



Research Paper

The Skepticism and the Dialectic as Instruments of Apprehension of Knowledge: Some Approaches between Descartes and Plato

Pablo Silva Machado Bispo dos Santos

Received 17 Jan, 2017; Accepted 27 Jan, 2017 © The author(s) 2017. Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

ABSTRACT: *The rationalist aspect of philosophy has in Plato and Descartes two of its main exponents. These are two distant thinkers about twenty centuries in time, but they have several possibilities of theoretical approaches, especially when used as guiding the study of his works the epistemological issues related to the dialectic (platonian) and the logical skepticism (Cartesian). Among these multiple possibilities of understanding of philosophy (and, more precisely, the epistemological perspective) of these philosophers, i will look for in the lines below to develop a brief essay regarding the role of dialog and doubt methodical as possibilities of research in epistemological work of these authors that became classics of human knowledge.*

Keywords: *Skepticism and Rationalism, Philosophy of knowledge, Epistemology*

I. INTRODUCTION

Rationalism is a philosophy that never begins, because in reality it always resumes from the obscure or unfinished points of previous reasoning (Bachelard, 2000). In this sense, it is possible to trace a genealogy of rationalism, which goes back to ancient Greece with philosophers before Socrates. There is, however, to consider the fact that even though human reason is the guiding axis of philosophical reflection, some authors will have greater affinity than others from the epistemological point of view. Among these authors, we have in Plato and Descartes two examples of thinkers whose ideas have more similarities than differences in their view of the apprehension of knowledge. The following will present similarities, differences and contributions of such authors to Epistemology and to the Philosophy of Education.

II. THE DIALECTICS AS THE FOUNDATION OF THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE PLATONIC

The Platonic philosophy, as it's known is built upon the employment of constant allusions to a dimension that would be beyond the concreteness of the material world, and that is called by Plato "world of ideas". This world of ideas would be the purest expression and just the knowledge of any element of reality, and from it, everything that exists and is perceived by the senses is copied and brought to the world in which we move and have our being. In the world of ideas are the "perfect shape", which would give rise to ideas such as: the good, truth and wisdom. Such ideas do not come about in the tangible world but would be observable by reason, property of the individual soul, seen by his time as a daemon (genius). The reason would be property that would allow the genie inside remember the knowledge of the truth about the loved intelligible (components of the world of ideas). Plato uses the idea of remembrance when it refers to the process of learning the inner genius because it understand that this comes from the world of ideas and, at a given moment, comes to join a material body so as to constitute a complete individual. As a way of getting closer to the knowledge of the truth, Plato (and, perhaps, Socrates, if we consider the possibility of historical existence of this character) uses of dialectic, especially as a way to define the starting point of all research on the face of the dialogic arguments. Let us see how the concept of dialectic in Plato is expressed in the words of the philosopher in the dialog Phaedrus: Cover in a single blow of view all ideas sketchy for one side or the other and merge them into a single idea generally in order to be able to understand, thanks to an exact definition, the subject of which you want to treat (Plato, 2000, p. 106).

From the analysis of the platonic prescription, can be led to believe that Plato associates directly rules of logic the imperatives of homogenization and discursive organization as a way to employ the dialectic as an instrument for understanding the world. In this regard, it is interesting to note that, in the respect of dialog Cratylus of Plato, Maria Aparecida Montenegro (2001) affirms that:

As indicate several of his dialogs, the work of the teacher/philosopher is to persuade the soul of the apprentice/disciple in direction of knowledge through fine speeches and dialogic exercises questions and answers [...]. Given that this work of psychology [...], which coincides common to real therapy by word [...], should take into account the specificity of each soul to be persuaded (or purified), such that for each soul must be a speech that best suits you, there can be no knowledge without the intervention of language (MONTENEGRO, 2001, p. 376).

In this way, taking as a basis the reflection developed by the author, it can be said that to associate the method of dialectical reasoning set out in Phaedrus with the mediation of the discourse dialogic, as seen in all the dialogs of platonian, it is possible to say that the epistemology in this perspective is oriented so as to develop the philosophical speculation in a dialectical approach through language, using dialog as a fundamental tool for such an undertaking.

