The Socratic Pedagogy of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

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THE SOCRATIC PEDAGOGY OF SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ

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35.1 Introduction

Though she is primarily considered a poet and a playwright, Novohispanic nun Juana Inés de la Cruz is also one of the most distinguished women philosophers from the Early Modern period—in particular, one who offered a substantial defense of the right of women to be educated in seventeenth-century New Spain. Her most well-known arguments are contained in her famous *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz* (*The Answer to Sor Filotea de la Cruz*). In this piece, Sor Juana aims to provide a systematic response to the bishop of Puebla Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, writing under the pseudonym Sor Filotea de la Cruz, who reprimanded and reminded her of her position as a nun and of the demands associated with this role by ecclesiastical and civil authorities.

Numerous scholars have studied in detail the strategies and arguments that Sor Juana deploys to respond to Sor Filotea. For instance, both Georgina Sabat Rivers (1994) and María Luisa Femenías (2006) have pointed out that Sor Juana develops in the *Answer* a catalog of illustrious women that preceded her to create a philosophical tradition that legitimizes her endeavors to cultivate herself. Joan Gibson (2006) has argued that Sor Juana, following the admonition of Luis Vives according to which women should be taught to be chaste, uses the logic of chastity that was imposed on women to maintain that its upholding requires the education of women by women.

Although much has been written about the many strategies that Sor Juana uses in the *Answer* to vindicate the right of women to be educated, little has been said so far about whether Sor Juana advocates some specific pedagogy in her works. Our aim in this chapter is to argue that there is a philosophical pedagogy underlying Sor Juana's works that is in many respects Socratic. By this we mean that, in order to argue for the right of women to be educated, and given her social position, Sor Juana deploys a method of teaching that mirrors Socrates' strategies. We conclude that the development and use of Socratic pedagogy emerges as a reaction to the paternalistic/authoritarian pedagogic model that was imposed by scholastic philosophy in colonial New Spain in the seventeenth century.

In order to show this, we proceed in the following way. In Section 35.2, we present what we take to be four important elements of Socratic pedagogy, and which we identify in Sor Juana's work: (i) the use of autobiography as a pedagogical tool, (ii) the deployment of complex irony as a way to engage interlocutors, (iii) the use of shame as an attempt to correct behavior and promote virtue, and finally, (iv) the characterization of the quest of knowledge as an erotic enterprise. In Section 35.3, we examine how Sor Juana uses autobiography in the *Answer* to defend herself against some of the charges raised against her. In Section 35.4, we present a few examples of Sor

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Juana's use of complex irony aimed at engaging her interlocutors in a way that she both appears to mean exactly the opposite of what she writes and to be committed in some sense to what she writes. In Section 35.5, we show how Sor Juana uses shame as a way to motivate others (in particular, men) to correct their behavior and to promote virtue. In Section 35.6, we show how Sor Juana characterizes the pursuit of knowledge as an erotic enterprise. Finally, in Section 35.7, we offer a brief conclusion that highlights how the pedagogy that underscores Sor Juana's works deploys key elements of Socratic pedagogy as a way to carve out an intellectual space for free inquiry as a woman in seventeenth-century New Spain.

35.2 Some Key Features of Socratic Pedagogy

On the basis of an analysis of Plato's early works and the writings of several distinguished Socrates' scholars—in particular, Gregory Vlastos (1987), David Roochnik (1987), Paul Woodruff (2000), and Owen Gower (2008), in this section we introduce briefly what we take to be some of the central features of Socratic pedagogy. In particular, we focus on: (i) the use of autobiography as a pedagogical tool, (ii) the deployment of complex irony as a way to engage interlocutors, (iii) the use of shame as an attempt to correct behavior and promote virtue, and finally, (iv) the characterization of the quest of knowledge as an erotic enterprise.

This goal, however, presents us with an immediate challenge: how can we present these features given that Socrates maintains in the *Apology* that he "[has] never been anyone's teacher" (33a; Plato 1997)? The enterprise of offering an account of Socratic pedagogy might seem, in light of this pronouncement, doomed from the start. However, Socrates himself seems to suggest further down that, although he never was a teacher in the sense that Evenus or Gorgias were considered to be (i.e., as merchants of wisdom who were paid for their services), his defense in court involves, in some sense, a type of pedagogical activity since he also states: "I do not think it right to supplicate the jury and to be acquitted because of this, but to teach and persuade them" (35c; Plato 1997). Thus, by considering closely how Socrates defends himself in the *Apology* by teaching the jury, we can extract some of the main characteristics of his pedagogy. The analysis of Socrates' defense also serves to highlight an interesting parallel to Sor Juana. One of the main aims of pedagogy in her work is not simply to teach her readers, but to persuade them that in engaging in philosophical thought she is not doing anything wrong. That is, much like Socrates, she teaches her readers to convince them that she does not deserve to be persecuted for the very act of teaching.

