

# НАУКОВЕ ЖИТТЯ

## (LOCAL CONTEXTS OF GLOBAL PHILOSOPHIES)

*Plínio Junqueira Smith, Olexandr Lukovyna*

### RESEARCH ON SCEPTICISM IN BRAZILIAN PHILOSOPHY

#### *Foreword: Brazilian philosophy*

**O. L.<sup>1</sup>:** *To start our discussion of the development of research on skepticism in Brazil, we should clarify the idea of a “Brazilian philosophy”. It is very important, because unfortunately in Ukraine we lack knowledge about philosophical life in Brazil, and even about the whole of Latin America. We have some exceptions like “Nahua philosophy”, theology and philosophy of liberation, theoreticians of revolutionary Marxism, and popular in the liberal context “Chicago boys”, who, ultimately, are economists, but not philosophers. In 2019 our media shared two president’s tweets, who had so scenically announced the end of the government’s support of philosophy and sociology in high school. I got acquainted with Brazilian philosophers due to Plínio Junqueira Smith’s book<sup>2</sup>, who is now my interlocutor.*

*Probably, more erudite colleagues would add more information about Brazilian and Latin American philosophy, but the substantial fact will not be changed: we lack translations of Latin American thinkers, and so far there are no relations with research centers, exchanges, discussions, etc. Hence, till now we were not able to discover the philosophy of the New World, especially in Latin America.*

*For example, Fred Gillette Sturm in Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy [Sturm 1998] distinguishes European philosophy in Brazil and Brazilian philosophy:*

*“The former refers to Brazilians who participate in discussions of issues occurring in the European philosophic tradition without any reference to Brazilian reality and its problems; the latter to those Brazilian intellectuals who respond to the problems growing out of situations which have confronted the nation historically whether their philosophical orientations have originated in Europe or elsewhere.”*

*It is said: “progression spans from the precabralian Tupi-Guarani speaking societies of eastern South America to the healthy development of Brazilian philosophy since 1950 after the founding of the Institute of Brazilian Philosophy.”*

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<sup>1</sup> The participants of this interview are marked with initials: O. L. – Olexandr Lukovyna, P. J. S. – Plínio Junqueira Smith.

<sup>2</sup> See: [Smith 2022b] and review of this book: [Lukovyna 2022].

*Some data about Brazil's philosophy can be gained from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy [Smith, Bueno 2016], but they are fragmentary. It is assumed that real philosophical research in Brazil started in the XX century. Nonetheless, I cannot judge whether it is true or false.*

*So, in your opinion, when does philosophy begin in Brazil, and what it is? Of course, this interview allows us to give only general statements. But, without considering this question, we would not be able to understand the other ones, because we would leave the main question untouched.*

**P. J. S.<sup>3</sup>:** First of all, I would like to thank *Sententiae* for this interview. It is not only unexpected but also incredible that this connection between Brazilian philosophy and Ukrainian philosophy has been established. This shows, among other things, that philosophy has something universal to it, so that people in very distant countries and with very different languages and histories, can talk to each other. Unfortunately, it is not only in philosophy, but in literature, arts, and culture that Brazil and Ukraine are far from each other, despite the huge Ukrainian immigration to Brazil at the end of the Nineteenth Century (from 1882 on) and in the first half of the Twentieth Century. There are more than 500,000 Ukrainian descendants in Brazil, almost all of them in the province of Paraná. One of the best Brazilian writers was Ukrainian: Clarice Lispector. Despite all that and though I have been able to read Nicolai Gogol, Isaac Babel, and Mikhail Bulgákov in Portuguese, we have very few translations from Ukrainian authors. It's a pity.

The first time I started to learn about Ukraine was from an excellent professor I had in High School: Nicolau Sevchenko, who was a descendant from Ukrainians. I was 16 years old. We became somewhat close, and I remember playing football with him (and some other professors). He told me, for instance, that wheat in Europe was grown in Ukraine. The next year, I attended his PhD defense and he became an important historian in Brazil. His PhD thesis was on two Brazilian writers near the end of the Nineteenth Century, and his methodology was, at that time, very new: learning about Brazilian history from novelists. Later, he became famous, started to write for the most important Brazilian Journal, and went to live in New York. Unfortunately, he died young.

It may be difficult to say when a "Brazilian philosophy" began. As Bento Prado Jr. said long ago, in 1968, it is difficult to talk about philosophy in Brazil, not because it is hard to define it, but because we don't even know whether it exists. Brazil became independent in 1822. There were no universities in Brazil. During the Empire (1822–1889), the first Faculties were created. In 1889, Brazil became a Republic. The first University was founded only in 1912. The University of São Paulo, the biggest and the most important one, was founded in 1934. I guess that one can say that, despite occasional or even more systematical philosophical thinking, Brazilian philosophy as such started to emerge only from the 1930s on. Given our history, it comes as no surprise that "Brazilian" philosophy was deeply influenced by Portugal, especially during colonial and imperial times. Concerning the whole history of Brazilian

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<sup>3</sup> Plínio Junqueira Smith is associate professor at the Federal University of São Paulo. His PhD was on Hume's scepticism (1991) and his Habilitation was on the sceptical principle of opposition in Early Modern Philosophy (2013). He was a Visiting Scholar at Wolfson College, Oxford (1997-1998), at University of California, Berkeley (2015-2016) and at the Jean Moulin University, Lyon 3 (2022-2023). He edited *Scepticism in the Eighteenth Century: Enlightenment, Lumières, Aufklärung* [Charles, Smith 2013], *Academic Scepticism in the Development of Early Modern Philosophy* [Charles, Smith 2017] and *Scepticism Doubt and Disbelief in Modern European Thought: a New Pan-American Dialogue* [Raga Rosaleny, Smith 2021].

philosophy, two books stand out as the most important ones: João Cruz Costa [Costa 1956] and Álvaro Vieira Pinto [Pinto 1960]. The first one was written in a more historicist vein, while the second is more Hegelian [Prado Jr. 1985]. We have a solid tradition in the history of philosophy, and Brazil is one of the countries that publish more books on philosophy in the world.

**O. L.:** *How much is philosophy “domesticated” in Brazil, whether your philosophical community in your country feels “at home”?*

**P. J. S.:** I think that by now all kinds of philosophy are well developed in Brazil. The Brazilian philosophical community is, next to the American one, the largest in the continent. The Brazilian National Association of Graduate Programs (In Portuguese: Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação em Filosofia – ANPOF) is the main organization that represents Brazilian philosophy. In the 1980s, its Meetings had less than 300 participants. Since then, these meetings grew larger and larger. About twenty years ago, it had over 2,000 participants. Measures had to be taken not to let these Meetings grow even bigger. So, they still have around 2,000-2,500 participants every other year. I don’t know the exact figures, but in the 1980s there were like 8 Graduate Programs, and now there are 35.

In these Meetings, all areas of philosophy are represented. In the history of philosophy, from Ancient Philosophy to the philosophy of the XX Century. All fields are well represented: ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics, logic, epistemology, philosophy of science, etc., as well as all main traditions: phenomenology, analytic philosophy, Marxism, hermeneutics, etc. The ANPOF is organized in Working groups (in Portuguese: Grupos de Trabalho – GT). There are some requirements to constitute a GT (number of PhD members, of different universities in different states, etc.). But with such a big community, even very specialized topics in philosophy have their GT.

So, I think, the Brazilian community feels “at home”, because now we have these GTs, and we have created an integrated Brazilian community throughout the decades.

**O. L.:** *What are the leading philosophy departments in Brazil? When were they established and how did they develop?*

**P. J. S.:** Brazil is a big country, and it is hard to describe in general what happened in many places that are so far away from one another. In the old times, philosophers working in the south of the country, where German immigration was huge, had their own tradition, working with German philosophers and under German influence. Balthazar Barbosa was decisive for the Philosophy Department of the main university there, and sometime after him Paulo Francisco Estrella Faria.

In Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais, things were different, and the Jesuits were very important. There was an outstanding Jesuit philosopher, Father Henrique Lima Vaz, but it was only with Raul Landim Filho and Guido de Almeida, in Rio de Janeiro, and Ivan Domingues, in Minas Gerais, that the level of philosophy in these two states raised to higher levels.

In São Paulo, the French influence was crucial. But one can say that, even if before the 1960s some good, serious philosophy was already emerging, it is only in the 1960s that it really began to improve everywhere. João Cruz Costa and Lívio Teixeira, long ago, were the two most important philosophers. But only with José Arthur Giannotti, Oswaldo Porchat Pereira, and Bento Prado Neto, their students, the philosophy in São Paulo became a very good one.

