

Problematization of Philosophy Teaching and Teacher Formation in Brazil

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ABSTRACT – Problematization of Philosophy Teaching and Teacher Formation in Brazil. The objective of this study is to enlighten two problems: the first regards the obstacles that oppose acknowledging the broadening of the concept of Philosophy, whereas the second concerns resuming the comprehension of the specific nature of philosophical activity. The concepts of humanity and philosophy are approached in a uni-versal perspective, as well as the original anthropological function of teaching. The study aims to contribute with enhancing the freedom of educative intervention by philosophy teachers in Brazil. The conclusion proposes an expansion of the concept of philosophy and encourages teaching practices that set the conditions for a harmonious and multi-rational coexistence among various forms of love for wisdom.

Keywords: **Universality. Teaching. Education. Unity. Diversity.**

RESUMO – Problematização do Ensino e da Formação de Professores de Filosofia no Brasil Atual. O objetivo deste artigo é elucidar dois problemas radicais: o primeiro diz respeito aos obstáculos relativos ao reconhecimento da ampliação do conceito de filosofia, enquanto o segundo concerne à retomada da compreensão da natureza específica da atividade filosófica. Abordam-se os conceitos de humanidade e de filosofia em perspectiva *uni-versal*, bem como a originária função antropológica da docência. Essa abordagem contribui atualmente com o alargamento da liberdade no âmbito da intervenção educativa de professores de filosofia em variados níveis de ensino no Brasil e em contextos similares. Conclui-se com o ensaio de uma síntese das soluções propostas aos referidos problemas.

Palavras-chave: **Universalidade. Ensino. Educação. Unidade. Diversidade.**

Prelude

Both the undergraduate student who chooses to become a philosophy teacher or the fully graduated philosopher who works at a given academic level, when facing the peculiarities of the contingent nature of teaching, whether they already teach or will do so in the future in Brazilian society, must deal with certain concrete issues and implications that are inherent to their practice (even though they might not be aware of or partially recognize them). The first issue concerns obstacles relative to acknowledging the broadening of the concept of philosophy, whereas the second issue concerns resuming the comprehension of the specific nature of philosophical activity.

Developing the ability to clearly distinguish the general outline of these issues –which this article seeks to aid with – has the potential to broaden the freedom of acute interventions at the service of humanity. For this purpose, we propose that the aforementioned issues be approached from a truly universal conception of philosophical reflection. The approach is consciously assumed in this article: current controversies surrounding the concept of universality are not neglected and, to effect, a certain beneficial path is suggested herein after careful ponderation.

According to Severino (2007), the professional formation of every teacher must include the development of a profound conscience regarding their integration with humanity, i. e., the teacher must be aware that human existence cannot reach its full meaning until it crosses the limits of individuality and the social group where one is inserted, in order to greatly develop their educational function. With specific regard to teaching, the author understands education as the most coextensive function to the fabric of humanity, so that educators are – or should be – the first line of humanity, due to the fundamental originality of their function to sustain humanity itself (Severino, 2007, p. 126).

Despite being inside dramatically adverse conditions of Brazilian society, the current or future philosophy teacher, as well as other teachers, must not lose sight of their particular situation, as mentioned above. Should they fail to know their anthropological function or, while knowing it, should they chose not to live accordingly, then they will fail to sustain the fabric of humanity as a species and even contribute to tear it further. Therefore, radical problems that present somewhat clearly to philosophy teaching practices in current Brazilian society warrant current and future teachers to develop a clear conscience of their general outline, not only to make personal decisions, but also to honor their position as first line towards building more favorable conditions for humanity.

Humanity, as we should know by now, is not restricted to *civilization* or opposite to *barbaric* and/or *savage folk*, as euro-western philosophical tradition has led us to believe through disguised ideologies of *universal knowledge*. If, on one hand, this illusion has in many ways played the role of strengthening social groups and nations in face of

various historical conditions of hostility and/or struggle for survival, or preservation of privileges; on another hand, it actually places humanity in check, since the current exaggerated spirit of competition among nations driven by the greed of small groups is invested in a planet extension against the *common ground*, even though there is hope that technological solutions will be developed to salvage situations in which the catastrophe reaches the very individuals who were leading the *progress*.