One particular salient feature of Socrates' defense consists in the use of autobiographical narrative at certain stages of the *Apology*. Socrates is accused of busying himself studying things in the sky and below the earth, of making the worse argument into the stronger, and of teaching others to do the same. In order to respond to these accusations, Socrates offers a brief autobiographical narrative describing his actions after being informed of the answer that the oracle of Delphi gave to Chaerephon (21b–22e; Plato 1997). On the one hand, with this autobiographical narrative, Socrates is able to show that the accusations are nothing but unsubstantiated slander propagated by certain individuals who were resentful of their critical engagements with him. But, on the other hand, the use of this autobiographical narrative in the *Apology* serves a more important pedagogical purpose: to teach the jury the importance of epistemic humility, since true knowledge can only come from the previous acknowledgment of one's own ignorance. This is relevant for Socrates' defense to justify to the jury his instructive attitude vis-à-vis his fellow citizens, which Socrates describes in the following manner: "I go around seeking out anyone, whom I think wise. Then if I do not think he is, I come to the assistance of the god and show him that he is not wise" (23b; Plato 1997).

The use of autobiographical narratives with pedagogical purposes is not only limited to the *Apology*, but it also emerges in other early works of Plato. In particular, there is a famous passage

in the *Phaedo* (95e–102a; Plato 1997) where, after rehearsing the objection that Cebes had earlier raised about the immortality of the soul, Socrates immediately offers an autobiographical narrative of his early life that tells the tale of his intellectual failures as a young man. Just as in the case of the autobiographical narrative in the *Apology*, several scholars (e.g., Gower 2008; Hoinski 2008) have argued that this passage plays a central pedagogic function, although they disagree about the exact import of what Socrates is trying to teach. In particular, while Gower takes the core lesson of this autobiographical narrative to be that "if Socrates has made philosophical progress, it is by relying on himself — and that, if we are to become philosophers, we must do the same" (2008: 341), Hoinski maintains that the central message that Socrates wants to convey concerns his philosophical praxis which is grounded upon "a first, foundational choice and on the judgment in each and every case to hypothesize the strongest speech" (2008: 353). That is, although they disagree about the exact lesson autobiographical narrative is meant to convey, they agree that it fulfills an important pedagogical role in Socrates' teaching. In particular, it seems that the pedagogical role of autobiographical narrative is that of taking Socrates's own life as an example to make a meta-philosophical point concerning the aim, relevance, and justification of the philosophical endeavor.[1]

A second noticeable feature of Socrates defense in the *Apology* involves the use of what Vlastos has called "complex irony," which he characterizes in the following terms: "In 'simple' irony what is said is simply not what is meant. In 'complex' irony what is said both is and isn't what is meant" (1987: 86). Indeed, in one of the most memorable passages after the court gives its verdict of guilty, Socrates discusses what would be an adequate "penalty" for his actions. Though Meletus had proposed the penalty of death, Socrates argues in this passage that, if it is indeed the case that his "penalty" should match his actions and that if what he did was to go to each person privately to bestow upon him the greatest benefit, what he deserves is not being put to death but rather being fed at the Prytaneum (36b–37a; Plato 1997). Given the circumstances in which he finds himself, this statement from Socrates constitutes a case of complex irony considering that, in the conventional sense of "penalty" understood as punishment, Socrates does not mean what he says but that, in the sense of "penalty" understood as desert, he does mean exactly what he says. Immediately after putting forth his suggestion, Socrates emphasizes the following point: "since I am convinced that I wrong no one, I am not likely to wrong myself, to say that I deserve some evil and to make some such assessment against myself" (37b; Plato 1997). The pedagogical use of complex irony seems to consist in exploiting the ambiguity of the statement to get the audience to engage in a complex act of interpretation by which they reflect on how the ironic statement might be consistent or inconsistent with the rest of the teachings in order to derive further lessons. In this case, Socrates seems to use complex irony to make his audience reflect on what the "punishment" he has chosen for himself says about how he conceives of his intellectual endeavor given the inadvisability of wronging oneself.

We find other cases of complex irony as a pedagogic tool in other early Platonic dialogues. For instance, in the *Meno,* after Socrates introduces the view that

> As the soul is immortal, has been born often and has seen things here and in the underworld, there is nothing which it has not learned; so it is in no way surprising it can recollect the things it knew before.
>
> (81c; Plato 1997)

and Meno asks to be taught that this is the case, Socrates responds: "You now ask me if I can teach you when I say there is no teaching but recollection, in order to show me up at once contradicting myself" (81e–82a; Plato 1997). This statement is a case of complex irony because, on one hand, Socrates means what he says in the sense that there is no "teaching" understood as a transference

of knowledge but, on the other hand, Socrates does not mean what he says in the sense that he can "teach" Meno by helping him to discard his old epistemic practices (i.e., his slavish dependence on the rhetoric and memorization techniques exemplified by Gorgias) so he can effectively recollect what he already knew. The pedagogic function of complex irony in this passage is quite obvious since, after being teased in this way, Meno responds: "No, by Zeus, Socrates, that was not my intention, but just a habit" (82a; Plato 1997), thus showing that Socrates' ironic remonstrance has made him become aware of the problematic nature of his old epistemic practices.

