

Abstract:

In order to theorize about the nature and scope of the philosophical reflection, philosophers have used a wide array of metaphors and analogies, from Plato's cave to Wittgenstein "family resemblances". This paper reviews some of those metaphors and discusses what they show about the nature of philosophy, and most importantly, about the teaching of philosophy. It is not enough to be in favour of the presence of philosophical dialogue or to demand a specific philosophical subject matter in the curriculum of formal or compulsory schooling. We need to offer a more precise description of the kind of philosophical learning we are proposing, and which educational goals we think that students can achieve if they are exposed to philosophical reflection during the course of their school life. Philosophical metaphors can help us to present the style of philosophical dialogue we want to implement in our classrooms in order to empower children in such a way that they can think for themselves in a critical, creative and cooperative way. The paper ends with Husserl's metaphor of philosophy as the freedom of absolute self-responsibility and the philosopher as the 'civil servant of humanity', that puts over the shoulders of philosophers and of teachers of philosophy, the huge task of keeping alive a Western tradition of love for freedom and critical reason.

Keywords: metaphor; teaching of philosophy; Wittgenstein

Metáforas de la enseñanza de la filosofía

Resumen:

Con el fin de teorizar sobre la naturaleza y el alcance de la reflexión filosófica, los filósofos han utilizado una amplia gama de metáforas y analogías, desde la caverna de Platón a los "parecidos de familia" de Wittgenstein. Este artículo revisa algunas de esas metáforas y discute lo que muestran acerca de la naturaleza de la filosofía, y más importante, sobre la enseñanza de la filosofía. No es suficiente estar a favor de la presencia del diálogo filosófico o exigir una materia específica de contenido filosófico en el plan de estudios de la educación formal. Tenemos que ofrecer una descripción más precisa del tipo de aprendizaje filosófico que proponemos, y qué objetivos educativos pensamos que los estudiantes pueden lograr si se exponen a la reflexión filosófica a lo largo de su vida escolar. Las metáforas filosóficas nos pueden ayudar a destacar el estilo del diálogo filosófico que queremos implementar en nuestras salas de clase con el fin de que la filosofía capacite a los niños de tal manera que puedan pensar por sí mismos de una manera crítica, creativa y cooperativa. El texto termina con la metáfora de Husserl de la filosofía como la libertad de la auto-responsabilidad absoluta y el filósofo como el "funcionario de la humanidad", lo que pone sobre los hombros de los filósofos y de los profesores de filosofía la enorme tarea de mantener viva la tradición occidental del amor por la libertad y la razón crítica.

Palabras clave: metáfora; enseñanza de la filosofía; Wittgenstein

Metáforas do ensino de filosofia

Resumo:

Para teorizar sobre a natureza e o alcance da reflexão filosófica, os filósofos têm utilizado uma ampla gama de metáforas e analogias, a partir de caverna de Platão "semelhanças de família" de Wittgenstein. Este artigo revisa algumas dessas metáforas e discute o que elas mostram sobre a natureza da filosofia, e mais importante, sobre o ensino da filosofia. Não basta ser a favor da presença do diálogo filosófico ou exigir um conteúdo específico de filosofia no currículo do ensino formal obrigatório. Precisamos oferecer uma descrição mais precisa do tipo de aprendizado filosófico que estamos propondo e que metas educacionais pensamos que os alunos possam alcançar se eles são expostos à reflexão filosófica ao longo de toda a sua vida escolar. As metáforas filosóficas podem nos ajudar a apresentar o estilo de diálogo filosófico que queremos implementar em nossas salas de aula, a fim de que a filosofia capacite as crianças a poder pensar por si mesmas, de forma crítica, criativa e cooperativa. O texto termina com a metáfora de Husserl da filosofia como a liberdade da auto-responsabilidade absoluta e o filósofo como o "funcionário da humanidade", o que coloca sobre os ombros dos filósofos e professores de filosofia, a enorme tarefa de manter viva a tradição ocidental de amor à liberdade e à razão crítica.

Palavras chave: metáfora; ensino de filosofia; Wittgenstein

METAPHORS OF THE TEACHING OF PHILOSOPHY

Introduction: the use of metaphors

Metaphors are used not only in poetry or literature in general, but also in political rhetoric and even in scientific theorizing. Its presence and power in scientific thought help to build comprehensible models, make predictions and estimates, and achieve precise calculations (Brown, 2008). Even more, according to Lakoff's approach, we live by metaphors that help us to cope with the problems of everyday life. If "our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 103). It would be a mistake to establish a clear cut distinction between the language of science or philosophy and the language of poetry, literature or everyday life.

