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THE LEGACY OF STRUCTURALISM: FROM ITS DOGMAS TO METHODOLOGICAL PLURALISM¹

1. The myth of structuralism

Since 1983, when I became a student in the Department, I have heard people say that the USP Philosophy Department is structuralist. This myth has been repeated throughout Brazil. And I should confess frankly that once I believed this myth. A long time later, looking back, I realized that I hadn't actually received a structuralist education. Since this widespread myth apparently exists, it still needs to be denounced.

A brief overview of the leading names, many of whom were my teachers, already shows that structuralism was not hegemonic in the 1980s. Of the four big names of the older generation, three were not structuralists: Bento Prado Jr, Rui Fausto, and José Arthur Giannotti. The only exception was Oswaldo Porchat. Even he, however, stopped being a structuralist at a certain point in his career. Right from the start, back in 1968-9, in the inaugural lecture he gave, which was published the following year under the title "The Conflict of Philosophies", he abandoned the dogmatic metaphilosophical theses of structuralism [Porchat 2007: 21-22]. Many years later, a lecture he gave at a Meeting of the Brazilian Graduate Program Association (ANPOF) entitled "Why I am not a structuralist" became famous.

Of the next generation, I believe that most were not structuralists: João Paulo Monteiro, Maria Silvia de Carvalho Franco, Rubens Rodrigues Torres Filho, and Marilena Chauí were not; nor were Pablo Mariconda, Paulo Arantes, Sérgio Cardoso, Leon Kossovitch, among others. I took two courses in Ancient Philosophy, one with Ligia Watanabe and the other with Mário Miranda Filho: neither was structuralist. Perhaps some fit the image of structuralism better, like Carlos Alberto Ribeiro de Moura. But what about his text, the basis for a lecture that caused so much expectation and which I attended: "*Historia stultitiae e historia sapientiae*" [Moura 2001: ch. 1]? It is a critique of structuralism. Franklyn Leopoldo e Silva also maintained a critical distance from structuralism. In short, few of our teachers were actually structuralists.

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Porchat's translation of Goldschmidt's article "Logical time and historical time in the interpretation of philosophical systems" was very important; it was, so to speak, the bible of structuralism. But it was all we had, and it is a small paper. Moreover, it was very difficult to find Goldschmidt's book *Plato's religion*, which contained it, so that few people of my generation had access to it. I had two copies of the book, and I remember other students trying to buy the second one (which I sold). Of Gueroult's works, only those who read French could read his book on Descartes [Gueroult 1968]. I read a good part of the first volume, but I only read the second when I was already a PhD and teaching a course on Descartes.

Other French professors circulated in the Department, whose names we heard quite often, but about whom we knew little, such as Gilles Gaston-Granger and Jules Vuillemin. None of them were structuralists. The great French professor in front of us, who served as a model, was Gerard Lebrun. I took three courses and had the opportunity to talk to him many times. He wasn't a structuralist. Once, talking to him, I remember him speaking with reticence about structuralism. He was critical of the idea of objectivity promoted by structuralism. In his view, the history of philosophy did not consist of trying to explain a philosophical system according to its internal logic, but examining it with more suspicion. After Lebrun came Francis Wolf, also not a structuralist.

What is more, structuralism wasn't taught. There was no course on structuralism. We were supposed to learn structuralism in practice, so to speak. According to Jacques Brunschwig, Goldschmidt distinguished between the "method in act" and the "method taught" [Brunschwig 2009: 19]. We can assume that structuralism wasn't taught, but it was practiced. By taking certain courses, we would swallow structuralism without realizing it. However, if most of the teachers were not structuralists, how could we implicitly absorb structuralism?

2. The three parts of structuralism

This myth, however, wasn't built out of thin air. After all, structuralism, as bequeathed to us by Victor Goldschmidt and Martial Gueroult [see Goldschmidt 1970; Gueroult 2015], is an important formative element in the history of the Philosophy Department at USP, perhaps a fundamental one. Even if it was never hegemonic, structuralism left its mark. How can we assess its impact on the Department?

Structuralism and the structural method are spoken of almost interchangeably as if they were one and the same. However, I don't think that is the case. Structuralism is a complex philosophy that reflects on philosophy and its history. Porchat distinguished two parts in structuralism: a philosophy (or metaphilosophy) and a structural method [Porchat 2005: 250-251]. In my opinion, we can distinguish three parts in structuralism, because metaphilosophy involves, on the one hand, dogmatic theses and, on the other, a conception of philosophy [Smith 2017: 295-303], as well as a method of investigation to discover the structures that define each philosophical system [ibid.: 303-307]. It is therefore essential not to confuse the structural method and structuralism.