A third significant element in Socrates's defense in the *Apology* is the attempt to elicit shame in his interlocutors and to use it to correct their behavior. For instance, at a certain point in his defense, Socrates contrasts his detached demeanor with that of others before him who have begged in tears and brought their families to court to try to elicit pity from the court when facing less dangerous charges, and he explicitly embarrasses them by stating the following:

> I think these men bring shame upon the city so that a stranger, too, would assume that those who are outstanding in virtue among the Athenians, whom they themselves select from themselves to fill offices of state and fill honors, are in no way better than women.
>
> (35b; Plato 1997)

This use of shame is then explicitly linked to a pedagogical function since Socrates's intention is to help the members of his audience to correct their behavior: "You should not act like that, men of Athens, those of you who have any reputation at all, and if we do, you should not allow it" (35b; Plato 1997). As we can see, the use of shame is explicitly tied here to correcting behavior that is deemed to be morally wrong. Shame as a tool in moral education—as an instrument that serves not only to identify and rectify current moral failures but also as a deterrent against potential future moral trespasses—also appears in other works from Plato as well. For instance, in the *Symposium*, Phaedrus explicitly says love is of the utmost importance in imparting a moral education insofar as it provides a crucial guidance which is based upon "a sense of shame at acting shamefully, and a sense of pride in acting well." These emotions are essential from a pedagogical viewpoint for Phaedrus because, "without these, nothing fine or great can be accomplished, in public or in private" (178d; Plato 1997). In light of this, shame does clearly play a central role in Socratic pedagogy.

A fourth feature of Socrates' defense in the *Apology* is the characterization of what he does (i.e., philosophy) as an erotic activity. To understand this, it is important to keep in mind that, for Socrates, "[Eros] is in between knowledge and ignorance" as he points in the *Symposium* (204a; Plato 1997). In virtue of this status, the practice of philosophy is an instance of love in virtue of two things. First, just as Eros, who as a *daimon* mediates between gods and mortals, the position that philosophers occupy is one in between knowledge and ignorance. Consider Socrates' acknowledgment of his position in the *Apology* in the following terms: "I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us knows anything worthwhile, but he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think that I know" (21d; Plato 1997). Second, given that, according to Socrates in the *Symposium* (200e; Plato 1997), the objects of love and desire for any human being are "what is not at hand and not present, what he does not have and what he is not, and that of which he is in need," then philosophy *qua* practice turns out to be a particular form of erotic activity (Belfiore 2012). Philosophy involves not just a desire for wisdom, but a desire for wisdom that is born from the recognition of one's ignorance. In other words, philosophy should be understood as the activity of those who desire wisdom which they recognize they lack. This desire is just a manifestation of our incomplete and longing nature as finite beings.

Now, this characterization of philosophy as an erotic activity functions as a pedagogic instrument since it is precisely this deep yearning for wisdom that Socrates uses as a tool to illustrate

often important lessons. For instance, in a famous passage in the *Symposium*, after Alcibiades has offered all of his possessions and himself to Socrates in exchange for Socrates' wisdom, Socrates pushes Alcibiades to reflect on the nature of the trade he is proposing (and of the value system that underpins it) by responding in the following way:

> If I really have in me the power to make you a better man, then you can see in me a beauty that is really beyond description and makes your own remarkable good looks pale in comparison. But, then, is it a fair exchange that you propose? You seem to want more than your proper share: you offer me the merest appearance of beauty, and in return want the thing itself.
>
> (218e; Plato 1997)

Now, in this passage, the misdirected yearning for knowledge that Alcibiades has is used by Socrates to show him that the system of values that he adopts implicitly (and upon which the exchange that Alcibiades proposes is grounded) is flawed since it puts on the same level appearance and reality. As this example shows, the erotic dimension of philosophical practice plays also a key role in Socratic pedagogy. Having presented some of the main features of Socratic pedagogy, let us turn to an examination of Sor Juana's works.

35.3 Sor Juana's Autobiographical Narrative and Its Pedagogic Function

Sor Juana refers to herself and different events in her life at numerous points in her poetry and in her plays, providing glimpses of her social and mundane activities and of her private mental life. But it is undoubtedly her *Answer to Sor Filotea* that contains the most substantial autobiographical narrative that Sor Juana penned. Now, it is important to notice here that the *Answer* is not merely an autobiography but rather a complex piece that, as Electa Arenal and Amanda Powell stress, is "polyvocal and polysemous" (1994: 19). Indeed, though Sor Juana's text at times imitates the traditional genre of a nun's *vita*, an autobiographical narration in which the author reviews her conscience as she retraces her life, the *Answer* often blends elements of other genres such as the sermon or the juridical appeal to help convey other senses beyond a mere description of her early life. In particular, the autobiographical sections of the *Answer* seem to have both an apologetic (in the Greek sense of the word) and a pedagogical function. Much like Socrates, Sor Juana uses the *Answer* to legitimize her intellectual endeavors. Pedagogy is thus aimed not only at imparting knowledge, but at imparting knowledge that will convince her interlocutors to allow her to continue to engage in philosophical thought.

