

Philosophy or philosophies? Debates surrounding academia and life*

¿Filosofía o Filosofías? Polémicas en torno a la academia y la vida



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Abstract

Although philosophy is often considered a purely academic position, we all have philosophical concerns regarding natural phenomena, the origin of life and the universe, the human essence, and ethics; in short, we can consider the existence of these problematic nuclei as essential for human beings. This article reflects on the above and also on the false idea of the existence of Philosophy as a uniform and singular whole, a canon produced and imposed by Europe and its colonizing processes, which resulted in the invisibility of non-Western philosophies of the indigenous peoples of Asia, Africa, and America (Abya Ayala). Another idea supported in the article refers to the necessary updating and relevance of the professions linked to Philosophies, which can contribute much to the understanding of contemporary dilemmas.

Keywords: Philosophies, philosophizing, academia, life.

Resumen

Aunque con frecuencia se considera que filosofar es una postura solo académica, todos (as) poseemos inquietudes filosóficas respecto a fenómenos naturales, el origen de la vida y el universo, la esencia humana, la ética; en fin que podemos considerar la existencia de esos núcleos problemáticos como esenciales para el ser humano. El presente artículo reflexiona sobre lo anterior y también sobre la falsa idea de la existencia de la Filosofía como un todo uniforme y singular, canon producido e impuesto desde Europa y sus procesos colonizadores, los cuales trajeron como consecuencia la invisibilización de las Filosofías no occidentales de los pueblos originarios de Asia, África y América (Abya Ayala). Otra idea sostenida en el escrito se refiere a la necesaria actualización y pertinencia de las profesiones vinculadas a las Filosofías, que mucho pueden aportar a la comprensión de los dilemas contemporáneos.

Palabras clave: Filosofías, filosofar, academia, vida.

Introduction

One of the fundamental characteristics of the methodological framework of Philosophies is its contemplative stance, encompassing dissent, aporias, doubt, and a sense of unease toward what is considered established knowledge, as well as a constant reflection on one's worldview. There also exist strong dispositions—especially in contemporary times—to engage in the transformation of the reality to which one belongs.

These ideas emerge from my situated experience as a Philosophy professor trained in Cuba, having taught in several Latin American countries—Cuba, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, among others—from whose interactions I have drawn intellectual nourishment, and having published my work in indexed journals across Latin America and Spain. From this contextualized vitality, I aim to “assemble a mosaic” of what befalls and moves through me in philosophical matters, understood as a human essentiality that transcends the anthropocentric stance to connect with Life in its entirety.

This presentation argues that Philosophy does not exist in the singular¹. We are in the presence of Philosophies, which the reductionist Western discourse of European modernity ultimately co-opted through universal imposition, first of Scholastic and Renaissance Philosophies, followed by Positivism, ignoring the other Philosophies of colonized peoples.

Philosophies are not exclusively European in origin.

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From the dawn of humanity, all peoples have had questions or core concerns regarding the nature of Being, the existence of supernatural forces, the meaning of life, and the ethics of human existence, among other inquiries. Therefore, it can be affirmed that ontological, gnoseological, epistemological, and axiological concerns are not exclusive to philosophers either, although the scientific and academic production on these subjects may be.

We might also ask whether any Philosophy graduate today can dedicate their professional life to pure philosophy, and the answer is quite evident: it is neither possible nor necessary. Nevertheless, Philosophies continue to play an important methodological role, adapted to new needs such as philosophical studies of technological development and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

New applied dimensions are constantly emerging, such as: Philosophy of Technology, Bioethics, to name just a few. Consequently, it is necessary to teach and conduct research from an inter- and trans-disciplinary approach, linking philosophical thinking with the world and professions. This involves adopting a posture of constantly being at the edge of scientific frontiers and the thresholds of knowledge (Medina, 2022).

We share the view of Dussell et al. (2009) and Dussell (2015) regarding the non-universality of European philosophies. It is essential to broaden the dissemination and recovery of philosophies produced over centuries—some even predating Greek philosophy—in the territories of China, India, the Middle East, Africa, and the philosophies of the original cultures of Abya Yala. Their main characteristics are diversity, an understanding of Life beyond the human being, harmony with nature, and the entire universe. We refer to contextualized philosophies marked by an internalization of the cultural essences of the peoples who produce them.

¹ Just as there is no singular science or art, but rather sciences and arts.

Meanwhile, globalized Eurocentrism is reaching the limits of its destructiveness, evident in the current ecological crisis and all the accompanying systemic consequences: economic, social, and cultural. It is increasingly urgent to decolonize the thinking of the Global South, to put an end to the epistemicide and ontological violence to which millions of human beings have been subjected.

Philosophies, for what purpose?

Philosophies possess a very genuine essence: they require a proactive predisposition to confront bewilderment, contradictions with no apparent resolution, the clash of ideas, and a break with established philosophical tradition. In addition, there is a growing need to break down the stigmas surrounding the philosophical as something disruptive, and about us who dedicate ourselves to philosophizing: as the "weird ones," the misfits, among other pejorative labels.

