



SUMMARY. The article explores the ontological, gnoseological, and ethical aspects of the classical and contemporary philosophical seminar. The primary focus of the research is on a comparison between the ancient and the modern philosophical seminar, highlighting the questions of whether the old tradition of philosophising in the academy and the university has lost its relevance today, and how the principles of the philosophical seminar have evolved in the course of more than two thousand years. In addition, the article addresses many of the identities, contexts, and fates of the contemporary philosophical seminar and the university in our day. The research demonstrates that the classical philosophical seminar remains relevant and has a future in academic institutions, despite numerous social, political, business, and cultural interferences. As long as the seminar continues to be a rigorous, insightful examination of philosophical texts and other related issues, philosophising about many phenomena of reality will remain a small and silent alternative in a world where the importance of the written source is gradually diminishing, the development of screen culture is reaching its apogee, and no longer questions arise about where we have come from and for what we are living. The philosophical seminar is a time capsule of sorts, containing the foundations of Western civilisation and their potential relevance to the current fate of the planet.

KEYWORDS: Plato Academy, philosophical seminar, ontology, gnoseology, ethics.

This article aims to analyse the development of the academic philosophical seminar from its invention in antiquity to the tradition of academic philosophical discussion that continues today. This task entails the following objectives: to describe the ancient origins of the philosophical seminar and to compare them with the continuation of the academic philosophical seminar, which remains in existence at the university today. The object of the research is the academic philosophical seminar in classical times and its contemporary counterpart in the university. The comparative methodology chosen for the analysis enables us to identify the primary similarities and innovations between the old and the current academic seminar.

The article is based on the texts of Plato's dialogues in the ancient philosophical tradition (Plato 1968) and on empirical material, which is based on the author's long-term experience teaching the *Philosophy of Literature* course to philologists at Vytautas Magnus University and the *Philosophy of Arts* course at the Academy of Arts in Kaunas College, Lithuania. The classical philosophical seminar is viewed in the research as an activity that allows ontological, gnoseological, and moral philosophical questions to be raised in the form of a conversation and to receive answers of one kind or another, leading to new questions. The focus of this research is on the questions of being, knowledge, and virtue as these three philosophical disciplines most clearly reveal the problems of classical and contemporary education, which make it possible to decide what a philosophical seminar is, how to convey what is being taught in a philosophical seminar, and how to develop a decent participant in a philosophical conversation. A key focus of this article is the distinction between the dynamics and concept of monologue and dialogue, which creates the conditions for understanding how the theory and practice of the philosophical seminar have evolved over more than two millennia. The research deliberately chooses extreme phenomena, allowing for an analysis of the philosophical seminar in ancient and contemporary times, straddling the long evolution that academic conversation about philosophical problems has undergone over the period in question.

The object and methodology of the article are new because, given the numerous examples of classical philosophical seminar analysis (Kalligas, Balla, Baziatopoulou-Valavani, Karasmanis 2020), on which the research draws, it is virtually rare to have the above-mentioned ancient form of academic study compared with current concrete empirical practices and contexts. The research hypothesises that the classical philosophical seminar remains an essential form of analyzing questions of being, knowledge, and virtue in the university, despite the increasing number and severity of disruptions. The article concludes by inquiring about the future fate of the philosophical seminar and why this form of cultural study should be preserved and further developed.

The study is structured around several aspects of the development of the philosophical seminar, presenting a comparative analysis of the philosophical seminar as an ontology, a theory of cognition, and a philosophy of morality in both the classical era and the present. The arguments are summarised by conclusions regarding the reciprocal influence of this form of academic life on society, the mass human condition in Western civilization, and the development of technology. The comparison of the philosophical seminar of antiquity with current academic practices also suggests the challenges facing university studies now and in the near future, as the academic world is subject to increasing change and societal pressures to evolve

in ways that institutions and influential personalities with financial and symbolic power in politics, business, and technology desire.