In order to grasp clearly the apologetic dimension of the autobiographical sections of the *Answer*, it is important to bear in mind that, before Sor Juana narrates certain events from her childhood, she stresses that "I have never written save when pressed and forced and solely to give pleasure to others" (de la Cruz 1994: 47). Now, the theme that her intellectual drive is a force that is beyond her control is used here to address the charge that, given her condition as a woman, her writing and her desire to learn are at odds with the customs of her society. Indeed, though these customs impose boundaries on what endeavors are appropriate for women, Sor Juana suggests she is not blameworthy because

> Since the light of reason first dawned on me, my inclination to letters was marked by such passion and vehemence that neither the reprimands of others…nor reflections of my own...have sufficed to make me abandon my pursuit of this impulse that God Himself bestowed on me.
>
> (de la Cruz 1994: 47)

As we can appreciate here, Sor Juana echoes elements of Socrates' defense, insisting that she cannot give up her activity despite the social opposition she faces since it is, in a sense, God-mandated.

Now, to support the aforementioned claim that her intellectual drive is a force beyond her control, the autobiographical narrative that Sor Juana provides includes several events that purport to show that her actions were motivated by her natural impulse to learn. For instance, she mentions that

> Though I was as greedy for treats as children usually are at this age, I would abstain from eating cheese because I heard tell that it made people stupid, and the desire to learn was stronger for me than the desire to eat —powerful as this is in children.
>
> (de la Cruz 1994: 49)

As we can see, since Sor Juana stresses through this anecdote that her desire to learn was stronger (i.e., more natural) than the desire to eat in her early years, she provides support for her claim that she should be not blamed or disparaged for the transgression of social norms that govern women (in particular, the norms that restrict their education to simple domestic tasks) given that her intellectual drive has always been stronger than other appetites such as hunger—and, thus, beyond her control.

In addition to this apologetic function, the autobiographical narrative that Sor Juana presents also has a pedagogical function. Indeed, through the telling of her early life, Sor Juana aims not only at vindicating her later actions, but at conveying certain specific lessons through certain anecdotes that have a pedagogical goal, as the following passage illustrates:

> I began to study Latin, in which I believe I took fewer than twenty lessons. And my interest was so intense, that although in women (and especially in the very bloom of youth) the *natural adornment of hair is so esteemed*, I would cut off four to six fingerlengths of my hair, measuring how long it had been before. And I made myself a rule that if by the time it had grown back to the same length I did not know such and such thing that I intended to study then I would cut again my hair to punish my dull-wittedness. And so my hair grew but I did not yet know what I had resolved to learn, for it grew quickly and I learned slowly. Then I cut my hair right off to punish my dull-wittedness, for I did not think it reasonable that hair should cover a *head so bare of facts —the most desirable adornment*.
>
> (de la Cruz 1994: 51, our emphasis)

This anecdote is remarkable because, not only does it exhibit the natural inclination of Sor Juana for knowledge again, but it also fulfills an important pedagogical function: it aims to convey the reader a lesson gleaned from her own life experience, which is that one should not care about one's body as much as (or more than) one cares about one's soul. In doing this, she is clearly echoing Socrates when he states in the *Apology*: "For I go around doing nothing but persuading both young and old among you not to care for your body and your wealth in preference to or as strongly as for the best possible state of your soul" (30a–b; Plato 1997).

There is, of course, a crucial difference in Sor Juana and Socrates' disregard for the body. While Socrates is concerned with the soul simply in opposition to the body, Sor Juana is concerned with the *genderless* soul in opposition to the *gendered* body.[2] Sor Juana uses autobiographical narratives to emphasize the genderless soul as the subject of knowledge, and to notice the limitations imposed by the gendered body. Autobiographical narratives are a pedagogical tool to teach her interlocutors that women, trapped as they might be in the body by gender norms and expectations, are also the locus of a natural impulse for knowledge. At the same time, however, Sor Juana exploits Baroque contradiction to use autobiographical narratives not simply to disregard the gendered

body, but to revalorize gender activities, such as cooking or gardening, as places ripe for philosophical reflection: "Well, and what then shall I tell you, my Lady, of the secrets of nature that I have discovered while cooking?" (1994: 75)

Considering this evidence, the use of autobiography in Sor Juana's works seems to have an important pedagogic function, just as it does for Socrates in Plato's dialogues. Let us consider now the case of complex irony.

35.4 The Pedagogic Use of Complex Irony in Sor Juana's Works

Several scholars have pointed out that Sor Juana's works (in particular, the *Answer to Sor Filotea*, but also her poetry and her plays) are permeated by a deep sense of irony that surfaces in various passages. However, none of them have pointed so far that many instances of irony appear to be cases of complex irony in which Sor Juana means what she says but also its opposite. For instance, in one of her most famous poems, the Romance titled "Finjamos que soy feliz"/ "Let us pretend I am happy" (Poem 2), Sor Juana uses complex irony when she addresses her own passion to learn and educate herself in a self-deprecating way, pointing out all the dangers and sorrows that learning potentially brings and praising a state of ignorance in which one's mind finds happiness:

¡Qué feliz es la ignorancia	How happy in his ignorance
del que, indoctamente sabio,	is the man unlettered yet wise
halla de lo que padece	who finds relief from suffering
en lo que ignora, sagrado!	in what no knowledge supplies!
No siempre suben seguros	The boldest flights of wit
vuelos del ingenio osados	will be buffeted by the wind,
que buscan trono en el fuego	though aspiring to thrones of fire
y hallan sepulcro en el llanto.	in tombs of tears they will end.
También es vicio el saber,	Learning is one more vice,
que, si no se va atajando,	unless deterred its ambition,
cuando menos se conoce	when the learned least expect
es más nocivo el estrago;	will lead them straight to perdition.
y si el vuelo no le abaten,	If its course is not deflected,
en sutilezas cebado,	on subtleties learning feeds,
por cuidar de lo curioso	impertinently inquisitive,
olvida lo necesario	Indifferent to genuine needs
.....	.....
¡Oh, si como hay de saber,	What we need is a seminar
hubiera algún seminario,	with no other aim than showing
o escuela donde a ignorar	not the ways of human learning
se enseñaran los trabajos!	but those of human unknowing!
.....	.....
Aprendamos a ignorar,	Thought, let's learn not to know
Pensamiento, pues hallamos	since so plainly it appears
que cuanto añado al discurso,	that whatever we add to our minds
tanto le usurpo a los años.	we take away from our years.

(de la Cruz 2010: 5)

This passage exemplifies, according to us, a case of complex irony in virtue of the following. At first sight, a cursory reading of poem suggests to the reader that Sor Juana is taking an anti-intellectual stance since she characterizes learning as a "vice" that can lead us to become "impertinently inquisitive, indifferent to genuine needs." She also praises ignorance as a state of happiness and contrasts it sharply with the endeavors of one's wit or intellect which, though "aspiring to thrones of fire, in tombs of tears they will end." In virtue of this, she appears to disparage learning. But a closer reading of these stanzas shows that, contrary to what she says, Sor Juana does

not advocate taking an anti-intellectual stance and abandoning learning, but rather adopting an intellectual stance that involves a type of learning that is both self-critical and measured. Indeed, it is only when learning "feeds on subtleties" and "its course is not deflected" that it becomes a vice. Moreover, the ignorance that Sor Juana praises is not that of the ignoramus, but that of the man who is "indoctamente sabio" ("unlettered but wise"), thus showing that what she values is not sheer ignorance but rather one's awareness of one's lack of knowledge. In virtue of this, we do have solid evidence that the poem exemplifies not only irony, as Roggiano (1972: 67–68) and Merrim (1999: 166–67) have noticed, but complex irony since Sor Juana means in the poem both what she says (disparaging "learning" when it is manifested as an unbridled drive) and the opposite of it (praising "learning" when it involves acknowledging the limits of one's capacities or, in her words, learning "not to know").

This case of complex irony has clearly a pedagogical dimension for Sor Juana, as we can appreciate when we reflect on a couple of stanzas. To wit, after she states that learning is dangerous when it is allowed to roam freely without any checks, she stresses the importance of having a "seminar" where people are taught not "the ways of human learning, but those of human unknowing." What Sor Juana is advocating for here, according to us, is the need to have schools that, rather than feeding the worst impulses of students (e.g., vanity) by giving them a false impression of their intellectual capacities, would teach them to be intellectually humble by forcing them to confront their limitations and gaps. This recommendation is clearly echoed in the last stanza of the poem where Sor Juana enjoins her own mind to "learn not to know" (i.e., to be self-critical and aware of its own boundaries) by reminding her that, since Sor Juana is an embodied entity, any excessive intellectual pursuit that ignores the needs of the body will shorten her lifespan.

In addition to this instance of complex irony, there are several other prominent examples in Sor Juana's works that one can highlight. For instance, in a famous passage of the *Answer*, Sor Juana deploys a magnificent example of complex irony when she makes the case to Sor Filotea that one does not need books to practice philosophy since one can engage in earnest philosophical activity while performing the most mundane and seemingly trivial tasks such as cooking:

> Well, and what then shall I tell you, my Lady, of the secrets of nature that I have discovered while cooking? I observe that an egg becomes solid and cooks in butter or oil, and on the contrary that it dissolves in sugar syrup… I shall not weary you with such inanities, which I relate simply to give you a full account of my nature, and I believe this will make you laugh. But in truth, my Lady, what can women know, save philosophies of the kitchen? It was well put by Lupercio Leonardo that one can philosophize quite well while preparing supper. I often say, when I make these little observations, "Had Aristotle cooked, he would have written a great deal more." And so to go on with the mode of my cogitations, I declare that all is so continual in me that I have no need of books.
>
> (de la Cruz 1994: 75)

Sor Juana deploys shrewdly here complex irony to tease her reader in the following way. On one side, Sor Juana means the opposite of what she says when she states that, if Aristotle had cooked, he would have written a great deal more than what he did. Indeed, if Aristotle's had been burdened with the task of cooking for Alexander the Great rather than teaching him, it is almost certain that he would have written nothing, or far less than what he did in fact pen. On the other side, Sor Juana means exactly what she says in the following sense: if Aristotle had occasionally cooked, he would have likely observed a series of important phenomena that take place while cooking (e.g., the browning of meat and bread or the whipping of egg whites to a froth point). And this would have perhaps led him to theorize and write about the chemical and physical processes that underlie

these phenomena, just as he did theorize and write about the biological processes that underlie the generation of animals.

