Journal of Didactics of Philosophy, Vol. 7, 2023, 1-5 DOI: 10.46586/JDPh.2023.11140

Challenges to thought and philosophical lessons

Caputo, Annalisa (2019): *Manuale di didattica della filosofia. Per l'insegnamento e l'apprendimento delle metodolgie e tecnologie didattiche della filosofia e per i docenti di Scuola secondaria superiore*, Roma: Armando.

Reviewed by Stefano Franceschini, University of Kiel
sfranceschini@philsem.uni-kiel.de

Annalisa Caputo's voluminous text *Manuale di didattica della filosofia* (Handbook of didactic of philosophy) introduces the reader to many of the core issues of the philosophical-didactic field. It is not possible to provide a detailed overview of the covered areas here. For this review, I will focus on the following chapters: The first chapter ("Theoretical-Epistemological Issues. In defense of philosophy and its didactics"[1]), the third chapter ("Current issues"), and the "critical annotations in the margin". Other topics such as historical developments in teaching philosophy (Chapter 2, "Historical-Critical Issues. A Brief History of Philosophy Teaching in Italy") will remain in the background. Other chapters will be dealt with selectively (Part Two: Chapter 4, "Issues of Methods and Methodologies. Possible models of teaching philosophy"; Chapter 5 "Concrete issues and classroom practices. Technologies and techniques of teaching philosophy"; Part Three: Chapter 6 "Dialogical issues. Philosophy, other pieces of knowledge, other languages"). The reason is that the latter issues are as it seems to me much better known, while the former bring out more clearly the critical discussion that animates (thinking about) teaching philosophy.

The starting point of the critical reflections in the Handbook is a "philosophical reading" of the Italian National Guidelines (*Indicazioni Nazionali*, 2011) and of the so-called "Orientations" (*Orientamenti*, 2017)[2] at the same time linked to university education purposes. The Handbook articulates three points of the *Orientamenti:*

1. Critical analysis of the primary methodologies developed in research about philosophy education,
2. Design and development of philosophy teaching activities
3. Methodology of interdisciplinary teaching and technologies.

[1] Quotations from Caputo's book in the text are translated from Italian by the author.

[2] The full title of the document is "Orientations for the Learning of Philosophy in the Knowledge Society" (it. *Orientamenti per l'apprendimento della Filosofia nella società della conoscenza*) and was published in 2017 with the declared institutional purpose of "proposing the renewal of philosophy teaching in schools and the spread of philosophical learning as an opportunity for all" (p.4). This should result in a "methodological renewal" and a "renewal of the didactic of philosophy". The following points are listed for the latter: "the functionality of the historical-cultural contextualization of authors and themes; the critical-reflexive dimension of philosophical thought as a tool for the enhancement of the ability to think and judge; the correlation of the cultural tradition of philosophy with that of the linguistic-literary and scientific disciplines; the impact of technological environments and digital tools (new potential for textual analysis, learning functions that can be activated through medialization, digital humanities); the need to know how to use traditional and digital communicative tools to organize arguments and contents also in a structured and complex form; the integrated learning of foreign languages (CLIL) and of a vehicular language with philosophy; the need to foster competences of active citizenship" (p.9)

Said otherwise, university education does consider present delineations, but it questions what the right way is to train teachers philosophically in the field of didactics. This critical perspective can undoubtedly be suppressed, but that would deprive philosophical education of much of its specificity. The same applies to didactical discussions and their many also philosophical aspects: what are didactics for, and how does it articulate their discourse? Caputo, for example, explicitly distinguishes between general didactics (it. *didattica generale*), didactics of philosophy (it. *didattica della filosofia*), philosophical didactics (it. *didattica filosofica*), and disciplinary or subject didactics (it. *didattica disciplinare* as a translation of the German "Fachdidaktik"). We can also add a philosophy of didactics and pedagogical didactics (as part of educational sciences). The sphere of didactic challenges thought to open itself to the diversity of approaches and to renew its conceptions.

