



Plato and Aristotle (at center) in Rafael's fresco *The School of Athens*: ideas of the two great philosophers of ancient Greece become topics of research

Demanding reading

A disciplined analysis of textual sources has been one of the department's hallmarks, from the time of its French founders to that of its present researchers

Márcio Ferrari

The three FAPESP-funded thematic projects underway in the field of philosophy at the University of São Paulo demonstrate the breadth of the department's activities in the university's School of Philosophy, Literature and Human Sciences (FFLCH). One of the projects focuses on classical Greek philosophy, another is about science, technology and society, and the third investigates the development of the ideas of the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951). "One of the characteristics of our research is the balance we achieve between topics and periods of study," explains Roberto Bolzani Filho, a 1985 graduate and current department head who, under the mentorship of project coordinator Professor Marco Zingano, is one of the researchers contributing to the thematic project titled *Plato, Aristotle and their Influence in Antiquity*.

The project's main objective is to study the central themes of Plato and Aristotle that left a profound mark in antiquity, in principally two key areas: metaphysics and ethics. Both philosophers share important ideas about the nature of knowledge, the world, and our actions, and, in general terms, maintain a



Wittgenstein: a project about the evolution of the philosopher's ideas

Some features of the philosophy studied at USP can be traced far back to the program's beginnings in the 1930s

Blue Book—dictated in 1933 to his students at Cambridge University—and reached his peak with *Philosophical Investigations*, which was published posthumously.

MAUGÜÉ AND THE FRENCH

The thematic projects provide an understanding of much of the research that is now underway at the USP philosophy department, but important influences can be traced far back in the department's history. Some look to the first years of the program—to 1935, the year after its founding—when it was under the mentorship of Jean Maugüé, a memorable figure in the department until 1943, when he left for North Africa to fight alongside fellow Frenchmen during World War II. Gilda de Mello e Souza, his student and future professor of aesthetics at the

department, said at its 1973 inaugural ceremony that “Maugüé was not just a professor but a way of walking and talking” and “a way of approaching subjects.”

He was, in other words, a “style” (according to Bolzani's definition) introduced to the department by Maugüé and his compatriots, especially Martial Guéroult, who taught at USP from 1947 to 1953. According to Mello e Souza, this style amounted to a habit of “presenting to students, in a spirit of loyalty, a well-defined topic, backed by updated bibliographic source material.” Textbooks would be a thing of the past as students relied exclusively on a methodical reading of original philosophical texts. “At the time,” adds Bolzini, “the idea of free thinking lent itself to a very eclectic philosophy, a sort of incoherent group of literati and humanists. It was necessary to establish a disciplined way of thinking. A number of approaches to the study of philosophy are practiced today in the department, but the notion of discipline endures.”

“The essay—more to do with the history of ideas, characteristic of French philosophy—has always been influential in the department,” says Pablo Mariconda, 1971 graduate and now principal

realistic perspective of matters eminently founded on reason. However, Aristotle—who had been a pupil of Plato—broke with his former mentor to become a fierce critic of Platonism, presenting an alternative to his master's thought. The project looks at this opposition between Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism up to the time when eclecticism gained momentum in an attempt to harmonize the two philosophical views.

A second thematic project—*Origin and significance of technoscience: on relations among science, technology and society*—examines topics that lie at the meeting ground of epistemology, ethics, and politics. “The project is interested in crucial and very current themes, like the hegemony of agribusiness and genetically-modified agriculture, as well as sustainable proposals like agro-ecology,” says Pablo Mariconda, the project's principal investigator. “We are also interested in matters related to the divide between public and private knowledge, the anti-scientific aspect of the techno-scientific practices of multinational corporations vested in health and agriculture, and ethical problems in connection with the practice of eugenics in human genetics,” he adds. According to Mariconda, the

research not only defends those positions that are critical of these approaches, but also serves to contribute to the dialog by putting forward a proposal for applying science to public life in a way that makes it more responsive to the development of alternative approaches that are more socially and environmentally sustainable and less beholden to the interests of capital and markets.

