Interrogativity: Problematological Model and Applied Technique

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Abstract: Our paper deals with interrogativity from a philosophical as well as an educational perspective. Firstly, the rhetorical-argumentative theory of problematology is presented from the philosophical perspective of the problematological model. On the other hand, the question formulation technique shows a possible connection with educational or academic practice. What is finally obtained from connecting the two, through problematology as a philosophical construction and education as a practice of questioning, is that different ways of reasoning are encouraged and used in the socio-humanistic disciplines: creative thinking, critical thinking and thinking through questions.

Keywords: Interrogativity, problematology, question formulation technique, reasoning, rhetoric, philosophy.

1. Introduction

We consider that research should primarily starts from problems triggered to be solved in order to bring significant benefits to the individual and society. In general, scientists describe problems or formulate questions that guide their work and by which they pursue progress in the research work. Many times, in academia we tend to privilege theory or answers and sideline controversial issues or genuine questions. The knowledge and the academic environment in which the intellectuals develop their activity is a game of ideas. Our paper intends to recover the culture of argument and the analysis of culture (Graff 2003, 112), but not so much in the direction of templates of the academic writing (Graff & Birkenstein 2014, 10) or the research design and question (Wentzel 2018, 49). Our purpose is to connect the philosophical perspective

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regarding the problematological, rhetorical-argumentative version, not to an aphoristic communication one (Băiaș & Pop 2017, 189), but to a technique that can be practically applied in generating and improving the interrogative stage of research in an academic environment. We consider that in the university environment, reading means a dialogue between us and the author(s), and writing is a debate between other authors' ideas and our own. However, before the thematization of these stages there are still unexplored assumptions, such as the capitalization of the questioning stage or the appropriate way of using a question in educational practice from a philosophical perspective.

2. Philosophy as radical inquiry and problematology
The philosophical discourse is made up of the creations of great thinkers. More precisely, the history of Western philosophy coincides with the main philosophical works of the great thinkers. For the general public, the philosophical discourse is difficult due to the high level of abstractiveness and technical language used by most of the authors. However, the general assumption is that the great philosophers have tried to provide answers, in a more or less systematic manner, to a series of the general questions.

Disciple of Chaïm Perelman and follower of the Brussels School, the Belgian philosopher Michel Meyer (1950-2022) is associated with the approach that brings together argumentation and problematization. In Michel Meyer's view, philosophy's greatest concern is the question. His systematic philosophical reflection focuses on rhetoric by introducing an approach to the argumentation that he calls problematology. Problematology has at its center the concept of problem. The interrogative polemic, the one that triggers polemical reactions, is the basis of the problematological. The central theme of the problematological approach is questioning, interrogation or "temptation". For Meyer (1986, 14) "questioning is the principle of thinking itself, the philosophical principle par excellence", and the philosophical approach is a "radical questioning whose primary theme is questioning itself".

From a problematological perspective, the dimensions of the question depend on three distinct categories, the Self, the Other and the World, which can structure the questions, because "man is the questioner and, at the same time, he is his own question, a question that raises the question of why he is a question" (Meyer 2013, 24). In our view, from a philosophical perspective, that is, the problematological one, critical thinking and rhetoric should offer useful tools for questioning the Self, the Other, the things or the external reality. Firstly, a philosophical attitude is encouraged to privilege the formulation of research questions: their generation and evaluation. Secondly, various methods can be proposed and used which have the role to channel and guide the questioning reasoning.

The problematological model is opposed to the propositional model of the resolution. If the propositional model of thought considers that the answer to a question, as a solution to the problem, takes the form of a sentence whose true or false

6

character must be determined or justified, the problematological model never seeks to close the problem by specifying its truth or falsity, but it opens the way to problematization. The problematological model is the one that refuses to suppress or eliminate the problem by seeking to amplify or diversify it. The problematological difference represents the assumption of a radical questioning through the conceptual couple question – answer, a couple that is considered to be the origin of human thought and the dialogical relationship. Thus, "generally speaking, the problematological is therefore the very link which associates questions with answers" (Meyer, 1995, 212). This is what unites language, argumentation and rhetoric.

In his main work, Meyer (1986, 7) simply defines problematology as "the study of questions", that is, the systematic research of questioning. In an alternative form of understanding, problematology can be technically understood as "the study of interrogative acts" (Balhur, 2005/2006). It is worth to mention that the core of this orientation resides in the study of questions or questionnaires for a better understanding of the philosophical issues.