1) The first point – the critical analysis of the primary methodologies developed in research in philosophy education – would be to avoid "didacticisms" (p. 19), which would have an obstructive component regarding the teaching of philosophy in relation to the continuous changes in the educational field and therefore need to be enriched with a specifically philosophical formative and interrogative perspective. Therefore, we cannot restrict the field of education to mere "technical issues of didactic," but we also need philosophical, critical issues about the first ones. The Handbook presents itself as a document capable of standing within the discussions of the research field of philosophical didactics. It has an approach that the author describes as hermeneutical, and that focuses on the "logic of 'mediation'" (it. "*logica della 'mediazione'*" p. 30) and should therefore offer "lessons in the didactic of philosophy" (p. 19). Thus, it is a disciplinary training perspective concerning "a meta-reading of the value of the didactics of philosophy, which, if experienced in a truly critical-theoretical way, can become a discipline that gives thinking not only to the other 'fields' of philosophy but also (and perhaps more so) to general didactics" (p. 18). It would therefore also be partly a matter of rethinking university didactical formation (p. 20). The issue, however, seems to me to be salient not only for the "interactive" aspect of didactics as the author points out but also for a matter of a more general nature in that it would involve recovering a philosophical dimension of university training in didactic. University formation could, in my opinion, focus on philosophical didactic in questioning our way of thinking about didactics, which, like other philosophical fields, maintains its institutional validity even in the face of the diversity of the school panorama and for an international research context.

My question here aims to explore the conceptual tensions between philosophy and its didactics and to highlight some characteristics of philosophical didactics. Of particular interest here is the relationship of philosophical didactics to "disciplinary or technical didactics" (ger. "Fachdidaktik") and how the first can change the character of the second. For the author, the theoretical problem is profound: "didactics of philosophy" is an untransparent compound. Caputo also knows about the German-speaking debate of the past 30 years (particularly the studies of Johannes Rohbeck) and the conceptual tensions that arise from the relationship between philosophy and its didactics. Caputo also quotes Luca Illetterati's words highlighting

how in the expression “didactics of philosophy,” the genitive “infects” the noun (p. 25). One runs the risk of not understanding anything, of being “entangled” (p. 26) in logical-linguistic diatribes that, while on the one hand at least made us think, on the other hand today risks making philosophical issues disappear to narrow it down to technical or absurd issues, if not well-understanding. It can be argued that different philosophies have their didactics and different didactics have their philosophies (p. 31) which should be made transparent and not oppress the plurality of philosophical and didactical approaches. Thus, the starting point is a philosophical didactic that has to make itself transparent and critical in its specificity concerning general didactics if it is to contribute to the conception of the teaching of philosophy. But what role does this have concerning “disciplinarity” and specific lines of thought? What validity or use can philosophical didactics have for the teaching of philosophy? Would it simply be a matter of passing conceptual tensions under wraps, dissimulating them, and transmitting philosophy in a “low voltage” way? The challenge can appear precisely to highlight the dignity of philosophical didactic without producing a duplicate of general didactics. Caputo shows the complexity of the current debate through the administrative jungle and the concerns of professors and colleagues about the future of philosophy and its teaching (Chapter 1.3) at a time when economic and industrial interests conflict with educational interests. This is a discussion of the institutional role of philosophy.

2) We then turn to the “current issues” presented in the first part of the volume and to the second point mentioned above – the design and development of philosophy teaching activities. In the face of declarations of neutrality concerning didactical-pedagogical models, Caputo tries to highlight – with what she calls a “hermeneutic suspicion” – a “didactic of competencies” that is being hushed up (p. 109), and that is also present in the thought of the teaching of philosophy. On the one hand, philosophy could play a central role in enhancing so-called “transversal competencies”. According to Caputo, they go beyond the stated eight, namely:

i. “Diversity of methods used by the various disciplinary fields”,
ii. “Ability to ‘interconnect’ methods and results of the ‘individual disciplines’”,
iii. “Ability to ‘argue one’s thesis and know how to listen’”,
iv. “Ability to reason with logical rigor”,
v. “Ability to “critically interpret” different forms of communication,
vi. “Understanding of the rights and duties proper to the condition of a citizen”,
vii. “Ability to place the development of the history of science and technology “within the broader framework of the history of ideas”,
viii. “Acquisition of the appropriate instrumentation to compare different cultural traditions” (p. 103)

Although there is also a need for philosophical disciplines. In particular, Caputo sees her hermeneutic-existential reading of the logic of competencies as a potential that brings schools closer to life, a philosophical reading capable of vitalizing the competencies thought.

On the other hand, attention must be paid to how a “model (or an attempt to give a model)

of philosophy" is inscribed in the *Orientamenti* (p. 113). Caputo's invitation seems to be to proceed with critical vigilance about guidance documents, but this is so as not to leave unnoticed the multiplicity of unresolved issues that arise for philosophy education and the choices that guide teacher training. Also, in the institutional document, Caputo highlights the essential didactical-pedagogical choice that revolves around a "Knowledge Society," and that refers, according to Caputo, to an unbalance toward an "essentially analytic-pragmatical model of philosophy" (p. 133) based on "critical thinking" and "debate." What is at heart is to highlight that philosophy has a much more complex and varied articulation and that any orientation is a narrowing that must be carefully inspected: "We cannot decide what philosophy is from what seems most interesting for didactics. The opposite is true: didactics will help us 'transform' meaningfully for students what we think is theoretically important" (p. 138).