But perhaps one can say, as it is acknowledged by the main philosophers in Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, and Rio Grande do Sul, Oswaldo Porchat Pereira was the philosopher who really integrated all these traditions into a unified Brazilian tradition. He created the Center for Logic and Epistemology (CLE) at the University of Campinas (UNICAMP), where he organized two colloquia a year, inviting philosophers from all over Brazil. It was

the first time that these philosophers, coming from different regions of Brazil, met each other. This was around 1975–1982. Sometime later, the Brazilian Association (ANPOF) was founded, as a result of this initial integration.

**O. L.:** *As far as I know, Brazil in the mid-1970s had the fastest rate of economic growth in the world. At the same time, if I am not mistaken, the gradual liberalization of the regime of the military dictatorship began. How would you assess the impact of these processes on the development of the philosophical community?*

**P. J. S.:** It is true that, in the mid-1970s there was economic growth in Brazil and that there was a gradual liberalization of the dictatorship at the end of the 1970s. But I am not sure these two movements are closely connected to one another. On the one hand, economic growth allowed the military government to keep investment in academic research; on the other, liberalization was a first step toward the constitution of a large philosophical community. But it took a long time to constitute this community. At the beginning of and in the mid 1970s, things were not easy at all and repression was still hard.

**O. L.:** *What can be said about intentions to cancel the government's support of philosophy departments?*

**P. J. S.:** The very recent history of Brazil is a sad one. From 1985 to 2015, Brazil lived under a democracy. In this period, Brazilian philosophy grew larger and larger. However, in 2016, there was the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, then Brazilian president; for many, this was a parliamentary coup d'état. Her vice-president, Michel Temer, was one of the persons behind the process of impeachment and he became president for 2 years (2016–2017), but he was a failure in the next elections. Jair Bolsonaro, a former military, who was expelled from the institution, for he tried to plant a bomb to protest for better salaries, won the elections (Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, who was the favorite, was put in jail by a partial judge – he was later condemned of partiality in the trial – who soon became the Minister of Justice of Bolsonaro's government). We had a government, from 2018 to 2022, that was not only of the extreme right-wing, but also one that fostered obscurantism and was against all kinds of intellectual work, against the university, and also against democracy itself. It is in this context that one has to understand Bolsonaro's policy for philosophy, education, universities, and research in general. Money for scholarship and research sank; money for universities was cut down. The government also wanted to eliminate Philosophy and Sociology from high school education. That was very bad for our students, for they would have fewer opportunities for jobs. Happily, this government lost the last election, even if they abused political and economic power, and they failed in trying a coup d'état, imitating Trump in what has been called "the Brazilian Capitulum", at the beginning of the new democratic government (on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023). Now, the new government is much better. For instance, there is more money for scholarships; their value has been increased and the project for bringing Brazilian and Argentinian universities closer will be renewed. Let's hope the good old days are coming back.

**O. L.:** *Well, I can't help but use the occasion to wish my Brazilian colleagues stable development and new philosophical achievements!*

*By the way, you said that philosophy and sociology are studied in "high school" in Brazil. Did I understand correctly that it is about a secondary school, not a university? If so, how is the teaching of philosophy at the pre-university level organized in Brazil? What is it more like: a French lycée or a German gymnasium? In Ukraine, for example, philosophy is not taught in secondary schools, except as an optional subject, at the initiative of a specific institution.*

**P. J. S.:** Yes, by "high school", I mean secondary school. During the dictatorship, the educational orientation was directed toward the hard sciences and, above all, with a view to

preparing students for the “market”: the student should be prepared to have a job, that is, one should be able to work, say, in a laboratory of chemistry. There was no concern for the citizen and for a more critical spirit. When I studied in high school, it was like that. Just like in Ukraine, philosophy was at best an optional discipline, that only some private, better schools had. Happily, I had a philosophy course in my school, and I remember reading (and not understanding) Kant’s Preface for the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Things changed later. With the return of democracy, there was a movement to reinsert Philosophy and Sociology into the curriculum of public schools. It took a while, but eventually, the orientation became more humanistic. As far as I know, there isn’t much influence of German gymnasium system, except perhaps in the south, whereas French culture has always been more influential in Brazil, at least in São Paulo. But, of course, one has to remember that Brazil was colonized by Portugal, so Portuguese influence is the most important one.

### **I. Beginning of Brazilian studies on skepticism<sup>4</sup>**

**O. L.:** *Can you tell us something about times before the 1960s in the XX Century?*

**P. J. S.:** I don’t know much about these times. But in São Paulo, more particularly at the University of São Paulo (USP), French philosophy was very important. The French government paid French philosophers to teach at USP for decades. And many Brazilian scholars went to France to do their PhD. This collaboration was fundamental to philosophy in São Paulo. In particular, French structuralism was a huge influence in Brazil. Claude Lévy-Strauss, for example, came to Brazil and did many kinds of research. I remember, when I was young, seeing him walking around at USP, very old, surrounded by anthropologists. In philosophy, Jean Maugué, at first, and then Gilles Gaston-Granger, Martial Guerout, and Victor Goldschmidt were the most important ones. Later, when I was a student, Gérard Lebrun and Francis Wolf taught at USP. Lebrun was an excellent professor with whom I studied Nietzsche, Plotinus, and the Philosophy of Law. But this was already in the 1980s.

**O. L.:** *What was going on in Brazilian philosophy in the 1960s (in particular, the end of the sixties) (in the context of the historical development of your country)?*

**P. J. S.:** Perhaps the most important thing in the 1960s is that French structuralism was implanted and became dominant at USP. The point is that Brazilian philosophy, before that period, was very essayistic in the bad sense of the word: lack of rigor, too many guesses, few analyses, bad arguments, superficial character, etc. Above all, philosophy was a matter of indoctrination. So, French structuralism as a rigorous method for doing the history of philosophy was welcome, for it not only enhanced rigor in the history of philosophy, but also freed us from dogmatic indoctrination; now, one was allowed to study whatever philosophy pleased him or her, since it was no longer a matter of saying the truth, but only of understanding a philosophical system. Any philosophy was a possible object of historical investigation. Before philosophizing, so went the story, one should learn more from the history of philosophy. Oswaldo Porchat played a decisive role here. He was a disciple of Goldschmidt and went to France to work on Aristotle. His PhD thesis became a model of rigorous study in the history of philosophy. He set standards very high for us. Bento Prado Jr. also wrote a very good book on Henri Bergson (which was later translated into French) [Prado Jr. 1989]. He was, at that time, a leftist, but also a phenomenologist (he met Jean-Paul Sartre when Sartre visited Brazil), and he wanted to know better not Sartre or Maurice Merleau-Ponty but their main adversary. He thought that he should study more the philosopher to be criticized

<sup>4</sup> Main source: [Smith, Bueno 2016].

than those with whom he agreed. Later, he was fascinated by Ludwig Wittgenstein and even read Rudolf Carnap and Willard Quine with interest. Bento Prado Jr. had a very open mind.

Concerning the end of the sixties, the political context is decisive to understand what happened. In 1964 there was in Brazil a military coup d'état, later called a civil-military coup, because (as always) civilians also took part in it, and things started to change. In 1967, the situation became much worse, and in 1968 the government imposed a law of terror, that is, the Fifth Institutional Act (AI-5), which gave them the liberty to arrest people without any legal procedure. Many were killed and tortured, people were gone missing. Not only students but also professors. I had one professor, Luis Roberto Salinas Fortes, an excellent scholar on Rousseau, who was tortured. Some, like Bento Prado Jr., had to flee from Brazil. This was a sad period in our history. Perhaps one should talk not about the sixties, but about a period from 1964 to 1985 when we had the first civil president; the first direct election for president was only in 1989, but from 1980 on things were clearly better.

**O. L.:** *What about the development of philosophy in Brazilian universities during this period?*

**P. J. S.:** As I just said, from 1964 to 1985, Brazil was under a civil-military dictatorship, and many professors had to flee. This was a huge problem. Younger students had to finish quickly their PhDs to become professors. But the dictatorship, at least, didn't destroy the institutions that funded research. Moreover, universities were still functioning, for persecution was partial and mostly directed against left-wing professors, while the right-wing professors were spared. So when democracy came back, the terrain was not completely destroyed, as it was in Argentina, for example, and philosophy could flourish again. The comparison with Argentina is interesting because in Argentina the military dictatorship was much harder than in Brazil: though the period of dictatorship was shorter, the military killed much more people, and they destroyed the universities. So, philosophers had to find another job, and they created private philosophical associations to keep philosophy going. The conditions were pretty rough to philosophize in Argentina. Here, it was not that bad. In Brazil, the philosophy departments, though greatly impacted, still survived, and there was a space to do some philosophy inside the universities.