From a multi-rational paradigm (Masolo, 2010) consonant with the recent proposition of coexistence, humanity can be understood and is defined here as uni-versal – or, as stated by Noguera (2014), pluriversal, given its diverse character. Humanity is *uni* in the sense of species, but also at the same time *versal* in the sense of the freedom that enables multiple formative possibilities of groups with various sociocultural characteristics. For this reason, any pretense of *universal knowledge* that may take part for the whole, emphasizing unity over diversity, is but an ideology that, as opposed to a true authentic universal philosophical approach, contributes to tear the fabric of humanity. In this context, however, teachers who serve as the first line of that same humanity should support, preserve and revitalize the bonds that recognize, strengthen and connect diversity to the unity of species.

If any difficulties should be found while investigating possible problems that effectively surround philosophy teaching in theory and practice, among with the precarity of the conditions of work in Brazilian institutions, which in turn challenge the efficacy of the educator's work, how should one expect philosophy teachers to be in harmony with their *dharma*? Should these problems present themselves, despite teachers knowing or scarcely knowing about them, this article thus assumes the role of shedding light on the philosophical reflection that will allow such problems to be identified at least to their general traces, in order to perfect teaching practices of philosophy in Brazilian society or similar contexts.

Obstacles to Acknowledging the Broadening of the Concept of Philosophy

Regardless of our earlier questioning about the very nature of philosophical activity, current Brazilian historical contingencies – which greatly result in successful or unsuccessful attempts to mimic modern euro-western experiences – place philosophy teaching in a certain horizon of sense marked by institutionalization, which is guided by transformations of the State. The State has, in turn, acted historically to support a specific national identity, characterized mostly by an ideal of whiteness (Bento, 2002). On another hand, according to Mills (1999, p. 13), philosophy is the whitest in the field of humanities. Also, Noguera (2014, p. 37-38) refers that western philosophers often show profound ignorance by remaining in a comfort zone and not questioning the bases of their thinking, to the extent that the situation contributes to maintain an Eurocentric structure with center and peripheries, urban

zones of philosophical thinking and suburbs immersed in philosophical ignorance.

It is not by chance that philosophy teaching in Brazil is comprised of a structurally Eurocentric tradition. In a certain way, the common rejection of forms of expression of philosophy other than that based on ancient Greece that is seen in Brazilian academic environments reinforces and disseminates the misconception of a “metonymic reason” (Noguera, 2014), which takes the part for the whole while proclaiming a pretentious universal notion of universality. In this article, one of the reasons for this undisputed dissemination of the misconception – which converts in to an obstacle to acknowledging the widening of the concept of philosophy – consists of maintaining the dogma according to which philosophy would have date and point of origin, i. e., Tales’, Socrates’, Parmenides’ and others philosophers’ ancient Greece.

When searching for different understandings of the term *culture*, it comes as no surprise that we are faced with this mistake in the classical work of German thinking, which was not only restricted to its country of origin, but also diffused throughout Brazil, more specifically *Paideia*, by Werner Jaeger. Jaeger (1994, p. 7-8) states that discussing Chinese, Hindu, Babylonian, Hebraic or Egyptian culture is commonly done under a vague analogic sentiment, whereas, in his own opinion, the “Law and the Prophets” of the Hebrews, the Chinese Confucianism, the Hindu “dharma” are all essentially and spiritually something fundamentally different from the Greek ideal of human formation. Western tradition, in this perspective, would be more keen to the Greek-Roman legacy than to eastern traditions, so that the strict concept of culture – *paideia* – could not apply to the historical experience of non-western civilizations without cognoscitive damage. Therefore, the mistake that leads us to believe philosophy would essentially be the most beautiful creation of the Greek spirit and an eloquent testimony of its peculiar structure (Jaeger, 1994, p. 12) is indirectly reinforced. *Distant* forms of *human thinking*, while similar to Hellenic philosophy, could not be rigorously called ‘philosophy’.