The structuralist conception of philosophy is a moment of deep awareness of what philosophy is. The structuralist considers philosophy itself to be his primary object of reflection. To put it succinctly, it can be said that what defines a philosophy is its structure; that is, each philosophy has its own structure. The philosopher takes certain principles as the starting points of his philosophy. On the basis of these, he will argue to establish other truths. From these allegedly proven theses, the philosopher infers more theses and gradual-

ly builds up his doctrine. When necessary, he can introduce new principles to prove yet more theses and enrich it. Thus, this order of reasons establishes his philosophy, articulates the theses and forms a coherent and articulated doctrine. As arguments in philosophy are rarely deductive, the philosopher takes responsibility for his inferences, as if they were demonstrative or conclusive arguments. This is why it is a 'logic', not formal logic, but the logic accepted by the philosopher that allows premises and conclusions to be articulated. It is 'internal' because it is defined within his philosophy. In this progression of theses, through an order of reasons subject to internal logic, there is a method. It is this method that generates the doctrine and the doctrine depends on it. For the structuralist, method and doctrine are inseparable.

Associated with this conception of philosophy, the structuralist defends a series of theses about philosophies. I'll give you a few examples. First, the thesis that philosophies have an eternal value, as if they existed in a Platonic heaven, outside of time. Their validity is not restricted to a particular era or historical context. Then there is the idea that they are indestructible, because they have the capacity to defend themselves against any and all attacks, that is, their resources to defend themselves are inexhaustible and they are able to assimilate arguments coming from other philosophies in their own terms and thus weaken them so as to be able to resist and neutralize them. From this assimilation of the external objection to the internal logic stems the thesis of the incommunicability between philosophies, since one only understands the other when it incorporates it into its own internal perspective. Philosophies would be like monads that don't communicate. There would be a kind of necessary distortion of one by the other. Hence the thesis that the philosopher is necessarily a bad historian and the good historian cannot become a philosopher [Porchat 2007: 17]. There are other dogmatic theses of structuralism, but it's not necessary to go over them here.

Finally, the structuralist elaborates a way in which we can discover this structure behind the texts and which defines each philosophy. If you want to study and understand a philosophy, you need to retrace the path travelled by the philosopher. This task is guided by the structural method. The latter consists of a set of rules and guidelines on how to proceed in order to correctly apprehend the structure that defines a given philosophy. I will come back to this point in detail later.

We are now in a position to assess more precisely the extent to which structuralism has marked the Philosophy Department: has it accepted all three parts? Only the conception of philosophy? Were the dogmatic theses endorsed? To what extent? How was the structural method interpreted and used? What came after this method?

3. Structuralist dogmatism

I'll start with the philosophical dogmas of structuralist metaphilosophy. Porchat soon abandoned the dogmatic part of structuralism and, as we have seen, most of the Department was not structuralist [Porchat 2007: 21-22; cf. 2005: 251]. Even so, I think it's worth talking about two apparently opposing but complementary dogmas that have been bequeathed to us by structuralism. Few, perhaps, were willing to defend them explicitly, but I believe that they underlie a very common attitude to this day.

Even if some of the Department's professors haven't limited themselves to the history of philosophy, the fact is that most of them are dedicated to the history of philosophy. In itself, this choice to study the history of philosophy is not problematic. For most of my career, I myself have done more history of philosophy than philosophizing on my own.

The problem lies when you go one step further and say that there is nothing more to be said in philosophy. This is dogmatic structuralism, which makes us decree the death of

philosophy, as if there were nothing more to say in philosophy and we were condemned to only interpret the philosophies of the past, whose richness would be inexhaustible. It would be better, from this point of view, to carefully interpret a sophisticated philosophy from the past than to develop a crude reflection in the present.

This “dogma of the death of philosophy”, however, is just one of the philosophical positions. It’s not a fact, but an open question. There are other positions in this regard: many, if not most, believe that philosophy continues; among these, there are two groups: those who believe that philosophy continues as always and those who believe that philosophy has been transformed [Baynes et al. 1987]. It is therefore necessary to argue in support of the controversial thesis that philosophy is dead. But this has been taken for granted at the Philosophy Department at USP.

Moreover, the very attempt to defend this thesis seems self-contradictory, because it is a philosophical argument to establish a philosophical conclusion about a philosophical problem in force today. Wouldn’t this be proof that philosophy is still alive? Wouldn’t this show that we have a new philosophical question concerning philosophy’s death?

The second dogma bequeathed by structuralism is “the dogma of the eternity of philosophies”: they don’t die and have perennial value. Thus, studying a philosophy from the past would always be of philosophical interest today. Everything happens as if philosophies (or their structures) lived in a Platonic heaven, outside of historical time (but in a logical time). To study them would be to discover the forms of universal and eternal reason. Of course, no one accepts this Platonic explanation of philosophy, but they still believe in the intrinsic and permanent value of philosophies. And that alone would justify their study in our own time.

But it’s not clear that philosophies always have their value, regardless of the philosophical context. Are philosophical problems eternal? Many believe so, but why wouldn’t it be enough for a *historian* that a problem is, for example, two and a half thousand years old? Or that another philosophical problem, such as the problem of the external world, arose at a certain time and is “only” four hundred years old? Or that a philosophical problem only makes sense within one context and, in another context, that problem ceases to make sense and even disappears? Or that certain problems are only raised within a specific philosophy? When one interprets a particular philosophy, one stumbles on innumerable problems peculiar to that philosophy alone.