THE ONTOLOGICAL SPECIFICITY OF A PHILOSOPHICAL SEMINAR

Plato's ancient academic seminar is an enlightened dialogue, which does not occur when one participant directs what the other should think, but rather when each of them formulates questions addressed to the other person. Here, Socrates, in his dialogue with Crito, asks, but does not instruct: "And the opinions of the wise are good, and the opinions of the unwise are evil?" (Plato, *Crito*, 3) Plato's Academy is the first philosophical phenomenon characterised by non-monopolised speech. At the same time, it does not exemplify a culture of writing, but rather a culture of speaking with a voice and in a lively manner, observing the interlocutor's non-verbal reactions, and listening to their arguments. It is no coincidence that Plato's ancient philosophical seminar was born and developed in ancient Greece, where the ancient theatre and drama, unimaginable without the dialogue of actors, existed and flourished both before and during that period. Plato's Academy is, in a sense, the first intellectual theatre in the history of humankind, albeit without an audience, so his words had to be written down and conveyed on pieces of parchment. Plato's Academy is the place where philosophical questions are provoked and answered. It is also clear that these philosophical debates have fostered a culture of responsibility for one's own words and those of others. "The Apology of Socrates" states: "Indeed, they call him eloquent who speaks the truth. For, if they mean this, then I would allow that I am an orator" (Plato, *The Apology of Socrates*, 3) Plato and his fellow academics are perhaps the first friends in the European intellectual space who are characterised above all by their commitment to other participants in the conversation. It is a position radically opposed to indifference and excess, a position of discussion and disputation, which means that the participants in the conversations do not assemble to be entertained or to make enemies. They are together trying to explain how they see and understand the world. Plato's Academy is the first realised opportunity for calm and constructive conversation and dialogue on the war-torn continent of Europe.

Today, living in a time of rare uncertainty, we are constantly re-evaluating the classical humanist tradition, which is increasingly at odds with the current post-humanist present, in which many of the genres, their rules and their methods of thinking are undergoing a kind of reversal effect – what have been important foundations for more than two thousand years are almost suddenly seen in a different perspective (Kubilius 1986). What in antiquity was considered a divine power to

discuss abstract questions is today not divine – it is virtually superfluous and condemned to marginality. Of course, the crowd, armed with smart devices, is by no means new to the development of Western civilisation. Jose Ortega y Gasset wrote about the threat of mass uprisings and the need to control crowds in Spain as early as a century ago: to control the mass, you have not to be the mass, you have to be a strong force, a group in good shape (Ortega y Gasset 1999: 105). But now, in our day, unlike a hundred years ago, it is possible to note an unprecedented threshold in the existence of philosophical thought in societies: perhaps never before has there been such a massive celebration of poor education and undeveloped mental capacity. According to the psychoanalyst Slavoj Žižek, visual culture, which has replaced the paradigm of writing, testifies to humanity's over-saturation with traumatic experience (Žižek 2010), which makes verbal discourse on philosophical topics unwanted and anachronistic in the university classroom and the public sphere – the hominid of today needs not a well-reasoned and written argument, but an anaesthetising flicker of screens.

From the point of view of the theorists of the British school of social anthropology, today's human beings, and not only the young, are on the verge of being unable to express any thought. After all, the Western world once wrote in folios, then the printing press was invented, which is why our ancestors enjoyed books. Not so long ago, the dominant genre of communication was journalistic commentary in newspapers, and we learned a lot from a few lines of a social networking post. Now, we have reached the point of communicating with letter combinations.

On the other hand, the Western world has always solved humanity's problems with the help and efforts of the deeper and more educated rather than with the help of the masses, which is why today's philosophical seminar can still rely on the still classic example of Plato's allegory of the cave, which at first glance appears to be a very old-fashioned anachronism. In an age when centrism is overwhelmingly dominant, it is paradoxically avant-garde and yet conservative to discuss philosophers and treat them as radical opposition. The university auditorium is still a place where not only globalist calls for the centring of the whole world can emerge, but also small and silent alternatives that require professors and students to enjoy a certain distance, both physical and mental, from abstract problems, other people and things, and, finally, from themselves – thinking classically is only possible at such a distance. In a world becoming more homogeneous by the second, a philosophical seminar at university is an opportunity to encounter classical texts as an other-worldly reality. If History has not yet ended, it can continue in forms of reading and discussion that create a future that is not radically different, not revolutionary, and not shocking, but evolutionary.

THE GNOSEOLOGICAL ASPECT OF A PHILOSOPHICAL SEMINAR

In Plato's academy, the fundamental interest of all interlocutors is the search for truth, often even denying man's corporeal origins: "Then when does the soul attain truth? – for in attempting to consider anything in company with the body she is obviously deceived" (Plato 1931). In other words, the need to talk in philosophemes comes from the desire to explain the world and ourselves and others in it. The essential feature and characteristic of Plato's philosophical seminar is the intersection of subjectivity and objectivity, where, according to the ancient Greeks, truth is born. On the one hand, the participants in the debate expressed their positions, but on the other hand, they also expected to agree or disagree with them. For perhaps the first time in European history, a system of thought was established that implied objectivity was something that most agents agreed upon. In fact, all the conversations in Plato's academy were driven by that desire to move from personal arguments to conclusions that most or all of the participants in the conversations would agree on. This did not mean that definitive and incontrovertible laws were sought, but rather that every statement that might for a time appear to be a claim to indisputable truth was immediately called into question. In "The Banquet" by Plato, Apollodorus states that he seems to be well prepared for what one is asking (Plato 1931). The undeniable character and intellectual behaviour of the members of Plato's Academy were a curiosity that compels one to keep listening and asking. As long as philosophical statements do not cross over into the territory of the irrefutable laws of the exact or other sciences, there is no end to the answers and questions. This is the radical opposite of the narcissistic self-satisfaction of the individual, when, after a long period of mental work, supposedly final results are available.

