Commentary

The Doctoral Journey: Perspectives

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Abstract*: A journey entails endings and beginnings, loss and retrieval. It offers a chance of change and renewal, but also a risk of disorientation and displacement. Researchers-as-voyagers, travel from familiar inner and outer landscapes into unknown territories with new horizons. They progress through an itinerary of developing meanings, both epistemological and ontological. Researchers-as-voyagers are engaged in a process of becoming, and of discovering a voice. The 'voyage' tenders experimental possibilities for alternative understandings of who they are, who they could be and what they know. It opens up transitional spaces for the formation of a new sense of identity. However, certain educational practices underpinning contemporary doctoral studies programmes may impede the process of self-authorship that is fundamental to research.*

Introduction

The following article is a 'double-act' on the same topic: the journey students make in their doctoral studies. The co-writers of this article were both doctoral students at the Institute of Education under the same supervision. Although the article has been written in the form of two separate contributions to allow space for individual perspectives and styles, there are nevertheless strong thematic links between the two pieces.

The main aim of the overall paper is to offer the reader some of the authors' personal reflections on their own doctoral journey, a few years after completion, as it was 'lived' by them. Rather than a straight narrative of their own experiences, both authors have chosen to conceptualise their journey by drawing on particular elements of literature and philosophy. Through reflection on the doctoral experience as such, a critique of doctoral studies in general is attempted, within the specific context of the contemporary British higher education system. Due to its nature and scope, the paper addresses both an audience of current doctoral students, to whom such reflections may be of immediate relevance, and to a wider audience of educationalists who are interested in the changing nature and scope of doctoral studies today.

Section I is written by Denise Batchelor (London South Bank University), and Section II is written by Roberto Di Napoli (Imperial College London).

Section I: The Voyage Out

Beginnings

The title I have chosen, *The Voyage Out*, is borrowed from Virginia Woolf's novel of the same name. Out of the many rich strands of meaning this text contains, I should like to focus on just one. *The Voyage Out* is a novel of beginning, and one of its metaphors is that of taking ship and watching solid land drift away. In relation to the journey of research, it is this aspect of casting off into the unknown that I hope to consider especially. I propose to frame research as a 'voyage of vulnerability'.

Fundamental changes happen during the voyage; changes which my collaborator in this article considers in Section II. When you reach your destination, you are different. The

changes that occur are ontological as well as epistemological. They are changes in 'who you are' as well as 'what you know'. They contribute to shaping your voice for being and becoming, as a person, as well as your voice for knowing.

Both epistemological and ontological modes of voice relate to two questions that all students ask in their own way. Although they are old questions, they are always new for each student. They are questions, which are perhaps often prompted by the experiences of a long journey, and they are especially pertinent to the journey of research. The first is the question Montaigne had engraved around the ceiling of the tower in Bordeaux where he retired to record the workings of his own mind in his Essais: *'What do I know?'* The second is the question underlying all matters of identity: *'Who am I?'*

The answers to these questions are likely to be influenced and shaped by the writers and thinkers you encounter at different stages of the journey. In setting out on the voyage of research you also embark on a journey of reading. I should like to reflect on certain quotations from different philosophers that are particularly meaningful to me. They have helped me in attempting to make sense of some of the experiences a student might go through, not only as a beginning researcher but, in my own case at least, as one who, in seeking to continue, keeps encountering new possibilities for beginnings.

Being becalmed

When you set out on a voyage, you expect to make steady progress and move forward. But sometimes the exact opposite happens: you become as becalmed as the fleet at Aulis, with no breath of wind to move you in any direction. In a research climate where students are required to be demonstrably productive, the experience of feeling stuck and unable to move can make one both anxious and uncomfortable. During these times of being becalmed you may suffer periods of obscurity in your thinking that feel like failure. Your voice for knowing is an apparently unproductive voice, a voice without any immediately clear results. Paradoxically, however, this apparent inactivity may be covering over germinal activity at another level. Lyotard likens this kind of epistemological voice to a child-like voice, a voice that is full of potential, a voice that needs periods of apparent lack of productivity and lying fallow in order to understand how to express itself. Lyotard (1992, pp. 117-118) also recognises the lack of fit of a child-like voice with contemporary priorities:

> 'The idea that we could put up with not making progress (in a calculable and visible way), that we could put up with always doing no more than making a start - this is contrary to the general values of prospection, development, targetting, performance, speed, contract, execution, fulfilment…one has to - endure the childhood of thought.'