Brazil's political situation began to get better only by 1978–1980. There were many important strikes, and Lula (Luis Inácio Lula da Silva), who later became twice our president (2003–2010) and is now on his third time as president (2023–2026), emerged as an important leader and founded the Workers' Party (in Portuguese: Partido dos Trabalhadores – PT), probably the only ideologically consistent party in Brazil. It is supposed to be a socialist party, but in my view, it is a social-liberal one, a moderate reformist, democratic party. In 1978 (if I am not mistaken), Bento Prado Jr. was offered a job at the Universidade Federal de São Carlos (UFSCar). Though at first reluctant, he soon accepted the job, because he would be the first exiled professor to get a job at a public university after the dictatorship. A more democratic government offered him the job; in the circumstances, he thought he had to accept it. I think he did the right thing: Brazil was heading again to democracy. During this whole period, some universities (the main ones) were left with fewer professors, and it was difficult to teach philosophy.

At that time, the Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP) was a leftist university. Exiled professors were hired by PUC-SP to teach there, like philosophers Bento Prado Jr. (before moving to UFSCar) and José Arthur Giannotti. We have to remember that in those days the Catholic Church had an important leftist movement that really had an interest in the poor people and social justice. So, some important philosophers were teaching there. In those times, the

Philosophy Department of the PUC-SP was an excellent one, and it remained so for decades. In other major Brazilian cities, like Rio de Janeiro and Porto Alegre, Catholic universities were good ones, like PUC-RJ and PUC-RS. So, one can say that, besides the public universities (both Federal and State universities), catholic universities also played an important role.

**O. L.:** *From where did the skepticism in Brazil receive its impulse?*

**P. J. S.:** The main source for skepticism, at least in São Paulo, is French structuralism. First, as I said, because it freed us from doing philosophy as merely stating one's thoughts in an essayistic way. Philosophy was no longer in the business of holding dogmas, but only in understanding philosophical systems. But, above all, because structuralism raised the following problem: how can one choose rationally among conflicting philosophies? If each philosophy has its own internal logic and if the criteria to choose a philosophy are always internal to a particular philosophy, it is impossible to choose rationally. Porchat saw this problem acutely. When he finished his PhD on Aristotle in 1967, he was asking himself this structuralist question, and extracting what he called his "first skepticism". So, for him, structuralism led to skepticism. In 1968, he read Sextus Empiricus and realized that the ancient skeptics (and Protagoras) asked a very similar question and claimed that one cannot choose rationally one particular philosophy. They are all equally powerful and indestructible. To his surprise, Goldschmidt also arrived at a similar conclusion. But Goldschmidt said he became an Academic skeptic, while Porchat was closer to Pyrrhonism. They came to similar, but different conclusions one independently of the other. So, in 1968 Porchat gave the inaugural lecture of the Philosophy Department at USP and then, in 1969, published the first paper where skepticism played an essential role. It was also his first paper as a philosopher, developing his own philosophical thought.

In Rio de Janeiro, interest in skepticism started with Emilio Eigenheer, in the 1980s. Then, Danilo Marcondes de Souza Filho, working on John L. Austin and, later, on Wittgenstein, was also attracted to skepticism. Next, José Raimundo de Maia Neto became a scholar of skepticism, and finally, Renato Lessa, a political scholar, developed a skeptical political philosophy. So, Brazilian skepticism had two different sources. Though at first, the goal was merely to enhance studies on skepticism, with a historical purpose (Maia Neto is a scholar on Early Modern Philosophy), Marcondes and Lessa gave them a twist of a more sympathetic, systematic approach.

But soon the dominant figure of Oswaldo Porchat unified research on skepticism in Brazil. These two groups merged into a single group, and since the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties, one can say that there is a single working group on skepticism in Brazil. Both aspects of skepticism were preserved: most scholars are devoted to studies on the history of skepticism, ancient and modern, but many are also interested in discussing philosophically the viability of the skeptical stance. So, both the historical impulse and the philosophical impulse are still preserved in Brazilian studies of skepticism.

**O. L.:** *It would be important to hear, when the works of Sextus were first translated into Portuguese and whether these works were translated by Brazilian intellectuals.*

**P. J. S.:** This is funny, for there has never been a translation of Sextus in Portuguese, until very recently, and even so just of less important works like *Against the Grammarians*, *Against the Rhetoricians*, and *Against the Astrologers*. There was an indirect translation of PH 1.1-12 by Danilo Marcondes, and one of his Graduate students, whose name I never knew, of the whole book 1 of the *Outlines*, which circulated from hand to hand. For an indirect translation by a non-expert philosopher, this translation was reasonable. But, of course, we needed a reliable translation that would be done directly from ancient Greek. Porchat

should have done it, but he didn't. Or perhaps Roberto Bolzani, his student, who did his master's and his PhD on ancient skepticism, should have done it, but he didn't. Now, Rodrigo Pinto de Brito and Rafael Huguenin are finally translating the *Outlines*, but it will take some years to come to light. What is interesting is that the lack of reliable translations was not an obstacle to the flourishing of scholarship in ancient skepticism.

## II. Oswaldo Porchat and Ezequiel de Olaso

**O. L.:** *It is not hard to find some information about these philosophers, especially about the latter one. We definitely know something about Porchat: he studied in France for a long time, particularly with Victor Goldschmidt in Rennes, and in École normale with Martial Gueroult, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur, and Jean Hypollite. He had a position of invited professor in several leading university centers and even earned the French Ordre des Palmes académiques; this testifies unequivocally to his remarkable position among academics. But in this part of the interview, I would like to ask you to share with us some biographical details about these respected philosophers, their cooperation, careers, relationship, etc.*

*Could you tell us more about the interrelation of historical-philosophical research, on one hand, and the development of Brazilian Pyrrhonism as a vector of contemporary philosophizing, on the other hand?*

**P. J. S.:** Both philosophers were leaders in their own countries. Both got interested in skepticism, for different reasons, in the 1960s. In the case of Olaso, this interest grew out of his work on Leibniz, and in the case of Porchat out of his structuralism. Olaso lived in Brazil for two years, invited by Porchat to help him to create the Center for Logic and Epistemology (CLE). The CLE was very important for the process of integrating Latin-America philosophy, as well as projecting Brazilian philosophy into the world.

In the 1970s, both Olaso and Porchat were critics of skepticism. After that, they became close friends and collaborated for many years until Olaso's death. Olaso was a very clever, erudite person, whose sense of humor was incomparable; he would destroy his adversary with humor and finesse. He remained always a critic of skepticism. In 1991, Porchat became a skeptic, a neo-Pyrrhonist, for he realized that his arguments against skepticism were ineffective. At first, he thought that Pyrrhonism was akin to Cartesian philosophy and that it contained in germ early modern skepticism. Sextus, in his view, would be guilty of a kind of mentalism. At that time, Porchat thought that there was a skeptical-Cartesian model of skepticism, a continuity throughout skepticism. But he came to see that this was wrong and that Pyrrhonism was very different from Cartesian skepticism. His arguments were valid against Cartesian skepticism, but not against Pyrrhonism. So, he became a Pyrrhonian skeptic himself.

**O. L.:** *One can find very little if anything about these two profound thinkers on the Web. Could you recommend any reference literature that can help us know more about them?*

**P. J. S.:** You won't find much on the Web either even if you search in Portuguese or in Spanish. At least in Brazil, Brazilian philosophers are not very fond of discussing each other's ideas on paper. Of course, there are some things on Porchat's philosophy in Portuguese, and I did my best to promote discussions of his neo-Pyrrhonism, organize events, edit books, and even write a book myself on his philosophies (for he had three, in my view). Recently, a younger colleague of mine complained that younger philosophers never met Porchat, and so they have not the slightest idea of the person, though they have heard about the "myth" (his words). Maybe the same can be said of Olaso in Argentina, for he died earlier.



I am currently embarking on a project with Springer to edit three books: one on Latin-American skepticism; another with translations of all of Porchat's philosophical papers; a third with a selection of papers written by Olaso. Each book will have an introduction to clarify matters for an Anglo-American or European philosopher. But we are just beginning these projects, and it will take from two to three years for the books to appear in print.

