

***Sino peripatético. Un despertar americano* by Daniel Campos Badilla, New York:
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Philosophers have often cultivated the memoir genre as a way not only to convey (as memoirs usually do) a sense of a particular period of their life that holds significant meaning to them as Jean Paul-Sartre does with respect to his childhood in *The Words* (1981), but also to show that philosophical reflection and activity is often intimately interwoven with the big and little events of one's life, as Simone de Beauvoir also details in *Memoirs of a dutiful daughter* (2005), where she describes how her passion for philosophy was shaped in great part by her engagement and conversations with her friend and classmate Zaza, her initial respect for and subsequent chafing under the strict education and supervision at the Cours Désir and her admiration for her cousin Jacques. And, indeed, part of what makes a philosophical memoir to be engaging and meaningful text is its capacity to show, as both Sartre and Beauvoir do, that philosophy, despite its reputation for being an abstract discipline that leads its practitioners away from others and compels them to isolate themselves in an ivory tower, is in fact deeply interwoven with the particular and mundane everyday experiences and events that punctuate one's life, and that philosophical reflection and engagement emerge while doing commonplace activities. In this respect, Daniel Campos Badilla's memoir *Sino peripatético* (Peripatetic fate) is a great achievement. Indeed, through the pages of his delightful memoir, Campos Badilla invites his readers to not only retrace some of his steps while chronicling some of the encounters, travels and experiences that make up his nomadic lot as an immigrant, but also to reflect on how these encounters, travels and experiences provide the basis for philosophical reflection while he performs activities such as contemplating some flowers, accompanying a relative to a medical appointment or visiting an old childhood friend in his native Costa Rica. Because of this, Campos Badilla's memoir provides an excellent illustration of some penetrating remarks by John McDermott, who writes: "It is not the monumental or the charismatic which provides a clue to the magnificence of being human. Rather, it is the celebration of the *ordinary* that enables us to make our way as truly human, avoiding the twin pitfalls of the humdrum, ennui and boredom and the equally dehumanizing attempt to escape from the rhythm of time on behalf of a sterile, and probably self-deceptive, eternal resolution" (2007, 289-290; my emphasis).

Let me elaborate on this by focusing on some examples. Towards the end of the memoir, Campos Badilla (2023, 354) recounts the joyful experience of watching some beautiful orchids bloom one morning in his garden in San José, as he comes to realize that both his feeling of joy and the beauty of the orchids are only meaningful because both are ephemeral and contingent: "Hoy mis chicas salvajes amanecieron con los sépalos y los pétalos completamente desplegados. Se abrieron al mundo de mi jardín

para darle un abrazo y darme uno a mí. Sé que nos la veré de nuevo. Sé que no me verán más. Por ello vivimos el momento presente y lo disfrutamos.” (“Today my wild girls woke up with their sepals and petals fully unfolded. They opened themselves to the world of my garden, to give it a hug and give me one. I know I won’t see them again. They know they won’t see me again. That is why we live in the present moment and enjoy it”). This passage possesses a deep philosophical significance for two reasons. On one side, it echoes a poem authored by the Nahua-Acolhua tlatoani Nezahualcoyotl and translated by Daniel Brinton wherein Nezahualcoyotl reminds his audience of the transience of life and the imperative to enjoy its beauty as long as it lasts: “Alas, thy riches shall end; the Giver of Life teaches me that for a little while we do enjoy the prince Nezahuacoyotl, nor a second time will he come to his house on earth; no second time will he rejoice on earth” (1887, 119). On the other side, Campos Badilla’s intense focus on the blooming flowers as he delights in them exemplifies an observation made by John McDermott regarding how one should live a human, transient life: “In transiency, paraphrasing John Dewey, it is the *quality* of the journeying that counts, not the end in view and certainly not the claim that we have journeyed. The quality of transiency is achieved by *passing through* rather than *passing by*. We should make our journey ever alert to our surroundings and to every perceivable sensorial nuance” (2007, 287; my emphasis). Campos Badilla’s *Sino peripatético* is exquisitely attuned to his author’s surroundings and to his every perceivable sensorial nuance, making it a paradigm of a life lived passing through rather than passing by.