Of course, a philosophy that didn’t arouse much interest at one time can arouse it again at another. But is its eternity the best explanation for this? In my opinion, the return of a forgotten philosophy, so to speak, is best explained when a new philosophy sheds light on it and thus brings it out of oblivion. It comes back into force, not because it has eternal value, but because a new philosophy puts it back into circulation in a new context. For this new philosophy to appropriate the forgotten philosophy, it must translate it into its own vocabulary and accommodate it to new discussions. Only in this way can it once again become an alternative on the philosophical scene.

4. The structuralist conception of philosophy

Let’s now move on to the other aspect of structuralist metaphilosophy: its conception of philosophy and the fundamental idea that a philosophy is defined (or identified) by its structure. As Porchat puts it, “what we are calling ‘structuralism’ in the History of Philosophy is, at the end of the day, purely and simply this: trying to discover the ‘logic’ with which the author structured his own work” [Porchat 2005: 251]. The structuralist aims to

grasp the *hidden* structure behind what is written in the text. In this sense, the idea that philosophies are defined by a structure to be revealed by the structuralist historian of philosophy is a form of dogmatism. The hidden nature of a structure was very well pointed out by Brunschwig when he said that a structure is an “external source” that projects itself onto texts [Brunschwig 2009: 25]. This structure could only be apprehended through the rigorous application of the structural method. Let’s call this “the dogma of structure”.

I don’t think many would subscribe to this dogma, at least formulated in this way. This dogma of structure stands alongside the dogmatic theses of metaphilosophy and is in accord, for example, with the dogma of the eternity and permanent value of philosophies. Like the latter, the former must also be rejected.

I think there is a certain belief in the air that a *rigorous* reading of the text, according to the structural method, would grasp this structure and thus the philosophical meaning of the text. I would now like to dispel what seems to me to be a misconception about the supposedly beneficial legacy concerning the structuralist conception of philosophy.

What is this rigor that resulted for us from structuralism? The philosophical meaning of a text is allegedly given by its structure. Unravelling it is the primary objective of a rigorous reading. A useful technique begins by listing the paragraphs. Then, writing everything down, following the text paragraph by paragraph, one should divide the text into parts, trying to understand the articulation between them. As one realizes how they are connected, one should group them together and give them a title that indicates the main idea. In this way, a scheme of the text with its sections and subsections emerges. This scheme is usually considered as the structure sought. So, the rigorous structuralist reading turns out to be discovering the text’s scheme.

This procedure of discovering the text’s scheme is very useful and recommended. I learnt it from Porchat, I teach it to my students, and I know some other colleagues who do the same. But this procedure is very far from being a method. It’s just a technique that, whatever method the interpreter uses, consists of a first reading stage. Although useful and perhaps even necessary, it is insufficient for an interpretation. In fact, it’s a common procedure that we see in countless books on the history of philosophy. Even in texts that, at first glance, seem disorganized, we find schemes (not structures) of the type described above. Burnyeat’s analysis of Plato’s dialogue *Theaetetus* starts from a rigorous division of the text [Burnyeat 1990]. Recent commentaries on chapters of Montaigne’s *Essays*, such as those by Blandine Perona and Joan Lluís Linàs Begon, emphasize that, however winding they may seem and however many digressions they may contain, they are all well-ordered [see Perona 2019; Linàs Begon 2023]. None of these three excellent commentators is structuralist, yet they use the technique described. Countless other cases could be cited here.

In my opinion, there is a confusion between the structure of a philosophy, with its order of reasons, and the scheme of the text, with its organization in sections and subsections. The scheme of the text is not the structure of a philosophy; it is only the way in which the text is organized. While the structure of a philosophy lies behind the text, the scheme of a text lies in its surface. Usually, the philosopher points out explicitly its sections and subsections, but the alleged structure of the philosophy must be sought and revealed by the interpreter. This difference, it seems to me, is pointed out by Gueroult:

This method is, therefore, first and foremost a method of analysis. But it is not simple analysis. Analysis breaks down the elements of a system and can demonstrate how these elements are grouped together, but it is limited to this and does not concern itself with showing us why the grouping occurs in one way and not

another. The method of structures, on the contrary, strives to discover this why. It not only highlights the structures, but also indicates in some way the reasons behind them.

[Gueroult 2015: 163]

The main mistake I see in thinking that the use of this reading technique (or, in Gueroult's terms, method of analysis) corresponds to an application of the structural method is that the order of reasons is confused with the order of the text. When one says that one has read a philosophical text using the "structural method", all one means is that one has divided the text into parts, that one has paid attention to each one, that one has tried to understand how the author moves from one part to another. The reading technique, which divides a text into parts and examines the connections between these parts, dismantling and reassembling the text as if it were a jigsaw puzzle, serves to uncover the order of the text, but not the order of the reasons. The result is the organization of the text, not the structure of the author's philosophy. In sum, the legacy of a rigorous reading does not depend on a structuralist conception of philosophy.

Before moving on to a discussion of method in the history of philosophy, starting with a discussion of the notion of method and then the structural method, I would like to highlight two other consequences of the impact of the structuralist conception of philosophy on the Philosophy Department at USP.