### III. Contemporary research: main personalities, centers, tendencies

**O. L.:** *More than fifty years have passed from the end of the sixties to nowadays. Can we talk now about the new generation of Brazilian scholars and the research they do?*

**P. J. S.:** Philosophy in Brazil is so widespread that it is difficult to summarize it. I belong to a generation that knew well enough the founding fathers of Brazilian philosophy. I myself worked under the supervision of Porchat, and, after that, continued working with him for over 30 years; I worked with José Arthur Giannotti for 3 years (without learning much) and also with Bento Prado Jr., from whom I learned a lot. The younger generation, however, didn't have much contact with them. That's a pity. We have many good historians of philosophy. Probably, this is the most well-developed area in Brazilian philosophy, especially Early Modern Philosophy. Analytic philosophy is done now on a much higher level than it used to be. But I must confess that I don't know much about younger researchers. My contact with younger philosophers is very limited, especially after the pandemic. Some of them I know are very good, others not so much. We have to wait and see what they will turn out to be. It takes a long while to become a good philosopher. One thing, however, is very important: in the old times, good philosophy was done mostly in big cities, like São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro, but nowadays we find good philosophers all over the country. Moreover, old philosophers didn't publish much, as if to publish a paper or a book was not dignifying, as if a philosopher should not publish: they were "above" writing and publishing. So, some old philosophers were held in high esteem, though they didn't write anything really important. Younger scholars tend to be much more productive, and it is easier to judge who is a good philosopher and who is not. This is a positive development, for we still lack a strong philosophical tradition, at least in what concerns papers and books in Portuguese. There is still a tendency to privilege international interlocutors over Brazilian ones. It is very common to see PhD theses that are concerned only with foreign scholars, neglecting some good Brazilian scholars who deal with the same author or subject. Of course, one should not discuss another Brazilian scholar just because he or she is Brazilian, but because we have by now some good scholars worth being discussed. One should treat a Brazilian scholar as neither below nor above a foreign scholar.

**O. L.:** *Surprisingly, our situation is somewhat similar! We are now only beginning to study more or less systematically our own philosophical history of the 60s and 80s. And it is only now that the works of young specialists in this area start appearing. They describe and discuss the ideas of local philosophers, both of the recent past and our contemporaries. Here we can talk about at least some correlation between the processes in the Brazilian and Ukrainian philosophical communities.*

*By the way, are there any fundamental publications devoted both to the history of Brazilian philosophy and to its leading figures, for example, Porchat? It would be important to offer our colleagues some small selected bibliography.*

**P. J. S.:** As far as I know, there aren't many books on the topic. When I was an undergraduate student, Paulo Eduardo Arantes wrote a book about the history of the Philosophy Department of the University of São Paulo [Arantes 1994]. He had one chapter on each of

the philosophers he considered the most important, like José Arthur Giannotti, Oswaldo Porchat, and Bento Prado Neto. But this is too local to be considered a history of Brazilian philosophy. Besides, even as a local history, it is problematic, for his analyses are too biased and, perhaps, confined to one generation. Arantes seems to limit his view on philosophy at the University of São Paulo by considering the philosophy at USP under the prism of the structural method. His main thesis is that the Philosophy Department at USP was colonized by French structuralism (namely, Gueroult's and Goldschmidt's structuralism), which is true, and that this produced infertility in our philosophy. It remains a fact that French structuralism was adopted as a way to avoid philosophizing: it created a philosophical culture where doing the history of philosophy was the only acceptable alternative. Philosophy Department at USP, probably without knowing or acknowledging it, declared the end of philosophy: all that was left for us to do was to interpret the philosophical systems of the past. That is why, perhaps, Arantes' book is not a philosophical book, but a book that takes philosophy as its object. For him, it seems, philosophy is over. But it is perhaps more accurate to say that he hides his philosophical presuppositions.

Another book consists of a series of interviews with some major Brazilian philosophers [Nobre, Rego 2000]. Since each chapter is an interview, at least we have the perspective of these philosophers on his or her own philosophy, their own philosophical background, how they see the philosophical situation in Brazil, etc. It is a very informative book and we learn a lot about each individual philosopher, but we don't get a general picture. Moreover, since most questions are the same for all philosophers, the interview seems very formal and not very sensitive to each case. Still, it is perhaps the best source we have.

Everything, of course, and unfortunately, is only in Portuguese.

We still need a reliable, serious history of Brazilian philosophy and of philosophy in São Paulo.

**O. L.:** *What are, in your view, the main Brazilian contributions to the studies of skepticism?*

**P. J. S.:** In my view, the most important contribution is, by far, Porchat's invention of Neo-Pyrrhonism, a very elaborate, refined form of skepticism. It is not only an epistemological form of skepticism, but it is a broad philosophical stance. Porchat has promoted a sympathetic attitude towards skepticism. While in most parts of the world, skepticism is seen as a target or, at best, a challenge that stimulates dogmatic theories, in Brazil many philosophers look at skepticism favorably. Many Brazilian philosophers reacted to Porchat's neo-Pyrrhonism. Some criticized it, some tried to develop some aspects of it. For instance, Otávio Bueno worked out a neo-Pyrrhonian stance and Luiz Henrique Dutra proposed a "zetetic skepticism" in the philosophy of science. Renato Lessa did some work towards a skeptical conception of politics.

This sympathetic attitude to skepticism as one main kind of philosophy has far-reaching consequences on the way Brazilian scholars study the history of skepticism: they do this not in order to raise difficulties but to foster a sympathetic interpretation. Here, one can also detect some important contributions. Internationally speaking, the most important one is José Raimundo Maia Neto's contribution that highlights the role of Academic skepticism in Early Modern Philosophy. But there are some other contributions that help to understand the role of skepticism in Early Modern Philosophy, like Luiz Antonio Alves Eva's research on Montaigne's skepticism or Jaimir Conte's on Berkeley. Concerning ancient skepticism, Roberto Bolzani Filho wrote a wonderful book on Academics and Pyrrhonism, while Rodrigo Pinto de Brito translated Sextus. There is also a lot of work on contemporary skepticism. Danilo Marcondes de Souza Filho was perhaps the first to argue for a skeptical interpretation both

of Wittgenstein and Austin. Waldomiro José da Silva Filho works on skepticism and Virtue Epistemology. With Waldomiro, I edited some books on skepticism, and we have been doing a lot of things together.

But there is another major contribution linked to this one. Porchat taught us that skepticism was not merely a destructive enterprise. It has an important constructive side as well. And he was particularly interested in building the constructive part of skepticism. Clearly, he was under the influence of Hume, who he knew very well, but without acknowledging it. Sextus, Porchat used to say, didn't explore the positive side of Pyrrhonism, for he was not a great, subtle philosopher. But he gave many hints of this positive side. So, Porchat followed these hints, trying to work out the positive side of skepticism. This is his main contribution to skepticism.

What I am trying to convey is the following: we have a false image of what skepticism is as if skepticism were a purely negative, destructive philosophy. Porchat proposed a totally different image of skepticism, at the same time more adequate historically and more persuasive philosophically. Descartes, or at least how Descartes was read, is responsible for this false image of skepticism. Hume shares part of this responsibility because he said that Pyrrhonism was an excessive, radical form of skepticism. He even said that there never was such a creature, for it is impossible to live skeptically. Nowadays, a skeptic is just someone who raises doubts, without any care to develop a coherent, articulated position. But this image does not correspond to what real skeptics (Pyrrho, Sextus, Montaigne, Hume himself...) said. Our image of skepticism comes from what dogmatists say about skepticism, not what skeptics themselves said. And when we read skeptics, we read them through the lens of dogmatism.

It took a long while until Porchat himself got freed from this false image. In the 1980s he wrote an important paper [Porchat 1986], identifying what he called the Cartesian-skeptic model of philosophy, in order to criticize it. At that time, he thought that there was a continuity between ancient and modern skepticism. He thought that ancient skepticism had in germ what modern skepticism later developed into a full tree. He realized, not much later, that Pyrrhonism was very different from Cartesian skepticism. Given the criticism of two students (Luiz Antonio Alves Eva and Carlos Alberto Inada), he changed his mind. And so he became himself a neo-Pyrrhonist. He started to show us the positive side of skepticism.

My own initial reaction was to reject this positive side as spurious, and so I wrote a paper to criticize Porchat's neo-Pyrrhonism [Smith 1995b] and to suggest a purer skepticism. When I first told Danilo Marcondes de Souza Filho about my idea for this paper, he immediately endorsed it. He thought that Porchat was going too far in his skepticism by developing a positive part. Why take the risk? Today, I think we were wrong. An Argentinian friend, Eduardo Barrio, reacted in the same way to Porchat's positive proposal of a neo-Pyrrhonian doctrine of truth [Barrio 2000]. He thought that a skeptic could have never had a conception of truth, let alone a correspondentialist one. Later, he also realized that skepticism has this positive side, and he acknowledges that he learned this from Brazilian skepticism. In fact, I don't think that Barrio's position is that far from Porchat's position, for deflationism is not merely negative, nor is correspondentialism necessarily dogmatic [Smith 2012].

So, perhaps, the most important Brazilian contribution to skepticism is Porchat's neo-Pyrrhonism, with its positive, constructive aspects and a new, more favorable image of skepticism.

