
PIAGET, BUNGE, AND THE FUTURE OF GENERAL PHILOSOPHY IN LATIN AMERICA

Tristan Guillermo Torriani¹**Abstract**

The current state of Philosophy and the Humanities is widely acknowledged to be endangered. This historical essay addresses epistemological reasons and institutional causes of this malaise in light of Piaget's and Bunge's scientific critique of humanistic approaches. As my discussion is sensitive to concrete social realities (or territorialized), I limit myself to the Latin American context, which was highly influenced by Catholicism, Positivism and Marxism. Although Piaget and Bunge are justified in claiming that Philosophy disassociated from Science is too speculative, Bunge's proposal of reconstructing it as a holistic system is unviable because it goes way beyond a normal research program, as if it were a superscience. However, a closer examination of Piaget's and Bunge's practice suggests a second, more modest possibility: Analytical Philosophy can focus on methodological, conceptual and ethical problems within specific scientific disciplines. This prevents the outright extinction of Philosophy, which could in itself be conceptually incoherent besides being unwise, and instead proposes its subordination, articulation, fragmentation and diaspora among the Sciences. A third option would be historical-theoretical reconstruction, which Piaget also accepted as an honorable exit. In addition, curricular and institutional changes would be needed in undergraduate education for Philosophy students to acquire at least basic scientific training that would break what Piaget described as the spell of holistic reflection (holology).

Keywords: Piaget, J.; Bunge, M.; Metaphilosophy; Scientism; Latin America.

¹ Professor Doutor na Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP), Faculdade de Ciências Aplicadas (FCA), campus Limeira, São Paulo, Brasil. E-mail: tristan.torriani@fca.unicamp.br

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Resumo

A condição atual da Filosofia e das Humanidades é amplamente reconhecido como estando ameaçada. Neste ensaio histórico procura-se tratar das razões epistemológicas e das causas institucionais deste mal-estar à luz da crítica cientificista de Piaget e Bunge das abordagens humanísticas. Por ser sensível à realidade social concreta (territorialização), esta discussão se atem ao contexto latino-americano, fortemente influenciado pelo Catolicismo, Positivismo e Marxismo. Embora Piaget e Bunge estejam justificados em alegar que a Filosofia desassociada da Ciência seja especulativa demais, a proposta bungeana de reconstruí-la como um sistema holístico é inviável porque ultrapassa um programa de pesquisa normal, como se fosse uma superciência. Porém, um exame mais próximo da prática de Piaget e Bunge sugere uma segunda, mais modesta possibilidade: a Filosofia Analítica pode focar em problemas metodológicos, conceituais e éticos no interior de disciplinas científicas específicas. Isto evitaria a extinção total da Filosofia, o que poderia ser em si mesmo conceitualmente incoerente além de ser desaconselhável e, no lugar disso, sugere a sua subordinação, articulação, fragmentação e diáspora entre as ciências. Uma terceira opção seria a reconstrução histórico-teórica, que Piaget também aceitava como uma saída honrosa. Além disso, mudanças curriculares e institucionais seriam necessárias na formação de graduação em Filosofia para que os alunos adquiram pelo menos um treino científico básico que romperia com o que Piaget percebia como o encanto da reflexão holística (holologia).

Palavras chave: Piaget, J.; Bunge, M.; Metafilosofia; Cientificismo; América Latina.

Introduction

After the unprecedented violence of World War II, one would have expected studies of the human condition in a historical, cultural, linguistic and philosophical perspective to be recognized as more than ever necessary. However, C. P. Snow's controversial 1959 lecture on "The Two Cultures" exposed the

disconnect between the sciences and the humanities while inaugurating the latter's legitimation crisis. Sixty years later, the situation does not seem to have improved much, if at all. As far as Latin America was concerned, the 1960s were defined by military regimes that sought to counter Soviet influence and the dissemination of Communist ideology. Local oligarchies had scarce interest in providing education that would make citizens aware of other ways of organizing society. In Brazil, Paulo Freire's efforts were interrupted after the 1964 *coup d'état* by imprisonment and later exile in Bolivia and Chile. At the University of São Paulo, which had been founded thirty years earlier, professors, employees and students alike had to live under the threat of imprisonment and torture, while several preferred to leave the country. In Argentina, the centenarian Mario Bunge (1919 -) had already been arrested by Perón for two weeks in 1951 when he decided to emigrate in 1963. This shared experience of military repression has left deep scars in the Latin American academic community. Mauricio Macri's election in 2015, Dilma Rousseff's impeachment in 2016, Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva's arrest in 2018, and the recent election of Jair Messias Bolsonaro are understandably regarded as part of a new wave of right-wing populism in the region.

It is important to point out that in spite of these conditions of political instability, repression and inequality, Latin American academics did not succumb to the temptation of adopting a self-pitying victimological attitude, but have struggled to establish solid institutions of higher learning that serve increasingly diverse local constituencies and contribute to social and economic development. In Philosophy, the area of the Humanities that is relevant to this essay, there are numerous departments with distinguished scholars and excellent undergraduate and graduate programs, predominantly in Continental Philosophy

and History of Philosophy, but also in Logic and Analytic Philosophy. This institutional achievement should be celebrated in a region that still struggles to overcome illiteracy. However, this notwithstanding, Piaget and Bunge detected severe theoretical difficulties in Philosophy (as well as in the Humanities in general) that need to be addressed because they call into question the very purpose of the discipline and suggest a need for deep reform. In his book *Insights and Illusions of Philosophy*, Piaget wrote candidly about his *déconversion* and his trouble in extricating himself from theoretical mistakes and institutional conventions of the francophone academic world of his time.² Bunge has castigated a wide range of philosophers and scientists for their lack of rigor, both logical and moral. Often, much of what they have to say about Philosophy may strike readers as being overly negative and it would be regrettable if their critique were taken amiss, as if they were not sensitive to the hardship of Latin American reality. Any cursory reading of their biographies should be enough to dispel this misunderstanding. Throughout his long and productive life, Bunge has always stayed in touch with his native Argentina.

