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Visual and Philosophical Pedagogies

Philosophical pedagogies are typically based on abstract discussion of texts, and have remained largely unchanged throughout the history of the subject. However, there is a considerable body of research which suggests that this is unsuited to some learning styles and may discourage some students from prolonged study. Many prefer to learn through visual cues and models alongside engaging with literature resources. Students with learning needs like dyslexia might find the emphasis on the written word to be a considerable barrier to philosophical study. Simultaneously, there are ever greater numbers of websites, apps and mashups dedicated to the study of philosophy which sometimes do little more than recreate printed materials in a digital environment.

This proposal will explore the potential for introducing and integrating visual pedagogies into teaching and learning philosophy by reviewing a number of different styles of visualization and their possible use in educational scenarios with a particular focus on education and the appropriate use of digital technologies. This investigation is guided by the following research questions:

- Can philosophical ideas be usefully depicted in visual representations?
- How might the creation of, (and reflection upon) such images be of pedagogical value?
- Are there freely available technologies which could support visual learning in philosophy?
- What kind of workflow might students/teachers of philosophy be able to use?

I argue that we are at a point where we can take advantage of visual pedagogies through mobile and tablet technologies. Now is the time to show how learning can be structured in this way, and to perform interventions which will allow us to analyse its effectiveness. Philosophy is an approach to understanding the world which typically involves creating and criticising hierarchical ontologies, and so tools like mind-mapping may have a number of distinct pedagogical uses. Mind-maps are also used by dyslexic students to help them study without engaging with large amounts of complex text, and specialised software exists for this purpose. Thus, assistive technologies originally developed to support those with specific learning needs may have unintended applications which could be beneficial to students and teachers of philosophy. Furthermore, the confluence between new web tools designed to convey complex information visually and the rise of open, informal educational resources and of online education more generally means that there is a pressing need to develop new pedagogies for philosophy. We need

research to further explore these possibilities. With this in mind, I suggest a number of activities for both formal and informal visual learning in philosophy.

Rob FARROW is a philosopher and educational technologist at The Open University, UK. Last year he spoke at the Budapest Visual Learning conference on the theme of visualising digital scholarship. For an up to date list of his publications/presentations since then see http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/openminded/?page_id=26. E-mail: r.j.farrow@open.ac.uk.