**O. L.:** *Listen, it's congenial! To turn skepticism into "constructive" teaching! Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to read Porchat's works, but now I will definitely do*

*it. However, would you be able to describe Porchat's vision of the "constructive side of skepticism" in a few essential features? I think it will be extremely interesting to our readers.*

**P. J. S.:** In one of his papers, he says his neo-Pyrrhonism had a negative, critical side, and a positive, constructive one. On the negative side, neo-Pyrrhonism tries to demolish dogmatism, with its traditional weapons, like the conflict of philosophies, the modes of Agrippa, the antinomical method of arguing both pro and con, and also with new weapons, like Porchat's renewed argument from madness [Porchat 2002]. Neo-Pyrrhonism has no theory and, when it investigates something philosophically, it only suspends judgment. But Porchat was interested in its positive, practical side, namely, living everyday life by following what appears. This is well-known even if usually not well understood by scholars of ancient skepticism.

In my interpretation, however, the positive, practical side of neo-Pyrrhonism has two aspects. The first one was just pointed out: to live a happy everyday life without dogmatism. But Porchat went on and proposed that the neo-Pyrrhonist could elaborate his or her own skeptical view of the world. It is possible for the neo-Pyrrhonist, if he or she wishes to, to describe how he or she conceives the world. The neo-Pyrrhonist is an empiricist, and his or her worldview is always changing. Porchat even used Quine's expression "empiricism without dogmas" to characterize the neo-Pyrrhonist stance. Accordingly, the neo-Pyrrhonist will relate his or her own thinking, without asserting it firmly as a truth about an "absolute reality". Porchat came to develop an explanation of how a neo-Pyrrhonist can relate how things appear to him or her, without falling into dogmatism. Not every assertion is dogmatic. As long as sentences are correlated to what appears, they may even be considered true by the skeptic; but if they are considered as positing what is true about an absolute reality (non-evident reality), then the neo-Pyrrhonist suspends his or her judgment. At first, in my view, Porchat had a kind of Kantian notion of what appears (*tò phainómenon*), for he conceived it as linguistically structured: "It appears to me (us) that *p*", where *p* is a sentence about the external world, with its objects and events, like "honey is sweet". Sentences were taken to be the very content of what appears. That is why, in my interpretation, Porchat thought that a sentence *p* could express the phenomenon *p*. The very phenomenon that appears, namely, honey, is at least in part linguistically structured. Our concepts shape not only our experience but the very thing that appears. Later, he claimed that observational sentences are empirically correlated to situations in the world without the further assumption that what appears is constituted linguistically. He dropped this residue of (Kantian) dogmatism in his previous view in favor of a Quinean position. So, neo-Pyrrhonism does not take what appears as something subjective as an appearance in the mind; he does not take it as objective, nor intersubjective, for the neo-Pyrrhonist has no dogmatic theory about what appears.

Now, the neo-Pyrrhonist has a view of the world, and he or she can relate what appears to him or to her, without dogmatically affirming it. So, even on the practical side of neo-Pyrrhonism, there is room for a neo-Pyrrhonist to elaborate on a skeptical view of the world without dogmatizing. Porchat came to develop a conception of philosophical problems: some are only dogmatic, but some can be dealt with empirically; and if they are treated empirically, one may perhaps find an answer to them. Opposing the Wittgensteinian and positivistic conception of philosophical problems as false (pseudo-problems), Porchat thought that they were meaningful and could even be answered if treated as empirical questions [Porchat 1996]. Porchat gave us one example: the neo-Pyrrhonism can hold a neo-Pyrrhonian doctrine of truth, once one divorces the correspondent theory of truth from its dogmatic

(metaphysical) interpretation or its association with a dogmatic (metaphysical) theory of reality [Porchat 1995].

This is, I think, the most important contribution of Porchat's neo-Pyrrhonism to the history of skepticism: the idea of a skeptical view of the world (which can, of course, vary from skeptic to skeptic). It is very Humean. I hope that this very brief abstract is intelligible.

**O. L.:** *Can one say that there is Brazilian skepticism?*

**P. J. S.:** As I just said, one can say that Brazilian skepticism is, first and foremost, Porchat's neo-Pyrrhonism. He wrote many papers, starting with the seminal paper "On what appears" [Porchat 1991], where he laid the basis of his skepticism. This paper sketches the main lines of his neo-Pyrrhonism. One can find in it the germs of many ideas he developed more fully later in unexpected directions, but he also came to change his mind in certain areas. For instance, in this first, inaugural paper [Porchat 1991], Porchat distinguished between scientific realism and metaphysical realism, holding that the skeptic rejects metaphysical realism, but he could be a scientific realist. Later, however, he came to defend the view that the skeptic is a conventionalist in the philosophy of science. But he remained committed to empiricism his whole life, claiming that skepticism is a form of empiricism, but not all forms of empiricism are skeptical. He called his neo-Pyrrhonism empiricism without dogmas, alluding to Quine [Porchat 2005].

**O. L.:** *Brazil has a journal specifically devoted to skepticism: Sképsis. You are the editor-in-chief. Can you tell us more about the goal of this journal and its importance?*

**P. J. S.:** This Brazilian journal on skepticism has two roots. First, there was the journal called *Sképsis* that Emilio Eigenheer founded in the 1980s but was unable to keep. It had only one issue. About a decade later, Porchat wanted to publish four books of Brazilian papers on skepticism. But he never even tried to make his idea real. He also called his planned collection of papers *Sképsis*. Much later, when I was the head of a Graduate Program, I introduced some changes to Porchat's idea. It would be a journal, not a collection of papers. Its goal was to publish not only old, important papers, access to which was difficult, but also translations of important papers, new papers, translations of classic skeptical texts, reviews of new books on skepticism, etc. At first, for many years, this journal was oriented toward our Brazilian students, and all papers had to be in Portuguese. Later, however, as the journal grew in importance, and as Brazilian scholars on skepticism had more contact with the international community, *Sképsis* changed its goals. It still has our Brazilian students in mind, but now seeks to promote international collaboration among scholars on skepticism from all over the world. *Sképsis* targets both Latin-American scholars, helping to create a Latin-American philosophical community, and North-American and European scholars. In the last ten years or so, *Sképsis* published papers in Spanish, French, and English. Despite many problems and difficulties, *Sképsis* has been around for 15 years, with two issues a year, and has fulfilled its purposes.

**O. L.:** *You anticipated the next topic. Let's move now beyond Brazil. First, I would like to ask you about the reception of Brazilian skepticism in wider Latin America. How do you see the relationship between Brazil, on the one hand, and Spanish-American countries, like Argentina and Mexico, on the other, focusing, of course, on skepticism?*

**P. J. S.:** One has to remember that we speak Portuguese in Brazil while most countries in South and Central America (plus Mexico, and some States in the United States) speak Spanish (some places, like Québec in Canada, speak French). So, what we call Latin America is more varied than usually thought. In my view, when we say Latin America, people think mostly of Spanish America. Though the languages are very similar and our histories

have similarities, there are some differences. So, we have to overcome some barriers to build a community. In fact, it is not very difficult, but it has to be done, and much has been done in the last decades. Today, we have an integrated skeptical community, where everybody knows everybody. From 2016 on, we started to build a Latin-American group on skepticism. But the pandemic interrupted our plans. We are now resuming it. Naturally, Brazilians and Argentinians are closer, for we are neighbors. Colombia, Peru, and Mexico, for instance, are not so close, and it takes more time and money to get there. Collaboration happens in all areas and aspects, but especially in the Early Modern Philosophy studies and contemporary analytic epistemology, that focuses on Wittgenstein.

Perhaps the most important Brazilian contribution to skepticism in Spanish America is the sympathetic approach to skepticism. In my view, many philosophers throughout Latin America are skeptics or, at least, are close to skepticism. On the other hand, Brazilian skeptics learned a lot from Argentinians and Mexicans, for they have a better analytic background.

**O. L.:** *And what about North America and Europe?*

**P. J. S.:** We have a lot of contact with them too, but not so systematic. For instance, there has been a lot of interaction with scholars in Canada, mostly in Québec, but also in Toronto. We have been in contact with many important American scholars, like Richard Popkin long ago, but more recently Barry Stroud, Michael Williams, and Richard Bett. Stroud's books are well-known and respected in Brazil, while Bett came to Brazil many times and is a constant interlocutor. There has been a lot of contact with Europe too. Recently, I spent 5 months in Lyon, France, working on Montaigne, in contact with many French scholars, like Thierry Gontier, Sylvia Giocanti, Stéphane Marchand, Emmanuel Naya, Blandine Perona, and Olivier Guerrier. There, I met Joan Luïs Llinàs, perhaps the best Spanish scholar on Montaigne, who spent a couple of months doing research in Lyon. We also have contact with scholars like Vicente Sanfélix Vidarte and Vicente Raga Rosaleny and, in Italy, Gianni Paganini. Also very recently, we published a book on "Hinge Epistemology", with papers by Danièle Moyal-Sharrock, Annalisa Coliva, Duncan Pritchard, Modesto Gómez Alonso and David Chico Pérez, and many Brazilian philosophers [Figueiredo & Smith 2022]. Brazilian skepticism is, in my view, has a lot of international insertion.