The first section of this essay proposes a preliminary definition of General Philosophy and provides some historical context. In the second section, Piaget's critique of General Philosophy is reconstructed as a two-tiered argument that is both epistemological and psycholinguistic. In the third section, Bunge's outstanding contribution is given consideration as a model for General Philosophy because it combines systematic organization with analytic detail. However, all in all, the cases of Piaget and Bunge do not seem favorable to General Philosophy, in spite of the enormous range of their own work. Perhaps this paradox

² I agree with the reviewers of this paper that Piaget's discussion of Philosophy goes way beyond the single work I am mentioning here and apologize for this limitation. It is indeed necessary to acknowledge that the centrality of Genetic Epistemology for Piaget's project implies a much wider range of possible theoretical answers to the challenges of Philosophy than I can possibly cover in this article.

can be explained because both are not only philosophers, but also superscientists (psychologist and physicist respectively) and their philosophies are powered by their scientific work. They agree that philosophers need scientific training, so they do not reject General Philosophy *per se*, but only if it is disconnected from Science.

The Problem of General Philosophy

In Plato's *Gorgias* (484c - 486d), Callicles entreats Socrates to not completely loose contact with social reality by pursuing philosophical inquiries to extreme detail. With a sense of foreboding, he warns Socrates that he would be defenseless if brought to court on false charges. In Callicles' considered opinion, the study of Philosophy was indeed a necessary preparatory part of education, and advisable at an earlier age, but only for a definite period, not as a lifelong pursuit.

The ancient Greeks used several terms related to wisdom: sage (σοφός), payed itinerant teacher or sophist (σοφιστής), and unpaid lover of wisdom or philosopher (φιλόσοφος). Plato's concern with the possible contamination of education and research by financial interest still resonates with us today, as it did for J.-J. Rousseau, F. Schiller and A. Schopenhauer. The latter's well-known excoriation of university professors as persons who live not for Philosophy, but *on* it cannot be simply brushed aside. Strictly speaking, the notion of a "paid philosopher" is as contradictory as that of a square circle. Perhaps there should be no reason to take offense at applying the term 'Sophistics' to currently financed Philosophy and Science.

Plato's concern is even more justified when we consider how economic interest can transmogrify into ideologies and belief systems ("money talks"). In French, Piaget used the term '*sagesse*' to speak of Philosophy as a coordination

of values related to self-reflection. W. Mays' translation of '*sagesse*' as insight misses the semantic link Piaget wanted to maintain between Philosophy and wisdom, but it also overlooks the possibility of relating *sagesse* to Sophistics. As far as Bunge is concerned, he uses the Spanish term '*macaneador*' to denounce charlatans, but not 'sophist' in a negative sense.

Historically, we can say that General Philosophy began as an approach, namely, an argumentative engagement with philosophical problems that resorts freely to any subfields when needed, yet without attempting to provide a wide-ranging philosophical system. Plato's dialogues were the perfect literary model for giving birth to General Philosophy, later followed by the genre inspired by Aristotle's systematic lectures and treatises, which tend to become rather technical and scientific. In its original spirit, General Philosophy was meant to remain as close as possible to everyday language, while performing work that could not be achieved by mere common sense. In accordance with Plato's concern with the possibility of teaching virtue and acquiring wisdom, General Philosophy could be regarded as a practical subject in the Kantian sense, concerned with the development of personal moral-historical conscience. It is important to admit that in the current post-modern dispensation General Philosophy cannot be completely separated from issues that many consider ideological.

Stated simply, the problem of General Philosophy is that it resists fragmentation and specialization because it tries to be the last refuge of a holistic approach to the Big Questions. It is this claim to universality that makes General Philosophy seem special. Once this quest for completeness is given up, specialization in Philosophy ceases to be much different from that in any other particular science. This will be all the more so if one follows the thesis that Philosophy is continuous with Science, and less so if one takes the position that Philosophy is above all conceptual (as opposed to empirical) and should deal primarily with

what W. Sellars called the manifest image (or our phenomenological self-understanding).

Should General Philosophy be simply extinguished? This question seems to admit only two solutions, either yes or no. If yes, there is no hope for a philosophical discipline that transcends specialized interests. In the medical area, for instance, generalists are becoming increasingly hard to find. In the Humanities, however, specialization may become dysfunctional as one can very easily miss the forest for the trees. If no, the pursuit of a general synthesis may be necessary for what Piaget called equilibration and value coordination, instead of just being a waste of time and an exercise in confusion and self-deception.

The solution of problems is generally agreed to be the hallmark of intelligent behavior. But how ought we to define the concept of a problem? What are the kinds of problems General Philosophy ought to solve? What is the concept of a solution or answer? What is a concept? If General Philosophy deals with the big questions, does it make sense to pursue such questions at all? Would it not be better to limit oneself to special cases of those big questions? What is the difference between conceptual and empirical problems?

The expression 'General Philosophy' may seem redundant at first sight because Philosophy is usually thought to deal with big questions concerning life, meaning, truth, justice, beauty, whereas scientists prefer to concentrate on narrower problems with a more empirical or quantitative orientation. However, contemporary academic philosophers also need to specialize in several sub-fields such as Ethics, Epistemology, Aesthetics, or Philosophy of Language if they want to contribute to some current debate and earn their degrees. Academic Philosophy has to deal with several significant issues: (a) it is inescapably embedded in natural language, which creates national traditions and hinders international

scientific communication; (b) it presupposes a monumental past that cannot be ignored without running the risk of unconsciously repeating it; (c) it mediates between Common Sense, Journalism, Science, Religion and Politics, which has led to the persecution and death of figures such as Socrates and Jesus. In the English-speaking world, the solution to issue (a) has required a major and ongoing effort of translation and editorial clarification of works mainly in French and German (Continental) Philosophy. Whatever merits these works may have must be then rendered into and evaluated in English. To solve problem (b), History of Philosophy was established as a separate discipline and assigned the task of preserving the past. Problem (c) was not really solved, but minimized by the promotion of the analytical approach. By breaking down general issues into technical details a certain illusion of rigor could be introduced to contain uncontrolled discussion.