As we said in the previous section, Sor Juana exploits Baroque contradictions to examine the complexities of gender. Complex irony is thus used in this fragment to both denounce and value women's place in Novohispanic societal structures. On the one hand, Sor Juana uses irony to denounce the impact of gender norms and expectations on women's intellectual endeavors. But on the other hand, she means what she says and aims at highlighting that so-called feminine activities are worthy of philosophical exploration. This case of complex irony has for Sor Juana an important pedagogical role. Indeed, since her remarks on Aristotle and cooking are intended to show that one can engage in philosophical activity without books as the closing sentence of the passage suggests, what Sor Juana intends to do in this passage is the following: while accepting her place as a nun and heeding the patriarchal command to focus on certain activities usually associated with women such as cooking, she also reclaims as her own the space that is assigned to her (namely, the kitchen) and she reshapes it into a place of inquiry and learning where the intellectual activity of women is legitimate and can freely unfold. In other words, the complex irony that Sor Juana deploys operates in a way such that, as Bokser puts it, "the kitchen becomes a pedagogical site" (2006: 12). On the basis of these two examples, we can clearly see that complex irony plays for Sor Juana an important pedagogical role, just as it does for Socrates. Let us turn now to consider the appearance and the function of shame in her works.

35.5 Shame as a Moral Emotion and as a Pedagogical Tool in Sor Juana's Works

In addition to complex irony and autobiographical narrative, Sor Juana uses shame as a pedagogical tool aimed at correcting behavior. Thus, the use of shame isn't simply a rhetorical resource aimed at conferring Sor Juana's writing with a characteristic tone. Instead, the role of shame as a distinctively moral emotion is to hold her interlocutors accountable for their conduct: Sor Juana uses shame to confer responsibility and to emphasize the obligations her interlocutors have failed to meet. In particular, it seems that Sor Juana uses shame not only to emphasize how men's attitudes toward women are unfounded, but to hold men accountable for the wrongs resulting from women's subordinate position.

In the letter written under the pseudonym Sor Filotea de la Cruz, bishop of Puebla Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz reprimands Sor Juana for studying philosophy and poetry, and for writing verses. Fernández de Santa Cruz claims that, while there is nothing wrong with the education of women, they must dedicate themselves to the study of the Holy Scriptures. Further, he argues that women should not write verses that elicit admiration: not only do they risk falling prey to vanity, as they are naturally inclined, but they risk disengaging from obedience. That is, Sor Juana's greatest transgression is challenging women's subordinate position. Nevertheless, Fernández de Santa Cruz frames the issue of the subordination of women not as a matter of oppression, but as a matter of genuine care: in guaranteeing that women remain obedient, men in general, and the Church in particular, are looking after the salvation of their souls. In her *Answer*, however, Sor Juana argues against this claim that keeping her from studying and writing is not born out of benevolence, but rather out of envy:

> Truly, my Lady, at times I ponder how it is that a person who achieves high significance — or rather, who is granted significance by God, for He alone can do this — is received as the common enemy. For that person seems to others to usurp the applause they deserve or to draw off and dam up the admiration to which they had aspired, and so they persecute that person.
>
> That politically barbarous law of Athens remains in effect, whereby anyone possessing significant qualities and virtues was expelled from the republic to prevent his using them for

> the subjugation of public liberty; it is still observed in our own times, though no longer for the same reason the Athenians held. But now there is another motive, no less potent though less well founded, for it resembles a maxim of that impious Machiavelli: to abhor the person who becomes significant because that one tarnishes the fame of others.
>
> (de la Cruz 1994: 63)

Further, Sor Juana compares this attitude towards her study to that of the Pharisees against Christ. She argues that being "crude and base men" it is vanity that does not allow them to see that the beauty and benevolence of Christ's miracles were cause of love and not condemnation. Sor Juana argues that the cause of Christ's condemnation was not that the Pharisees failed to see His greatness, but that it was precisely *because of* His greatness that he was condemned. The Pharisees' vanity clouds their judgment:

> No, to state as cause that He worked miracles seems unfitting in learned men, and such were the Pharisees. But this is the way of things, for when learned men fall prey to passion they burst out illogically in just this fashion.
>
> (de la Cruz 1994: 65)

A further example of Sor Juana's use of shame in correcting men's wrongful attitudes toward women can be found in her poem "Hombres necios que acusais"/ "Foolish, you men" (Poem 92):

Hombres necios que acusáis	Foolish, you men — so very adept
a la mujer sin razón,	at wrongly faulting womankind,
sin ver que sois la ocasión	not seeing you're alone to blame
de lo mismo que culpáis:	for faults you plant in woman's mind.
si con ansia sin igual	After you've won by urgent plea
solicitáis su desdén,	the right to tarnish her good name,
¿por qué queréis que obren bien	you still expect her to behave —
si las incitáis al mal?	*you,* that coaxed her into shame.
Combatís su resistencia	You batter her resistance down
y luego, con gravedad,	and then, all righteousness, proclaim
decís que fue liviandad	that feminine frivolity,
lo que hizo la diligencia.	not your persistence, is to blame.
Parecer quiere el denuedo	When it comes to bravely posturing,
de vuestro parecer loco,	your witlessness must take the prize:
al niño que pone el coco	you're the child that makes bogeyman,
y luego le tiene miedo.	and then recoils in fear and cries.
……	……..
Pues ¿para qué os espantáis	So why are you all men so stunned
de la culpa que tenéis?	at the thought you're all guilty alike?
Queredlas cual las hacéis	Either like them for what you've made them
o hacedlas cual las buscáis.	or make of them what you can like.