There is a curious story. Willard Quine came to Brazil in the 1940s, during the World War II. Nobody knows why or who invited him. He learned some Portuguese and even wrote a book in Portuguese based on conferences he gave in São Paulo (1942): *O sentido da nova lógica* (*The meaning of new logic*). Quine went back to the United States, and the book was forgotten and had almost no influence at all in Brazilian philosophy, till Décio Krause, a very good mathematician interested in the philosophy of mathematics and logic, published a new edition in 1996, with a new Preface by Quine where he tells the story of the book [Quine 1996].

#### **IV. Global state of affairs in skeptic research: schemes of main vectors, key discussions, and the most actual themes**

**O. L.:** *Very few philosophers are skeptics or, at least, call themselves skeptics. Do you think that skepticism is still a viable position in contemporary philosophy?*

**P. J. S.:** Absolutely. That is the main contribution of Brazilian neo-Pyrrhonism to philosophy. Porchat published his seminal paper in 1991 [Porchat 1991], while Robert J. Fogelin published his book in 1994 [Fogelin 1994]. Both held not only a similar form of skepticism (as Bruno Pettersen showed in his PhD thesis [Pettersen 2012]) but also the same idea that most contemporary philosophy is, properly speaking, skeptical, without knowing it. Think of the decades-long period of analytic philosophy from the 1930s till the 1980s: it is

a very modest form of philosophy, compatible with skepticism. It is as if contemporary philosophy unconsciously absorbed the skeptical message; this modest, anti-metaphysical message is so widespread that philosophers forgot its skeptical origin. Since philosophers think that skepticism is basically Cartesian skepticism, they think they are not skeptics at all, that they are anti-skeptics. Fortunately, this perception is starting to get better, but a false image of skepticism (invented by dogmatists, especially Descartes) is still pervasive. So, while many philosophers reject what they take as skepticism (namely, Cartesian doubt), they unconsciously adopt a sort of Pyrrhonism. In the Epistemology of Disagreement, many, like Hilary Kornblith [2010, 2013], think that disagreement, not Cartesian doubt, is the route towards suspension of judgment in philosophy. This is very Pyrrhonian.

**O. L.:** *I understand that my question may sound too general, but I think it makes sense. Name, in your opinion, the most important world centers for the study of skepticism as of today. And, also, name those researchers who can now be considered the most influential. It would also be good to get your version of the problems that are currently the most debated in contemporary historical-philosophical studies of skepticism.*

**P. J. S.:** Probably, the best place, today, is the University of California, Irvine, where many scholars of ancient, modern, and contemporary skepticism serve as professors, like Casey Perin, Annalisa Coliva, Duncan Pritchard; unfortunately, Karl Schafer is no longer there, and though not a scholar on skepticism Sven Bernecker is a very good epistemologist; nearby, John-Christian Laursen teaches at University of California, Riverside. One must also mention Johns Hopkins University, for Richard Bett and Michael Williams are professors of this prestigious university. Usually, however, we do not find “centers” for the study of skepticism, since scholars are scattered all over the world. For example, here in São Paulo, besides me, there is Roberto Bolzani Filho and Luiz Antonio Alves Eva, but there is no center, properly speaking, for each one of us teaches at a different university.

**O. L.:** *Skepticism is usually considered a position within epistemology. Do you agree with this view? Isn't skepticism a philosophical doctrine interested in all main areas of philosophy?*

**P. J. S.:** Of course, skepticism is much broader than a position within epistemology, even if this is widely held. In fact, most philosophers get interested in skepticism for epistemological reasons, since skepticism offers the most powerful challenges to a constructive philosophy, and its job is to question everyday beliefs leading one to philosophize. But there are other forms of skepticism: moral skepticism, religious skepticism, and so on. Even within epistemology, skepticism is piecemeal: skepticism about the external world, skepticism about other minds, about induction, about the past, etc. This conception that one can be a skeptic in one area, but not in others is typically modern. In ancient skepticism things were different. Sextus went as far as to say that one single dogma is sufficient to turn a philosopher into a dogmatist. If one were to be a skeptic, he would have to suspend judgment on all things. Pyrrhonism was characterized by the suspension of judgment about everything investigated by philosophy. At that time, this meant suspending judgment about all issues in logic, physics, and ethics. Now, what we call epistemology is an important part of what they called logic; what we call metaphysics was, in part at least, what they called physics; ethics and politics were part of ethics. So, a philosopher was a Pyrrhonist only if his suspension of judgment reached beyond epistemological questions. Pyrrhonism was a broad, articulated position.

**O. L.:** *What's your opinion about the many attempts to refute skepticism?*

**P. J. S.:** There is something remarkable about all attempts to refute skepticism: the very dogmatists that attempt it are not convinced by their own arguments. Whenever one dogmatist brings about a new argument against skepticism, other dogmatists immediately examine this

argument and decide against it. Then, they go on to propose their own argument, which in turn is examined and rejected by other dogmatists. But the situation is even worse, for it is very common to see one philosopher saying that someone else's theory, despite its intention to the contrary, leads to skepticism. This is a very common charge among dogmatists. So, the more we see new attempts to refute skepticism, replacing old attempts to refute it, the more we see skeptical philosophy being established by this debate among dogmatists. The skeptic, himself, needs not to invent any argument to refute dogmatism or to establish the skeptical philosophy, for the very disagreement between dogmatic philosophers does both things at the same time. These attempts are doomed to fail, because dogmatists always find counter-arguments against them, even if the purpose is to find a better argument to refute skepticism.

**O. L.:** *There seems to be a kind of predominance of externalist, naturalist, and contextualist philosophers. They all seem to agree about the basic elements for a refutation of skepticism. Skepticism presupposes internalism, a sort of detached and non-empirical stance. What do you think about this diagnosis of skepticism? And what do you think about a possible solution to this issue?*

**P. J. S.:** This is a huge, but extremely interesting and important question. I cannot but be very brief. First, I am not sure that externalists are more numerous than internalists. Hilary Kornblith [2010; 2013] says that the philosophical community is roughly divided. But even if they were the majority, this does not settle the question, for philosophical questions are not to be settled by the number of adherents. Fashions come and go, and philosophers are not fashion-proof, so to speak. Second, I am not sure that the source of skepticism is internalism. It is indeed true (or, at least, it is agreed on all hands) that internalism leads to skepticism. If internalism were the true source of skepticism, one could avoid skepticism by being an externalist. But is it true that externalism avoids skepticism? Maybe the situation is so bad (from their point of view) that both internalism and externalism lead to skepticism. Ancient skepticism, especially Pyrrhonian skepticism, is not internalist at all; its arguments do not depend on any kind of internalism. As I just said, philosophers point out that externalist philosophies lead to skepticism, and that only their own don't. Finally, one may see these new epistemologies trying to answer a different problem than the traditional epistemological problem, as Porchat [2001] and Fogelin [2004] have argued, and as I did following them [Smith 2022a]. For, so it seems to me, all these new epistemologies raise a different question, for they all seem to agree that, given traditional epistemology, skepticism is the only, or the right, answer. That is why they propose, not so much to refute skepticism, but to avoid it. If that is so, these new epistemologies are not only compatible with skepticism but they are even committed to skepticism. If their solution is meant to refute skepticism as if they were trying to answer the very same problem, I think they are a failure; this is what they themselves point out to each other. If their solutions are perceived as answering a different problem, then, in my view, despite the fact that they do not answer the skeptical challenge, they may illuminate our knowledge in different ways.

#### **V. Plinio Smith's route toward philosophy and to skepticism in particular (biographical data, the evolution of ideas, the colleagues whose impact was the most significant, his main ideas, and other "creative mainstreams")**

**O. L.:** *The Sententiae now wants to know more about you. How did you get interested in philosophy, in the first place?*

**P. J. S.:** When I was young, I wanted to be a physicist. So, I started to study physics at the university. But I didn't want to have only a natural, hard science as my background. At



the same time, I wanted to be a novel writer. So, my second course should be Portuguese and literature, for literature has always been my passion. An older friend of mine, who became a writer, was doing Portuguese and literature, and he advised me to study philosophy instead. He argued that Portuguese had many boring courses and, given the kind of literature I liked, philosophy would be more useful, and also more interesting even when not useful. I accepted his suggestion. My second course at the university was philosophy. After one year of studying both, I came to realize that philosophy was attracting me much more than physics. I soon gave up physics to devote myself entirely to philosophy. Even though I never stopped reading literature, the fact is that, as a writer, I was writing only philosophical texts. What is worse, my texts were not literary at all: I had to follow a boring, repetitive, academic pattern. Great philosophers of the past were also great writers: Plato, Montaigne, Hume... Only much later I went back to writing literature.

