

## A Brief Testimony of the Unforgettable Presence of Gilles-Gaston Granger in the Philosophy of Brazil

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### Abstract

I give here the testimony of a former student and friend of Granger that I went. I outline the influence of his thinking on Brazilian philosophical studies from the decade of the 50's until today, as well as for the area of Epistemology.

Professor Granger was one of the most influential teachers and researchers in Philosophy at the University of São Paulo during the fifties, when he came to Brazil to contribute to the implementation of the Department of Philosophy. He was responsible for introducing the area of Logic and Philosophy of Sciences. He was also responsible for developing a new and rigorous style of dealing with philosophical texts, applying techniques for reading and interpreting them, techniques inspired on what may be characterised as the “structuralist turn”.

One of his most influential and innovative ideas was the philosophical method of Comparative Epistemology, which consists of making comparisons among concepts belonging to different scientific models with the aim of showing the internal conceptual development of the various theories. The main characteristic of that method is the construction of a new version of the Kantian concept of the *Transcendental* – a concept that is a guideline for all the descriptions and comparisons developed. To that aim, he introduced the concept of *work* as the activity of correlating forms and contents by means of language, in order to incorporate the *movement* inside the originally static concept of the *structural system*.

Pursuing this idea, he arrived at showing the emergence and development of the main concepts in different fields of knowledge, like Mechanics, Physics, Mathematics, Logic, etc.; for instance, concepts like the *geometrical object*,

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according to Descartes and Desargues, the emergence of the idea of *vector*, according to Möbius, Hamilton and Grassmann. Applying the method of comparisons, Granger was naturally driven to analyse broader scientific and philosophical concepts, like the meanings that the concept of *verification* takes in those different fields – as opposed to *proof* and *demonstration* – and, equally, the meanings of the concepts of *probability*, *possibility* and *virtuality*.

As Granger's conception of structure is imbibed by the idea of its construction, he had to deal with two apparently opposite dimensions: the *fixity* of structures and their historical *transformations*. To understand the life of concepts inside structures, Granger conceived a notion of the transcendental that takes from Kant the ideas of *formal* and *a priori* contents, avoiding all sorts of sociological and psychological descriptions and, at the same time, incorporating the conceptual changes introduced by the activity of correlating the matter of experience and the rules of thought –consequently, avoiding the original Kantian purity of the transcendental.

At this point Granger attains *individuality* by the presence of the redundancies that activity always entrains, vis a vis structures, in the elaboration of concepts by different authors. The redundancies are considered in that they are not aleatory but, on the contrary, as they are conceptually connected with other concepts in the same field – regardless of the social and historical circumstances. That is what Granger conceives as a *stylistic transcendental history* of scientific thought – a history where the activity of the transcendental Kantian subject is no more graceful; a history where that subject has to deal with the material of experience applying language to it, in order to construct concepts and insert them inside structures.

Actually, the linguistic activity is what constitutes, according to Granger, the basis of the formal thought, i.e., the basis of human reason – which allows the knowledge of the world by means of scientific concepts. In that sense, strongly inspired by structuralism, Granger built his own paths according the important philosophical movement called “linguistic turn”, by placing language in the centre of Epistemology. It now becomes possible to clarify the Aristotelian question as a result of Granger's reflexion: how is it possible that the universal is able to touch the individual, or, in other words, how can universal knowledge be applied to the individuals, i.e., how is it possible that Calias could be cured of his individual sickness from universal knowledge. Language is the instrument allowing the linkage between the universal and the individual, by means of linguistically correlating the material of experience and forms of thought.

Granger lived in São Paulo between 1947 and 1953 as a member of a French Cultural Mission. He participated in the implementation of the new Department of Philosophy of the University of São Paulo, inaugurating the area of

Logic and Philosophy of Science by giving lectures, published in 1955 by Editora Melhoramentos with the same title. These lectures were the grounds for that area during the 60s, and surely one of the main inspirations for the foundation, many years later, by Oswaldo Porchat Pereira da Silva, of the Centre for Logic and Epistemology – nowadays Centre for Logic, Epistemology and the History of Science – recalling, in some aspects, the Vienna Circle movement.

Granger's initial most finished philosophical project, which was developed throughout his career, was published in French under the title *Pensée Formelle et Sciences de L'Homme*, in 1960, by Aubier Montaigne – with a reedition in 1967 containing a new preface; a new edition in 2010, in Archives Karéline; and an English translation: "Formal Thought and Sciences of Man" by Dordrecht-Boston-London, 1983. All of the several subsequent books and articles published by Granger are the exploration and development of the ideas mentioned in *Pensée Formelle*, and were deepened during his linguistic inspiration period mentioned above.

Granger established a strong and profound academic relationship with the Brazilian colleagues and students, and the friendly seeds he sowed in Brazil are growing steadily and calmly – as does the most special virtue of philosophical style. Indeed, as does the most special virtue of the best wines.

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