Philosophers have also used metaphors, not just as a poetic device to suggest a first grasp of their abstract theories. As well as the scientists do, they have employed metaphors and analogies to discover, develop, explain and evaluate their theories (Thagard and Beam, 2004). Plato inserted many metaphors or allegories, myths and stories, in his dialogues, especially in his later writings; some of them are very short, just a single statement or a brief story no more than twenty lines long (Partenie, 2011). For him, metaphors or allegories allow their audience to go deeper in their understanding of the philosophical problems that haunt human thinking. They permit the philosopher to make a presentation of the most difficult philosophical theories to a wider audience, a non-philosophical public who lack the cognitive skills of the students who had received a sound philosophical education. We can still do a very fertile use of the platonic myths to trigger the philosophical discussion with middle and high school students (García Moriyón, 1998). Although the meaning of those myths is far of a clear interpretation, with different opinions about their validity and philosophical value, Plato attributed to those myths a value of their own, and there was a moment or aspect of truth in the myths and all the stories he took and reworked from the ancient Greek mythology or in the new stories and analogies he created anew (Edelstein, 1949).

We argue that philosophical metaphors and allegories should be approached as theoretical devices that help us to get a better understanding of the philosophical endeavour. They have their moment of truth and aid us to present a more reasonable argument in order to convince people; we can't reduce them to poetic or rhetoric procedures aimed at persuading people, hiding the weakness of our argumentation. They are also very useful expedients to clarify what we are talking about when we talk about the teaching of philosophy and when we favour the implementation of the discipline of philosophy in formal education, since kindergarten all through primary school and high school. It is a well-known fact that, although we might get a huge agreement with many, if not all, philosophers about the need of giving more class time to philosophy, positions have always diverged according to the different philosophical background and to the different educational systems in place. There are differences between those who are supporting the presence of philosophy in primary school, even in kindergarten, and

those that think that philosophy is a substantive and very abstract content that can only be taught at late adolescence. And there are also differences between those who, according to Kant's position, look at philosophy as a procedural discipline that foster critical and creative thinking, and those who emphasize much more the content of the philosophical discipline and defend handing down to the students the accumulated knowledge of the Western (mainly) philosophical tradition.

The discussion is an old one, and it is currently very active, although the movement in favor of the presence of philosophical practice in primary school has achieved a great reconnaissance and has attained an increasing acceptability by the philosophical academy. For the last decades, Philosophy for children is an active and well accepted field of philosophical practice and theory. On the other hand, there is also a huge agreement about the overlapping of philosophical subject content and specific procedures and cognitive and affective skills or dimensions. Educational laws passed by the governments and also teaching statements prepared by teachers of philosophy in their schools both take into account, in determining their goals, the contents objectives of the discipline and the ways of thinking an intellectual and affective skills students should learn. The only way to learn philosophy is learning to philosophize and the only way of learning to philosophize is learn philosophy.

In the next three sections, I'm analyzing three pairs of metaphors that allow us to get a more precise idea of the approach to the learning and teaching of philosophy. I'm moving from a pure descriptive theory of the teaching of philosophy towards a more normative one. That is, I talk in favor of a specific style of teaching and learning philosophy that is coherent with some of the best contributions of philosophy in the history of Western education, but that is not the only possible way of teaching philosophy. As a matter of fact it is not a very usual way of teaching in the current educational system,.

The Philosopher King vs. the torpedo fish

Plato offers us a first metaphor that has enjoyed a great acceptance in the Western tradition. In one of his mayor dialogues, *The Republic*, he compares the philosopher with a king. In a perfect and just society, Calipolis, only those who have a philosophical education can become the rulers of the society, the Kings who guarantee the well being of the citizens and the harmonic working of the society as a whole. We should not confound the philosopher with the connoisseur or the sophist who offers just an appearance of knowledge without a true understanding of the nature and content of the knowledge that provides human beings with the wisdom needed to govern the society and their own life. Knowledge is not opinion, and the philosopher is not the person who has unsounded opinions but the person who has in his mind the perfect pattern of justice, beauty, goodness and truth. In the ideal Republic, a model of society where the education starts just before birth, with the adequate selection of men and women that will marry and bear children, the education is aimed to the selection of the best persons, those who can climb up at the top of their education and acquire a philosophical education. At that moment



they get a first glimpse of the knowledge of the eternal, of beauty and good themselves, no only of beautiful things or good human actions.

Plato is not in favor of a democratic society, at least in the classical sense of the word that Pericles led in the Athens Plato lived in. He's endorsing an aristocratic model of society where only those who are good enough, the best of all men in the city, are the rulers that govern and protect the city. It is then, and only then, when we arrive to this perfect society, where philosophers are kings and kings are philosophers. Any society will ever have a acceptable functioning "Unless," said I, "either philosophers become kings in our states or those whom we now call our kings and rulers take to the pursuit of philosophy seriously and adequately, and there is a conjunction of these two things, political power and philosophic intelligence, while the motley horde of the natures who at present pursue either apart from the other are compulsorily excluded, there can be no cessation of troubles, dear Glaucon, for our states, nor, I fancy, for the human race either" (Plato, 473 c-d). Later in this dialogue, Plato reinforces the metaphor using another analogy that has also had a huge impact in Western tradition. In a ship, only the person who has a perfect knowledge about all the techniques and the necessary skills to govern the ship, should be the captain of the ship. If the crew decides to offer the governance of the ship to a man without those competences, but who use his demagogic charms to captivate their ignorant companions, the ship will sink (Plato, 488, a-d).