For this reason, General Philosophy is not clearly defined and may be confused with introductory level material meant for an undergraduate course or even with Pop Philosophy for the layperson. Academically, General Philosophy is not an acceptable genre from the point of view of Analytic Philosophy. Therefore, the solution to the problem of General Philosophy would be to simply declare it extinct or non-existent. However, Piaget and Bunge noted that the inadequacy of this false solution lay in its lopsided denial of the cognitive, but also general psychological need for synthesis and systematization. Analysis and synthesis are complementary cognitive processes, but it would appear that proponents of Analytic Philosophy did not realize that the neglect of synthesis and context lessens the relevance of whatever results they may believe to have attained. To make their case that only analysis matters, Analytic philosophers needed to restrict their understanding (or concept) of what a philosophical problem is to logical-semantic issues.

Analytic Philosophy enabled its practitioners to bring some conceptual and logical clarity to doubts that most people recognize as being deep and philosophical. This is certainly an important and even indispensable skill. After B. Russell and L. Wittgenstein, linguistic analysis became a widely accepted method to approach philosophical problems. However, it is not and cannot be an exclusive property of analytic philosophers, but belongs to the general scientific community. Moreover, it has shown itself unable to achieve a sufficient consensus on solutions to basic issues, which makes it aporetic. Part of the problem is that differences between a materialist, a dualist and a spiritualist cannot be overcome by just attaining a clearer statement of their beliefs, for they also involve commitments to different values, which makes logical refutation ineffective even when it is indeed possible to a certain degree. Analytic Philosophy's claim to have brought progress is legitimate only in that it raised our awareness of the extent to which deep-seated disagreements remain unsolvable.

Dissatisfaction with Analytic Philosophy was already sufficiently high by the 1980s to lead philosophers increasingly towards interdisciplinary collaboration. So-called "cognitive science" came about as a conversation involving the fields of Artificial Intelligence, Neuroscience, Anthropology, Linguistics, Psychology and Philosophy. Piaget had already pointed the way for this decades earlier when he created the *Centre international d'épistémologie génétique* at the University of Geneva in 1955 with support from the Rockefeller Foundation. However, the major problem for Philosophy when it is "naturalized" or brought closer to scientific research is that it tends to become a mere appendage to methodology as it belabors epistemological and ethical issues that scientists usually prefer to take for granted. B. Croce brilliantly described this situation in his *Logic*:

[...] when it is only a question of classifying and systematizing those results, the scientist rightly [p. 410] feels that he can dispense with the

labours of the philosopher, indeed, he feels that he alone, who has obtained the results, knows what these exactly are and how they should be treated in order to avoid deformation. And the philosopher, who by making himself an empiricist, a positivist, a psychologist and a neocritic, has renounced his autonomy, approaches the scientists and offers with little dignity services that they refuse. He elaborates scientific expositions, which they call compilations and mistakes, he proposes additions or corrections at which they mock as superfluous or foolish. Nevertheless, the philosopher does not grow weary nor becomes offended at these repulses and jests; he returns to the charge and indeed it is only when someone wishes to redeem him from this voluntary servitude and abjection that he turns upon him with fury, saying that philosophy should live on familiar terms with the sciences. As if the relations that we have faithfully described were relations of reciprocal respect and harmony! The truth is that the majority of empirical philosophers are failures in science and unsuccessful in philosophy... (CROCE, 1917, p. 409-410)

Indeed, in spite of the noteworthy contributions to cognitive science by philosophers such as Daniel Dennett in the US, Peter Hacker in the UK, and Arno Ros in Germany, Philosophy cannot be said to have overcome this subordinate position. Unfortunately, a resentful affirmation of autonomy is not viable because, as Gilles Gaston Granger (GRANGER, 1988) argued following Kant and Wittgenstein, Philosophy lacks a definite concrete object, but deals with the way we approach objects in general. Moreover, in an interdisciplinary context, autonomy is a dubious ideal to pursue. Actually, the issue of Philosophy's subordination goes way back to medieval times ("Philosophy as a handmaiden of Theology"), but received its modern version in John Locke's reference to himself as an "under-laborer" in the Epistle to the Reader of his *Essay*. What Woosuk Park (2018) describes as the "inadequately understood take-over" of Logic by Mathematics touches on another, perhaps even more critical issue, which is Philosophy's loss of content and monopoly over argumentation. A common argument, often attributed to Aristotle, against the extinction of Philosophy is that by the very act of arguing against Philosophy one would be doing Philosophy, which would be a performative contradiction and thus refute itself. But what if Logic

does not belong anymore to Philosophy? What if all scientists become philosophers because they also make use of argumentation and create concepts too (DELEUZE, 1991)? What if Philosophy, after thousands of years, has become such a confused concept as to be utterly useless? Are we not confusing the concept of Philosophy with Philosophy as an object or activity? Do we now need Metaphilosophy (cf. CASTAÑEDA, 1980 and RESCHER, 2006) to clear this all up?

A further difficulty exists for students at Latin American universities, where undergraduate courses are conceived as tracks with limited options for electives and migration to another course (say, from Philosophy to Sociology) requires retaking a grueling admission exam. When applying for an academic job, it is often required of candidates that they have earned at least both the Bachelor's and Doctoral (Ph. D.) degrees in the field. So a candidate who got his undergraduate degree in Sociology but has a Ph. D. in Philosophy may be considered unfit to apply for a job either as a Philosophy or a Sociology professor. Of course, decisions in hiring may vary considerably, but the issue is real because there are vested interests behind the advancement, power, and prestige of each science. Piaget himself described the tension he experienced between Philosophy and Psychology in French-speaking academic institutions.