Converted into a dogma, the belief regarding the strict meaning of philosophy is hardly criticized among western philosophers, including those in Brazil, thus leaving aside other forms of philosophy, even ones that exist inside the country. On one hand, philosophy teaching in Brazil has been done historically based on that mistaken belief²; on the other hand, by lacking criticism towards this dogma and by tacitly accepting it, philosophy teaching in Brazil has propagated an effect that blinds and obstructs the acknowledgement of rich and diverse forms of philosophy, which in turn has restricted not only the formative potential of universities, but also the experience of self-knowledge and self-realization among students from earlier grades.

An important clue to avoid the aforementioned obstacle was provided by Noguera (2014) when proposing to restore the inherently human meaning of the various forms of philosophical experience. In that matter, the *logos*-logical character of Hellenic philosophy can be

regarded as just one of the possible forms assumed by the *spiritual structure* of love for knowledge. To better understand this solution, the question posed by Noguera (2014), which at first glance may seem like an anecdote, should be reassessed. The author asks: does philosophy resemble architecture and religiosity, or does it resemble the telephone and the airplane? What is at stake here is the dichotomy between types of human production, the first being verifiable in all societies and cultures without determined date and place of origin, and the second being pinpoint inventions traceable in time and space. Well, if philosophy is evidently a part of activities found in every society and culture, as are architecture and religion, what then justifies the requirement of a birth certificate to it and the insistence of reducing philosophy to a type of activity that is exclusive to the west? By withdrawing the mistake, one can then acknowledge that philosophical reflections are in fact congenital to human condition. Therefore, it is just as wrong to assume that a given society would have invented philosophy as it is to affirm that something similar would have happened to architecture, especially since experience reveals these practices manifest in different forms in different contexts (Noguera, 2014, p. 63-64).

To acknowledge the broadening of the concept of philosophy implies to question mistaken dogmas that act as obstacles to conscience and freedom. The semantic meaning of the term *philosophía* (love for knowledge) has been profoundly changed, to the detriment of its original sense, over western history. Regardless of its Greek origin, the term was cultivated in many forms by different societies. Through literary, oral and/or pragmatic forms of philosophy, immaterial accomplishments have been reached, which oppose the exaggerated and hegemonic utilitarianism of idiosyncrasies and are vital guides for humanity, i. e., spiritual heritages of human species that, if not neglected, can benefit sickened societies. Thus, teaching and teacher formation in Philosophy in Brazil and other nations should be encouraged to think, plan and act by valuing the diversity of forms of love for knowledge, thereby articulating themselves in traditional institutions that require transformations within and beyond their walls.

The current context of the so-called *hyperculturality* – a phenomenon closely related to globalization and human immersion in the digital universe – seems to favor an equanimity among cultural paradigms that used to be *confined*³, according to Han (2019a). In this sense, philosophies that were marginalized before are, in the hypercultural space and other *places*, revalued in an unprecedented manner, as are its forms of teaching. In addition, according to the south Korean philosopher, hyperculturality must not be mistaken by a sort of 'hyperdimensional monoculture', since it actually enables a source of various forms and practices of life that modify, amplify and renew themselves, in a manner even former ways of life begin to happen (Han, 2019a, p. 34). On another hand, Han (2019a, p. 49-50) does not exclude relations of power inside hyperculture, but rather emphasizes that the peculiarity of the world that is created by hyperculture is the growth of spaces that

could not be reached by the economic powers, but by esthetic powers, and therefore are a part of the empire counterposed by Schiller to the empire of force and law⁴. This aspect of globalization deserves a more detailed analysis, which is not an objective of this study. The phenomenon in itself encourages research on the insertion of philosophies in this context, since one of the implications of acknowledging and valuing different forms of love for knowledge in equanimous bases can coincide with the broadening of the sense of *philosophía*. However, this may seem to happen as the hypercultural world removes the aura of the idealized concept that philosophy would have its own birth certificate and place of origin.