This is not the moment and place to comment the political implications of this platonic metaphor. Popper made a very strong critic in the eight chapter of his book *The Open Society and his enemies*, a chapter title "The King Philosopher". We are focusing on the pedagogical implications we can draw from this metaphor. An interesting quote of Popper's book might help us to centre the criticisms: "It has been said, only too truly, that Plato was the inventor of both our secondary schools and our universities. I do not know a better argument for an optimistic view of mankind, no better proof of their indestructible love for truth and decency, of their originality and stubbornness and health, than the fact that this devastating system of education has not utterly ruined them. In spite of the treachery of so many of their leaders, there are quite a number, old as well as young, who are decent, and intelligent, and devoted to their task. 'I sometimes wonder how it was that the mischief done was not more clearly perceptible,' says Samuel Butler, [...] 'the reason would seem to be that the natural instinct of the lads in most cases so absolutely rebelled against their training, that to do what the teachers might they could never get them to pay serious heed on it'" (Popper, 1966, p. 132)

From our point of view, three are the most important, and dangerous, educational consequences of this metaphor. The first one is to consider the teacher as a king, a magister who is himself wise or at least close to the wisdom, and have the duty of helping some students to climb up to the top of the knowledge that is accessible only for those with the innate competence and the right education. Education, using Freire's metaphor, is then conceived according to the bank model: the teacher is a "bank" full with knowledge and he is transmitting this bulk of ready-made knowledge to students, who should get a meaningful learning of it. The second dangerous consequence is to defend that philosophy should be taught just to the educational elite, never before 16 or 18 years. Philosophy is conceived as an esoteric and elitist activity that only can be practiced by those who have the

conceptual vocabulary and the procedural competences they manage to master after a long process of learning. Philosophy is as subject matter for the last years of high school period, or for college students, and only for those who attend the higher sections of secondary or tertiary education. No philosophy at all in primary school or in the public arena (Cevallos, 2007).

Last, but not least, philosophy teachers tend to make a biased statement: philosophy, as an activity and as a discipline, has the highest-status label in the humanities, and in education. Their arguments in favour of the teaching of philosophy contains the idea that if and only if students learn philosophy they will be able to develop an autonomous and critical thinking; they take for granted that the current education is missing some very important characteristics in the goal for an education committed to foster democracy and critical thinking. Education is going awry all over the world because its primary goal is to teach students to be economically productive instead of aiming at fostering students competences to think critically and become knowledgeable and empathetic citizens (Nussbaum, 2010). Although this criticism might be right, the solution they are proposing is wrong: we don't need to recover humanities and philosophy that is the heart of those humanities, as subject matters or disciplines. We don't have to recover Boethius' analogy that described philosophy as the "queen of sciences", either we need to accept a minor role of philosophy, in modern times reduced to underlaboured or handmaiden of sciences, even minimized to a symbolic presence in the curriculum. Educational system do need philosophy and humanities but as a shared intellectual and educational approach seriously committed to democracy, working together with all the disciplines as a partner in the common endeavour to transform and improve the world we live in. Critical and autonomous thinking should become the corner stone of any discipline.

Plato himself uses another very powerful metaphor in his dialogue *Menon*. In one of the episodes of the dialogue, Meno responds to Socrates' question about the meaning of justice, by accusing him of being like a torpedo fish, a variety of the electric rays which stuns its victims. Socrates admits the comparison because he knows that his questions disturb people and the reason of this intellectual discomfort is that he makes them to doubt of their own convictions and they are enforced to admit that they don't know what they thought they knew. Socrates offers a justification for his disturbing and impolite behavior, always making questions that bother and annoy his dialogical partners. Socrates tells Meno that he only resembles a stingray or torpedo fish if it numbs itself in making others become numbs, "for it is not from any sureness in myself that I cause others to doubt: it is from being in more doubt than anyone else that I cause doubt in others" (Plato, 1967, 80 c-d). Its questions are not rhetorical questions, but true questions of a person who ignores the answers and is in search for truth. There is not a clear agreement on the actual meaning of Socrates' irony. Some philosophers, and also some of his contemporary fellows and specially his adversaries, identify irony with a didactic trick to unveil the ignorance of his "wise" opponents and to guide them to admit Socrates' answer to the question. So, Socrates is not an ignorant, he is only pretending he doesn't know the answer.

The other option, the one that offers Socrates to Meno, looks much more promising for a better understanding of the process of teaching and learning philosophy. Socrates actually ignore or he has a tentative answer that is only a



partial, weak, provisional, answer that open more new questions than the one it solves. As a matter of fact, just after the analogy of the torpedo fish, Plato put into Socrates' mouth a pedagogical paradox: "Do you see what a captious argument you are introducing—that, forsooth, a man cannot inquire either about what he knows or about what he does not know? For he cannot inquire about what he knows, because he knows it, and in that case is in no need of inquiry; nor again can he inquire about what he does not know, since he does not know about what he is to inquire" (Plato, *ibid.*, 80 e). Irony is not a trick or a didactic device to bewitch or flatter their audience. It's a crucial characteristic of Socrates' understanding of learning that states that only those who recognize their ignorance can undertake the long and demanding process of learning in a dialogical community committed to the search for meaning and truth (Kohan, 2009).