First, the overvaluation of the historical perspective to the detriment of other perspectives, like thematic and philosophical ones. In both cases, I think, the consequences were problematic. This overemphasis is due, at least in large part, to a kind of structuralist reading that was practised to some extent for a long time. Thematic courses were taught as if they were historical. For example, in Ethics and Political Philosophy, I studied Rousseau's *Social Contract*. Many people think that, in Theory of Knowledge, you can take Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. In my opinion, doing so is tantamount to transforming thematic disciplines into historical disciplines. Similarly, we study a great contemporary philosopher in the same way as we study Plato, Augustine or Leibniz. We treat contemporary philosophy historically. It's in the title of the course: History of Contemporary Philosophy. Current issues, which are still hotly debated, are ignored. Treating thematic subjects as if they were historical subjects and treating contemporary authors in the same way as the classical philosophers of the past is not good for the student, because their training ends up being very limited. They are trained to work in only one way in philosophy. They don't learn other ways of doing philosophy.

The second harmful consequence concerns the very way in which the history of philosophy is thought of. It is conceived as the history of the succession of dogmatic philosophical systems. To study the history of philosophy is to choose a philosopher and try to understand his system or structure. Worse still, this study becomes the study of a single work, because the structure of a philosophy (or its order of reasons) has been replaced by the scheme of the text as the object of analysis. And the analyses are so detailed that it's difficult to read an entire book, even a relatively small one. As if it were possible to unravel the supposed structure in a book or only in part of it. The very task of a structuralist tends to disappear.

What's more, temporal succession is of little relevance to the structuralist perspective of the history of philosophy. All that matters is what is in the text, and the text is conceived as autonomous, having its own "internal logic" (in fact, its own scheme). So, for example, one could do History of Modern Philosophy first, then History of Ancient Philosophy, then History of Contemporary Philosophy, then History of Medieval Philosophy. The temporal

order doesn't matter, as if those who came after didn't refer to those who came before, as if there wasn't an accumulation or, at least, a continuity in which reference to predecessors is fundamental. Just as structuralism replaced historical time with logical time, we have paradoxically learnt that historical time is irrelevant in the History of Philosophy.

5. Ambiguity of the structuralist concept of method

I would like to comment on the concept of "method" in structuralism. I think there is an ambiguity here. This is surprising, for it is a basic concept in its conception of philosophy. It seems that structuralists didn't realize this ambiguity. Denouncing the ambiguity in the notion of method is not tantamount to arguing against structuralism, but it does allow us to refine our discussion. In my view, when using the term "method", the structuralist is referring to two different things.

On the one hand, there is the *philosopher's method*, through which the philosopher gradually builds up his system. He takes responsibility for considering certain propositions as the foundations of his system as well as for the internal logic with which he infers theses and, from these, yet other theses and so on. This notion of method is inseparable from the structuralist conception of philosophy, from notions such as logical time, order of reasons, formal truth and material truth, philosophical responsibility, structure. On the other hand, there is the method of the *historian of philosophy*. The method, in this second sense, does not aim to establish a philosophical system, but only to uncover the supposed structure of that philosophical system. In order to properly and objectively understand the structure of a given philosophy, it is necessary to rigorously apply this method.

For example, when Goldschmidt says "it is to the elaboration of a method that is both scientific and philosophical that the following notes would like to contribute" [Goldschmidt 1970: 140], he is referring to the method of the historian of philosophy. In the next paragraph, however, he refers to the method of the philosopher: "The progression (*method*) of these movements gives the written work its structure and takes place in a logical time" [ibid.]. But when talking about Bréhier, he refers to "*methodological* interpretation" [ibid.: 145], returning to the method of the historian of philosophy.

This ambiguity of the word "method" reappears clearly in the preface Porchat wrote for the translation he did with his wife, Ieda, of Goldschmidt's *Plato's religion*. Porchat focuses on the question of method in the history of philosophy and says that the methodological texts by Gueroult and Goldschmidt are "the two highest moments of scientific methodology in the history of philosophy" [Porchat 1970: 6]. Porchat then distinguishes between two traditional methods of interpretation called by him "dogmatic" and "genetic" [ibid.: 7-8]. All these uses of the word "method" refer, as is explicit, to the method of the historian of philosophy. However, according to him, these two methods have in common the fact that they "dissociate method and structure" [ibid.: 9]. This last use of the word "method" clearly refers to the philosopher's method. On the following page, the ambiguity is even greater because it occurs in the same sentence. After talking about a "presupposition in the structuralist method", Porchat says that the philosopher arrives at his assertions "thanks to the method of investigation and research he has adopted" [ibid.: 10]. While the former is the method of the historian, the latter is the philosopher's method. Then he refers again to the "methodical progression of the work" [ibid.], i.e., the philosopher's method.

Gueroult also seems guilty of the same ambiguity, though he uses more often than not method in its historical sense. However, in at least one occasion, he uses it in its philosophical sense: "The technique of all philosophy is, therefore, always a method of a logical and

constructive nature, which aims at both understanding and discovery, seeking the solution to a problem and the establishment of a truth considered to be directly or indirectly demonstrable” [Gueroult 2015: 167].