A voice of this kind, a child-like voice, is also a vulnerable voice in that it is testing out ways of expressing itself through a process of exploration and experimentation, almost like a child trying to learn to walk. If research is framed as a voyage of vulnerability, part of this vulnerability is to do with being open to finding your own voice through periods of apparent inactivity as well as activity.

Conflicting undercurrents

However when the wind changes and you do start to move again, something equally disturbing might happen. In the course of the voyage, and especially in your reading, you begin to be pulled in different and sometimes conflicting directions by currents of thought that contradict each other and that are hard to combine in your own argument. This happens to me constantly, and I found it very helpful to encounter in my reading Hegel's exposition of

dialectical consciousness, based on his theory of determinate negation. Insofar as I understand him, Hegel (1977, p. 51) describes thought as a progressive, conflict-driven process that is innately incomplete, but this conflict, far from being an impediment to progress, is an aid. He advocates a patient waiting with ways of thinking that are apparently contradictory and conflicting in the hope and expectation that they will generate a new awareness (*ibid*. p. 54). From the opposite poles of the thesis and antithesis a synthesis emerges that not only reconciles the different original positions, but creates a fresh perspective in its own right. Viewed in this light, the intellectual difficulties generated by conflicting arguments are then no longer potentially overwhelming, but themselves become the stepping-stones to new understanding.

In an analysis of Horkheimer's relation to Hegel's thought, Held (1997, p. 177) explains:

> 'What distinguishes the dialectical method is its recognition of the insufficiencies and imperfections of 'finished' systems of thought. The dialectical method is a critical method for it reveals incompleteness where completeness is claimed. It embraces that which is in terms of that which is not, and that which is real in terms of potentialities not yet realized.'

It is a risk to stay with uncertainties and contradictions in your reading and thinking rather than gravitating to the security of closure and completion. It means living with uncertainty, and involves a restless movement from integration to disintegration to reintegration. This uncertainty and continuous recasting of thought necessarily entails vulnerability of voice. Yet, through being vulnerable, travellers are potentially open to the shock of surprise that enables them to recognise spaces in which creativity in thinking can occur.

Sartre advocates deliberately cultivating the very vulnerability in thought, caused by conflicting arguments, by immersing himself in the work of writers very different from himself. Bair (1990) describes Simone de Beauvoir's unease when Sartre published his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1991): it was a new philosophy that contradicted *Being and Nothingness* (2001), and showed that Sartre had changed most of his thinking. He then became deeply involved in Flaubert's writing. Sartre explained why he needed to do this is an interview in 1964:

> "Because he is the opposite of what I am. I need to rub against everything that puts me into question. In *The Words* I wrote, 'I have often thought against myself'…that's exactly how one should think: one should always be questioning one's own assumptions" (Bair, 1990, p. 517).

Sartre invites us to challenge our familiar and comfortable assumptions and preconceptions in a radical way; just as a voyage to an unknown country, with a different culture and customs, might call a traveller's whole mode of being and knowing fundamentally into question. This deliberate courting of difference again entails vulnerability in the sense of taking the risk of being open to otherness and difference in thought.

Seeking the new

Making an original contribution to knowledge is one of the most demanding criteria for work at doctoral level. Descartes (1986, pp. 12-17) describes his decision, long postponed, to reject previously accepted ideas and influences in order to discover and speak out in his own intellectual and personal voice:

> 'I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations…*(but)*…My habitual opinions keep coming back, and, despite my wishes, they capture my

> belief, which is as it were bound over to them as a result of long occupation and the law of custom.'

Here, Descartes conveys two impressions with power and immediacy. Firstly, he expresses the sheer liberation of the tantalising prospect of shedding the constricting burden of old ideas and starting afresh. Secondly, he communicates the attendant difficulty of attempting to break habits of thought, so profoundly familiar and entrenched that they have become imprisoning custodians, delineating and restricting the scope any new voice might have. The sharp realism of this passage is reminiscent of the expectations travellers sometimes harbour that the act of going on a long journey will, of itself, bring about change and renewal. This expectation is then followed by the gradual and complex realisation that the travellers bring themselves, together with all their existing attitudes and modes of thought, along with them on the journey to the new situation. Changes in their inner, as well as outer, landscape are required. As the travellers progress through their external itinerary they must also simultaneously develop an increasingly sensitive internal itinerary of meanings for re-interpreting their outer and inner worlds.