Philosophy is thought to be "radical inquiry", that is, a question about the question, and as an "interrogation of the interrogation," it is in fact the implementation of the problematic difference between the question and the answer (Meyer 2005, 7). Thus, the aim of philosophy is to question philosophical questions or problems, not to provide answers. Philosophy conceived as radical questioning is called by Meyer (1995, 6) problematology: "Philosophy is radical questioning insofar as it has for its principal theme questioning itself." Meyer reproach's philosophy for "forgetting the question." From his perspective "the fundamental mark of the philosophical lies in its indifference to problematology and the central role of questioning" (Meyer 1995, 102). Hence, a genuine philosophical perspective must first recover the problem and the question. Therefore, the philosophical approach is meant to recover these aspects and its different branches, such as critical thinking, ethics or rhetoric will take problematization as a starting point and privilege questioning.

Questioning itself prevails the ontological conception and the questioning of Being. The foundation of questioning stands in itself, without relying on any absolute necessity, propositional knowledge, or ontological construction. Thus, as Nick Turnbull, one of the exegetes of Meyer's work, rightly remarks, the problematological rationality is a post-propositionalist attempt to find a foundation for philosophy: "Given that any rational articulation implies a theory of what rationality is, then philosophy simply cannot be 'post-foundational'. But it can be 'post-propositional', if and only if it is theorized in terms of questioning" (Turnbull 2015, 60). Through problematology, the contemporary philosophy makes an attempt to find a new way to avoid nihilism or continental relativism, positivism or Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy, as well.

It appears from the above that the role of philosophy from a problematological perspective implies a concern for questions of any nature. However, Meyer firmly emphasizes that the philosopher is only concerned with a special type of questioning:

> Because philosophy is not just questioning, but radical questioning, which implies that questioning cannot escape from itself. Reflexivity is the master term of the philosophical. By questioning questioning, philosophy establish itself philosophically but not historically. Historically, philosophical questioning was born from the collapse of nonphilosophical answers, those from mythology, for example (Meyer 1995, 167).

It is the philosopher who reflects on the process of asking questions. Meditation, reflection or contemplation on the question provides the critical or philosophical character. Thus, the philosophical is detached from what is non-philosophical: myth, dogmatism or uncritical authoritarianism. Meyer distinguishes between a model specific to science and one specific to philosophy. He distinguishes between the propositional model and the problematological model of reason. On the one hand, science, that is based on the principle of non-contradiction, will consider the truth as a value of the proposition, that is, the purpose of science is to suppress the problems and the questions in order to solve or know things. On the other hand, in philosophy the question is the basic principle where it starts from (Meyer 1995, 6-7). Questioning is considered the fundamental element of thinking. However, a distinction should be made between a genuine question, which calls for a reasoned answer, and an apparent question, which requires a rhetorical sentence or question.

Regardless of the type of questionnaire, the question is the one that ensures the principle of thinking par excellence, and we can say that there is no thinking in its absence:

> Questions, whether we find them in science or in literature, make us think through that which they ask but do not provide; and by the putting into question of our very selves that they imply when taken at their most profound level, questions oblige us to defend ourself, to give reasons, to assemble something coherent which will assure existential identity of that we are and what we want to be. One who thinks is one who asks questions, because he is required to answer, and therefore to understand, to link elements together, to do what used called "exercising one's judgment" (Meyer 1995, 305-306).

Strictly speaking, from the word family of the question we find: thinking, reasoning, argumentation (i.e. critical thinking), identity, existence, choice (i.e. ethics) or understanding, self-conviction and persuasion (i.e. rhetoric). In the new vision of philosophy, the distinction between question and answer is important. Thus, problematological deduction represents a special type of reasoning that in the game of passing from question to answer turns on questioning the question (Meyer 1995, 198). Specifically, the formulation of the question may help us to find clues to the future answer or answers. And precisely for this reason, meditation on the questions themselves deserves all the attention and seriousness of philosophical investigation. It is important to remark the dialogic component of problematology. The two components, the presence of the others and the emergence of the language make the rhetorical and argumentative dimension possible. The approach that the Belgian

philosopher makes between the rhetoric and the negotiation of relationships between people in social space is meaningful: "rhetoric is the discourse of negotiation, how we reveal the distances between us and how we attempt to reduce or increase them" (Turnbull 2015, 152). The domain of rhetoric is the discourse of the problematic itself. We live in a problematic society, where we face different problems and sometimes, we do not have solutions for them therefore we must first define the questions as much as the arguments in order to arrive at some valid answers over others.