But if I arrived at philosophy somewhat by chance, I didn't decide to pursue a philosophical career by chance. My friend was right. I had a real interest in philosophical ideas. When I read Berkeley's and Hume's criticism of the infinite divisibility of ideas, I immediately identified thoughts I had since I was 15 years old. I also held that our idea of time was not infinitely divisible. Solipsism also attracted my attention for similar reasons. I had similar thoughts about Hume's idea that our worldview was a product of our imagination. Maybe the external world was merely our own imagination. What about me? Was I something real? To avoid solipsism, I thought that perhaps – but only perhaps – I could be myself an imagination of a god. So, it was impossible for me to decide based on arguments between two doctrines: solipsism and a kind of theism. Both were equally plausible. Without knowing it, I was already heading towards skepticism and suspension of judgment. Of course, my own thinking was very basic, not sophisticated at all, but the worries were already in my mind since a teenager. This friend of mine realized that if one wanted to work out these ideas, it was better for him to philosophize than to study morphosyntax.

**O. L.:** *Why did you get interested in skepticism in particular?*

**P. J. S.:** Also by chance. I knew Porchat because his daughter was a friend of mine, but at that time I didn't know he was a great philosopher. He was just the dad of a good friend of mine. In fact, she had been my girlfriend for about a year. As an undergraduate student, I started to work under his supervision. He asked me to think about three philosophers I would like to study. I said: in ancient philosophy, Plato; in Early Modern Philosophy, Leibniz; in contemporary philosophy Husserl. I have no idea why I suggested these philosophers. Probably, for circumstantial reasons, I don't recall. He answered: in ancient philosophy, Sextus Empiricus; in Early Modern Philosophy, Hume; in contemporary philosophy, logical positivism. Since there was widespread prejudice against positivism (though I had already read Carnap, and Schlick and liked it) and I had never heard Sextus' name, I decided to study Hume. As soon as I started reading the first *Enquiry*, I accepted his suggestion. The topic of my research was Hume's skepticism [Smith 1995a]. Since then, skepticism became my major topic.

**O. L.:** *It is a traditional question that representatives of our Student Society for Oral History of Philosophy ask all their interviewees. Where did you get your secondary education, and what subjects were you most interested in during your school years? How do you rate the level of your school education? When you entered university, how many foreign languages did you know? And when did you learn ancient Greek?*

**P. J. S.:** I studied in two different high schools, and neither of them was very good. My older brother had studied at Colégio Equipe, and I knew it was easy. At that time, I wanted to be a tennis player, and so a weak school would allow me the time I needed to practice

tennis at a competitive level. Later, I gave up playing tennis seriously, and I changed schools, but the new one was not better. I didn't have to study much to do well enough. But they were not bad either. In fact, the first one was a very important school during the dictatorship, where children of artists and leftist politicians were able to study in a school with more freedom, so it had its history and importance. Tennis, however, gave me the training to focus on what I had to and the capacity to practice very hard.

I loved mathematics and biology: the science of numbers, and the science of life. I thought of doing biology, for I had an excellent professor of biology in the first high school, but then, in the second one, the professor was very boring. I was good at mathematics and I wanted also to be a novelist writer. I liked science fiction, so I thought physics would be the ideal career for me. In the first year, I was studying both physics (mornings and afternoons) and philosophy (at night). It was very tiring, and I soon realized that it was impossible to go on like this and that I had to make up my mind. My philosophy professors, Celso Favaretto and Oswaldo Giacoia Jr., were very good ones. So, I gave up physics, devoting my entire time to philosophy. I do not regret it, but I wish I had learned more about physics.

I always loved to travel and learn languages. So, when I entered university I could speak English reasonably well. I had studied French and German for two years, as well. As an undergraduate, I improved my French and my German, I learned Spanish (it is easy for us because it is very similar to Portuguese), and I also had three years of ancient Greek, starting in the third year, but I must confess that, except in the first year, I was not a good student, so I didn't learn much and, later, I forgot almost everything (as one can tell from my book). I thought I would specialize in Greek philosophy, but it turned out that I specialized in Early Modern Philosophy, because I started to do research on Hume's philosophy under the supervision of Porchat.

**O. L.:** *If you arrived at skepticism by chance, the question now is this: why did you spend almost your whole philosophical life thinking about skepticism and reading skeptical philosophers?*

**P. J. S.:** Again, if I arrived at skepticism by chance, it was not by chance that I devoted my life to it. It is not that I eventually became a skeptic. I think I have always been a skeptic. At first, my aim in studying philosophy was not to discover a deeper truth about the world. For me, truth was to be discovered by doing physics. I have always been an empiricist, and mere arguments were impossible to decide between different schemes of thought. Philosophy was a tool to become a better writer. My purpose was only to know better the history of ideas and to know the main philosophical doctrines. So, I was interested more in the history of philosophy than in philosophizing. This is, in a sense, a skeptical approach to philosophy, for philosophical doctrines are not perceived as truths, one cannot decide which among philosophical doctrines is the true one, but still one goes on studying them. By definition, a skeptic is a person who investigates truth by reading what (dogmatic) philosophers wrote. That was what I was doing. So, skepticism was the kind of philosophy that was in accord with my own ideas, suited my literary goals, and explained the philosophical experience I was having.

Moreover, many colleagues had philosophical experience that was very different from mine. Many became Marxists, Kantians, Hegelians, Heideggerians, or phenomenologists very soon. They did not even graduate, and they thought they knew the best philosophical doctrine. In my case, my first philosophical passion was the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico. But who is a "Vichian"? I used to say to them that, while they were supporters of Kant, Hegel, or Heidegger, I was supporting São Paulo Football Club, for I loved football. I always

did a lot of sports. As a teenager, I wanted to be a tennis player, but it soon became clear to me that that was beyond my capacities. Sextus criticizes dogmatists for being rash and partial. I didn't know that at that time, but I was thinking along the same lines. So, I take it, skepticism has always been running in my veins.

**O. L.:** *But isn't skepticism unsatisfactory? One usually expects more from philosophy than merely destroying castles in the air. Why not move to something more positive and constructive?*

**P. J. S.:** I don't think that skepticism is unsatisfactory at all. It was my own experience, and it was fine. Moreover, as Wittgenstein pointed out, destroying castles in the air is very important. It is important not to live under illusions. Hope is one of the evils in Pandora's box; for Christians, hope is important, but in my view, it fosters a passive attitude. One has to know what he can do and achieve, and what he can't do or achieve. Perhaps, the kind of knowledge that philosophers are seeking is too much to hope for. I thought that it was a satisfactory position to suspend judgment in philosophy and to live happily in everyday life. There was no need to have something more positive in philosophy. So, my first reaction to Porchat's neo-Pyrrhonism [Smith 1995] was precisely the opposite: why move to something more positive? Isn't it enough to denounce dogmatism? Why risk saying something dogmatic? Some other scholars, like Danilo Marcondes de Souza Filho and Eduardo Barrio, had the same reaction.

Later, I changed my mind [Smith 2017]. I came to realize that skepticism has a positive side, not only that one can live happily without dogmas, but also that the skeptic can treat philosophical questions empirically and propose answers without becoming a dogmatist. If only one had a more modest conception of philosophy, perhaps as an empirical enterprise or, at least, as a general elaboration of a worldview that results from an empirical investigation of the world as it appears to us in experience, one could answer these questions and, perhaps, even come to an agreement with his fellow skeptics. As I tried to highlight earlier, this is precisely Porchat's main contribution to skepticism. It is crucial, however, that one understands that he or she is not trying to answer philosophical questions as dogmatists try to answer them. That is the mistake of some new epistemologists. For example, some of them think they are answering to the skeptical challenge of the external world, but, if taken that way, their epistemologies are not satisfactory at all, for the Cartesian skeptic can retort to their arguments. But if taken empirically or in a more modest way, what they say is perfectly acceptable and can be even endorsed by the neo-Pyrrhonist. It took me a while to understand that the positive, constructive side of neo-Pyrrhonism does not lead to dogmatism at all.