Philosophers with historical and cultural concerns such as Charles Taylor, A. MacIntyre, P., R. Rorty, R. Scruton, H. U. Gumbrecht, R. Brandom and others explored another available path towards Historiography, History of Ideas and Intellectual History (RORTY; SCHNEEWIND; SKINNER, 1984). Peter Hylton showed that Analytic Philosophy itself could benefit from realizing that it had a history. Croce, R. Collingwood, A. C. Danto, H. White, P. L. Gardiner and others had already contributed to this historical option in the English-speaking world. From the institutional point of view, however, an argument had to be

made for courses on History of Philosophy in Philosophy graduate programs because analytic philosophers deluded themselves into believing that they were doing cutting-edge research, regardless whether it received scientific recognition or not. Alasdair MacIntyre's lecture "On Having Survived Academic Moral Philosophy" conveys much of the damage caused by the analytic obsession. From a Mexican perspective, Alejandro Tomasini Bassols rejects the idea that Analytic Philosophy must be conducted only in English³ and argues that

[...] the great problem with bad Analytic Philosophy is its cultural sterility, its lack of meaning, its ineffectiveness to affect in one way or another the academic and extra-academic life of the society in which it is produced, its character as an esoteric discipline and as a socially excluding or segregationist game. (BASSOLS, p. 185, 2014, my translation)⁴

This perhaps best sums up the frustration with Analytic Philosophy that led some, particularly R. Rorty, to speak of a "Postanalytic" Philosophy. But it is important to remain mindful of historical context and development. Analytic Philosophy emerged, as P. Hylton has shown, from a combination of a reaction against Hegelian Idealism and the promise of Mathematical Logic. As frustration with the limitations of linguistic analysis increased, the pendulum swung towards Post-Modernism, Post-Structuralism and other Post-isms as a way to satisfy the rekindled the interest in synthesis. But General and Continental Philosophy did not cease to suffer from the problems that Piaget had already pointed out in the late 1960s because of the untenable pure a priori claims of Phenomenology and Philosophical Psychology. Like Croce, he realized that a properly dialectical understanding of the complementary relation between analysis and

³ A similar critique concerning the use of English in Latin American Social Science is made by Alcadipani (2017).

⁴ In the original: "A mi modo de ver, el gran problema de la mala filosofía analítica es su esterilidad cultural, su carencia de sentido, su ineffectividad para incidir de uno u otro modo en la vida académica y extra-académica de la sociedad en que es producida, su carácter de disciplina esotérica y de juego social excluyente o segregacionista."

synthesis could allow Philosophy to adapt and survive as Historiography. Extreme elevation of either analysis or synthesis is bound to be harmful for any discipline. The historiographic turn allows us to add the temporal dimension to the linguistic aspect of thought and to break free from the illusion of a static atemporal conceptual framework within which one would have to discern ultimate truth. Charles Taylor argues that historiographical research helps us not only to distance ourselves from an oppressive established view, but to recover another one to take its place.

But historical retrieval is not only important where you want to free yourself from some picture. It is very important to my thesis that even in this negative case, where you want to break loose, you need to understand the past in order to liberate yourself. But liberation is not the only possible motive. We may also find ourselves driven to earlier formulations in order to restore a picture, or the practices it is meant to inform. (...) Or without seeking either outright rejection or straight restoral, we may be looking for a perspicuous reformulation for our time of some traditional doctrine, and this too may require that we go back. (RORTY; SCHNEEWIND; SKINNER, p. 22, 1984)

This brings to mind the expression 'rational reconstruction', which has been widely adopted by authors as different as R. Carnap, H. Reichenbach, I. Lakatos, P. Lorenzen, W. Stegmüller and J. Habermas. Gregg Alan Davia (1998) attempts to sketch a rational reconstruction of the concept of rational reconstruction within the perspective of Analytic Philosophy. He does well to underscore the descriptive-prescriptive dichotomy and the systematic-historical dichotomy. Both distinctions are indeed important for conceptual analysis. Concepts can be understood as verbal categorizing skills that vary synchronically as well as diachronically. But a systematic (or synchronic) General Philosophy would require massive theoretical construction, which is at least distinct from, if not opposed to analytical rational reconstruction. The diachronic analysis and reconstruction of single concepts, as was accomplished by A. Ros (1989) for the concept of concept,

is much less risky than the sometimes confusing theoretical syntheses attempted by J. Habermas and P. Ricoeur.

Yet another term that arises in more technical approaches to define the task of Philosophy is 'meta-methodology'. The coining of this cacophonous word is justified by the need to define a register of discourse that talks about methods, given their multiplicity. Mark Bevir provides an example of how Political Science can appropriate Philosophy by treating it as meta-methodology.

Meta-methodology is in many ways just another word for philosophy. The meta-methodology of political science is the philosophy of social science. More particularly, meta-methodology is the deliberate attempt to reflect theoretically about what methods are appropriate to the study of what aspects of politics and on what occasions. It is the attempt to clarify what kind of knowledge and what kind of explanations fit the kinds of objects that are the concern of political science. (BEVIR, p. 48, 2008)

Piaget admitted that no human being can be complete without at least a little Philosophy. Unfortunately, a painful trilemma arises because without 1) General Philosophy as a kind of superscience we lose a discipline that could allow us to develop a big picture of the universe. Current concerns about dysfunctional specialization and the need for interdisciplinary coordination are justified and widely acknowledged because, in Piaget's theoretical terms, cognitive schemata require integration (or synthesis) by what he called reciprocal assimilation. Under the definition proposed here, General Philosophy would be equivalent to what is sometimes called General Studies and would produce good generalists. In case General Philosophy were definitively abandoned, there would be two other options: 2) philosophers would have to submit to the usual constraints of scientific specialization and content themselves with only thinking about detailed, not big questions, as is done in Analytical Philosophy; or 3) investigate how ideas and concepts are concretely embodied in time, space and language, as is

done in History of Ideas or Intellectual History. If, however, one insists on pursuing General Philosophy, it is not clear how such larger issues can be dealt with in a manner that goes beyond just rehashing generalities and wasting intellectual effort. So on the one hand it is important to widen the scope of our thought and to coordinate information, as Piaget acknowledged, but on the other hand without concern for conceptual detail General Philosophy loses academic credibility. The main requirement for good generalism would be a combination of two apparently opposed cognitive abilities: to go beyond the narrow confines of a specialty but to be also able to focus on technical detail when needed.

