)

In “Maps for a Fiesta,” Otto Maduro discusses the ways that we actively produce knowledge—and also ignorance—of what the good life is and how we can get there.

For this assignment, you will write an informal reflection on how Maduro’s ideas relate to your own life. The reflection should be less than 750 words in length and should address each of the following questions:

1. What is the good life, in your view?
 - How does your vision of the good life relate to what you were taught by your parents, teachers, and/or other significant figures within your social environment?
2. What parts of your “map” to the good life do you know for certain?
 - What personal experiences have been most important in shaping your knowledge?
3. What parts of your “map” do you want to learn more about?
 - What sort of personal experiences or research do you think you would need to have in order to fill in the gaps?
4. What parts of the map do you *not* want to learn more about?
 - What motivation might you have to be ignorant about these parts of the map?

SECTION TWO: to be completed by note taker during discussion

Article/Essay Title: Maps for a Fiesta

Author: Otto Madura

Possible Applications:

Epistemology- first text to contextualize analytic material. When and who participates in analytic epistemology? Criticism aside, can we still motivate epistemology, broaden it?

Beginning to Intro Phil- flags important intellectual virtues. Humbling/empowering. Good first text.

Classes on ideology- what ideology do I adopt to block out certain forms of knowledge?

Intro to social norms/pragmatism: knowledge as something we do together, at certain times and in certain places

Complementary Texts/Resources:

Pair with the Meditations- stepping in and out of everyday life, the easiness and obviousness of things vs. philosophical reflection.

Sara Ahmed- happiness discussion. How is knowledge, curiosity related to happiness?

Loving Perception and World Traveling, Lugones: situated knowledge- knowledge within one world vs. another

Lear's Radical Hope – intro phil class pairing

Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Pair with Plato's vision of education, contrast with Madura. Aristotelian notions of habituation, moral education.

Movies! Fruitvale Station, Eternal Sunshine,

Possible Class Activities:

Reading reflection: what is your map? What do you know and not know, what would you prefer to remain ignorant about? What is the role of pain in your orientation towards happiness and the good life? Is lack of pain a detriment? Is pain beneficial? What is the relationship between the experience of pain and the drive to knowledge? Can certainty or the need for certainty be problematic?

Given this picture of knowledge what does education look like? What should education look like?

(Pair with RSA video on education, standardized testing)

What traditional texts might this text replace?

First text of the year. Plato on the value of knowledge