In sum, I think now that a neo-Pyrrhonist can move to something more positive and constructive, provided we realize that this positive and constructive aspect of neo-Pyrrhonism is not a philosophical theory in the same sense as dogmatism. As long as it is only an empirical hypothesis subjected to empirical control, as long as the neo-Pyrrhonist merely relates what appears to him according to experience, there is no danger of being a piece of dogmatism. This constructive side of neo-Pyrrhonism is not a theory but is still practical. I came to the conclusion that skepticism is, above all, an intellectual experience, and even in its "theoretical" aspect, i.e., the pursuit of philosophical truth, it is still "practical", namely, it is the activity to investigate, and this investigative activity has an impact on the philosopher [Smith 2020].

**O. L.:** *Are you a scholar on the history of philosophy or do you consider yourself a skeptic? If so, can you tell us what the main lines of your skepticism are?*

**P. J. S.:** For a long time, I was just studying Hume's skepticism, doing history of philosophy. After my PhD on Hume [Smith 1995], I devoted myself to Early Modern Philosophy,

focusing not only on skeptics, like Montaigne and Bayle but also on dogmatists like Descartes and Kant. I published many papers [Smith 2008; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2013a; 2013b; 2017; 2021] and books [Smith 2000; 2015] on this topic. But I didn't want to be only a scholar on the history of philosophy, and I decided to study contemporary philosophy, especially Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*, analytic epistemology (Moore, Austin, Quine, Davidson, McDowell, etc.), and recent works on skepticism (Stroud, Fogelin, M. Williams) [Smith 2016]. My background was that of a historian of philosophy, and I had to improve my skills and my knowledge to become a philosopher.

As I said, many of the things Hume said seemed correct to me. I was in favor of the spirit of his philosophy, so to speak. With time, I came to consider myself a skeptic. Not, at first, a neo-Pyrrhonist, for I considered that some aspects of Porchat's neo-Pyrrhonism were dogmatic. I tried, in Bolzani's words, to purify his skepticism from extraneous elements that he borrowed from his previous dogmatism [Smith 1995]. Porchat was for a long time a realist, common-sense philosopher, along Moorean and Strawsonian lines [Porchat 1975, 1979]. Later, however, I wrote a book on Porchat's thought [Smith 2017], and I think I came to understand his neo-Pyrrhonism much better. My objections fell to the ground, and I began to consider myself a neo-Pyrrhonist. Still, perhaps not quite the Porchatian form of neo-Pyrrhonism, for my own neo-Pyrrhonism depends on my own interpretation and development of his neo-Pyrrhonism [Smith 2020].

Let me point out one or two important differences. Porchat thought that the argument from disagreement was the most important one that was able to bring about the suspension of judgment about all apophantic discourse. One should withhold the mind not to give assent to any assertion whatsoever. I don't think that this argument is so powerful, even if it is a very important argument and perhaps the first one to make one cautious and not rash in philosophy. In my view, it may bring about the suspension of judgment regarding philosophical theses, but in everyday life and even in the empirical sciences it has limited power. Skeptics need more arguments if they want to suspend judgment about everything beyond philosophy, and, of course, Porchat had these other arguments.

This brings me to a second important difference. Porchat always hesitated between a rustic and an urbane interpretation of Pyrrhonism. At first, his interpretation was closer to the rustic one; eventually, he came much closer to the urbane interpretation. In my view, he never came to find an explicit solution to this issue. When he died, he was writing a paper on this topic, where he said he has always been rustic. However, everybody thought he was an urbane interpreter and philosopher. I think that, in my interpretation, I showed that he moved beyond this dispute: he was neither a rustic, nor an urbane neo-Pyrrhonist, but he was able to propose a new interpretation; if one wishes to say, a synthesis that superseded the old debate. But Porchat himself thought he was still moving inside this debate. I tried to develop such a reading of Sextus in my recent book on Sextus' neo-Pyrrhonism.

So, in one sense I am closer to the urbane interpretation than Porchat. But, as I said, I think this debate is misguided. For Myles Burnyeat [1998] and Michael Frede [1998] made a confusion regarding the notions of belief, opinion, and dogma, and the whole debate depends on this confusion. As Jonathan Barnes [1998] showed, *dóγμα* means "philosophical doctrine", not "belief". Pyrrhonists criticized dogmatism (their targets were theoretical *dogmata*) and proposed a life without opinions (*adoxastos*), but they never said that they would eradicate all beliefs (*pistis*). Porchat never said anything similar to this. That is why, I think, he was never able to work out properly his own neo-Pyrrhonism and hesitated between the rustic and the urbane interpretation.

In my view, the main contribution of Porchat's neo-Pyrrhonism is a new, more favorable image of skepticism, that emphasizes the constructive side. For him, the constructive side was practical, not theoretical. But one can divide the practical side into two parts: living a skeptical life according to what appears and relating in language what appears. More peculiarly, a skeptic could articulate how he sees the world without being dogmatic. Skepticism was not only a matter of living skeptically in the world, but it was also possible for the skeptic to say things about philosophical issues, provided we don't treat them dogmatically. He wrote a somewhat neglected, but very important paper on the idea of a philosophical problem. But my point is: Porchat thought that, inside this practical side of skepticism, there is room to develop some philosophical thinking. For instance, he wrote a paper in which he developed a "skeptical doctrine of truth" [Porchat 1995]. This is, in my view, his best paper.

Now, he used an important expression, scattered in many papers: "a skeptical view of the world", and many similar ones. But he never came to articulate this notion into a single coherent one. I tried to do it in my book on him. In my view, the skeptical view of the world has two aspects and three levels. It has a personal aspect and a common one. Each skeptic has his or her own beliefs, depending on his or her own historical and psychological circumstances. At the same time, we share a lot of beliefs with our fellows, and so most of our beliefs are common with other humans; they may be more common or less common. The three levels, or dimensions, are an everyday level, a scientific level, and a philosophical level. A skeptical view of the world has, at its core, the everyday level, in which we have many beliefs. But these beliefs are revisable, in the light of further experience, not only everyday observations but especially scientific observations. So, a skeptical view of the world will incorporate scientific results. But a skeptic is a philosopher, and so philosophical arguments may help him to shape his worldview. There are no clear borders between these levels. But, however totally based on what Porchat wrote, this description, or perhaps appropriation, of the "skeptical view of the world" is mine.

Perhaps all these differences boil down to differences in emphasis and different ways of putting the same idea on paper. That's how I see things. But my students, for instance, say that my version of neo-Pyrrhonism is very different from Porchat's. Roberto Bolzani Filho, who also worked under the supervision of Porchat and has been discussing philosophy with me for almost 40 years, also thinks that, despite being Porchat's disciple, I have always kept some critical distance from his thoughts. So, maybe there are important differences after all. It's hard for me to tell, and it is not very important after all. What is important is not to say something different or original, but to say what is (or appears) right or correct.

I sincerely hope that all this debate makes sense to Ukrainian philosophers.

**O. L.:** *You have outlined a very interesting problem area. I can assure you that we will make efforts to organize a relevant discussion in our country. We just need to bring in some of the texts you mentioned to get this discussion off to a good start.*

*Once again, thank you very much for the interview! In my opinion, it turned out to be extremely informative and heuristic.*

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### *Plínio Junqueira Smith, Olexandr Lukovyna*

#### **Research on Scepticism in Brazilian Philosophy**

Olexandr Lukovyna's interview with Professor Plínio Junqueira Smith is devoted to skeptic research in Brazilian philosophy, the beginning of skeptic studies in Brazil, Oswaldo Porchat's and Ezequiel de Olaso's roles in establishing the tradition of skeptic studies, contemporary studies in skepticism, and the global state of affairs in skeptic research.

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### *Плініо Жункейра Сміт, Олександр Луковина*

#### **Дослідження скептицизму в бразильській філософії**

Інтерв'ю Олександра Луковини з професором Плініо Жункейрою Смітом, присвячене дослідженню скептицизму у бразильській філософії, зокрема початковому етапові цього вивчення, внескам Освальдо Порчата та Єзекіля де Оласо, сучасному бразильському неопірронізму та глобальному дослідницькому контекстові.

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*Plínio Junqueira Smith, PhD, associate professor at the Federal University of São Paulo.*

*Плініо Жункейра Сміт, доктор філософії, ад'юнкт-професор Федерального університету Сан-Паулу.*

*e-mail: [plinio.smith@unifesp.br](mailto:plinio.smith@unifesp.br)*

*Olexandr Lukovyna, undergraduate student, Faculty of Philosophy, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (Ukraine).*

*Олександр Луковина, студент філософського факультету Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка.*

*e-mail: [oleksandrlukovyna@gmail.com](mailto:oleksandrlukovyna@gmail.com)*

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