(de la Cruz 2010: 109)

As we said before, shame as a moral emotion aims at conferring responsibility to agents. In this fragment, Sor Juana adopts a more confrontational tone and demands men to recognize the harmful nature of their attitudes toward women. In particular, this fragment aims at evidencing men's conflicting expectations from women's sexual attitudes. While Sor Juana's point is that women are measured according to conflicting standards (either they are prudish and ungrateful, or they are licentious and vane), the power of the verses stems directly from their confrontational character: rather than appealing to the power of discourse, Sor Juana resorts to eliciting shame, not only as an invitation for men to reflect on the role they play in the perpetuation of stereotypes, but as a motivation to acknowledge their responsibility in the construction of harmful gender norms.

35.6 The Pursuit of Knowledge as an Erotic Enterprise and its Pedagogic Role

Let us finally consider love as a pedagogical tool in Sor Juana's works. Just as many other central figures of the Spanish Golden Century, Sor Juana was influenced by a strong neo-Platonic line of thinking according to which love had an eminent role in the education of people (in particular, of adolescents and young adults). For instance, echoing a theme that emerges in Lope de Vega's play *A Lady of Little Sense* (where one of the main characters, Laurencio, states the following: "Love, my lords, has been/ that profound intellect/termed the soul of the world/ and, as a teacher, has held/the chair of all the sciences, /because only through love/ man understands best/ their divine differences" (de Vega 1966:1113))[3], Sor Juana emphasizes in her play *Love is a labyrinth* the view that love is not just a tool for scientific education, but also for moral education when she puts the following lines in Theseus' mouth:

Pero la mayor victoria	But the greatest victory
fue, Señor, que amante tierno	was, my lord, that as a lover
de la belleza de Elena,	of the beauty of Helena
la robé: no estuvo en esto	I took her: but the valor
el valor (aunque el robarla	laid not there (though her capture
me costó infinitos riesgos),	costed me infinite risks);
sino en que, cuando ya estaban	it consisted in the fact that,
a mi voluntad sujetos	once I had bound to my will
el premio de su hermosura	the prize of her beauty
y el logro de mis deseos,	and the triumph of my desires,
de sus lágrimas movido	I was moved by her tears
y obligado de sus ruegos	and, forced by her pleas,
la volví a restituir	I did send her back
a su Patria y sus deudos,	to her country and family,
dejando a mi amor llorando	leaving my love weeping
y a mi valor consiguiendo	and obtaining for my valor
la más difícil victoria,	the hardest won victory
que fue vencerme a mi mesmo.	which was vanquishing myself.

(de la Cruz 2010: 722)

As we can appreciate, this passage illustrates well how love works for Sor Juana as an instrument for moral education since it teaches Theseus to do the morally correct choice by returning Helena to her family. In this case, love of others has an important pedagogical function in that it is a tool for moral education. But love of *knowledge* also plays a key pedagogical role, as is the case for Socrates.[4] To appreciate this clearly, let us consider the following passage from the *Answer* in which Sor Juana draws a parallel between Peter's love of Christ during the episode of the denial, and her own pursuit of knowledge:

> The Prince of the Apostles once found himself a long way indeed from Knowledge, as it is remarked in the emphatic: "But Peter followed afar off." A long way from receiving praise as a learned man was he, who once bore the title of unknowing: "not knowing what he said." And, indeed, when faced with an examination concerning his acquaintance with Knowledge, he himself said he had not acquired the least notion: "Woman, I know not what thou sayest. Woman, I am not [one of them]." And what befalls him? Possessing this reputation for ignorance, he reaps none of the rewards but suffers all the afflictions of the learned. And why? No other reason is given, save "This man also was with him." Peter was fond of Knowledge, which bore away his heart; and he followed after, calling himself a follower and lover of Knowledge. And though he followed so "afar off" that he neither understood nor attained Knowledge, still this sufficed to incur in its torments. The soldier from without would not

> hesitate to afflict him, nor the maidservant within-door, fail to trouble him. I confess that I am far indeed from the terms of Knowledge and that I have wished to follow it, though "afar off."
>
> (de la Cruz 1994: 71–73)

This section from the *Answer* is quite revealing of the pedagogical function that the pursuit of knowledge conceived as an erotic activity has for Sor Juana in the following sense. By identifying Christ with knowledge and characterizing Peter as a philosopher, Sor Juana aims, in our view, to teach her reader two important lessons: (i) pursuing knowledge (regardless of gender or social location) is no different than loving God and (ii) the pursuit of knowledge, though ultimately natural and good since it is just a form of love of God, is not without costs since it involves being confronted (as Peter is) by agents of the political and social *status-quo*. In virtue of this, Sor Juana is, according to us, using the story of Peter's denial of Christ in the face of social pressure despite his love of him and her own love and pursuit of knowledge despite the social pressure she experienced to abandon it (considering her gender and her social location) to convey a crucial insight about philosophy: it is fundamentally a *transgressive* enterprise. In doing this, we think that she anticipates Stanley Cavell's accurate characterization of philosophy as