Piaget

Although Piaget's interest throughout his life was predominantly epistemological, his status as a major developmental psychologist has overshadowed his importance as a reformer of Philosophy. Piaget's objections to the Philosophy of his time are too numerous to be summarized here but it is possible and advisable to concentrate on two dimensions: the epistemological and the psycholinguistic.

At the epistemological level, Piaget showed that sensorimotor schemata led to the construction of mental object permanence and representational notions and symbols. During the pre-operational (or, as I prefer to call it, the semiotic) stage, as Michael Halliday (1975) showed, children develop their meaning potential, learn how to mean and can start to use legitimate discursive concepts as they begin to adopt socialized signs.

Contrary to Kant's view that time and space were a priori intuitions and that causality was a pure a priori category of the understanding, Piaget's research suggested the view that time, space and causality could be all regarded as discursive empirical concepts, and would be hence impure a priori constructions,

not innate. Kant had earlier distinguished between the pure a priori, which contained the deeper categories of thought (such as quantity, quality, relation (causality), and modality), and the impure a priori, which comprised all concepts constructed empirically to deal with concrete things and most abstractions of social life (such as love, justice, etc.). It is also important to note that while truth pertains to propositions and validity to arguments, notions and concepts⁵ cannot be considered true or invalid, but are either legitimate or flawed. Regrettably, although probably aware of these distinctions, Piaget did not exploit them to their full potential, which led to some confusion concerning naturalizing Genetic Epistemology. Piaget realized correctly, however, that his results required that he strongly oppose apriorism and innatism/nativism, which he did.

In particular, Piaget understood that if knowledge was to be understood organically, it had to develop in a dialectical process that dynamically balanced assimilation with accommodation. But cognitive development was not only something to be theorized about in the armchair as Descartes and Kant had done. It was not only possible, but incumbent upon theoreticians to relate their hypotheses to observable reality. Philosophy and Psychology must go hand in hand. Psychology without Philosophy would be methodologically naive. Philosophy without Psychology would lose itself in speculation. This disconnect between theory and experience in Epistemology was dramatic, as it had led philosophers not only to neglect development, but to believe in intuition as a means to achieve mystical insight into absolute reality. In his book on reconstructing Philosophy, J. Dewey described this untenable metaphysical view in a way that Piaget would have probably agreed with, although he was neither a Pragmatist nor a Positivist.

⁵ The traditional distinction, followed here, between notions and concepts is that the former are intuitive or pre-verbal, whereas the latter are discursive categorizing skills.

[...] Philosophy has arrogated to itself the office of demonstrating the existence of a transcendent, absolute or inner reality and of revealing to man the nature and features of this ultimate and higher reality. It has therefore claimed that it was in possession of a higher organ of knowledge than is employed by positive science and ordinary practical experience, and that it is marked by a superior dignity and importance – a claim which is undeniable if philosophy leads man to proof and intuition of a Reality beyond that open to day-by-day life and the special sciences. (DEWEY, p. 43, 1950)

During the immediate post-war period, this metaphysical concept of Philosophy fell definitely out of favor and was substituted in the policies of international organizations, such as the UNESCO, of whose International Bureau of Education (IBE) Piaget was Director from 1929 to 1968, for what Julian Huxley called a philosophy of evolutionary humanism with a political agenda geared towards world government. Under Huxley's plan, UNESCO's Philosophy section would be assigned two basic tasks: criticism and synthesis.

The section of Philosophy will no longer uphold the view (which during certain periods of history could be justified) that philosophy itself should embrace the whole of human knowledge, or that philosophers can arrive at results of value by pure cerebration or in solitude. On the contrary, it will work on the assumption that in the world of to-day philosophy has, broadly speaking, a twofold function. First the function of general criticism - criticism of the assumptions of the scientist, the artist, the mathematician, the political thinker, the man in the street; criticism of man's methods of thinking in general, including the critical faculty itself; this does not involve the direct pursuit of new knowledge, although it may help to promote the advance of knowledge by improving the methods of knowing. And secondly the function of synthesis, of relating the findings of all other activities of the human mind, moral and aesthetic as well as intellectual, to each other and to philosophy's critique, and distilling the product in unitary form. For both these functions, philosophers must be in close contact with all other higher activities of man, both with the workers in the various branches and with their works. (HUXLEY, p. 39, 1949)

This shows how Dewey, Huxley and Piaget, in spite of their differences, shared the conviction, sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, that interdisciplinary collaboration was the way to go for Philosophy. However, Piaget, as

could be expected, had a more sophisticated understanding of the implications of distinguishing, as F. de Saussure had done, between the synchronic and the diachronic perspectives and how they could throw light on each other. This led him to value the historico-critical method more highly for its potential theoretical insights than is perhaps usual in the English-speaking scientific world.