One may understand why they made such a confusion. In my view, it is because the structural method depends on the structuralist conception of philosophy. Gueroult says that “by placing oneself inside the work in order to determine its constituent structures, this method is based on the nature of philosophical works” [ibid.: 164]. Thus, it is because a philosopher has a method to build his philosophical system that the historian of philosophy will have the structural method, i.e., the method that allows him to follow the order of reasons instituted by the philosopher. Both the philosopher and the historian of philosophy travel along the same path.

But, even if the confusion is understandable, this is, as I have argued, to conflate two different meanings of “method”. The fact that the structural method is based on the structuralist conception of philosophy does not entail that the method used by the structuralist historian is the same method used by the philosopher. It only entails that, in order to grasp the philosopher’s method, the structuralist historian needs to use his own method, i. e. the structuralist method in doing history of philosophy is what allows him to understand and explain the philosopher’s method.

Let me dwell on this distinction and point out some differences between these two senses of “method”. Here’s a difference that I think is important. Each philosopher has his own method. Descartes has one method of arguing, Leibniz another, and Kant a third. So, there are as many philosophical methods as there are philosophical systems. However, the structuralist historian of philosophy has only one method: the so-called structural method. This is the method that must be applied to all philosophical systems in order to understand their internal logic.

Another difference: the philosopher raises a question, for example, “what is substance?” or “what is causality?”. The historian raises a different question, for example: “what is substance for Descartes?” and “what is causality for Hume?” While the philosopher elaborates his own conception of substance or causality, the historian of philosophy has to interpret what the philosopher meant, regardless of his own conception of substance or causality, if he has one.

A third difference follows from this, for it concerns how the question raised is to be answered. The philosopher argues in defense of his conception of substance or causality, and the texts of other philosophers do not constitute authority for his conception; he may use this or that text, and they are only the occasion for his own thinking. But for the historian of philosophy, the texts of the philosopher being interpreted are indispensable for him to be able to answer his question; and they are to be taken as evidence for this or that interpretation. While philosophy can be, and often is, an *a priori* activity, built from first principles through arguments, the history of philosophy is an empirical science: it studies philosophy by examining the sources we have of it.

It doesn’t follow from this that philosophy and the history of philosophy don’t have many close links. Of course they do. For example, the philosophical problems we face are found in the books written by philosophers. When we philosophize, we always refer to other philosophers. Many philosophies recognize certain texts as containing truths, and so philosophizing is, to a large extent, interpreting these texts. But I won’t go into that now [see the prefaces to Smith 2000 and 2005].

Let us now think about each one of these two meanings of “method”.

6. The philosopher's method

Having disambiguated the notion of method and drawn a distinction between philosophizing and doing history of philosophy, it is possible to enter into the legacy of structuralism in order to make a general assessment, perhaps leaving behind what is problematic and retaining what is healthy.

Structuralism makes it impossible to choose a philosophical method. If each philosopher has his own method and if method and doctrine cannot be dissociated, it is impossible to be impartial. Either one already has a doctrine and thereby presupposes a method; or one doesn't have a doctrine and so can't rationally adopt a method, for how can one argue for a method if not inside a philosophical doctrine? But this impasse applies only to dogmatic philosophies, which have a method in the sense of creating a philosophical system, with theses and doctrines articulated by means of an argument that is intended to be definitive or conclusive.

With regard to the philosopher's method, I would like to say the following. Before adhering to any specific method that produces this or that philosophy, the best (and perhaps only) way to proceed is one that examines both or more sides of an issue. This initial examination can be done hastily and partially or slowly and impartially, generating two (or three) different results. The first and commonest one is dogmatic. One usually decides in favor of one side of the issue, believing it to be the most persuasive, probably because the other sides have not been examined carefully enough. Hastily assenting to certain philosophical theses, the result is the precipitate acceptance of a dogmatic philosophy. If the examination of the arguments, after having evaluated them unhurriedly and impartially, does not detect the superiority of any of the sides involved, no doctrine is accepted. Here, the philosopher has two options: either he gives up searching, for he no longer thinks he is able to find the truth he is seeking, or his investigation continues. While the former is a kind of skepticism (Sextus calls this position Academic philosophy, distinguishing it both from dogmatism and skepticism; cf. PH 1.1-14), the latter result characterizes skepticism. Once one of these initial results has been reached, the method of philosophizing follows different paths.

First, whatever the dogmatic method is in particular, it aims to defend one side of the issue and criticize the other. Like a lawyer, the philosopher even considers the arguments of both sides, but with the purpose of defending one against the other. To do this, he only allows himself to show the strong side of his thesis, hiding the weak side; conversely, concerning the opposed position, the arguments for which there is no answer are avoided or a caricature of these arguments is made in order to answer them better, and only the weak arguments are shown, because they are easily refuted. In my opinion, the defects of partiality and hastiness found in the attitude with which the initial investigation was done persist in the dogmatic method. Properly speaking, it is no longer a method of philosophical enquiry, but a way of teaching and indoctrinating.