The Root of the Problem of the Nature of Philosophy and Some of its Implications to Teaching and Teacher Formation

Alejandro Cerletti (2009) states that teaching philosophy has been, from its beginning, strictly related to its own development, whereas in modern times and from various forms of institutionalization of philosophy, this matter begins to integrate educational systems and, therefore, begins to occupy a place of lesser or greater importance in official programs. In this context of institutionalized teaching, masters and teachers no longer teach philosophy – or their own philosophy –, but rather Philosophy, according to contents and criteria established by official work plans and institutions that are licensed to do so (Cerletti, 2009, p. 13).

In current educational institutions, maybe teachers are not required to *practice* philosophy, only *teach* philosophy, by understanding and applying didactic resources that favor the apprehension of the content by students. However, we do not intend to address the dilemma of teaching *philosophy* or to *philosophize*⁵, since it has been widely discussed. We do acknowledge the existence of a much deeper problem, which could be described as follows: on one hand, in contexts that differ from modern institutionalization of philosophy teaching, philosophy teaching would be strictly connected to the very act of philosophizing; on another hand, Brazilian philosophy teachers nowadays are mostly taught to pass on preestablished content by institutional programs that limit their autonomy. Adding to that is the obstruction of the bulk of experiences of love for knowledge by a fixed curriculum based on laws in work regimens that are often incompatible to the goals set by those very programs. Perhaps occasionally in line with these limitations of philosophy teaching by licensed teachers in elementary and high school – to avoid negativity, we chose not to bring any categorical sense to this relation – ,philosophy colleges in Brazil also limit diverse possibilities of experiencing the love for knowledge by its undergraduate students, despite having greater autonomy to define their curricular content.

What does the idea that philosophy teaching was in close harmony with philosophy making mean, so that after its institutionaliza-

tion by modern schools and universities this connection was likely broken? By reflecting upon the matter, one could reformulate the second problem of this study, as it seems to precisely regard the relationship between the affinity of philosophy for certain forms of freedom, and also historical contingencies that limit institutions where philosophy is taught nowadays. In other words, there seems to be a conflict between educational values of current teaching institutions and values of philosophical formation (including not only euro-western tradition, but also other traditions that are excluded by certain western and/or hegemonic techno-scientific conceptions of world and human beings present in debates on institutional norms, curricular structure etc.).

As was carefully pointed out by Huizinga (2008), not even the Greek regarded science and philosophy as products of school, in the current sense of the term, which means that they were not secondary of an educational system destined to prepare citizens for useful and profitable functions. The semantic idea of *school* (*skhole* in Greek; *scholae* in Latin) underwent considerable transformation, since at its origin it meant leisure, the complete opposite of labor, only to be further understood as a systematic preparation for labor. This transformation came to happen as educational institutions over the past centuries were labeled as *schools* and were built to receive a crescent number of young students to be trained for their insertion in society, through routines and work that add up to the common life of rigorous application following childhood (Huizinga, 2008, p. 165).

In contrast, philosophy, while an activity that is inherent to human condition in its various forms of manifestation, seems to play a more intimate role next to leisure and play, rather than labor. Current teaching institutions, however, teach philosophy as labor, both to the teacher that has to make a living out of teaching (precariously), and to the students, who are expected to perform in a certain way during elementary and high school to advance through the years and then are taught during college in a way that fails to question the relations between labor, leisure and play⁶.

The institutional conditions that are imposed to the first line of humanity – teachers, that is – tend to get in the way of their own *dharma*⁷, which naturally leads to a personal and professional uneasiness that is widely referred to in specialized literature (Arroyo, 2015; Gatti, 2009; Lapo; Bueno, 2003; Roldão, 2017). Thus, teachers – mainly philosophy teachers – see themselves in great difficulty as modern teaching institutions are traditionally organized to form *winners* in societies that, as a paradoxical condition to their own convalescence, need to mitigate the agonism among their members and among groups and nations.