Another virtue of Campos Badilla’s memoir consists in illustrating how difficult situations can be overcome with love and support from others, and how beauty can be found amid these difficult situations through love. One of the passages that most marked my mind while reading the book was a philosophical reflection that Daniel makes when accompanying his father in the hospital. In this passage, while waiting at the hospital, Daniel first relates a series of observations he made in an office, contrasting the cold and detached treatment of an oncologist towards a patient with the attitude of the patient’s daughter who encourages him and comforts with affection. After contrasting these attitudes, Campos Badilla (2023, 127) formulates the following philosophical reflection, in which he seeks to complement Plato’s vision of the union between the true, the good and the beautiful with the ethical emphasis on the importance of love in the thought of Charles Sanders Peirce: “Una verdad sin Amor no hace el Bien, ni es Bella. Ni siquiera es Verdad.” (“A truth without Love does not do Good, nor is it Beautiful. It’s not even True”). In my view, this reflection is crucial since it makes clear the importance of love to establish a genuine human community, as McDermott stresses when he recounts the key role of love in Royce’s vision of a beloved human community: “Yet, Royce warns us, as paraphrased, that to love the world and to detest one brother or sister is to be a hypocrite. For Royce, community is a flowering of deeply and integrally held commitments to one’s local environment” (2007, 126).

Finally, in a third passage of deep philosophical significance, Campos Badilla narrates a visit to his former teammate and childhood friend JuanPa, who was the victim

of a spinal accident that left him quadriplegic. What marked me the most when reading it was the author's gesture towards JuanPa when taking his leave. Campos Badilla (2023, 339) narrates the event as follows: "Cuando me despedí, quería sentirlo y que me sintiera. Espontáneamente apoyé mi frente en la de él, le agarré la nuca con mis manos y me quedé así por varios segundos. Luego me aparté. No dijimos nada." ("When I said goodbye, I wanted to feel him and for him to feel me. I spontaneously rested my forehead on his, grabbed the back of his neck with my hands and stayed like that for several seconds. Then I moved away. We didn't say anything"). This passage holds special philosophical significance because of two reasons. On one side, it shows that sometimes silence can be more expressive than any speech, as the Mexican philosopher Luis Villoro (2016, 41) mentions when writing this: "En estos casos el silencio es índice de una actitud espiritual o de un estado de ánimo y puede ofrecer una ventana abierta para el estudio de la intimidad ajena" ("In these cases, silence is an index of a spiritual attitude or a state of mind and can offer an open window for the study of others' intimacy"). On the other side, the passage clearly exemplifies the importance of another key recommendation of McDermott to live a meaningful human life: "The distinctively personal ingredient should color all of our activities; otherwise, we live in the grey of correctness, external and dead to the world and to ourselves. We should widen the frame of relations and avoid being hung out to dry, like jetsam, or carried by the mob or by the occult or by the socially acceptable, like flotsam. Reach and touch. And when you are touched, touch back. The key is not in objects, names, and definitions. The key is in the *relations* and *symbols*" (2007, 137; my emphasis). This focus on relations and symbols deeply permeates *Sino peripatético* beyond Campos Badilla's reaching and touching JuanPa to the extent that we see the author constantly undertaking extensive efforts to develop or reinforce relations with people and to showcase the importance of symbols -such as the taste of gallo pinto at the Feria Verde de Aranjuez- as providing the vehicle for experiencing a rich and freighted human life in all its marvelous complexity. Because of all this, *Sino peripatético* should be read not just as a memoir, but also as a philosophical work, the main goal of which is to remind its readers that philosophy is -at its best- not a collection of abstract doctrines collected in dusty volumes, but rather a way of life that ideally enables us to understand that, as Dewey and McDermott remind us, the nectar is in the journey.

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