The second is the skeptical method. It is essential to examine the arguments for and against any philosophical thesis carefully and without haste. And, as far as possible, it is necessary to weigh them up impartially, i.e., without taking sides beforehand. Thus, when a thesis seems stronger, the skeptical method recommends investigating what can be said on the other side, to try to find arguments that make this weaker side stronger, and examining whether the side that seems stronger has any previously unsuspected weaknesses. It prescribes we investigate fully one side and then turn to the other one, also investigating it fully, in both cases with an open and critical mind. This skeptical method maintains the attitude of the first investigation, which led to skepticism, but now in a conscious way.

In general, in my experience, it is always possible to balance the two sides. But this is not a purely subjective matter. Testimony to this balance is the undeniable fact that philosophical disputes are persistent and never seem to end. The philosophical community is always divided and can't agree on anything. It is this objective fact that shows the equal persuasive force of philosophies in disagreement.

In short, the dogmatic method is not entirely critical, as it aims to defend a previously adopted position from criticism, while the skeptical method preserves to the end the critical spirit characteristic of philosophizing, as it submits any and all opinions to examination, without accepting or rejecting them. Unfortunately, the skeptical method is not practiced as often as it should be.

7. Structural method, absence of method and methodological pluralism

There's a lot of talk about the structural method. But what is a method? In my opinion, a method is not a theory that can be true or false. Among other things, a method contains *rules* that guide a practice or activity. They prescribe something. Goldschmidt says: "To admit a logical time is much less to formulate a theory, which is itself dogmatic, than a rule of interpretation" [Goldschmidt 1970: 143]. Porchat also emphasizes that in the scientific and philosophical conception of the structural method, "we are looking for the rules that make it possible to achieve real objectivity in the exposition and interpretation of philosophical systems" [Porchat 1970: 7].

An important question is: how do we evaluate a method? Not by its truth or falsity, because rules are not true or false. They are useful or useless. As Gueroult says, "a method is nothing but a tool and it is its use that decides its value" [Gueroult 2015: 160]. Thus, a method is good if it leads to a good result and bad if it leads to a bad result. A method is therefore judged by its consequences.

There are at least three rules of the structural method [see Smith 2017: 303-307]:

(a) don't pass judgement, but only try to understand what the philosopher is saying. One should have the attitude of a disciple, not that of a judge. When interpreting a philosopher, the intention is not to critically evaluate what he says. What we think of the philosophy being interpreted should be set aside as far as possible.

(b) never dissociate a thesis from the philosophical doctrine to which it belongs. Instead of considering an argument and the thesis to which it leads in isolation, one should try to understand their place in the wider context of the philosophy to which they belong.

(c) seek the greatest possible unity and coherence in a philosophy. Instead of pointing out alleged contradictions, the interpreter should endeavor to find solutions that explain how the philosopher can say both things without contradicting himself.

Naturally, these three rules are articulated with each other, and it is not difficult to see how they combine to form a single method. Let's briefly evaluate these rules.

The first rule leads the interpreter to a healthy posture: before criticizing, understand. I think that when people talk about the structuralism of USP's Philosophy Department, they talk about this rule: don't judge, just understand. In my view, this rule is not limited to not criticizing philosophy. For example, we also shouldn't associate thoughts that occur in our heads with the philosophy being interpreted (my students do that a lot) or try to improve it by making the argument stronger at our own risk (analytical historians of philosophy are inclined to do that). It may seem that we are enriching the text or making it stronger, when

perhaps we are only impoverishing or weakening it. Attributing ideas that *we* associate with what is written to the philosopher (who probably does not make the same association) only obscures and prevents us from understanding what *he* meant. Trying to understand first means not only not to criticize, but also not trying to improve.

The second rule prevents us from taking an isolated thesis or argument as the target of criticism or improvement. Generally speaking, when a thesis or argument is placed in the broader context of the author's philosophy, one realizes that his position is stronger than it seems. When reconstructing the order of reasons, the intention is not to separate one part of it from the rest, but only to understand that part as a link within a broader doctrine. What's more, one has to realize that one part of a philosophy sheds light on another. For example, one must take into account what a philosopher explicitly says about concept C in order to understand passages in which concept C is used. To me, this is a sound procedure.

The third rule leads the interpreter to look for solutions to resolve difficulties that arise in developing an understanding of a philosophy. Often, a philosopher seems to contradict himself and, at that point, before accusing him, it is up to the interpreter to try to dissolve this apparent contradiction. It's a form of the principle of charity: don't assume that a philosopher contradicts himself easily. In general, it's we who don't see the coherence of the whole. And the interpreter ends up selecting certain passages to the detriment of others and creating a philosophy that differs from that of the author.

As far as I can see, in general, these three rules are good because they help us to interpret a philosophy properly. In my opinion, the structural method leads to good results, as Gueroult, Goldschmidt, and Porchat attest [see Gueroult 1955-1959; 1956; 1968; Goldschmidt 1970; 2000; & Porchat 2001]. Perhaps it is correct to say that the structural method, when consistently applied, leads to explanatory and probable interpretations of a philosophy. It is therefore useful and recommendable.