Philosophical pluralism will exist when, with equal importance alongside the study of Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, and Hegel, we study Confucius, Avicenna, Fanon, Martí, and Zapata Olivella. When we delve into the oral traditions and symbolic universe of Maya, Aymara, Guaraní, Mapuche, Nasa, Misak, Wayuu philosophies—among others—efforts currently concentrated in ethno-education and interculturality, but which need to advance more profoundly into the cosmovisionary universe of these peoples. It is worth mentioning that many researchers are concerned with and engaged in this task (Conrado, 2022; Rengifo, 2022; Guadarrama & Martínez, 2023; Correa, 2024).²

From the stale individualism of capitalist society, which placed the human being at the center of everything with the universal and abstract possibility of climbing the ladder and becoming rich, few philosophies gain legitimacy—only those that smell of pragmatism. Meanwhile, original philosophies focus their gaze on the strength of collectivity and the importance of safeguarding and enriching familial bonds, respect for elders, and the love of the community. These are societies touched by modernity, many of which are losing their ancestral traditions.

Today, the reign of the market is overwhelming. Everything is bought and sold: our data, our personal identity, what we publish online. Nearly everything is governed by marketing. This leads us to ask: Philosophies, for what purpose? (Alvargonzález, 2020). From this, several concerns arise, such as:

- *The valuation of the scientific and the technological.* AI and its overwhelming dominance in our lives. Issues as abstract as philosophies are considered obsolete.
- *Engineered political democracies.* Each citizen is free to think, ground their worldview, and act. Thus, it is useless to "dwell" on philosophical doubts.
- *The market and the economy*—what purpose would such intelligible discourse serve when everything is so concrete and immediate?
- **Governments concerned with budgets.** They allocate few resources to developing philosophical research projects, as these are considered secondary in importance.
- *Families wonder* about the practical sense of a young person studying Philosophy when there are other more attractive and better-paid careers in the job market.

A superficial analysis of such questions would lead us to conclude that the social function of Philosophies is over. However, possible answers that validate their importance stem from another question:

² Only those works that were consulted are mentioned. However, many more exist in indexed journals and reliable databases.

What is the purpose of philosophizing today?

I come from a Cuban philosophical tradition that finds its highest expression in the Philosophy of Relation, by José Martí³. An exceptional human being in whose existence the roles of the independence-minded politician, the writer of the highest caliber, the tireless journalist were articulated not with an abysmal contradiction, but with great personal effort and human drama⁴ art critic, chronicler of science and technology, innovative pedagogue, and also the philosopher who broke with canons and schools.

According to Medina (2024), one of the marvelous keys to Martí's philosophy lies in its practical nature and its ability to engage with real and authentic contexts, in harmony and articulation with the representative values of the human condition. He did not choose to be a philosopher in the traditional mold. We will not find in his work a systemized treatise following the canons of classical systems. He practiced philosophy in every journalistic chronicle, poem, or speech. It is the philosophy the world needs to transform itself, a philosophy that walks with life and beats in every human and social conflict. Philosophy as social and transformative action.

This so profoundly Cuban and Latin American essence of a Philosophy for action is what we must reclaim today. Martí (2000) enunciates the principle of Philosophical⁵ Electivism, which means: "...there is no way to save oneself from the risk of blindly obeying a philosophical system other than by nourishing oneself from all of them, and seeing how in all of them the same spirit pulses..." (p. 234).

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Electivism in Philosophy involves free choice without prejudice or pre-established dogma, renouncing rote learning (which, centuries later, is still in good health) and intellectual servility, and practicing the questioning of the world and the life that seek to be imposed upon us. It means drawing one's own conclusions about certain "truths" that are born of a specific time and context but can expire. It entails rethinking each philosophical question and selecting the wisest ideas for every challenge of existence. The role of Philosophies is never abstract nor ahistorical; it is situated. But it must respond to the very nature of philosophizing: choice, a critical and unbiased stance.

For Martí (1991a), there are three essential ideas when examining the world from a philosophical posture: 1) truth is synthetic, 2) philosophy is nothing more than the secret of the relationship between the various forms of existence, and 3) the good philosophical method is one that, in judging humanity, considers it in all manifestations of its being.

Furthermore, he expressed an assertion still highly relevant in the 21st century: "...Life must be daily, dynamic, useful; and the first duty of a man in these times is to be a man of his time. Not to apply foreign theories, but to discover one's own. Not to hinder one's country with abstractions, but to inquire into the way of making useful ones practical..." (Martí, 1991b, p. 97). In the Cuban thinker, Philosophies, Arts, and Sciences merge. His thought moves on the thresholds of all knowledge.

The damage done by dogmas to the circulation of ideas is immense, as is the reductionist way in which we learned to think from Eurocentric pedagogical models, evident when, on a subjective level—as Deleuze (1994) states—the Other is missing from the structure of the world, and the summary

³ Cuban intellectual, patriot, and politician (1853-1895).