How is it possible for teachers to fulfill their mission for humanity in such institutional conditions that pose obstacles to the development of teaching? The solution does not seem simple, given that institutional changes that favor the love for knowledge require the assumption and experiencing of values only a truly universal philosophical practice

– in the sense indicated previously in the Prelude of this article – can provide to transform the States and societies that contain schools and universities. From that, comes the need to emphasize the importance of teachers developing their activity, on philosophy or other subjects, beyond the classroom and the walls of the institutions, widening their sphere of influence over society as a whole.

Conclusion

The amplified knowledge of the problems mentioned in this study regarding teacher formation and philosophy teaching has proved complex to the point it shed light on many concrete difficulties opposing a healthy intervention. However, the type of approach to these problems, for its qualities, encourages us to deal with them through paths that lead towards the convalescence of modern society, from a truly universal standpoint and from a relationship between teaching and teacher formation.

Through the approach proposed in this article, the universal concepts of humanity and philosophy are mutually related. The concept of humanity cannot be limited to a mono-rational perspective, since various forms of rationality have been nurtured from various forms of love for knowledge (*philosophía*) in many societies. Therefore, humanity, while comprehended in a universal manner, does not correspond to a development of capabilities that respond to only one type of rationality, excluding other forms of body, intellectual, sensitive and spiritual culture. On the other hand, philosophy is universally comprehended by acknowledging the possibility of dialogue between *various* rationalities and forms of love for knowledge on a *common ground* among the human species. In the current historical context of modern societies, this common ground finds exceptional conditions to grow, since the expansion of the contact network among societies predicts a possibility of strengthening diversity in the fabric of a shared and fraternal humanity, mainly if current and future teachers are capable of gathering strength and fulfilling their anthropological function. Philosophical reflection enlightens the first problem by outlining obstacles to the broadening of the concept of philosophy, both in academic scenarios of idealized justifications related to the severity of the idea of culture, and in the context of educational and curricular theories and practices of traditional teaching institutions. The second problem has revealed deep roots while we tried to establish a comparison between the two models of philosophy: modern institutionalized practices and original experiences. Based on the concept of philosophy as a group of activities that are inherent to human condition, we were inclined towards recognizing the specific nature of philosophy to indicate its close affinity with leisure and play. Through this reflection, many complicated implications of teachers' work in institutionalized philosophy have been elucidated.

The lines of solutions proposed by this article to the two problems discussed before indicates the importance of comprehending philos-

ophy, the value of marginalized forms of philosophical activity in the mainstream academic context and the articulate projection of the educational action of philosophy teachers (in various academic levels), as well as teachers from other fields of knowledge, in a wider and deeper manner and beyond the walls of traditional teaching institutions.

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Notes

- 1 Sanskrit term that indicates a vital norm applied to each individual or a particular human group. As stated by Rohden (2008, p. 203), translated from the eastern conception to western terminology, *dharma* can be thought of as the manifestation of harmony between the norm and our actions in everyday life.
- 2 This belief can be perceived through exercising philosophical thinking in specifically Hellenic structures, as long as one is willing to leave their comfort zone and question the very basis of cognoscitive centers created in that thought. As indicated by Noguera (2014), if according to Aristotle surprise and wonder are the motors of philosophy, how is it possible to exert surprise and wonder directed solely to one's own self? The attitude that is without wonder and fails to learn from various forms of love for knowledge (*philosophía*) would then be antiphilosophical.
- 3 Globalization today is more than an exchange between places. Different forms of culture that migrate from one place to another or one place influencing the culture of another do not a globalization make. Globalization today modifies the place itself. It brings out its aura, it gives it life. The decline of the aura ensues when cultural forms of expression are lost in the process of dis-location from its place of origin, when they are taken and offered to a hypercultural juxtaposition, a hypercultural simultaneity, where the unicity of here and now gives space to atopic repetition (Han, 2019a, p. 66-67).
- 4 On Friedrich von Schiller's *On The Aesthetic Education of Man*, the twenty-seventh letter comments on the empire of play: "No pre-eminence, no rival dominion is tolerated as far as taste rules and the realm of the Beautiful extends. This realm stretches upward to the point where Reason governs with unconditional necessity and all matter ceases; it stretches downwards to the point where natural impulse holds sway with blind compulsion and form has not yet begun; indeed, even on these outermost boundaries, where its legislative power has been taken from it, taste still does not allow its executive power to be wrested away. Unsocial desire must renounce its selfishness, and the agreeable, which otherwise allures only the senses, must cast the toils of charm over spirits too. Necessity's stern voice, Duty, must alter its reproachful formula, which resistance alone can justify, and honour willing Nature with a nobler confidence. Taste leads knowledge out of the mysteries of science under the open sky of common sense, and transforms the perquisite of the schools into a common property of the whole of human society. In its territory even the mightiest genius must resign its grandeur and descend familiarly to the comprehension of a child. Strength must let itself be bound by the Graces, and the haughty lion yield to the bridle of a Cupid. In return, taste spreads out its soothing veil over physical need, which in its naked shape affronts the dignity