The voyage back

In Homer's epic tale of a voyage, *The Odyssey*, Odysseus returns home to Ithaca after years of trials and tribulations, and is physically unrecognisable to his wife Penelope and other members of his household. Clearly, writing a thesis will not take as many years as Odysseus's wanderings, and will not result in such dramatic outward changes of appearance. However, the inner changes are potentially as significant.

The traveller who returns from a journey cannot be unchanged, preserved as s/he was at the moment of departure: the person who re-emerges is, in a sense, always someone new. Lyotard (1995, p. 192) opens his commentary on James Joyce's *Ulysses* with the following unsettling question:

'How can one be sure that what returns is precisely what had disappeared? Or that what returns not only appears, but is reappearing?'

The process of engaging in research, with its struggles, uncertainties and shifting landmarks, is bound to bring about change. Lyotard suggests the ambiguities and uncertainties of returning. For the travellers themselves, and for those to whom they return, it is like gazing at an intensely familiar configuration and suddenly experiencing the shock of perception in seeing its other side, the hidden Gestalt. The returning travellers are simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar as a result of their voyage.

Conclusion

The quotations above from Lyotard, Hegel, Sartre and Descartes suggest different aspects of the process of research which might contribute to one not being precisely the same at the end of the voyage as at the beginning. Lyotard intimates that in thought you can only make repeated beginnings. Research is not usually a straightforward linear process. There are some days when you move forwards and others when you move backwards. Hegel communicates the tension and discipline of staying with different arguments until a new synthesis emerges from the conflict. Sartre conveys the challenge of thinking against his natural grain, and Descartes expresses the continuous frustration of struggling to deracinate an intellectual identity that is familiar and comfortable.

Feeling becalmed in a slough of no apparent progress; experiencing conflicting currents of thought and struggling to formulate original perspectives, all entail the courage and will to be

vulnerable in the sense of being open to difficult and disorientating experiences. In Section I of this article I have framed research as a 'voyage of vulnerability'. A dimension of this vulnerability lies in being open to alternative interpretations of your identity, and hearing different tones of your own voices for knowing and being: your epistemological and ontological voices. Far from being a weakness, this vulnerability will be a source of strength as you gradually move towards your destination.

Section II - The Possibility Of (Another) Island: Ontological and Epistemological Spaces In The Doctoral Journey

For, where knowledge is, there is much suffering (Qohèlet – Ecclesiaste, I, 17-18) (author's translation from the Italian version, published by Einaudi, 2000)

Points of departure

As my co-writer has clearly illustrated, when it comes to learning, literary and philosophical discourses are full of images of travel, voyage and spaces. These images highlight the process of growth and change that human beings go through in their lifespan, as they attempt to make sense of them-selves in the world. It is therefore no surprise that the metaphor of learning-as-travel has also been adopted in educational writing proper. A typical example of this is given by Baxter-Magolda (2001). The very title of one of her works, *Making their own way: Narratives for Transforming Higher Education to Promote Self-development*, alludes, very significantly, to ideas of students' journeying, through higher education, in order to attain, however provisionally, the goal of self-authorship. Such a journey does not only imply, at the epistemological level, a critical distance from and a personal stand on a specific area of a given disciplinary domain; it also requires, ontologically, the formation of a new sense of identity as somebody who can consciously make sense of the world around him/her in richer and more complex ways.

The goal of self-authorship through education represents, in my view, the 'possibility of another island' which appears in the title of my contribution to this article. This title and the images it evokes have been adapted from the latest novel by the French author, Michel Houllebecq (2005). In it, the question of self-authorship remains unresolved across generations, in a world in which the twenty-fifth clone of the main character (who is our contemporary) still battles with issues of self-authorship that stemmed from the original character's life experiences. For Houllebecq, self-authorship is, therefore, a partially fulfilled possibility, an ongoing journey in the vast and changing sea of one's life. The journey never ends until one's death, and is, indeed, a hard one.