Socratic irony has been a constant philosophical style in western education from Plato till now, although not always has played a central role in the teaching of philosophy. Early in the nineteenth century, the German philosopher Leonard Nelson made a very suggesting defence of Socratic Method and proposed to implement it in non-formal and formal educational settings. He even established in 1922 the *Philosophisch-Politische Akademie* in German that is currently active, to foster the implementation of Socratic dialogue in different settings (Nelson, 1965). This Academy and the British *Society for the Furtherance of the Critical Philosophy* promoted Socratic dialogue beyond educational settings after 1980. Some decades later, Matthew Lipman (Lipman, 1980) created the innovative proposal of doing philosophy with children, since kindergarten straight to high school level; with the help of Ann M. Sharp and other colleagues, he built a philosophical curriculum with special emphasis on Socratic method and established a centre for the formation of teachers, the IAPC. At present, Socratic Method is a fundamental approach to the teaching of philosophy.

Irony is just the first step of the Socratic Method, the starting point that, provoking perplexity and puzzlement in students, triggers their philosophical reflection. During this process of philosophical dialogue, students, together with the teacher or facilitator, clarify the concepts, offer reasons to justify their statements or points of views, draw conclusions and ask new questions. It is not an activity aimed at the elite, at the people with a philosophical background; as Socrates did in Athens, normal people, based in their own experiences and knowledge, using the non-specialized language of everyday life, discusses rigorously the classic philosophical topics. So, you can practice the philosophical dialogue with children, teenagers, adults and elderly people, fostering their critical, caring and autonomous thinking and introducing them into the western – and non-western – philosophical tradition. Michel Tozzi (Tozzi, 1994) offers a clear and accurate description of this process naming three moments or stages of the philosophical dialogue: first, people problematize their taken-for-granted beliefs; then, conceptualize, looking for a more precise use of very common words; last, they argue, they offer the best reasons they have and evaluate their own reasons and those presented by their partners in the community of philosophical dialogue.

Allegory of the cave and Socratic art of midwifery

There is a certain contradiction between the two metaphors I have explored in the previous section. Notwithstanding, we must be careful and we don't have to push the contradiction too far. Although it is needed to make a choice and to opt for each of the two approaches as the leading idea of our pedagogical practice, there is no a dilemmatic contraposition and we are not required to put totally aside the other option. According to the specific students we are working with, and also to their own philosophical background, we might move from one possibility to the other. Our role as philosophy teachers in formal schooling should be much closer to the ironic facilitator who invites children to think for themselves than to the magisterial professor who, out of his/her higher knowledge of the philosophical stuff, hands down to students' minds the answers from the philosophical tradition. However, the more you are familiar with this tradition, the easier will be your role as ironic facilitator. It's not so difficult to build a bridge that goes from one side of the gap to the other.

There is another allegory by Plato that can help us to go deeper in our reflection upon the teaching of philosophy. In the allegory of the cave, Plato presents for our consideration a story that is a brief explanation of some of his fundamental philosophical ideas. This is not the moment or the place to explain the whole philosophical meaning of the allegory, but there are some valuable pedagogical implications that will allow us to overcome the contradictions of the two other metaphors. To begin with, people are compared with prisoners chained in a cave where they can only watch shadows in the wall across them, and hear the echoes cast by people they don't see. For them, this world of shadows is the actual world; they think that those shadows are real things. A prisoner is freed, permitted to stand up and forced to turn back, to look at the "real" things; then he's dragged upward, and after an arduous walk arrives to the world outside the cave. All this way upward and out, is described with painful words: the man is forced, and then he grows angry and is distressed by the sunlight and he miss the peaceful time chained in the dark cave. Therefore, the myth of the cave reminds us of the raw fact that there is not knowledge without personal involvement and effort: knowing is suffering, it is nothing you can get for free, and the road to the discovering of the truth is a personal path nobody can do for you. So if you want to learn, be prepared for a hard journey. At the end of this personal journey, you will be free, and the final result is worth the great effort.

Philosophy and philosophizing is a two faces activity and discipline. On the one side, there is that liberating search for the truth: the only possibility we have to attain freedom and happiness is philosophical reflection because an "unexamined life is not worth living", as Socrates says to his judges in the *Apology*. But this bring us to the sad side of philosophizing, because it force us to break the ties with this world of platitudes and "aurea mediocritas", in the sense of golden mediocrity, not golden mean. Once we accept this personal effort to become free, our only hope is to become worth of happiness, because as Kant states: "morality is not properly the doctrine how we should make ourselves happy, but how we should become worthy of happiness. It is only when religion is added that there also comes in the hope of participating some day in happiness in proportion as we have endeavoured to be not unworthy of it." (Kant, 2002, A 234). Hume was even more pessimistic about



the healthy contribution of philosophy to human being and he established a strong relationship between the desire of knowledge and melancholy, even nervous breakdown (Lemmens, 2005). This comment by Hume is very close to the sorrow complain of the lowly philosopher in Voltaire's *Story of the Good Brahmin*.