III. THE SKEPTICISM AND METHODIC DOUBT AS BASES OF THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF RENE DESCARTES

The epistemological perspective developed by René Descartes is based on a guideline deeply connected to skepticism. Such skepticism, as we can see, is taken to extreme levels when the author after having rejected any perception perceived sensuously, ends up taking as fact substantive and decisive own state of doubt subjective. This would be an influence attributed to pyrrhonian philosophers, which constituted one of the strands are more radical of skeptics (MAIA NETO, 2006).

On this issue it is correct to say that the metaphysical Meditations (2001), Descartes goes a long way from where begins to wonder about the reality of the material world. At the end of this process, the question arises as internal reality, and as proof of the existence of a passage, a fundamental element of the subject and at the same time, ensuring the possibility of human knowledge. Such a possibility would develop to the extent that the doubt was applied to each and every loved the reality outside the subject (already duly attested by him in the meditations), in order to make the knowledge about such loved evident. What we put then in the epistemological perspective Descartes is a radical separation between subject and object, this separation that comes to be the basis of all and any possibility of perception and understanding of the objective world.

In this sense, it should be said that to be successful the dichotomy between subject-object opens by Descartes, this should then be structured from some elements of rationalization, that the philosopher will denominate precepts. To establish such ordinances, which would be enough for all and any investigation based on subjective questions and find the desired knowledge about the object of his doubt, Descartes part for a very particular analysis of the laws of logic and geometry, coming to formulate four precepts "unchanged". This is evidenced in the following extract, taken from the Discourse on the Method:

[...] In place of this large number of precepts that comprise the logic, I thought that I would be enough the four following, since that would make the firm and steadfast resolution not to let one time to observe them. The first was to never accept something as true that I did not know clearly how such; i.e., carefully avoid the hurry and the prevention, and nothing to do appear on my judgments that are not present so clearly and distinctly in my spirit that I didn't have any reason to doubt him. The second, the splitting each of the difficulties which I consider to so many plots how many were possible and necessary in order to better solve them. The third, the lead by order my thoughts, starting by the objects more simple and easier to understand, to raise me, little by little, like climbing stairs, until the knowledge of more volatile, and assuming even a order among those who are not naturally precede each other. And the last, the logging in every part relations methodical as complete and reviews so general in which I had to make sure nothing omit (Descartes, 2003, p. 10-11).

In this way, it is possible to realize that in an epistemological perspective the Cartesian "awareness" and the seizure of knowledge if they give from two movements of "epistemological vector": a) when moving from subjective sphere in relation to the objective world through the exercise of doubt methodical comprised in the scope of the obedience to the first three precepts mentioned above; b) In the restructuring of knowledge operated through the observation of the fourth and final precept, to which corresponds the actions to make foreign methodical and general reviews about the first three commandments epistemological.

As seen, there is in doubt methodical some foundations that in addition to the epistemology bring issues that are affecting teaching and learning, which means that they are located within the scope of the Philosophy of Education. In the section that follows will be addressed precisely the unfolding for this field of the epistemological of two philosophers who are the object of this work.

IV. PLATONIC DIALECTIC AND CARTESIAN SKEPTICISM APPLIED: CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF KNOWLEDGE

The Philosophy of Education as a field of knowledge is both a perspective on the ontogenetic phylogenetics with respect to Education. Thus, both the responsibility to study (and think about) the different ideas and educational proposals over time, which originated in the Philosophy and were applied to Education, as, with equal interest, focuses on the reflection on the major problems related to education as, for example: how does the learning?

From that outside exposed to the two authors treated in this article, and to follow the precept Socratic inquiry (and, to a certain extent, platonic) to put the settings (especially the misleading) clarified more unambiguous as possible,

so we will take the following definition of education:

Regarding the concept of education, we believe that the meaning of this term corresponds to the whole intentional process of formation of individuals (or groups thereof) which is carried out with the aim of conserving, change or break with the social standards exist, what is given through the transmission of knowledge deemed desirable for certain group or society (Santos, 2015, p. 2-3).