After the distinguished studies of Cournot – whose true value has for so long been neglected – which dealt with the analysis of scientific thought in a somewhat synchronic perspective, a certain number of thinkers like G. Milhaud, L. Brunschvicg, P. Boutroux, and A. Reymond, have realized that the epistemological significance of a scientific theory only fully shows itself when seen in its historical perspective. This is so because it answers the questions raised by earlier doctrines and prepares the way for its successors by a network of relationships that continue or contradict it. In other words, as scientific thought is continually developing, the problem of what knowledge is can only be resolved under the most limited forms, which tend to analyze the way in which knowledge grows or develops in the context of actual construction. From this results the historico-critical method, one of the most important methods of scientific epistemology. (PIAGET, p. 74, 1972)

A brilliant example of the use of the historico-critical method can be appreciated in J. Schumpeter's (SCHUMPETER, p. 149, 1947) suggestion that "economic historians and economic theorists [...] make an interesting and socially valuable journey together [...]," which leads him to the important distinction between an *adaptive response*, in which an economic unit accommodates (to use Piaget's term) to conditions by increasing effort but maintaining standard procedures, and a *creative response*, in which accommodation leads to social-economic change and requires a new point of equilibrium (Piaget's optimizing equilibration or *équilibration majorante*).

At the psycholinguistic level, Piaget's rejection of apriorism and innatism/nativism led to his critique of Phenomenology and philosophical Psychology in *Insight and Illusions of Philosophy* (1972). Piaget's fundamental point was that Philosophy does not and cannot produce scientific knowledge related to a

single truth, but only a manifold of subjective “wisdoms” fueled by reflection (holology). The main reason for this is that there is no specific source of knowledge (in other words, no pure a priori categories) available for philosophers to appeal to that could establish verifiable facts or arguments on their own. In Gilles Gaston Granger’s terms (GRANGER, 1988), Philosophy could at best be considered a kind of “knowledge without an object”. Therefore, Piaget’s conclusions concerning Philosophy are not particularly encouraging.

Let us now return to philosophy, first noting that in many countries there is a marked increase in the number of philosophers as compared with earlier centuries when philosophy was not a profession but an exceptional achievement. It might be said that the same thing has happened with scientists. However, a mediocre scientist can still carry out useful work in a limited field, while an undistinguished philosopher is a little like an untalented artist or novelist. If then philosophy is concerned with reality as a whole, it is assumed to be possible to train specialists in this complete knowledge or search for the absolute, without their first having had some training in the field of partial or relative knowledge. It is true that they have acquired a sense [p. 169] of history and a respect for texts, since the only specialization demanded of them is the history of philosophy, but as far as methods of knowledge are concerned, only reflection is used, which, moreover, corresponds to the deep-rooted tendencies of adolescence and the natural inclination of the human mind. Hence, when they have not the exceptional courage to specialize in the epistemology of a particular science and to advance knowledge of the latter, (...) the studies engaged in by philosophers are either historical, or reflective in the most general sense. In such a situation, the knowledge of facts is divorced from that which alone can give it the character of knowledge properly so called, that is to say, from an inquiry into its technicality. There is therefore a strong temptation, moreover, under an unconscious or implicit form, to assume that reflection on fact is, in this case, subsequent and not prior to the establishment of fact (since, in the event, the latter has already in general been established by others), that it is of a higher order than the latter and consequently can intervene actively in the interpretation of fact, rectifying and completing it where necessary. (PIAGET, p. 168-9, 1972)

The takeaway is that, because of its normative nature, Philosophy cannot be a matter of truth or falsehood, but only of judgment (as to what is better or legitimate for a given cognitive need). In addition, it cannot deal with verifiable facts as History does. Piaget challenged philosophers to decide whether they

wanted to specialize in a particular science, or to become writers of novels (*romanciers*), popular science, or history of science. This ultimatum was generally dismissed by the philosophical community and has been barely ever mentioned thereafter, although his critique could be considered vindicated to some extent and a stubborn denial of these difficulties is bound to be more harmful than beneficial. It is also worth noting that Piaget's view was genuinely encyclopedic and arguably superior to that of both Heidegger and Wittgenstein for its (in principle updatable) articulation with formal, natural and social sciences, as displayed in his short book on *Structuralism* (1970).

Bunge

Bunge's outstanding contribution can be considered as a good model for General Philosophy because it combines systematic organization with analytic detail. Therefore, it could serve as a counter-example, against Piaget, to support the position that General Philosophy is still a viable and defensible pursuit.

In the General Preface to his *Treatise*, Bunge presents his balanced view of how analysis and synthesis should be articulated in a systematic constructive process.

Now a word of apology for attempting to build a system of basic philosophy. As we are supposed to live in the age of analysis, it may well be wondered whether there is any room left, except in the cemeteries of ideas, for philosophical syntheses. The author's opinion is that analysis, though necessary, is insufficient - except of course for destruction. The ultimate goal of theoretical research, be it in philosophy, science, or mathematics, is the construction of systems, i.e. theories. Moreover these theories should be articulated into systems rather than being disjoint, let alone mutually at odds. (BUNGE, p. v, 1974)

This systemism (or systemic approach) allows Bunge not only to overcome the dichotomy between analysis and synthesis at the methodological level, but also to maintain an open living connection between Philosophy and Science.

This is not possible for isolationist approaches, such as Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's, that advocate the autonomy of Philosophy in relation to Science. Systemism also informs Bunge's attitude towards identifying problems to be solved.

To engage in research of any kind is to work on a problem or a cluster of problems of some kind – cognitive, technological, social, artistic, or moral. In imitation of John's gospel, we may say that in the beginning was the problem. So, those wishing to start doing science must find or invent a problem to work on, as well as a mentor willing to guide them. (BUNGE, p. 1, 2016)

Bunge engages in fruitful dialogue with the sciences by raising awareness of the implications of their often unconscious assumptions. In this way, he argues that latent views of idealistic and phenomenistic inspiration can be shown to be harmful for those interested in an objective approach to reality. Philosophy's role is best carried out in clarifying scientific hypotheses.

Aurora Journal of Philosophy – (...) what would be the role of philosophical work and what type of Philosophy should we pursue, if it still has an important role?