If in science one looks for the solution or answer that suppresses the problem, in philosophy, starting with Socrates, the problematological answer amplifies or diversifies the answer. Thus, we can affirm alongside Constantin Sălăvăstru (2001, 83) that in philosophy we have a problematological model, that is, a model in which the solution does not close the problem through its truth or falsity, but, on the contrary, we want an opening of the problematization as it can be perceived in metaphysical speculation or rhetorical argumentation. The problematological model of discursivity that dominates philosophical discourse is opposed to a propositional model of resolution that rules the scientific research. We should refer to some terminological distinctions made by Meyer in order to understand his philosophical conception. Firstly, the distinction of the problematological inference or "chain of problematization which allows inferring the answer from the question" (Meyer 1995, 190). Then, the distinction between apocritical and problematological answers. On the one hand, we have apocritical or resolutional answers that lead to the disappearance of questions and the accumulation of answers. On the other hand, we have answers, specifically philosophical or problematic, which increase the problems and questions, without cancelling them. There are texts with clear and direct meaning (apocritical texts), and others that are more enigmatic and do not easily specify their meaning (problematic texts). More simply, compared to the resolutional answers, which suppress and solve the problem disputed by the question, there is another category: the problematic answers, which refer to a dialogical relationship. Finally, we can say that problematization unites philosophical, scientific and artistic discourse. The problematological perspective only makes us more attentive to the problem, the questionnaires and the questions that arise from every human endeavour. In addition to this, the problematological argumentation focuses on "the productivity and dynamism of ideas put into circulation in a dialogic approach" (Sălăvăstru 2003, 383), which influences the consciousness of the participants in the critical discussion, reasoning and debate.

3. Method of application
Next, we will try to put this type of philosophy into educational practice. That is, to describe a method that privileges questioning and can be applied in the university environment from the perspective of different socio-humanistic disciplines: logic, critical thinking, rhetoric, argumentation, persuasion, ethics and academic integrity.

Can a specific method for classes of thinking, rhetoric, negotiation or ethics be found to encourage questioning in general and philosophical questioning in particular? This question is also justified from the students' perspective or master's students participating in the university courses. Generally, a teacher's role is that of an expert in a certain field of knowledge. His purpose is to present or inform about the theories and practices of his own field of knowledge. In other words, the teacher delivers answers that often seem not interesting, because their formulation is not linked to the questions that concern the young. We can ask ourselves if a junction can be made between the problematological model of a philosophical character and the practice of classes that start from the genuine questions of the students.

The question formulation technique or abbreviated QFT (Question Formulation Technique) was created by the Right Question Institute and first theorized in the book *Make Just One Change: Teach Students to Ask Their Own Questions* (2011) by the American professors Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana to better develop the students' ability both to ask questions and to effectively participate in decision making (Rothstein & Santana, 2011). In addition, the application of the method in the classroom helps the teacher with a series of worksheets that facilitate the question formulation technique (QFT), the materialization of the process in different intervals of time, individually (7-15 minutes) or in teams (30-40 minutes) or the technique of formulating questions for responsible decision-making (Santana, Rothstein & Bain, 2016).

The six components of the question formulation technique are: question focus, QFocus (Question Focus), rules for producing questions, classification into closed questions and open questions; improvement of questions, selection and ranking of questions, the next step or use of questions and reflection refers to how and what they learned, and where they can use them (Rothstein & Santana 4, 2011). In simple terms, both, the teacher and the students, have well-defined roles in the educational process. On the one hand, the teacher introduces and discusses the rules for producing the questions, and then introduces the QFocus, that is, the statement on which the questions will be centered. On the other hand, students generate, classify and rank the questions, discuss the next applied step and finally they reflect on the whole process.

Without going into details of the real method, we only mention that each of the stages has its own specific rules and criteria. Thus, in the first stage, establishing the purpose of the QFT and developing a question worksheet is only the responsibility of the teacher or educator. The experts draw our attention to the following five important steps in designing QFocus: a) defining the purpose for generating interest, stimulating new ways of thinking or a better understanding in gathering information; b) generating possible ideas with the help of searching and writing down simple ideas or lists of statements, images; identifying pros and cons elements for each idea: clear focusing, challenging and stimulating new ways of thinking, but avoiding to formulate questions for the teacher's sympathies; d) choosing of a QFocus idea which can be evaluated by the above four criteria and in case it does not satisfy them, it should be reformulated; e) thinking of the questions that could come from the

students to anticipate future thinking directions (Rothstein & Santana 27-37, 2011). For example, a class on ethical negotiation might begin with a QFocus that starts with the following statement: "In any negotiation you have to get to the negotiating principles." The intended purpose is to understand the limits of negotiation and the importance of the ethical sphere that each student independently can come to know through the questions.

In the next stage the roles are different. The teacher facilitates the understanding and introduces the four rules for producing questions (Rothstein & Santana 2011, 19): 1. Ask as many questions as you can; 2. Do not stop to discuss, judge or answer any of the questions; 3. Write down each question exactly as it was produced and 4. Change each statement into a question. The student's goal is to problematize and discuss the challenges of the rules, which will then lead to generate questions.

According to the method, questions can be classified into closed and open. Certainly, the understanding of this distinction sheds light on the different research works and answers. However, in the university practice we have noticed that the students can get used to this distinction, which no longer has an element of novelty or importance for them. Therefore, we propose that in the third stage, that is, classification of the questions for their improvement, the technique of producing questions should be diversified with the distinction between resolutional answers and problematological ones.