From this definition, and taking into consideration what has already been said about the philosophy of education, it indicates that the authors bring (among others) some contributions to this field of knowledge. Such contributions are presented below. The dialectic head, as presented in the Phaedrus brings as a consequence for education the need to never discuss any issue (to be connected to the physical world or man) from a single angle, but rather, seek (within the framework of methods and techniques of teaching especially) to develop a broad understanding about the first notions that come to knowledge, understanding this that means thinking including the elements mixed and contradictory for a given object of knowledge, seeking to integrate them into a logical synthesis. The practice of debates and seminars on controversial topics can lead to stimulate precisely this aspect of the vision of dialog and dialectic of knowledge from the platonic perspective.

In terms of the logical skepticism Cartesian, the practice of exercising doubts methodical lends itself to expand the power of criticism and deepening with respect to philosophical problems. In this sense, it should be noted that the overshoot of the thought of dogma in the field of education (and, especially, in the field of philosophy of education), whether paid to service and maintain the spirit investigative, which, together with the rationale developed by the application of the dialectic platonic allow overcoming the reasoning flawed of the illusions of appearance first, which comes to be real obstacle epistemological to be won by students in various educational levels.

Given the above, it becomes clear that many other contributions to the philosophy of education could be brought by these two aspects of the work of Descartes and Plato outlined in this article, but those that have been observed already are in strong support for the preparation of programs research (and education) within the field of knowledge mentioned.

V. CONCLUSION

As seen in this work, Plato and Descartes start from the assumption that the reason is the fundamental element when it comes to philosophical research and epistemological guideline of these thinkers. The study of different forms from which these thinkers reach the application of rationality to the philosophical speculation is important background for understanding some of the conceptual bases that influenced all modern philosophy, which comes to suffer questionings stronger only from the 20th century with studies and work related to the advent of postmodernity.

The platonic *modus operandi* whit regard to epistemology is nowadays (among other things) as one of the main ways of understanding the basics of dialectics, the necessary basis for that to be possible (for example) a solid understanding of the way from which authors such as Aristotle, Hegel and Marx if they use this way of thinking as epistemological perspective.

In turn, the Cartesian rationalism, especially as regards the doubt methodical comes to constitute an indispensable type of reflection for you to understand some of the most discussed epistemological assumptions today as, for example: the relationship between subject and object and the notion of objectivity in science.

So, finally, it is correct to say that revisiting authors of this size, with the critical eye we have today, does not cease to be an indispensable instrument of research epistemological, very useful to everyone who proposes to study the fields of Epistemology and the Philosophy of Education and also to all those who intend to seek new forms of research and reflection in these fields of knowledge.

REFERENCES

Journal Papers:

- [1]. M.A. Montenegro, Linguagem E Conhecimento No Crátilo De Platão. *Kriterion*, Belo Horizonte, Brasil, Nº 116, Dec. 2007, P. 367-377.
- [2]. J.M. Neto, As Principais Forças Dos Pirrônicos” E Sua Apropriação Por Huet, *Kriterion*, Belo Horizonte, Brasil , Nº 114, Dec. 2006, P. 237-257.

Books:

- [3]. G. Bachelard. *A Formação Do Espírito Científico* (Rio De Janeiro, Brasil: Contraponto, 2000).
- [4]. Platão, *A República* (São Paulo, Brasil: Martin Claret, 1997).
- [5]. Platão, *Parmênides* (Rio De Janeiro, Brasil: Edições Loyola, 2000).
- [6]. Platão, *Fedon*, (Rio De Janeiro, Brasil: Edições Loyola, 2000).
- [7]. Platão. *Dialogos I: Menon, Banquete, Fedro* (Rio De Janeiro, Brasil: Ediouro, 2000).
- [8]. Descartes, R., *Meditações Metafísicas* (Rio De Janeiro, Brasil: Edufrj, 2001).
- [9]. Descartes, R., *Discurso Do Método* (São Paulo, Brasil: Martin Claret, 2003).
- [10]. Bachelard, G., *O Racionalismo Aplicado* (Rio De Janeiro, Brasil: Jorge Zahar, 1977).
- [11]. Santos, P., *Guia Prático Da Política Educacional No Brasil – Ações, Planos, Programas E Impactos* (São Paulo, Brasil: Cengage, 2015).