> Indeed outrageous, inherently so [because] it seeks to disquiet the foundation of our lives and to offer us instead nothing better than itself –and this on the basis of no expert knowledge, of nothing closed to the ordinary being, once, that is to say, that being lets himself or herself be informed by the process and ambition of philosophy.
>
> (Cavell 1980: 147)

Now, given that the way in which philosophy was taught and practiced in colonial New Spain in the seventeenth century was, in Guillermo Hurtado's (2016) words, "almost always lacking in originality and critical dimension" since it involved blind deference to the Church fathers, Sor Juana's Socratic philosophical pedagogy can then be seen as a (quiet) revolt against the paternalistic/authoritarian model of scholastic thought that was imposed on her, just as Socrates's philosophical pedagogy constituted a revolt both against the dogmatic religious authoritarianism of Euthyphro and other traditionalists and against the relativistic excesses of Protagoras and other Sophists.

Gender, nevertheless, adds another dimension to Sor Juana's use of love of knowledge as a pedagogical tool. As we saw before, in characterizing it as an erotic enterprise, Socrates highlights that philosophy is born from the recognition that we lack the knowledge we desire. Sor Juana thus uses love as a constant and quiet reminder that knowledge requires epistemic humility. This is aimed not just at putting down her detractors, but at reminding them that even men have a lot to learn. Characterizing philosophy as an erotic activity also serves to legitimize women's intellectual aims. The pursuit of knowledge is a natural impulse, so that, woman or man, Sor Juana's philosophical endeavor is born from this natural longing for knowledge. Finally, if characterizing philosophy as an erotic enterprise serves to highlight its fundamentally transgressive nature, Sor Juana uses this characterization to show that women's intellectual endeavors are doubly transgressive, insofar as it involves not only a critical examination of tradition, but a critical challenge to gender norms as well. Sor Juana's view of philosophy as an erotic enterprise constitutes a quiet revolt against oppressive gender expectations as well.

35.7 Conclusion

Let us recap. We have argued here that there is a philosophical pedagogy in Sor Juana's works, and that this pedagogy is, in virtue of its reliance on autobiographical narratives, complex irony, shame

as a moral emotion, and the characterization of the quest for knowledge as an erotic enterprise, manifestly Socratic in nature. As it is the case with Socrates, we think that Sor Juana's pedagogy can be seen as a quiet revolt against the dogmatic and religious model of thought imposed on them.

Gender norms and expectations, however, add a different dimension to Sor Juana's Socratic pedagogy. On the one hand, it seems that this was Sor Juana's only resource to engage with her detractors, given her position as a woman and a nun. She was expected to remain observant of her subordinate position and to respect ecclesiastical hierarchy. Socratic pedagogy thus allowed her to engage her interlocutors and to surreptitiously challenge them, while apparently remaining respectful of gender norms.

On the other hand, however, we think that, beyond it being her only resource to confront her detractors, Sor Juana realized that Socratic pedagogy was particularly well-suited for her aims of arguing for the right of women to be educated. As a woman, Sor Juana was not recognized as an interlocutor. In arguing for the right of women to be educated, she was partly arguing for their right to be recognized as worthy interlocutors. This presents a challenge: How can Sor Juana's arguments be acknowledged and considered if she isn't first regarded as a worthwhile interlocutor? Socratic pedagogy helps her argue by *revealing* her as an intellectual peer. This is what makes Sor Juana's strategy particularly interesting. Instead of merely arguing for her position, she demonstrates the very thing for which she argues by seemingly toeing the line and through exchanges that appear to be innocuous and benign.

Notes

1 In this respect, Socrates' autobiographical narrative (and, in particular, his description of his intellectual failures) constitutes a model for later autobiographical narratives such as the ones penned by Augustine and Rousseau, which provide through various vivid descriptions of the moral failures of their respective authors justifications of their philosophical endeavors.

2 Sor Juana emphasizes the importance of a genderless soul in other pieces, such as the Romance "Señor: para responderos"/"Sir, to reply" (Poem 48), (2010: 62–64).

3 Lope de Vega (1966: 1112): "Amor, señores, ha sido/aquel ingenio profundo /que llaman alma del mundo/y es el dotor que ha tenido/la cátedra de las ciencias;/porque sólo con amor/aprende el hombre mejor/sus divinas diferencias."

4 While we focus here on love of knowledge as *motivating* philosophical inquiry, Lisa Shapiro (2022) argues that Sor Juana thought that, given the limits of human understanding, the natural desire to know needs to be countered by a desire *not to know*. For this reason, Shapiro argues that Sor Juana's poems intend to elicit *negative* emotions, such as "lethargy, loss, and disorientation," aimed at "counter[ing] the desire for knowledge, serving to temper the impulse that can lead to useless and injurious erudition. They thus offer an introductory class in how not to know" (2022: 112). This is consistent with Sor Juana's use of complex irony highlighted before, but adds another layer to her characterization of Peter as a philosopher and his denial of Christ, which we later examine.

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