We saw above that a few professors in the Philosophy Department were structuralists. But have they abandoned the structural method as described above? Does the abandonment of structuralism mean that there was a methodological pluralism? In my opinion, no. What happened, I think, was that the methodological question disappeared. Questions of method were simply no longer discussed. Structuralism became interesting only as an object of study or as a moment in the life of the Philosophy Department at USP, never as an alternative to be adopted or rejected.

As far as I can judge, the abandonment of structuralism did not bring about a beneficial pluralism, but only the absence of a serious methodological concern. I don't mean to suggest, let alone assert, that a good historian of philosophy must first adopt a method, be aware of its rules, and then apply them as well as his strengths allow. Many good commentators don't have a method, but they know how to do their job.

There is a risk, however, when one doesn't think about the practice of the historian of philosophy and how to proceed. One runs the risk of offering a superficial and uninteresting interpretation. Perhaps some have run into this problem, believing that they have acquired a rigor in their reading, when in fact they have only lost the structural method. They continued to believe that they had the rigor that guarantees a superior and objective interpretation, while in fact, they started paraphrasing more than explaining.

Associated with this practice of paraphrasing texts rather than analyzing them is an idea about the role of commentators in the history of philosophy. Here, in my opinion, is yet another problem resulting from an abuse of another of structuralism's dogmas.

The belief that we had a sure and objective method, which allows for the proper understanding of a philosophical text, led to the idea that commentators are dispensable for a good interpretation. For those capable of 'rigorous' reading, commentators become irrele-

vant. Not only would philosophers distort other philosophers, but the historians of philosophy themselves, without our ‘rigor’, produce only distortions of the text and misinterpretations. Call this “the dogma of the structural method sufficiency”: if one has this method, there is no need to use commentators with other (harmful) methods.

This dogma led to the following methodological rule (I have heard and read it many times, including in submitted projects for grants): we should read commentators only after we have already formed our interpretation; one should not quote a commentator except to say (i) that the idea is not new or (ii) that he is wrong. The method boils down to reading the author directly, without resorting to any commentator; the commentator will only be read when the interpretation is already finished.

This rule seems inadequate to me for several reasons. From the fact that it’s good to read an author for the first time without having read a manual or commentators, since direct contact is indispensable, it doesn’t follow that one should put off reading commentators until one has a personal interpretation ready or at least well advanced. For one thing, philosophy is something very difficult to understand, and reading several commentators can not only help us understand it, but may even be indispensable for this task. It’s very unlikely that one person will be able to find the good interpretation on his own, ignoring all the others who have tried the same thing before him, probably in better conditions than we have here in São Paulo (they have better libraries, a better environment for discussion, the original language is often their mother tongue, etc.). To arrive at a good interpretation, given the complexity of a philosophy, it is useful, or even necessary, to use commentators as support.

To interpret a philosopher, one has to enter into dialogue with other interpreters. An interpretation is, among other things, but to a large extent, an attempt to solve the problems debated and the hypotheses suggested by the commentators. One has to know how to use the commentators. Brunschwig, based on his experience, states that “conflicts of interpretation between modern commentators” have been very useful [Brunschwig 2009: 35]. He says that “the good use of conflicts of interpretation would be [...] to use their power of intellectual incitement to try to go back to the root of the conflict, and to see where and why the texts on which the disagreement is based were able to engender it” [ibid.: 24]. Commentators serve several purposes, like: (i) limiting the issues at stake, because they are too numerous; (ii) raising central problems, drawing attention to the difficulties, obscurities and inconsistencies of the philosophy being studied; (iii) proposing solutions to problems and explanatory hypotheses for difficult passages; and (iv) discussing and clarifying the main concepts. As Brunschwig [ibid.] says, “analyzing the texts of commentators thus acquires its full meaning only if it leads back to a more demanding reading of the texts commented on”. Making a good history of philosophy requires a lot of hard work. We have to read carefully not only the philosopher (and some others in his philosophical context), but also many commentators, both the classics and the most recent ones.

In my teaching practice, especially as a member of the exam boards for master’s dissertations and doctoral theses, I realize that many candidates, if not the majority, don’t know how to use the commentators. It’s not their fault. We’re the ones who haven’t taught them how to use the commentators properly. Because we were not taught so in the first place.

There’s another problem with this methodological rule of putting off reading the commentators and limiting their use to merely recognizing that the interpretation is not new or merely saying that the commentator is wrong. If commentators are to be put to one side and are more of a hindrance than a help to understanding a philosophy, why would one produce yet another comment? At the end of the day, one’s comment should only be read and quoted by someone else with the purpose of saying that one has already said the same

thing or that one is wrong. Others will regard one's interpretation as dispensable as one sees theirs. It's to condemn the comment itself to uselessness.

