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Teaching Philosophy: Challenges and Prospects in the Algerian Academic Setting

Naceur Belwassa¹

Abstract

The mission of universities currently plays an extremely important role in the lives of nations and peoples, regardless of their economic and social development stages. From this perspective, the mission of universities lies in three main functions. The first function is for the university to advance knowledge and disseminate it through education and teaching, providing students with various sciences and knowledge, as well as preparing highly skilled human resources in various disciplines needed by society. The second function is for universities to play a fundamental role in scientific research in various fields and contribute to their scientific and technological applications and development. As for the third function of the university's mission, it lies in serving society through its educational and advisory roles, participating in the provision of social services, public awareness, and strengthening desirable social trends and human values.

Keywords: *University, Academic Traditions, University Mission, Innovation, Scientific Fields.*

Introduction

The scientific studies conducted in economically advanced countries have proven that the progress and development achieved by these nations were not solely the result of the availability of financial liquidity and natural resources. It was also a result of universities providing qualified workforce needed by economic development institutions, especially factories, companies, and various technological establishments. Therefore, our universities need meticulous scientific planning and organization to achieve economic and social development and to be on par with technically advanced universities. Currently, it is observed that the ranking of universities in Arab countries is lagging behind in terms of innovation. One of the reasons for this delay is the inadequate utilization of the research mission of universities in an effective and positive manner. Universities are the ideal place for rigorous academic and applied research conducted by specialists in various scientific fields. Based on this, the following question can be posed: What measures are taken to direct scientific research in Algerian universities to meet the requirements of economic and social development? And what is the role of philosophy in all of this?

Since its establishment until the present day, the teaching of philosophy in Algerian universities has not been separated from its function associated with the training of philosophy teachers in Algerian secondary schools. Despite the university being independent from the Higher School of Teachers and the fact that most philosophy teachers worked during the 1960s until 1968 (in French) and the end of the 1970s teaching philosophy (in Arabic) in secondary schools, this education also contributed to the formation of some researchers who engaged in university teaching and scientific research. However, the process of adapting programs to the requirements of the teaching mission in Algerian secondary schools has, in turn, led to reductionist processes that impoverished the spirit of open research, which is

¹Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nour Bashir University Center in Al-Bayadh, Algeria. Email: n.belwassa@cu-elbayadh.dz

supposed to be an inherent characteristic of university teaching in its various disciplines.

However, even until the beginning of the 1980s, departments were established in Oran and Constantine, which confirms the presence of philosophy in educational institutions today in terms of the spread of its teaching process. This reality imposes itself strongly, contradicting all negative discourses that speak of the death of philosophy in the era of technological dominance. (1) Simply put, throughout this history, we have not contributed to the creation of texts close to the realm of academic philosophical writing. The generation that has overseen and continues to oversee the teaching of philosophy in the Algerian university during the last quarter of the past century has worked on contributing to the popularization of the importance of philosophical lessons in our contemporary thinking. Perhaps the greatest significance of what has been accomplished lies in the fact that it has allowed us to understand the great distance that still separates us from the stage of productive and creative engagement in the history of philosophy. It has been able to work on accumulating the philosophical lesson in the Algerian university, which is important for us. It has also enabled us to organize this production into specific axes, issues, questions, and problems, facilitating our understanding in order to delineate its gains, boundaries, and prospects.

Specifically, we refer to the texts produced by the late Abdelmajid Meziane, Abdullah Cheriet, Abdelrazak Gassoum, El-Bekhari Hamana, Rabia Maïmoun, the late Nabhani Qriba, and Ya'qubi. They have provided us with more than others the opportunity to witness the insights that are closer, in perspective, to the spirit of philosophical thought, as they have employed concepts, methodologies, and argumentative approaches with a philosophical character. These texts are firmly linked to the data of the history of philosophy, consistently affirming that Algerian philosophical production is associated, and continues to be associated, with the Algerian university. It is also connected to questions that are closest to those of history, politics, heritage, and the present. Examples include the texts of Dr. Abdullah Cheriet published in both the press and public libraries. However, without attempting to classify these texts as Dr. Abdelrazak Gassoum did when he classified these writings into different ideological currents.

In our belief, ideological classification is a preconceived barrier to thought and its freedom. Reality itself is capable of judging the vitality or vitality of a certain thought, without disregarding the contributions of many Arab and foreign thinkers and professors and their role in academic formation, guidance, and supervision.

Regarding the issue of writing, I have undertaken several attempts in recent years to encompass the philosophical intellectual production. In most of these attempts, it has become apparent to me that philosophical thought in Algeria rarely goes beyond two central problematics: the problem of thinking about modernity and the problem of thinking about heritage. Within the realm of these problematics, a collection of writings, texts, and concepts has emerged, including engagement with epistemological research and some contemporary philosophical issues, which are in various forms connected to the aforementioned problematics. Epistemological investigations, in some aspects, draw on methodological concerns related to the heritage phenomenon or certain concepts of contemporary philosophy..

Therefore, these writings play a dual role as they reveal, on one hand, the extent of Algerian thought's comprehension of questions, concepts, and methodologies of the history of philosophy, and on the other hand, they present some aspects of the Algerian thought's capacity to construct its own questions related to its present and past issues, language, and inquiries. It is worth noting in this context that other knowledge sectors also contribute to the localization of many philosophical perspectives in a manner that expands the philosophical gaze and provides new perspectives for philosophical questions and concepts, such as writings that focus on cultural history, for example.

As for the second aspect in intellectual adoption, it relates to the emergence of several projects in writing and research, often through individual initiatives. However, to some extent, these projects reflect the level of engagement of the second generation of researchers in continuing to establish and reestablish a

philosophical thought capable of benefiting from the lessons and questions of contemporary philosophy. (Here, the reference is made to the writings of many colleagues from the second generation who tirelessly dedicate themselves to teaching philosophy at the university, reinforcing this teaching with publications and research that they publish here and there. It is assumed that these writings contribute to enriching many fields of Algerian thought, philosophy, and culture.