In the case of the non-problematological questions, the answer could be found through an evidentiary approach, that is, through theories or explanations of various social or natural disciplines, which can partially close the questions generated. However, in the case of problematological questions, the philosophical answers are the ones that call for other questions, so that the research has rather an exploratory aspect, that is, of a philosophical meditation. Without necessarily arriving at a satisfactory answer, the philosophical questioning may lead to a series of clarifications, insights or ideas, which may be valuable in themselves or may be further exploited through the scientific method of a qualitative research, or a quantitative one. In addition, the closed questions can be answered with a single word (yes, no, etc.), while the open questions require additional explanation. This explanation, with regard to the latter, can come either from the perspective of the sciences or the perspective of the philosophical investigation.

It should not be omitted that in the last stage, that of the reflection on thinking, affects and behaviours (Rothstein & Santana 120-125, 2011), the teacher only facilitates the students' discussion about how and what they learned, how the exercises can be put into practice, where the new found information can be used, or "what I know now" and "what I feel differently compared to the beginning of the activity". This technique can easily be integrated into the teacher's work with an individual student, and in counselling and coordinating meetings for writing a bachelor's thesis or a master's dissertation, as well. Moreover, based on the question worksheets with a standard content according to the stages, the technique can be

easily implemented both in the students' teamwork during the seminar classes, and in courses that are intended to be interactive, where the participation is highly encouraged.

In the new form proposed by us, that is, the introduction of a problematological component in the technique of formulating questions, a synthetic worksheet used during classes would include: 1) the main rule: ask as many questions as you can, along with the three secondary ones: don't stop to discuss, judge or answer any of the questions; write down each question exactly as it was formulated; and change each statement into a question; 2) find different types of open/closed, respectively resolutional/problematological answers; 3) practice changing questions to receive another information from open to closed questions (and vice versa), respectively from apocritical to problematic answers (and vice versa); 4) choose the most important one-three questions from the list and argue their relevance; 5) name the next step you will take (independently, in a team or under coordination) with the chosen questions for further research; and 6) the reflexive part is that where the focus is on what has been learned from the whole process, where it can be applied and what other interesting possibilities are open for further investigation.

In addition to the advantage of the content containing different ideas, this kind of worksheets can be standardized and offered for completion in the classes of various subjects or themes, which have a philosophical foundation, such as critical and creative thinking, rhetoric, negotiation and argumentation or ethics, integrity and moral reflection. Even if at the beginning the process will seem difficult, as soon as the students become familiar with this technique, the advantages of this approach will be seen.

4. Conclusions

Problematology as a philosophical construction and the practice of questioning encourage different ways of reasoning. Firstly, the creative or divergent thinking refers to an ability to produce a large number of ideas, options, hypotheses, or other possibilities. The stage of generating, classifying and improving questions would not be possible without a mode of thought that encourages students to produce questions. Considering the global cultural context and the uncertainty of the skills that should be acquired by the young people who have to face a technological future, various crises and potential social reconfigurations, we consider that the use of creative thinking and the opening to the unconventional can ensure the much-desired innovation and flexibility. We only emphasize that this ability should be encouraged, trained and used systematically not only in the so-called humanistic or creative classes.

Secondly, the critical or convergent thinking focuses on the ability to analyse and synthesize information and ideas in an attempt to find an answer or reach a conclusion. We have argued about the improvement of the method by introducing a new distinction between resolutional and problematological answers, that is, towards the opening of the answers to either the evidentiary domain of scientific theories or to the exploratory domain of philosophical speculation. The selection, the ranking from

the fourth stage, but also the use of questions for specific purposes from the fifth stage of the technique can be achieved by analysing, comparing, evaluating and finding complex practical situations of the application. A logical and focused thinking on the argument or on the identification of reasoning errors are important intellectual activities in the practice of change, which is based on: analysis, synthesis, interpretation, explanation, summarization, comparison, finding similarities and differences or finding a meaning in complex situations.

Last but not least, the whole manner privileges the problematology or metacognition succinctly defined as "thinking through questions", that is, the ability to be able to contemplate about the process of one's own thinking and one's own learning. The specific reasoning ability can be connected to both creative and critical thinking. This is generally associated with the following words: philosophy, reflexivity, self-knowledge, understanding, meaning, or learning strategies.

Finally, we can say that through the problematological philosophy and the application of the technique of formulating questions, the students can easily generate new ideas, analyse an academic text, synthesize information, find meaning in their research work, and independently use what they know in practice. Through divergent thinking, convergent thinking and metacognition, the most important employment skills which are expected to dominate the labour market in the second decade of our century are trained: solving complex problems, critical thinking, creativity, and taking decisions or cognitive flexibility (Stobaugh 2019, 14-15).

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