Self-authorship requires continuous work on our-selves, within and against the contexts in which we happen and/or choose to live in the course of our lives. It is a journey which is characterized by insecurity. This is a typical feature of doctoral studies. I wish to symbolize this particular learning journey as the landing on a number of epistemological and ontological islands. On these islands, like Ulysses, students may feel more or less comfortable, tired, anxious, satisfied or not, before setting out on the journey again, in the hope of finding a more stable but provisional island: that of a perceived sense of self-authorship characterized by the award of a doctoral degree.

It is in these 'journeying' terms that I have conceptualized my own doctoral studies. In the remainder of this contribution, I will attempt to frame this particular experience of mine in ways that I believe can be useful to those who are about to or have already embarked on a doctoral programme and supervisors alike. Without being overtly auto-biographical, the arguments I put forward are eminently personal and should be read as such. I will not attempt to give a full account of the doctoral process nor to illustrate all its current intricacies,

but only to highlight some issues that appear to me to be worthy of noting. In doing this, I also take issue with some educational practices that underpin doctoral studies today in the UK.

Which islands? Which spaces?

Traditionally, the experience of doctoral studies has been reified as a fairly compact process characterized by a set of aims, rules and expectations which apply to most disciplinary domains. It is around this fairly 'set' experience that so much advisory literature is written today (for instance: Dunleavy, 2003; Wisker, 2004; Phillips and Pugh, 2005). Its aim is to attempt to both guide and advise prospective and current students.

However, if one homes in onto the doctoral studies process a bit more, one immediately realizes that, far from being a compact journey, there are many differences and nuances in this process. First of all, quite apart from the fact that the very nature of doctoral studies in the UK is moving towards a taught model (Green and Powell, 2005), it is worth mentioning that there are important disciplinary variations. It is one thing to do a PhD in the sciences, another in the humanities and/or social sciences. In the sciences, topics are usually hetero-chosen (usually, by the supervisor) and the whole experience is of a more cooperative nature, with the lab representing the collective space for data gathering and analysis. A sense of community is generally built around such a space. Not so in the humanities and social sciences, where expectations of authorship and ownership, more often than not, require a more solitary engagement with the research. Such a strong sense of ownership is usually pursued, in the sciences, more at post-doctoral levels. As importantly, an individual's perception and conceptualization of what doctoral studies are, and require, inevitably varies according to the stage at which the individual is in the whole process. Such variations can be described both at an epistemological and ontological level. The ontological level is at least as important as the epistemological one. In engaging in doctoral studies, not only does one change one's epistemology, as one acquires new knowledge and skills as a researcher, but also shift one's ontology, as one develops a new habitus as a researcher.

Ontology, however, is also important in another sense: we come into our studies as whole people – we bring with us values, hopes and beliefs that colour our very learning and, especially, our motivation for it. One also hopes to emerge, and indeed does emerge, as a more enriched human being at the end of one's doctoral journey. This is why the ontological aspect is as important, at least, as the epistemological one. The two levels are intertwined and their lack of alignment is one of the main sources of dissatisfaction and frustration experienced by students. Any supervisor's main tasks should be to help students reflect, in a critical manner, on this relationship and help them to gauge gradual changes in it.

In the pages that follow, I try to characterize the doctoral journey in terms of different degrees of interactions between epistemology and ontology. These differential degrees can be characterized as a series of islands on which the student lands in the course of their doctoral studies. Through experience and my reading of some of the growing literature on doctoral studies, I consider these islands to be universal in the doctoral process, regardless of the discipline and/or of the type of thesis one is writing (be it a typical PhD thesis or a professional dissertation at the end of a professional doctorate). The expectations are similar, even if the length of the work may vary.

The first space on which one lands, as one starts one's doctoral studies, is the one which I call the *island of expectations and passion*. This is characterized by a strong sense of reification and idealization of the whole process. The PhD, for instance, is perceived as a status-bringing 'object' to be achieved, the 'book' to be written. This is the stage at which, ontologically, the most passion for the project is felt: motivation and excitement are high, along with some trepidation for the things to come. A sense of expansion is experienced, as one feels excited about starting off new studies whose topic is usually close to one's heart

and mind. Epistemologically, a student is often at a very 'immature' stage, busy as s/he is refining the aims and scope of his/her initial ideas, and positioning them within a wider knowledge context, through familiarization with the relevant literature. However, this task is usually undertaken with enthusiasm. The ontological level carries forward the epistemological one. Passion helps in the efforts to refine cognition and motivates for further studying. The major role of the supervisor at this stage, apart from guiding students to shape their thoughts and understand the nature and scope of a doctoral degree, should be that of capitalizing on a student's enthusiasm and energy so that these can last well through the second and most critical stage of the doctoral studies, which I call the *island of narrow and dark spaces*.