of free spirits, and conceals from us the degrading relationship with matter by a delightful illusion of freedom. Given wings by it, even cringing mercenary art rises from the dust, and at the touch of its wand the chains of thralldom drop away from the lifeless and the living alike. Everything in the aesthetic State, even the subservient tool, is a free citizen having equal rights with the noblest; and the intellect, which forcibly moulds the passive multitude to its designs, must here ask for its assent. Here, then, in the realm of aesthetic appearance, is fulfilled the ideal of equality which the visionary would fain see realized in actuality also; and if it is true that fine breeding matures earliest and most completely near the throne, we are bound to recognize here too the bountiful dispensation which seems often to restrict mankind in the actual, only in order to incite him into the ideal world" (2004, p. 105-106).

- 5 In a way, this formulation touches the traditional problem discussed earlier: the meaning of philosophy teaching, be it teaching *philosophy* or how to *philosophize*. Rocha (2005) has summarized this problem by dividing a party of content developers (who teach philosophy), according to whom philosophy has gathered a noticeable discursive richness over its history, in the form of arguments and discussions on fundamental problems that afflict humans, so that this inheritance, as well as accumulated knowledge in all sciences, should be within the reach of newer generations; and on another hand, a numerous party of processors (who teach to philosophize), according to whom believing in contents is the seed of rigidity of formulas that deplete the richness of the concepts, since philosophy is not a subject made of content as are other subjects taught in school, but rather a way of thinking, of being critical. Rocha (2005) acknowledges the hazards of being excessively schematic in the distinction and thus, to put an end to a possibly endless debate, proposes a consideration on the current scenario where philosophy teaching is developed, i. e., school. The false dilemma is then brought up to the question: how could philosophy be effectively included in the curriculum so that the educational community understands the importance of it articulating with the work of other teachers? (Rocha, 2005, p. 66-68). This conundrum is often reduced to the euro-western philosophical tradition and the reason for that is easily comprehended, since it emerges in the context of speeches that believe teaching should be done in an acritical manner in euro-western traditional institutions. Rodrigo (2009) has addressed the matter by comprehending that, despite the well-established difference between teaching philosophy or philosophizing, what is really at stake is the dissociation between philosophical learning, a merely receptive, passive behavior based on imitation, and philosophical practice, an active exercise of reason based on invention. Should we consider the author correct in her proposition, our main axis of discussion is then changed from the false dilemma of studying the product of philosophers' reflections or not, to the different forms of relating to tradition (Rodrigo, 2009, p. 46-47).
- 6 It is important to emphasize that we do not neglect the important functions of philosophy teaching as it is done today. Philosophy is not an exclusive dimension of labor that opposes leisure and play. We only seek to enhance the problematic character of educational institutions that associate philosophy to forms of labor in order to prepare citizens to the current model of work, society and symbolic reproducibility. The situation does not concern philosophy teaching alone, as it is seen also on many other subjects taught in both schools and universities. A wider and deeper comprehension of the rich potential of leisure and play is important for teacher formation in all fields of knowledge,

especially when the very ludic dimension of human spirit gradually becomes a hostage of this “society of performance”, as indicated by Han (2019b).

7 Refer to footnote 1.

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Problematization of Philosophy Teaching and Teacher Formation in Brazil

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