Does abandoning the dogmas of structuralism mean abandoning the structural method? I don't think so. My proposal is not to reject the structural method, but to complement it with other methods and think about the best method for each topic of a given philosophy. As Porchat says, "the so-called 'structuralist' method, as the first approach to the system, is the best approach. It's not the only one, it shouldn't be the last one, but it should be, in my opinion, the first one" [Porchat 2005: 251]. And then: "I'm not excluding, in any way, that once the 'internal logic' of the system has been established, other methods can be applied, which can broaden, improve and deepen our understanding of it." Porchat was thinking of sociological, economic, political, and historical methods. For him, it seems to me, he still thought that the structural method was the best philosophical method and perhaps also the only one to lead to reliable results. But I also think of other philosophical methods.

Just as the structural method leads to good results, other philosophical methods can also lead to good results. For example, Peter Strawson's book on Kant [Strawson 2006] does not use the structural method, but has produced a classic book on Kant's philosophy, which renewed Kantian studies in English. Another example is the work of Pierre Hadot, according to whom ancient philosophy was a spiritual exercise [Hadot 2002]. This different conception of philosophy has led him to treat texts in a thought-provoking and fruitful way. Countless examples could be given here.

Interpretations are basically just hypotheses, whether they are good or bad, exciting or uninteresting. Methods are merely useful tools helping us to perform the task. The structural method, however, supposes that there is one and only one correct interpretation and that we can establish, using its rules, the true interpretation. This is plainly false. Not only does the systematic use of structuralist rules not guarantee that one will eventually find the correct interpretation, but also one should put into doubt the idea that there is something like the final and objective interpretation. This could be called "the structuralist dogma of the true interpretation".

One should not, therefore, assume that the structural method provides an objective and definitive interpretation of a philosophy, nor reject other historiographical methods, because they would only lead to misinterpretations or fail to capture the philosophical meaning of the work. One has to know how to combine methods and adapt them to the philosophy and the subject one wants to interpret [see Smith 2017: 309-316]. I can see some limitations to the structural method. I'll give three examples to explain this point.

First, not all philosophies consist of theses supported by arguments that the philosopher considers conclusive, but can be activities of different kinds, such as the activity of clarifying concepts, investigating the truth, or carrying out a therapy. Skepticism is an example of this. How to understand it? At the very least, we need to adapt the structural method. Instead of talking about an order of reasons, perhaps we should talk about an order of experience, since skepticism is an investigative activity, not a set of doctrines, and arguing on both sides of a question has a different role, not that of establishing a thesis, but bringing about suspension of judgment [Smith 2022].

In political philosophy, the philosophical content cannot be abstracted from the context of the work. The philosophical significance of a thesis is not only in the text or the argument that supports it, but depends on the dialogue it establishes with other philosophies, i.e., its intellectual context, and the role it plays in society, i.e., its social and political context. Skinner, based on philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and John L. Austin, developed a very interesting method for interpreting political philosophy texts, the so-called contextualist method [Skinner 2002].

Finally, in ancient philosophy, we often don't have the complete texts of an author. In many cases, we have no more than a few fragments, preserved in texts by other philosophers, sometimes rival philosophers. In these cases, it is impossible to use the structural method. How should we proceed? Jacques Brunschwig proposes that the best way to work is by "microexegesis" [Brunschwig 2009: 35], i.e., examining the fragments with a magnifying glass, extracting the maximum from each one. This way of working is also useful when dealing with texts that are broader than one or a few fragments.

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The Legacy of Structuralism: From Its Dogmas to Methodological Pluralism

There is a widespread idea that the Philosophy Department at University of São Paulo, has been structuralist since the 1960s. In my opinion, this is a myth, the result of a misunderstanding of what structuralism is. I distinguish between three parts of structuralism: its conception of philosophy, its dogmas and its method for doing history of philosophy. I then discuss, for each of these parts, in what sense structuralism may still have left deep traces, for better or worse, in the Philosophy Department at University of São Paulo. Next, I point out what seems to me to be an ambiguity in the structuralist idea of method: one should distinguish between the philosopher's method and the method of the structuralist historian of philosophy. Concerning the first, while structuralism offers an argument against all dogmatic methods, I propose the skeptical method as the best one. Finally, I argue that the structuralist rules for doing history of philosophy are good ones, but in many cases insufficient. Thereby I propose a methodological pluralism.

Плінію Жункейра Сміт

Спадщина структуралізму: від його догм до методологічного плюралізму

Існує поширена думка, що філософський факультет Університету Сан-Паулу є структуралістським з 1960-х років. На мій погляд, це міф, результат неправильного розуміння того, що таке структуралізм. Я розрізняю три частини структуралізму: його концепцію філософії, його догми і його метод вивчення історії філософії. Потім я аналізую для кожної з цих частин, в якому сенсі структуралізм міг залишити глибокі сліди, на краще чи на гірше, на філософському факультеті Університету Сан-Паулу. Далі я вказую на те, що, на мою думку, є неоднозначністю в структуралістському уявленні про метод: слід розрізняти метод філософа і метод структуралістського історика філософії. Щодо першого, то хоча структуралізм пропонує аргумент проти всіх догматичних методів, я пропоную скептичний метод як найкращий. Насамкінець я визнаю структуралістські правила вивчення історії філософії добрими, але в багатьох випадках недостатніми. Отже, я пропоную методологічний плюралізм.

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