The process of distilling 'grander' ideas into a manageable research project based on an appropriate methodology tends to unbalance the relationship between epistemology and ontology. It is at this stage that, while the epistemological level expands, however tortuously, the ontological one experiences a sense of heideggerian 'throwness'. This is a growing sense of profound insecurity which is born out of the one's engagement with the complexity of the research process. One finds oneself on the land of *aporia* which, again in heideggerian terms, signals *'a lack of want, a perplexity achieved by the encounter with the previously unthought, an uncertainty where to go next driven by a desire to progress'* (Heidegger, in Peters, 2002, p. 41). This is perhaps the most difficult moment for any doctoral student, exactly because the ontological drive loses momentum**,** as the epistemological doubts augment.

A further factor in this unbalancing process is, often, the recognition that writing a doctoral degree requires a specific writing style, less personal and original that one had imagined it to be (and I am specifically talking here about humanities/social sciences where expectations of stylistic 'originality' are usually high). It is often felt that this style, in a way, thwarts thought. Not only has one to learn how to research but also both how to write in forms that are acceptable both to a given epistemological community and within doctoral parameters. As my co-author has put it, it is at this stage that the student's voice is at its weakest, as it acquires**,** quietly and often unconsciously, new tones and depths. This is why it is important to be 'becalmed', allowing what are apparently periods of inactivity and confusion to germinate into better shaped ideas and practices. It is the moment at which the presence and support of the supervisor is the most necessary. S/he should help the student not only, epistemologically, to make growing sense of ideas, thoughts and intuitions, but also, ontologically, to sustain his/her lean and fragile sense of self both as a researcher and, more generally, as a person.

A real sense of progression is only made when one reaches the *island of reasonability*. This is one of awareness and hope. It is the moment at which a student realizes the relativity of one's own project and uses this intuition to decide when and how to put an end to his/her doctoral efforts. The progressive relativization of one's project, accompanied by a clearer sense of worth and direction, usually represents the most mature stage in doctoral studies, one which preludes to a final synthesis. A student's fragile ontology becomes stronger again, this time not simply out of pure enthusiasm for the research project but, more significantly, as the result of an increased confidence in his/her own epistemology. The supervisor's role is to progressively let go of the student, allowing him/her to navigate more autonomously, while still guiding him/her towards submission.

This process of awareness usually leads to the *island of eudaimonia*. This is a word used by Greek philosophers to mean not simply 'happiness' but 'well being' (Honderich, 1995). *Eudaimonia* is to be conceived as a happier space where epistemology and ontology tend to work more in harmony than ever before, as the student approaches and then gains new doctoral status. It is at this stage that a student comes into his/her own being, reaching a new stage of self-authorship.

The process outlined above rather than being teleological, is, in reality, quite complex. Hesitations, regressions, false starts and progression intermingle in intricate ways, as a result of the changing balance between epistemology and ontology. As importantly, doctoral studies take place within specific socio-historical contexts that influence the nature, aims and scope of the doctoral process. It is to these contexts that I now wish to turn by referring to current trends in the higher education system in the UK. This will enable me to uncover some important trends and contradictions in which doctoral students may find themselves today.

The currents in the sea

The sea of the higher education system in the UK is a choppy and changing one these days. Interweaving currents of both tradition and innovation traverse it. Such currents make doctoral studies a challenging experience, as they pull both the ontological and epistemological dimensions in different and often contradictory directions.

Traditionally, undertaking a doctoral degree meant 'doing a PhD' (professional doctorates are a relatively new enterprise in the UK). 'Doing a PhD' still implies a host of practices and expectations. 'Originality' and 'authorship' are still perceived to be the two most important elements at this level. These two elements have traditionally required of students the development of a specific kind of self, an enterprising, resilient and autonomous one. However, this ontological sense is arrived at through a journey which is characterized by different degrees of fragility.