⁴ He wrote for more than 20 Latin American newspapers of his time.

⁵ Whose origin is found in Elective Philosophy, established by the Cuban educator José Agustín Caballero through his teaching at the Seminary of San Carlos and San Ambrosio, beginning in 1797 (Iglesias, 2018).

law of "all or nothing" then begins to reign. We thus enter a struggle without nuance, we become threatening because the gentleness that allows the world to be inhabited ends. Our lives are taken over by absolute differences that recall unbearable repetitions and superimposed distances, which reign in supposed philosophical debates.

Jaramillo (2009) points to a need felt by many intellectuals in our America: it is imperative to move from established philosophies to itinerant thoughts, the urgency of philosophical stances of decentring, and to rekindle the emancipatory sense of that irreplaceable vitality which is philosophical speculation.

Philosophies from, with, and for life

Martí (1994) asked, in a very poetic way, where life begins and from what workshop we human beings (complicated and marvelous) emerge. He then answered that life is a slow grouping and a wondrous chain linking all forms of existence—an idea diametrically opposed to modern anthropocentrism, which has led human society to chaos by turning nature into just another commodity in the service of extractivist capitalism. On the other hand, the Cuban intellectual considered that few scientists knew how to clearly explain the composition and production of life and the harmonious relationships that should exist between human beings and other life forms.

We need to learn how other species or living beings process information, solve problems, and live cooperatively and in harmony. Thinking like nature is a necessity we must cultivate from the earliest stages of human life (Medina, 2024). It is about reclaiming the simplicity of life, the seemingly insignificant because it is everyday, yet which defines the love and tenderness of what we are. Creating new interconnections and weavings to understand that we are not alone in this world, nor will we save ourselves alone. And internalizing the multiple webs of existence of the Biosphere, which Western culture has violated and exploited indiscriminately. It is about returning to the cosmologies of original peoples who, thousands of years ago, had a very clear understanding of the relationship between humans and nature and the entire universe.

Monroy et al. (2022) provide an interesting approach to the current issues and imperatives at the heart of philosophical reflections on philosophies themselves. They argue that although thinking is in itself a praxis, throughout history philosophies have not been content with thinking as mere theoretical contemplation but have deployed themselves through various practices.

The previous idea is quite unknown in popular understanding, where an equation is made between philosophies and abstractions. While it is true that philosophical categorical frameworks are characterized by a certain abstraction, this particularity is placed in dialogue with life itself in most bodies of philosophical ideas, with great clarity in non-Western philosophies.

The need to update the social and professional role of those who dedicate themselves to philosophy is a well-founded intention by Monroy et al. (2022), who recognize new fields and professional areas for graduates, conceiving in their reflections "...more than a defense of the usefulness of an undergraduate or graduate degree in Philosophy, an act of responsibility towards the expectations of people who choose to study it, but also a commitment to the world in which we live..." (p. 130). A commitment that does not entail mere accompaniment to new technological transformations or market demands, but the opening for debate of the ontological, gnoseological, and epistemological foundations of new realities that exceed modern philosophical understanding, and in which the destiny of humanity

and all life in the Biosphere is also decided.

It is increasingly imperative that social scientists, including philosophers, become active participants in all social spheres: from the university chair and teaching, to actively participating in the development of medicines and Health technologies, including joining the technical teams advancing AI—not to subordinate their knowledge to the interest of the market and capital, but to defend life and the rights of species (human and non-human). The bioethical responsibility of technology also involves philosophies from, with, and for life.

Reflections by way of non-conclusions

To ask today about the relevance and usefulness of Philosophies is, in itself, a form of Philosophizing. The present exercise has allowed us to debate, exercise our judgment, and thus move our thoughts towards a discussion of this disquisition, which proclaims the urgency of thinking about life beyond the academies. We call this section "non-conclusions" because such an important topic must remain open so that each reader can seek their own answers and examine their philosophical concerns.

The very etymological content of the word Philosophy and all its derivatives contains the love of knowledge in its highest expression: wisdom—not as an accumulation of information, but as an unraveling that guides understanding, being, and transforming the world.

Wisdom and philosophical reflection are not solely the heritage of academics or researchers. It is a natural human condition, enjoyed and practiced by all those who each morning wonder about some marvel of the world and the reasons worth continuing to live for.

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As Westerners, we must learn from original peoples who see themselves as part of a whole, leaving no room for notions of superiority or privilege. It is rather about the care and balance of all that exists between heaven and earth. More than protecting a natural environment (not littering, not polluting, which are important in themselves), there are deeper and more sublime threads connecting us to the earth, the rivers, the stars, which, while sometimes not so near, are all interwoven.

Therefore, to philosophize must help us broaden and reclaim the meaning of Philosophies beyond imposed reductionism. Beyond the academy, as a necessity of life and the human condition. As an understanding of the small fragment that we are... and that we are today discovering, as one discovers warm water.

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