3) We turn now to the third point – the methodology of interdisciplinary teaching and technologies. In the second part one can encounter collected current and varied methodical approaches in the field of teaching philosophy (different "theoretical models" such as systematic, interrogative, existential, problematic, critical, argumentative, aporetic, metaphorical) and general concepts of education (flipped classroom, concept-maps, etc.). There are also considerations of a more practical nature regarding teaching philosophy: the use of texts, forms of philosophical writing, critical thinking, and debate, etc. To finish, I will only dwell on a few points in the second part of the Handbook that, in my opinion, are especially of international interest. Caputo considers it a threat "on the one hand to make a clear distinction between 'Disciplinary Didactics' and 'Didactical Methodologies and Technologies'; on the other hand, to overlap them to identify them" (p. 140). For Caputo, moreover, "Disciplinary Didactics (properly lived and understood) are already also Disciplinary Didactic Methodologies and Technologies" (p. 141). Since we cannot discuss all the examples in the Handbook, we dwell on the proposed distinction between "methodology" and "didactical technology." Caputo says the difference between methodology and technologies becomes subtle, particularly in philosophy. Methodology concerns the study of patterns, which in the fifth chapter are investigated starting from the history of teaching philosophy in Italy and the manuals developed according to those patterns. Instructional technology refers to reflecting on the "techniques" that can be used in the classroom and thus can be understood as "practices." Among these, the digital dimension is included (p. 193).

The underlying message of the methodological apparatus is awareness of the plurality of perspectives and their careful use (p. 208). This is accompanied by didactical discussions that highlight the author's personal-hermeneutic formative approach and the value of laboratory practices for innovating current school teaching with the goals of transforming classroom practices into philosophical practices, practices of philosophizing. I will punctually examine what Caputo outlines as "working with 'mimesis' to 'enter' authors" (p 334f.) How does an "ipseisation" into authors occur? What is the potential of a philosophical education of an empathic nature? In her Handbook, Caputo considers this "at the basis of all the exercises and works proposed" (p. 335). Which delineate a threefold Ricœur-style perspective of the mimetic

character: reading of reality (*prefiguration*), confrontation with the other (*configuration*), and return to the self-enriched by the experience of otherness (*refiguration*), learning to 'lose oneself' to find oneself as a different version. Caputo describes these exercises as "a 'philosophical' version of simulation and/or role-playing" (p. 335. The valorization of play found articulation in the author's *Philosophia ludens*, here Chapter 5.7) that proceed to make philosophical thought intelligible. Not dissimulating oneself as an author, after all, should always be to bring out one's thinking and direct the conceptual practices that enable us to record our thoughts. The dramatizations presented in the Handbook are offered as practices to be enacted in the classroom that can bring one's insights to life in artistic and medial form. However, the risk of these practices seems to me to be twofold: losing oneself or losing the other, and philosophical didactics must, in my view, offer conceptual suggestions that can rethink and virtualize teaching practices that enable an esthetical and literary interaction.

We conclude this review with an illustration of the "dialogical" character that philosophy should have in addressing the issue of interdisciplinarity (Chapter 6.2), that is, between philosophy and other forms of knowledge. Caputo offers different images: instrumental/exemplifying use, thematic and historical comparison, "philosophy of" contaminations and transitions that dissolve disciplinary boundaries, and hermeneutic arc (reading other knowledge or the knowledge of others). They merely highlight the philosophical vocation, always reaching out with their critical voice to be heard in a renewed way in different disciplinary forms. It is ultimately about the philosophical initiative and its character of proceeding to initiate new readings from itself.

Caputo concludes her Handbook by returning to issues of the relationship between disciplinary and general didactics, proposing a discipline entitled "Didactic of Philosophy" (p. 450 and 454) with a critical-problematic character. In my opinion we find here the need expressed by Caputo to renew the "theoretical" question in a grounded way and open to a sphere beyond the national boundaries of philosophy teaching. Caputo's reflection is very inspiring and allows me to clarify one final thought. If philosophy needs its didactics in order to find her philosophical lesson, it is, from my point of view, philosophical didactics, that is, didactics which relates the thought, on the one hand, to disciplinary-didactical questions, on the other hand, to institutional delineations, but is sincerely called upon to recover its genuine critical vocation, which would enable us to teach philosophy and its history differently.

References

Caputo, Annalisa (2011): *Philosophia ludens*, Molfetta: La Meridiana.