Coming back to the allegory of the cave, as soon as the freed man is accustomed to the new situation and recognizes the absolute value of this real world of pure Ideas, he makes a "heroic" decision: to go back to the bottom of the cave in order to help their prison fellows to break their chains and to climb up to the outside world, where shines the Sun, the final cause of every thing. This is a metaphor of the philosopher, whose role is also to aid people to open their minds, to break their dependence on this world of shadows that offer them a false feeling of security. The first step of this process of education is to make them to problematize their own personal situation, to discover that under this appearance of security and reality they are living in a state of oppression and lack of personal freedom. In the same way that Freire's *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, philosopher (Socrates, as a perfect example) starts his liberating challenge by inviting their partner to discuss themes of importance to them, drawn from their real-life experiences. Sophisticated philosophical language is not of great importance at this initial step of their learning. Learners' conceptual development is a consequence of their engaging in the philosophical discussion: they acquire individual conceptual richness and the thinking and reasoning competences through a process of inquiry into the nature of real-life problems facing the community of learners. Problem-posing and philosophical dialogue (García Moriyón, 2009) are the most distinctive features of this course of learning, where students get the control of their own process over the direction of the whole practice. The most important goal of teaching philosophy is empowering children, young people and adults in such a way they can think for themselves.

Plato's allegory of the cave is also close to Wittgenstein's metaphors about philosophy than can also help us to look for a specific style of philosophy learning: we should help students to "shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle." (Wittgenstein, 1963, p. 103). Some philosophers, or just normal people, are like the flies closed inside the bottle, and the role of the true philosopher is to show them the way out of the bottle. The point of this metaphor is clearer in relationship with other statements by Wittgenstein. In his philosophy, the chains that keep people prisoners is language, or in a more precise description, the bad use of the language: "Philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday" (ibid., p. 19); "Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language" (ibid., p. 47). Again, two metaphors suggesting that philosophical problems come up from linguistic confusions, so that the only solution we have is to escape the confusion. In his metaphor, Wittgenstein substitutes language mistakes for chains. The method to escape is to be very careful with the use of language. Philosophy is much more a kind of therapy than a road to freedom, and the destination of the philosophical journey is not a world a true reality, but a much more simple and ascetic one, a world where, as he states in the last line of the *Tractatus*, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent".

It's also close to the second step of the Socratic Method, the maieutic (Fortunoff, 1998), the moment when the partners in the philosophical dialogue actualize their potential for philosophize. The philosopher, as facilitator of the

communitarian inquiry, leads the mind of the disciples, by attractiveness, to self-discovery. At no moment he aims to filling the mind, as the Sophists used to do, and many teachers do at present. In this case, the name, maieutic (*maieûtikos*), is again a very fertile metaphor, because it compares Socrates with a midwife. He was actually the son of a midwife and he looked at his own contribution to the philosophical dialogue as the contribution of a midwife to the labor. This woman helps mothers to deliver babies; Socrates is helping people to bring forth ideas, ideas that come from their inside, where they were waiting for the provoking questions of the philosopher to growth and achieve a full conceptual development (Holyoak and Thagard 1995, p. 217). Socrates is a midwife because his helping people to bring forth ideas is an analogy of a midwife's helping mothers to deliver babies. Of course, you don't have to endorse Plato's theory of reminiscence in order to accept this metaphor of the process of learning. The point is to look at education as an interactive process between the inborn competences and the influence of the environment, with the teacher acting as the "midwife" who helps children to use and improve those innate competences in their personal search for meaning. In that sense, children don't learn at school anything they didn't know in advance. They just get a clearer and more profound understanding of the world they live in and of themselves, take into account the reach information they get from their social and physical environment.

Once we move from the Philosopher King to the allegory of the cave, some of the problems we exposed in our previous section can be solved. It is possible to criticize the elitist role of philosophy teaching that follows from a specific interpretation of that metaphor, without sacrificing the valuable contribution of the teacher of philosophy to the personal learning of their students. S/she is no longer the wise philosopher who conveys knowledge to students; s/he becomes the lover of wisdom (*philo-sophos*) and the active companion who, with his questions, accompanies students in their process of personal growth. And s/he changes the usual role of the teacher and adopts a very different educational approach, one that involves, as Donald Finkel explores in deep, teaching with your mouth shut (Finkel, 2000). The philosophy teacher needs to admit her ignorance and accept that s/he is also committed to the search for truth and meaning, so s/he needs to be philosopher, that is, to internalize the philosophical attitude and to be familiar with the philosophical tradition. The more familiar you are with that tradition and the deeper is your understanding of the philosophical problems discussed by philosophers along this tradition, the easier will be for you to act as a "midwife" and to help children to break their "chains" and start walking their own path to freedom.