Thus, Plato's academy continues an intellectual journey, which means that gno-seological satisfaction in philosophy is impossible in principle. There are always only intermediate statements and new hypotheses that are tested on the scales of objectivity. Many of the ancient truths that have passed into the natural and exact sciences are the fruit of the debates of Plato's Academy.

The debaters of Plato's academy were certainly not tired of the multiplicity of truths and of trying to find consensus on the fundamental questions and versions of the answers to those questions about themselves in the worlds of nature and of culture (Plato, 1931).

The ancient Platonic seminar, as a practice, and the attempt to theorize it in our day raise many questions and uncertainties: Are today's university students capable of discussing complex philosophical topics and problems for more than an hour? Is the contemporary young person really incapable of keeping their attention on a

single object at all times? The answers to this question, which is rhetorical on the one hand and very practical on the other, seem to be simple, but at the same time touch on many changes in the education of philosophy as a subject of study. The need to sophisticatedly discuss a particular question is confronted with a reality that is no longer only schizophrenically fragmented, but also destroys any primacy of theoretical thought.

As verbal communication is being replaced by almost universal visualisation, the success of studies in philosophy of gnoseology is not only a matter of the choice of teaching methods. By studying a small passage of a written text for a long time, students still have the opportunity to learn the logic of a proposition and the basics of argumentation. In a context where cause-and-effect relationships seem hopelessly lost, the philosophy student is still able to discern the origin and purpose of phenomena – in other words, to form and communicate to others a worldview that creates meaning. After all, because the days of existentialist philosophy now seem like a fifty-year-old cultural paradigm, the absurdity of the world has not disappeared – it has been digitised, and its origins are of little interest to anyone nowadays, unlike in the texts of Jean Baudrillard (2009).

A student of Aristotle's or Immanuel Kant's texts gains a fundamental insight that many of the problems of our reality and their solutions do not depend on categorical propositions, but on nuances. They become accustomed to spending more time on a question that a person outside the university walls dismisses as irrelevant. Finally, another essential gnoseological benefit of the philosophical seminar as a theoretical practice is that the professor and the students pause for at least an hour, as if in resistance to the tradition of modernity that has endured for half a millennium. The philosophical seminar, to paraphrase the sociologist Anthony Giddens (2000), returns its participants to a brief traditional order in which information does not overwhelm and hinder critical and attentive reading.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL SEMINAR AND MORALITY

The philosophical debate of Plato's Academy is perhaps the first attempt in the history of Western civilisation to see the other person as something other than an enemy. Nor is the debater of the academy a fellow participant in the conversation with the other debaters. The most accurate definition of empathy that can be used to describe the interpersonal relationship between the members of the Academy is that of tolerance: tolerance that is not based on similarity or overlap, but on consideration of the other's opinion as Plato welcomes any opportunity

to participate in conversations about philosophy himself and to listen to others (Plato 1931). Moreover, Plato's academy strictly breaks with the ethical bonds that had previously been dictated by the world beyond, which had been interpreted mainly through mythology. The ancient participants in the Academy did not deny the divine dimension (in "Crito", Socrates says: "if such is the will of God, I am willing", (Plato, Crito), but were even more interested in what was happening on the other side, and in thinking about what can be influenced by the human being as a unique and individual being with at least two virtues – courage and will. Ethical and moral conversations in Plato's Academy did not arise from a desire to analyse reality in the manner of the exact and natural sciences, but above all from a kind of discourse that expressed concern for the world and others. Shortly before his death, Socrates says: "Nothing particular, Crito: only, as I have always told you, take care of yourselves; that is a service which you may be ever rendering to me and mine and to all of us, whether you promise to **do so** or not" (Plato 1931). This kind of care has shaped the nature of the Academy's debates, which are characterised by a concern for both the concrete and abstract worlds, and a love for the reality of the other person, their personality and character. This love meant that the world was not appropriated, because the boundary between the participants in the conversation was maintained. That love did not turn into worship, which had hitherto been characteristic of a mainly religious and political realm that demanded obedience. The ethics of Plato's Academy are rooted in the morality of democracy, which implies the rejection of hierarchy and the equality of all participants in the conversation. In this way, Plato's academy was the origin of many later Western traditions. The professor and their students in today's philosophical seminar serve as a reminder to society at large that it should remember we are not on a journey from nowhere to nowhere – it is a way of truth-telling that creates and sustains the still-remembering human being and the forms that their cultural activity has taken.