Mario Bunge – I believe that it will always have an important role. Philosophical hypotheses must be made known because scientists do not do it. When they present their ideas and their experimental results, they do not usually mention specifically the philosophical hypotheses that were useful to imagine either those ideas or the experimental designs. However, Philosophy is present in every scientific activity, and that is precisely the philosopher's task: to bring to light the philosophical hypotheses, which for me are realism, materialism and systemism. That is to say that everything in the universe is a system or part of a system; there are neither isolated facts, nor isolated properties. (BUNGE, p. 333, 2017, my translation)⁶

⁶ In the original: "Revista Filosofia Aurora – (...) qual seria o papel para o trabalho filosófico e que tipo de filosofia deveríamos fazer, se ainda ela possui um papel importante? Mario Bunge – Eu acredito que ela sempre vai ter um papel importante. As hipóteses filosóficas devem ser conhecidas porque os cientistas não o fazem. Quando expõem suas ideias e seus resultados experimentais não costumam mencionar especificamente as hipóteses filosóficas que foram úteis tanto para imaginar essas ideias como para imaginar desenhos de experimentos. Porém, a filosofia está presente em toda a atividade científica, e essa é justamente uma tarefa do filósofo: sacar à luz as hipóteses filosóficas, que para mim são o realismo, o materialismo, o sistemismo. É dizer que tudo no universo é um sistema ou uma parte do sistema; não há fatos isolados, nem propriedades isoladas."

By distinguishing strictly between a knowable, independently existing reality and egocentric imagination, Bunge avoids reflective quasi-autistic illusions Piaget was concerned about and opens the way for profitable cooperation between Science and Philosophy. His proposal is that philosophers excavate the foundations of Science and bring their merits and errors to light. He also advocates that Philosophy be judged by its ability to further scientific inquiry.

Last but not least, his humanitarian concerns for social, economic and political development are territorialized⁷ and tightly bound to a critical assessment of policies by their real outcomes. In particular, he lauded the efforts of Latin American philosophers in the Prologue to the Spanish edition of his *Treatise*.

Philosophy has developed vigorously in Spain and Latin America during the last decades. It has grown to the point that we already have little to learn from German Philosophy, which is still recovering from the disaster of 1933, and even less from French Philosophy, which for more than a century is dragging behind the German rearguard. (...) In our countries there are literally thousands of Philosophy professors and dozens of original investigators. Most of them are up to date in the international philosophical literature and a few write books and articles that contain new contributions to Philosophy. There are several national philosophical societies and dozens of philosophical journals, some of them bilingual or even trilingual, among them at least six at a good level. There are also national and international congresses of Philosophy. / All of these new events took place in the last decades. They allow us to assert that not only is there Philosophy in Spain and Latin America, but that there is now a Latin American Philosophy that is original and not less important than the German, Italian or French. This novelty is reason for legitimate pride for all those who, in one way or another, contributed to build this Philosophy and, most particularly, for those who have done this under difficult material and political conditions. (BUNGE, p. 19-20, 2008, my translation)⁸

⁷ I use the term 'territorialization', which is different from Deleuze's & Guattari's distinction between deterritorialization and reterritorialization because it does not make sense to say that Bunge "re-territorialized" or repatriated an Analytic Philosophy that was not previously available in Latin America.

⁸ In the original: "La filosofía se ha desarrollado vigorosamente en España y en Hispanoamérica en el curso de las últimas décadas. Se ha desarrollado al punto de que ya tenemos poco que aprender de la filosofía alemana, la que aún se está recuperando del desastre de 1933, y menos todavía de la filosofía francesa, que desde hace más de un siglo se arrastra a la zaga de la retaguardia alemana. (...) [p. 20] En nuestros países

It is generally agreed that the environment for Philosophy in Latin America depends on the state of democracy and religion⁹. A fact-based assessment of the current situation would require a sociological study that goes beyond the scope and purpose of this metaphilosophical essay. However, a few comments are in order here. The creation of Philosophy courses at Latin American universities does not require high costs associated to cutting-edge research laboratories typical of experimental and applied Science. Although Philosophy cannot produce scientific results, as J. Huxley noted above, it shares the probing critical spirit of Science and is indispensable for a democratic society. Arantes (1994) provides a vivid account of the Brazilian 1960s Marxist philosophical environment at the University of São Paulo, strongly influenced by French professors such as Jean Maugüé, Victor Goldschmidt, Martial Gueroult, Gérard Lebrun, Michel Debrun and others. Yves de la Taille also sees a role for Philosophy also in secondary education to promote the development of moral judgment.

The study of Philosophy can help, and a lot, [...] - provided, of course, that it does not reduce itself to mere exchanges of personal opinions. However, Philosophy goes farther than that, for it consists of an undertaking to decide how one will live and coexist. It follows from what I have just said that classes in Philosophy are directly related to moral education and, in particular, to the education of moral judgment, not

hay literalmente miles de profesores de filosofía y algunas decenas de investigadores originales. Muchos de ellos están al día en la literatura filosófica internacional y algunos escriben libros o artículos que contienen aportes nuevos a la filosofía. Hay diversas sociedades nacionales de filosofía y docenas de revistas filosóficas, algunas de ellas bilingües o aun trilingües, entre ellas por lo menos seis de buen nivel. También hay congresos nacionales e internacionales de filosofía. / Todos estos son hechos nuevos ocurridos en el curso de las últimas décadas. Ellos nos permiten afirmar no solo que hay filosofía en España y en Hispanoamérica, sino que hay hoy una filosofía hispanoamericana original no menos importante que la alemana, la italiana o la francesa. Esta novedad es motivo de legítimo orgullo para todos quienes, de una manera u otra, han contribuido a construir esta filosofía y, muy particularmente, para quienes lo han hecho en condiciones materiales y políticas difíciles."