This educational approach help us also to solve another problem of the metaphor of the Philosopher King: philosophy is an activity that can only be practiced by those who are mature enough so as to involve themselves in the deep and abstracts philosophical discussions. Kant, in the same mood than Plato, thought too that teaching philosophy to very young people was a serious mistake that could cause more harm than good. It is unclear whether Kant believed the problem could be overcome, approaching the teaching of philosophy with more appropriated teaching methods or he also thought with Plato that there is a minimum age below which philosophy cannot be taught because children's understanding and reason are not yet mature enough for philosophizing

(MacDonald, 2007). He proposed to use not the dialectic method of Socrates and Plato but the *zetetic* method, an style of philosophical inquiry that comes from Sextus Empiricus, a method that propose not merely think but involved yourself in an active philosophical inquiry.

Kant's approach, that most of current philosophy teachers would accept, is in tune with Socrates maieutic and with Plato's understanding of the role of the philosopher in the allegory of the cave. However, it is not easy to implement that active learning because it is at odds with most of the present teaching. Pupils at school are trained to write down the best answers they have (those that are in the text books or that have been delivered by their teachers at the class room), at the expense of an active thinking for themselves. Children are used, after years of compulsory schooling, to learn by "meaningful" rote and they have the tendency to prefer be taught the right answer, those that will allow them to get good grades in their examinations. They are no very prone to embarking themselves in a peculiar difficult but stimulating way upward and out of the cave.

In any case, the most fruitful proposal of the allegory of the cave, such as we have interpreted it, is to offer a feasible style of teaching philosophy, an style teachers can learn to implement in their pedagogical practice. This approach also offers us the possibility of building a bridge that allow students to overcome the split between exoteric an esoteric philosophy, between the more professional and difficult practice of professional philosophers and the more lively and "light" philosophical dialogue of the amateur philosophers who joint in "café-philo" or in many others settings where a community of philosophical inquiry starts a philosophical dialogue in search for meaning, discussing about philosophical themes embodied in their everyday experience, in their *lebenswelt*.

Descartes' the tree of Science, the chain, the cable and the web

At the beginning of the Baroque period, Descartes offers us another interesting metaphor. In the French edition of his *Principles of Philosophy* he uses the metaphor of the tree to present his personal conception of the human knowledge. This is the famous paragraph: "Thus, all Philosophy is like a tree, of which Metaphysics is the root, Physics the trunk, and all the other sciences the branches that grow out of this trunk, which are reduced to three principal, namely, Medicine, Mechanics, and Ethics. By the science of Morals, I understand the highest and most perfect which, presupposing an entire knowledge of the other sciences is the last degree of wisdom." (Descartes, 1953, p. 566). It is also an analogy, because Descartes describes the relationship between the different part of the tree as analogous to the different domains of human knowledge, a relationship that is functional and hierarchical: the tree and human knowledge are similar in function and structure.

The problem of the classification and order of the sciences in scholastic philosophy is a very huge one, which is referred back to Aristotle's works. Descartes, with the rigorous philosophical background he got during his years at La Flèche, an elitist school ruled by Jesuit priests, continues that discussion and introduces his metaphor in congruence with his very new approach to philosophy, which is a peculiar combination of old arguments with a truly novel philosophy

(Ariew, 1992). He wishes to unify all the sciences into a universal science, with mathematics as the model or reference. He's also discussing a systematic, ordered and to a certain point hierarchical classification of them and the metaphor of the tree tries to show us this systemic interrelationship of different sciences. This statement is coherent with his approach to the rules for the direction of the Mind; in the first rule he's very clear about the ultimate goal of his philosophical endeavour: the search for wisdom rejects the idea of a diversity of sciences each with its own method and subject domain. Just the opposite is the right approach, "for since the sciences taken all together are identical with human wisdom, which always remains one and the same, however applied to different subjects" (Descartes, 1953, p.37-39).

Philosophy is for Descartes the basic discipline for human knowledge. It has an epistemological preeminence, even over the mathematical method that inspires his deep and seminal renewal of the philosophical activity. Metaphysics constitutes the roots of the entire building of human knowledge, and only upon the solid underpinnings of philosophical method – that guarantees that the search for truth is not a futile endeavour, as sceptics say – can human beings start a fruitful path to a better understanding of the world and of us. On the other hand, philosophy is not a speculative reflexion far away from human interests, those that qualify life as a good life worth living. Learning to make true and sound judgements about whatever comes before a person is the best way of cultivating good sense. Morality is then the starting point of our philosophical reflection because living a good life is the first aim of human beings; and morality is also the highest degree of wisdom. The search for those truths brings us closer to perfection and felicity of life.