In current post-Soviet societies, any project aimed at creating a better reality at the mass level evokes a traumatic past and a post-traumatic present (Putinaité 2007). Digital virtual eternity is a reality that flattens the experiences of the whole world and does not place the person anywhere – the concept of the person in the classical sense has now lost its meaning and has been replaced by the idea of the virtual consumer (Fraser, Dutta 2010). A student who develops a mindset that resists such tendencies solves many of the social and political problems of today's world for himself or herself on a micro level – they learn not to fall victim to conspiracy theories, avoids social polarisation, becomes immune to propaganda, and distinguishes between fake news and facts, which are best verified precisely by the study of philosophical texts. Of course, the classical philosophical seminar is neither a panacea nor an intellectual activity that creates a utopian reality without problems.

The philosophical seminar, as an analysis and discussion of a written text, thus becomes a moral phenomenon, as students learn to work with complex sources of information that are ambiguous, but do not lose their relevance. After all, it would seem to the crowd that those statements from which it is not possible to draw immediate conclusions are simply verbal ballast. For the participants in the philosophical seminar, the meanings of words and their contexts form a multifaceted, complex, and inherited tradition that demands moral answers and responsibility.

In addition, the seminar participants are aware that historical sources are not open to manipulation – they must be interpreted honestly. All this creates a sense of personal engagement with the tradition of Western philosophical discourse today. Later, after their studies, the participants of the philosophical seminar engage in a variety of work activities for which the experiences gained during the seminar are particularly valuable: they create an administrative imagination of the public sector of states that is not just a modern buzzword, but acts as a factor in the thinking and fulfilment of the individual. Such a seminar student is engaged in self-creation, seeing themselves and the world as a work of art, characterised by the anachronistically sounding categories of truth, goodness, and beauty that are still present for many today.

INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS

The tradition of the ancient Platonic academy and the modern university philosophical seminar will live on and continue as long as the human of the Western world has retained the need to search for the truth in a dialogical, empathic, and reality-protecting way, in a language that does not succumb to the digital monologues uttered without hearing the other, without seeking consensus on objective phenomena, but only to express one's subjectivity. The academic philosophical seminar is radically opposed to the global post-truth states of the world and to an objectivity that seeks to overwhelm the whole of reality using machines, leaving no room for minor differences, nuances, and discussion. The university has been and continues to be an institution in which the academic philosophical seminar serves as a quiet and understated alternative to the limitless axiological dictates of business and politics. Philosophy, as a discipline of study, can and today still does offer the possibility of responding to many global problems and of continuing humanity's existence without breaking with the millennia-long history of European and Western civilisations, and without being caught up in the futility of post-history and the threats to the entire planet.

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KLASIKINIS FILOSOFINIS SEMINARAS ŠIUOLAIKINIAME UNIVERSITETE: PATIRTINIS ŽVILGSNIS

SANTRAUKA. Straipsnyje susitelkiama į klasikinio ir šiuolaikinio filosofinio seminaro ontologinių, gnoseologinių ir etinių aspektų problematiką. Tyrime nagrinėjamas antikos laikų ir dabartinis filosofinis seminaras, pagrindinį dėmesį skiriant tam, ar šiandien senoji filosofavimo tradicija akademijoje ir universitete nėra praradusi prasmės ir kaip keitėsi filosofinio seminaro principai per daugiau nei du tūkstančius metų. Be to, straipsnyje kalbama apie šiuolaikinio filosofinio seminaro tapatybę, kontekstus ir universiteto likimą mūsų dienomis. Tyrime prieinama prie išvadų, kad klasikinis filosofinis seminaras, nepaisant daugybės socialinių, politinių, verslo ir kultūrinių trukdžių, tebeturi dabartį ir ateitį akademinėje institucijoje. Tol, kol seminare bus kruopščiai nagrinėjami filosofiniai tekstai ir su jais susiję klausimai, tol filosofavimas apie daugelį tikrovės reiškinių bus mažoji ir tylioji alternatyva pasauliui, kuriame laipsniškai mažėja rašytinio šaltinio reikšmė, išigali ekrano kultūra ir nebekyla klausimų, iš kur atėjome ir dėl ko gyvename. Filosofinis seminaras yra savotiška laiko kapsulė, kurioje glūdi Vakarų civilizacijos pagrindai ir jų galima svarba dabartiniam planetos likimui.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: Platono akademija, filosofinis seminaras, ontologija, gnoseologija, etika.