Over the last decade or so, against a background of increasing student numbers and diversification, there has been a pull towards the marketisation of higher education in the UK. This has meant a growing emphasis on the student-as-customer's needs and the development of quality regimes to support these (Kogan, Bauer, Bleiklie and Henkel, 2000). Concurrently, there has been a shift in the ways in which we understand knowledge, away from the purely theoretical towards forms of hybridization between theoretical and practical/ applied (Nowotny, Scott and Gibbons, 2002). Such changes, cumulatively, have had a major impact on the nature of scope of doctoral studies. One major shift has been the recognition for the need of a more solid support system for doctoral students in order to 'prop them up', both at the epistemological and ontological level. One result has been the mushrooming of graduate centres around the country. Their remit is to coordinate the training in research skills, facilitate students' familiarization and cooperation with their fellow students, and support them, as far as possible, in their emotional needs. Concurrently, educational development units, which are now present in virtually every university in the UK, have been formed to improve, among other things, supervisory practices (Land, 2005). Taken cumulatively, there is much merit in these initiatives, as their aim is to help students in their academic and professional development by creating conditions that favour cooperation between students and the wider academic community. Images of apprentice communities of scholars are consciously superseding the traditional image of the lonely doctoral student. Knowledge acquisition is no longer seen as a top-down practice (from supervisor to student) but as a more horizontal process of sharing thoughts, ideas and experiences among a group of peers.

Nevertheless, there are arguments that can be levelled against the faddish spread of doctoral training. However positive and laudable the intentions behind these recent practices are, it is important to reflect on their impact at grass-roots level, in terms of their actual significance for doctoral students. At this level, it is arguable that several faults can be identified. In the first instance, enforced training regimes have a distasteful and worrying behavioural flavour to them. As students move along a chain of virtually compulsory skill training, one wonders, as I did, about the ultimate aim of such training. Is an all-thinking, all-doing, ethically conscious super-graduate what we are aiming for? If so, for what and whose purpose? Many critical voices and doubts in relation to performative regimes have been raised in the literature on higher education in recent times (eg, Readings, 1996; Strathern, 2000).

While, epistemologically, compulsory training activities can be of help in that they coach students in methodological issues, at the ontological level, it can be said that they may interfere with, rather than help, the fragile sense of self doctoral students experience. I would argue that most students embark on the difficult journey of doctoral studies out of passion for their subject/topic. This passion must be safeguarded and, indeed, fostered; the epistemological and ontological warmth of the project must be protected (Evans, 2004). The relationship between student and supervisor is pivotal in this and needs to be nourished through a continuous, fruitful dialogue around a topic of mutual interest. The nature of such dialogue should remain deep and intense, devoid of too many unwanted interferences from the other people and structures. It is within the dialogic space between student and supervisor that real growth and creativity occur, as student and supervisor share the greatest intellectual interest, and emotional investment, in a given topic. This is why too much *superimposed* 'help' may indeed contribute to damaging this vital relationship in that it detracts from a student's sense of agency, which is fundamental in the process towards self-authorship. The very idea of compulsory training advocates a deficiency model of students' abilities. Students are *all* seen as lacking in one or more capabilities that the skills-system must provide. The result is a massifying enterprise that can, in fact, be extremely patronizing towards student's intelligence and, as a consequence, deflate much of their intellectual excitement.

In saying this, I am not advocating that support is unwelcome, on the contrary, only that it should *not* be compulsory. Each individual should be given the choice of deciding on the amount and type of help needed, according to their own perceived needs and in collaboration with their supervisor. The student population is too varied these days for one-for-all solutions to be adopted. Doctoral students are usually people who have a developed sense of responsibility for their own learning and, supposedly, a passion for carrying out research on a certain topic. Anything that verges on blanket obligation can damage a person's sense of self, instead of fostering it. Choice, in terms of both the quality and quantity of assistance, should be the norm.

I wish to emphasize, at this point, that I am not in favour of a simple return to old, traditional practices. The past can be reified and made a myth of, if one is not careful. The doctoral sea, in earlier times, could be very choppy and daunting for many, except, perhaps, the very gifted. More structured assistance is welcome and should be available in any fair and open higher education system. However, such assistance should not be blindly compulsory, as a result of ready-made solutions enforced on universities by governmental think-tanks. The nature, type and mode of assistance should be well thought out, beyond the simple provision of ad-hoc training. At the same time, though, the traditional aim of doctoral studies should remain the same: the flourishing of self-authorship. The means should be there to assist students in this voyage. Nevertheless, the precious relationship between supervisor, supervisee and topic should be protected, in fact, enhanced. Good training of supervisors, as carried out by educational centres, should help in reinforcing this important point. Such training should concentrate not so much on the bureaucratic niceties of supervision but, indeed, on serious reflections about the nature of supervision as a means to help students towards self-authorship. This is a very important aim in supervisory practices but one that, perhaps, is sometimes forgotten by some supervisors in today's busy academic environments.