These multiple and relatively diverse writings, in many of their discussed topics, reveal a gap between the teachings of philosophy as practiced by professors in Algerian universities and what they actually produce and research. This blurring boundary turns the act of teaching into a research and authorship project, with the author and the research becoming a reference for the teachings. This raises questions about the nature of the renewed Algerian philosophical "production." Is it a philosophical reflection on philosophical issues, such as questions of existence, life, human beings, freedom, destiny, and value? Or is it merely a reflection on philosophy itself, analyzing, explaining, commenting, and translating its discourse?

Our question arises from considering that the university has not become merely an educational institution or a static study of reality, focusing on the paradoxical issues of human needs, desires, and aspirations. It seems to be a kind of hybridization of everything that is new. It is an organized and purposeful tool embedded within a well-established policy for the dissemination of knowledge and educational patterns that align with the conditions and components of the existing societal project. We emphasize this despite the proliferation of philosophy departments across various universities under recent university reforms. Our hope has become broader in what has been accomplished, a hope that we have finally realized the full range of tasks entrusted to philosophical thought throughout history.

However, this does not deceive us at all that the relationship between the university as an institution and philosophy specifically remains, to a large extent, a mysterious or even nonexistent relationship. Philosophy is integrated as a form of general knowledge within a framework of ambiguous coexistence, but it is a coexistence that is hostile to the desire for philosophical debate, not to mention philosophical writing, which mostly revolves around rehashing dissertations and theses. Even when there is variation, it rarely extends beyond the meta-historical and meta-social nature. It is sufficient to conduct a statistical analysis of the entirety of writings and topics addressed, in their diversity, to realize that they are mostly confined to research and authorship within the boundaries of the university institution itself.

Therefore, we can assert that the current philosophical writings have not sufficiently reached the level of philosophical creativity that produces new concepts. Concepts that are at least adaptable and can be quantitatively accumulated. However, there are exceptions that have begun to emerge. To name a few, we can mention the writings of Al-Zawawi Boughura, Jamal Mufraj, Al-Zawi Hussein, Ahmed Delbani, and Amara Nasser. Yet, it is firmly believed that mentioning these exceptions within this paper is insufficient, considering the pressing questions that surround us and that we have not seriously engaged with in terms of their approaches. Where are the questions of the present and the future, such as freedom, reason, life, environment, and destiny, within our writings?

Promoting the democratic project in our political life, for example, requires harnessing the gains and achievements of the history of philosophy and political philosophy. Revitalizing rational and historical dialogue in the spaces of thought and action in our society, in turn, necessitates solidifying the mechanisms and principles of philosophical inquiry and the methodologies of thought, as they have crystallized and continue to evolve with the gains of contemporary philosophical study. Any neglect or oversight of the role of philosophical thought in history will contribute to the perpetuation of dogmatism, absolute ideas, and certainties.

Given that we suffer in our contemporary thought from the burdens of history and the burdens of

beliefs that have become entrenched and rigid in our culture, traditions, and general way of life, resorting to philosophical thought with its methodologies and mechanisms of observation, reasoning, and analysis enables us to construct theoretical means and mechanisms that help break and shatter the restrictive shackles of inherited thought and foster freedom of thinking and creativity.

The institution in general, and the university institution in particular, in its culture and operational mechanisms, suffers from many manifestations of fragmentation, contradictions, and lack of integration in its relationship with philosophy. Although the university has not completely stripped philosophy of its effectiveness, liberating tendencies, and research capabilities, it has explored numerous margins of independence and liberation from any absolute dominance of the social institution. This qualifies it to emancipate itself and the institution simultaneously. Without attempting to assess or evaluate the philosophy department at a university like Oran, for example, there are over forty titles in various philosophical and cultural disciplines, both individual and collective. This signifies that the broader the scope of philosophy's movement, the closer its tasks are to realization. As Derrida says, "Philosophy goes beyond its institutions and must remain free at every moment, obeying only truth, the power of questioning or thought, and it has the right to sever ties with any institutional bond." What is outside the institution must have access to its institutions without belonging to them. So, how do we reconcile respecting the institutional threshold with disrespecting it? (3).

To establish a call for the liberation of philosophy from the continuous and non-circumstantial pressures of the institution, the academic study of philosophy has managed to innovate means that have allowed it to construct a range of theoretical achievements that have become a strong launching pad in culture and thought. What can be organized in our thinking today is this active and effective philosophical thought capable of building and reconstructing the modern project in our thinking and reality. This is because all the questions of our present are related to the question of modernity and renewal, the question of historical, social, and cultural action centered around the major issues of human existence, society, environment, and coexistence in abundance, creating a public space (4). Because this space is also connected to philosophy and philosophical thought. Does this discourage us and unfortunately discourage us from establishing intellectual traditions that monitor our attempts? Taking into account our colleagues in neighboring countries.

Efforts to liberate philosophy and establish a strong philosophical tradition should not be discouraged by the challenges posed by institutional pressures. It is crucial to foster an active and effective philosophical thought that addresses contemporary questions related to modernity, historical and social action, and the major issues of human existence and society. By building a strong foundation of philosophical thinking, we can contribute to the development of our culture and shape our reality. It is important to collaborate with colleagues in neighboring countries who share similar goals and aspirations in order to strengthen our collective efforts in promoting philosophical liberation and intellectual traditions.

Therefore, discussing teaching, writing, the role of the university, its academic function, and its social responsibility should primarily be philosophical, as long as it concerns the essence and destiny of both the university and society.

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