Heidegger explores Descartes' metaphor and tries to go deeper in the understanding of human knowledge. He accepts the statement that physics (the trunk) and metaphysics (the roots) are the fundament of the tree of knowledge; if that is right, we must accept also that they are rooted in some nourishing ground. "In what soil do the roots of the tree of philosophy have their hold? Out of what ground do the roots – and through them the whole tree – receive their nourishing juices and strength? What element, concealed in the ground enters and lives in the roots that support and nourish the tree? What is metaphysics? What is metaphysics viewed from its ground? What is metaphysics itself at bottom" (p. 207). For Heidegger, metaphysics only thinks about beings as beings, and its representation of the beings owes this sight to the light of Being. Being, no beings, is the deepest fountain of human knowledge. So, the roots forget themselves for the sake of the tree and branch out in the soil to enable the tree to grow out of the roots. That element, once it is absorbed in the soil by the roots, is transformed into the sap that flows all along the tree and make it possible that we got the fruits than help us to have a good life.

Husserl suggested a different possible interpretation of this nourishing ground that is worth considering in order to draw some fertile ideas for the teaching of philosophy. He introduces the notion of lifeworld, that can more or less be thought of in two different, but also compatible, ways: in terms of personal beliefs, that is, the set of previous ideas against which our attitudes towards ourselves and the objective world receive their justification; or as the social or cultural environment which constitutes a system of senses or meanings and makes possible an intersubjective constitution of the objectivity. Lifeworld, homeworld, refer to this bedrock of my (our) system-beliefs, a pre-given intentional background



which pre-delineates the world-horizon of our experiences. Metaphysic, philosophical reflection, should always start from this natural attitude, usually an unreflected attitude and, after a radical phenomenological *epoche* that puts into brackets or problematize our natural beliefs, develops a more careful, reflective and intersubjective constitution of objectivity.

The metaphor of the tree opens also another possible interpretation once we emphasize the role of the sap that goes out of the roots, brings the nourishing element to the whole tree, to the trunk and to the branches, and provides the nutritious food needed for the tree to flourish in good fruits. Philosophy teachers discuss whether philosophy should be a separate discipline or subject matter inside the current curriculum, or some activity teachers should foster in every subject matter. The first option is coherent with the image of the roots of the tree, metaphysic, and the branch of moral reflection, the highest degree of human wisdom. If children don't have a specific time in the school timetable to involve themselves in a community of philosophical inquiry, their educational development will lack a basic cognitive and affective competence, the philosophical competence (Lipman, 2002). The second option is related to the image of the sap. If children don't have time enough in all and every discipline for discussing the basic (philosophical) concepts that underpin those subject matters, their understanding and learning of the discipline will lack a solid foundation (Giordmaina, 2005). We don't have to make a choice between both options; we should favour the implementation of each one in order to a true improvement of children personal growth.

There is another fertile metaphor Descartes made to describe philosophical reflection. He saw it as the work of the architects who have to build their building over solid foundations. In the same way than the architect begins by removing the sandy soil so that he can lay his building on a solid foundation, philosopher starts by analyzing all that is doubtful and throw it out till he notices that there is something it is impossible to doubt. Once Descartes has discovered the bedrock on which he can build the new building of philosophy, he advances, piece by piece, from very clear and distinct ideas in order to overcome skeptical criticism and to recover the confidence in the capacity of human minds to progress in their search for truth. Nonetheless, we should not carry on this metaphor too far away, or to apply it to our teaching in such a way that we fill students' minds with the idea that it is possible to get a definitive and final answer or solution to our philosophical questions. If Plato's metaphor of the Philosopher King had a dogmatic or authoritarian bias, the same bias it's possible with Descartes' metaphor of the architect, although both philosophers were much more open-minded than their critics suggest.

Without abandoning this metaphor and its possibilities in order to build a progressive and serial method that goes from the most common and accessible towards deeper or higher levels of understanding, we should pay attention to two other philosophical metaphors. The first one is Neurath's metaphor of the ship and the sailor who prevent us of taking conclusively established protocol sentences, as Descartes proposed, as the starting point and solid underpinning of the sciences and philosophy. We are not like architects; just the opposite "we are like sailors who must rebuild their ship on the open sea, never able to dismantle it in dry-dock and to reconstruct it there out of the best materials. Only the metaphysical elements

can be allowed to vanish without trace. Vague linguist conglomerations always remain in one way or another as components of the ship." (Neurath, 1959, p. 201). The whole endeavour of the philosophical inquiry is a path without a clear beginning or a secure final point of arrival. As hermeneutical philosophers suggest, we must walk always forward, in a circle where we go from solid convictions or beliefs toward the revision and renewal of those convictions after contrasting them with our personal experience