Time must be made to decompress shortening and densely packed supervisory sessions. Governments and universities must make it their business not to dilute the vital supervisor-student relationship too much, as it is in this special relationship that students find their intellectual and emotional satisfaction. Similarly, given the importance of reflection in doctoral studies, time should be freed from the constraints of audit cultures which impose rigid deadlines on each stage of the doctoral process. Neither supervisor nor supervisee should feel intimidated by such an imposition which runs against basic principles of good, reflective learning and teaching. Time, dialogue, reading, silence, doubt, thinking, pleasure for learning

are at the heart of any good educational enterprise. These cannot be simply optimized through the pressurized and fragmentary experience that some training courses can offer. These are things that must be taken from tradition and protected against piecemeal, product-led and time-saving approaches that the current market, audit and quality regimes promote, in place of much desired intellectual excitement and emotional fulfilment.

Towards the island of *eudaimonia*

In drawing some conclusions to the arguments raised in discussing the doctoral process, and, indeed, in line with what my co-author has written from a more philosophical viewpoint, I would like to put forward a number of ideas that are important for students to reach a satisfying sense of self-authorship at the end of doctoral studies (what I have called the island of *eudaimonia*).

In the first instance, students should be helped to become more consciously aware of the ontological dimension of their doctoral studies, and of changes which such a dimension undergoes over time. It is important that students recognize the nature of rite of passage doctoral studies has and become perceptive of the changes that studying at a higher level brings to their sense of self. Discussions about how epistemology interweaves with ontology, and their mutual impact on each other, should be encouraged; both in the student's inner dialogue and in the intra-dialogue s/he establishes with his/her supervisor, colleagues and significant others. Reflecting on one's place in the doctoral continuum, ontologically, as well as epistemologically, can help students in having a better sense of direction and recognizing the overall benefits (and, at times, provisional damage) that studying for a doctoral degree may afford.

Related to this and in line with a part of the philosophical arguments put forward by my co-author, students should be encouraged to fully appreciate the nature of 'erring', not just in the sense of 'making mistakes' but in the more fundamental heideggerian one of 'wandering', 'being lost' in order to find oneself (Heidegger, 2003). This is fundamental in doctoral studies where hard thinking often brings about doubt and *angst*. Learning the importance of 'being becalmed' allows one to direct one's sense of self-doubt into fruitful paths. The notion of time-management comes to mean, in this context, the management of one's inner rhythms in order to mature more rewarding thinking. Helping a student to recognize such rhythms and gently 'capitalize' on them is one of the most difficult and challenging tasks in the student-supervisor relationship.

Finally, students should learn how to apply their own *arete*. This is a concept which was used in ancient Greece to indicate *virtue*, *excellence*, *goodness* and was central in the thinking of Plato and Aristotle (Honderich, 1995). When thinking about 'virtue', these philosophers gave this word the specific meaning of 'being the best one can' or 'reaching the highest human potential'. As used also by Homer, *arete* points towards ideas of courage and resilience. It is infused with the images of the battles human beings must engage in throughout their journey towards (self) knowledge. It implies ideas of both bravery and effectiveness. Thinking, as Heidegger has taught us, is engaging continuously with possible dangers. It is this battle that brings enrichment. Doctoral studies are ridden with conflict and students must learn how to deal with this effectively. They have to be determined to overcome difficulties and make a virtue of them in their important effort towards self-authorship. This is hard work. It means becoming aware of the necessity to be humble enough to accept the slow nature of growing, as it is slowness that brings about real understanding. However, being effective also means recognizing the boundaries of one's journey. It is in setting these boundaries and pushing the limits for reaching them that the dialogue between supervisor and student is essential. The supervisor's work consists in a very subtle art: pushing students towards the limits of understanding, probing them all the time, gently, while giving them all possible support. It also implies being able to signal when outer boundaries have been reached and the road

towards (provisional) self-understanding and self-authorship has come to an end. It means being able to indicate to a student that another important island, in his/her life journey, has been attained.

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