⁹ In his encyclical *Fides et ratio* (Faith and Reason, 1998), Pope John Paul II addresses the general loss of confidence in human reason in 20th century Philosophy and renews the claim of the Catholic Church to divine wisdom and transcendent truth. However, a satisfactory combination of faith and reason does not seem to have been achieved yet at the societal level. Reason tends to reject supernatural explanations, leaving little or no room for faith. The improbability or even impossibility of divine intervention leaves humans to their own devices and favors pessimism. Faith can be (mis)placed in humanity, but by treating ourselves as gods any person can nullify what is sacred. Validation of the sacred seems to require a non-human extrarational dimension subjectively given as faith to a believer.

only because the study of the love for wisdom helps us to think well, but also because it allows us to approach the theme of morality in a deep way, given that the majority of the great philosophers devoted themselves to it. (LA TAILLE, p. 243, 2009, my translation)¹⁰

In spite of the recognition of the social-political role of Philosophy, the difficulties pointed out by Piaget from the scientific perspective remain and should not be forgotten. Undergraduate courses in Philosophy at most Latin American universities are still far from preparing students for the challenges of the 21st Century, with its strong emphasis on Applied Science. Given the typical profile of Philosophy students, a thorough training in methods of historical research would be appropriate and would probably be well received by them. Another problem is that most institutes and faculties are misnamed 'Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences,' while they should be renamed and rearranged as institutes and faculties of History and Human Sciences,¹¹ with "Philosophy" placed under the umbrella of History. Logic is a formal science and should be properly welcomed among its mathematical peers. Moreover, Bunge's General Philosophy may be too ambitious and hence not advisable for young philosophers to follow as a model. Bunge's case may be an exception that indirectly points to General Philosophy's impracticality rather than the contrary. And the harmful confusion about what exactly the discipline is supposed to do seems unsolvable. The relative lack of general philosophers who can be taken as an example to follow is also discouraging. All in all, the proliferation in the use of the term 'Science' has made term 'Philosophy' obsolete and unhelpful.

¹⁰ In the original: "O estudo da Filosofia pode ajudar, e muito, (...) – contanto, é claro, que não se reduza a trocas descompromissadas de opiniões pessoais. Porém, a Filosofia vai além, por se tratar de uma empreitada para se decidir como se vai viver e conviver. Decorre do que acabo de afirmar que aulas de Filosofia relacionam-se diretamente com a educação moral e, em particular, com a educação do juízo moral, não somente porque o estudo do amor à sabedoria ajuda a pensar bem, mas também porque permite abordar de forma profunda o tema da moralidade, uma vez que a maioria dos grandes filósofos se dedicou a ele."

¹¹ With his Sociobiology, E.O. Wilson reminds us that the Social Sciences in principle also include non-human species, so it would be proper to specify that we are talking about Human Social Sciences. To keep things short, it would be better to use the expression 'Human Sciences', because there are no "Individual Human Sciences" as even psychologists widely acknowledge the social dimension of human behavior.

Concluding Remarks

Does this spell the end of General Philosophy? Unfortunately it does, if General Philosophy is conceived as an autonomous subject that could ignore Science (what Piaget called a “para-scientific” view). A non-scientific General Philosophy, as practiced in Continental Philosophy, often in combination with Psychoanalysis, is in principle possible as a discursive genre, but not advisable because it inevitably runs into a collision course with the Social Sciences. Deleuze admits that, “If there is place and time to create concepts, the operation by which they are made will be always called Philosophy, or one would not even distinguish it at all if one gave it another name.”¹² (DELEUZE, p.14, 1991, my translation). The problem here is that according to the academic division of labor, the Social Sciences *de facto* take possession of the fragments of reality they investigate and the concepts used to describe them. Social scientists have a legitimate claim to be considered philosophers because they also reflect on and revise their concepts. Aware of this, Deleuze rejects self-knowledge, contemplation, reflection and communication as specifically philosophical tasks. Deprived of its content, pure Philosophy becomes an empty shell, while Science is progressively enriched as scientists reflect on their own conceptual frameworks. But as a form of “knowledge without an object” (Granger), at the end of this process Philosophy finds itself just like the loser in the game of musical chairs: standing and helpless, without anything to do. All scientists can claim to be philosophers, but philosophers cannot claim to be scientists unless they follow Piaget’s advice to do further work and commit themselves to researching a fragment of reality. Philosophy is not a Pseudoscience, but rather a Parascience. In the same way that Latin it is not strictly dead, but lives on in the Romance languages, Philosophy survives in Science as a discursive genre that articulates theory and empirical verification. It

¹² In the original: “S’il y a lieu et temps de créer des concepts, l’opération qui y procède s’appellera toujours philosophie, ou ne s’en distinguerait même pas si on lui donnait un autre nom.”

becomes rather an attitude, like the love of truth (Philalethia), than an autonomous discipline with specific content.

Analytic Philosophy avoids embarrassment by not indulging in transversal speculation and protects itself from banalization by deploying sophisticated critical and logical skills. This is fine because even if one is a genius, it still remains advisable to tackle problems that can be broken down into manageable parts and then try to reassemble them into a coherent whole. If analysis precedes synthesis, less confusion will ensue. But conceptual analysis is part and parcel of the scientific method. A historiographer cannot study the history of the concept of work without providing at least a preliminary definition. This leaves Analytic Philosophy in the condition of a Protoscience or a truncated Half-Science (Methodology and Epistemology).

It may be urged that the discussion of general concepts and problems remains to some degree not only socially but also intellectually necessary and unavoidable, provided that it maintain its connection to current scientific research and its commitment to objectivity. This is indeed reasonable, but cannot be undertaken as a task for academic Philosophy, as it is now performed by journalists and social commentators on the internet.

The unsatisfactory conclusion is hence that General Philosophy became academically unpromising but not wholly eliminable from intellectual life, and must coexist with Science in a hybrid or symbiotic form unless it wants to deteriorate into quasi-autistic reflection (holology) and banal ideology. In the end, Piaget's diagnosis and warning fell on deaf ears, but he was right all along.

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