Peirce suggests another metaphor that implies a strong critique of Descartes metaphor of the architect. According to him, reasoning should be understood as a cable rather than a chain: "Philosophy ought to imitate the successful sciences in its methods, so far as to proceed only from tangible premises which can be subjected to careful scrutiny, and to trust rather to the multitude and variety of its arguments than to the conclusiveness of any one. Its reasoning should not form a chain which is no stronger than its weakest link, but a cable whose fibers may be ever so slender, provided they are sufficiently numerous and intimately connected" (Peirce, 1958, pp. 40-41). Peirce's metaphor is very suggesting not only for a richer style of philosophizing, but for a better approach to the implementation of philosophical dialogue in educational settings. On the one hand, it makes possible to adopt a more fallibilist style of teaching and learning where knowledge, and also human personality as whole, is like a cable whose strength comes out of very slender fibers. The target is not fostering the development of a strong chain out of strong links, because the chain is never stronger than the weaker of its links. Our goal as philosophy teachers would be to help children to make a very strong cable with the different traits of their personality, some of them strong and other weak. On the other hand, the idea of transforming the class room into a community of philosophical inquiry, such as it is developed by the Socratic Method and many other teaching approaches that are very active at present, aims also to building a strong community of inquiry out of the weakness and strengths of its members, each of them offering a personal contribution according to their abilities and getting from the other members of the community according to their personal needs.

We can mention two last metaphors that complete the ideas we have exposed in the last paragraphs and reworks Descartes' ideas present in his metaphor of the tree of Science. Quine, together with Ullman, wrote a book about human reasoning titled *The Web of Belief*, where they use the metaphor of the web that suggests that knowledge is the result of multiple interconnections more than of good foundations. They use also the analogy of the mechanic of the automobile, in contrast with Descartes' architectural metaphor, but in tune with his rules for the direction of mind: in order to explain beliefs and to get a deeper knowledge is better to see the process as a whole whose parts function together, than just examining its parts one by one (Quine and Ullian 1970, p. 8). Three centuries earlier, Francis Bacon, contemporary with Descartes, proposed another metaphor that is close to the idea of the web and that reinforces an interdisciplinary approach to human knowledge. Bacon made a distinctions between the ant (empiricist), the spider (foundationalists), and the bee (true philosopher), which shows us a middle way to approaching knowledge and the work of philosophy: recollecting from the flowers, but also digesting the pollen we have recollecting in order to transform it into food for our personal growth. He stated that "not unlike this is the true business of philosophy; for it neither relies solely or chiefly on the powers of the



mind, nor does it take the matter which it gathers from natural history and mechanical experiments, and lay it up in the memory whole as it finds it, but lays it up in the understanding altered and digested” (Bacon, 1960, p. 63)

Conclusion

This brief philosophical journey, recovering and interpreting classical metaphors and analogies from the Western philosophical tradition, might help us –I hope so– to offer a better and more fertile proposal for the teaching of philosophy in formal education, and also in other informal educational settings. We agree with Nussbaum (2010) that we are living in hard times, and that education is in strong need of the humanities if we do want to cope with those problems with any possibility of success. A complex, global and strongly interrelated world needs independent-minded and creative individuals who have the character and confidence to look for new ways that allow humankind to overcome the current challenges and face future with hope for a better life. But we need to offer a more precise approach to the teaching of the philosophy, because the contribution of the practice of philosophy in our classrooms is depending very much upon the style of the teaching and upon the idea of philosophy we want to work with.

We are in need of people taught to resist arbitrary authority and hierarchical attitudes, to take the risk of thinking for themselves in a cooperative endeavour they share with their contemporary, and also with the generations who preceded them and with those who are coming after them. As a matter of fact humankind has always been in need of this kind of people because it always has had to cope with problems and huge challenges in order to live a life worth living, that is, a reflective life. If we do want to produce such people, we need a form of education that fosters active dialogue, developed out of Socratic questioning. And that is the main goal of the teaching of philosophy: struggling for a school of freedom and critical thinking (UNESCO, 2007), a school deeply committed to the growth of democratic societies.

I want to finish this paper with a last metaphor. Almost 80 years ago, in a hard time for Europe, when the fears of a coming war loomed large and ahead, Husserl gave a lecture in Vienna and Prague, later developed as a book, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy*. For him, philosophy is the freedom of absolute self-responsibility and the philosopher is the ‘civil servant of humanity’, a powerful metaphor that put over the shoulders of philosophers and of teachers of philosophy, the huge task of keeping alive a Western tradition of love for freedom and critical reason. The final paragraph of this book might be a very appropriate end for this paper: “The crisis of European existence can end in only one of two ways: in the ruin of a Europe alienated from its rational sense of life, fallen into a barbarian hatred of spirit; or in the rebirth of Europe from the spirit of philosophy, through a heroism of reason that will definitively overcome naturalism. Europe’s greatest danger is weariness. Let us as ‘good Europeans’ do battle with this danger of dangers with the sort of courage that does not shirk even the endless battle. If we do, then from the annihilating conflagration of disbelief, from the fiery torrent of despair regarding the West’s mission to humanity, from the ashes of the great weariness, the phoenix of a new inner life of the spirit will arise as

the underpinning of a great and distant human future, for the spirit alone is immortal" (Husserl, 1965)

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