A detailed description of the evolution of the ideas of one of last century's most important thinkers is the primary objective of the thematic project titled *The Middle Wittgenstein*, and is being carried out at the FLLCH, despite the fact that the project coordinator Bento Prado Neto, son of Bento Prado Jr., teaches at the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar). Scheduled to conclude in mid-2015, the project is conducting a thorough study of the evolution of Wittgenstein's philosophy from the early 1930's. The changes that took place during this period provide a vantage point from which to better understand his 1921 work, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, from the philosopher's initial phase and up to the more mature philosophical work of the Austrian thinker. Wittgenstein launched this second phase with his

investigator for the thematic project titled *Origin and significance of technoscience: on relations among science, technology and society*. The project, scheduled to end in June 2016, particularly in light of the contemporaneity of the theme, is in line with present-day trends. “In a very typical manner, some of the researchers and professors have a sort of hybrid training that combines conceptual analysis and linguistics with epistemological and historical analysis, a characteristic French leaning,” adds Mariconda.

PHILOSOPHY EN PLEIN AIRE

Several individuals highlight the importance of the French presence at the department during the post-war years, including Gilles-Gaston Granger, Victor Goldschmidt and Claude Lefort (who taught from 1953 to 1954). Gérard Lebrun taught in the department on a number of occasions between 1960 and the mid-1990s, where he published important works on Kant and Hegel. Michel Foucault lectured at USP in the mid-1960s and then in 1973. According to Bolzani, “Lebrun, as much as Bento Prado Jr., to a great extent inspired the ideas behind the founding of the department.”

The presence of the French influenced philosophical trends at USP, especially during the first decades of the program

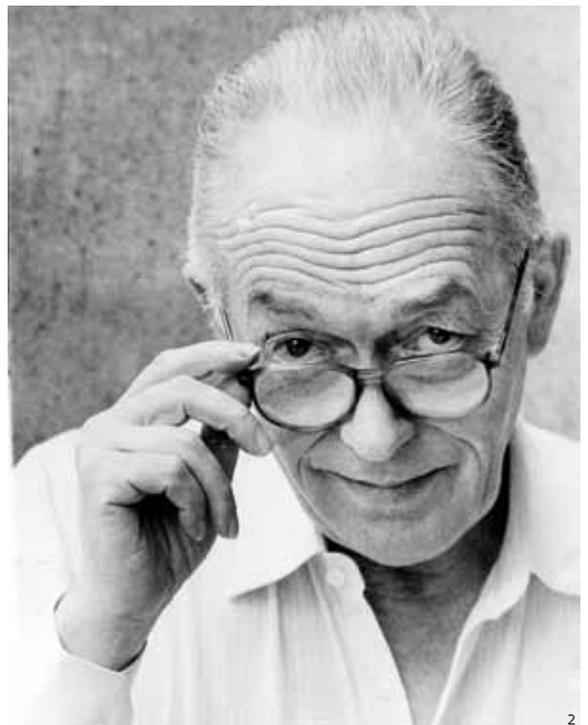
Bento (as he came to be known among his colleagues and students) was a key figure in a generation that—under the influence of their study of Marx in the early 1960s and with their relatively mild critique of the founders’ methods—is now considered the first to have established an original approach in the department. According to Paulo Eduardo Arantes (another member of this generation, though having studied under the first) Bento, in his 1994 *Um departamento francês de ultramar* (A department of Frenchmen from across the sea), “was a philosopher who worked in the open air, far away—but not too far—from the original texts.”

Other celebrated members of this generation, like José Arthur Giannotti, Ruy Fausto, Marilena Chauí, were also influenced by their study of Marx. Marilena Chauí led a thematic project ending in 2013 that studied the relationship between nature and the history of philosophy in the 17th century, its legacy and the analyses and critiques of these seventeenth-century concepts by both the French and German Enlightenment and certain contemporary philosophers. Oswaldo Porchat, another philosopher, was known for his originality and the independence of his philosophical skepticism. The military government at the time was the first to censor the intellectual activities of the group when, in 1969, both Bento and Giannotti were forced to resign under the provisions of the regime’s Institutional Act 5 (AI-5). The group would face other challenges in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the fall of the communist regimes of Eastern Europe. “With the retreat of Marxist thought the department’s professors began to rethink their philosophy,” says Bolzani.

“The debate surrounding the so-called USP brand of Marxism took on many forms,” says Professor Vladimir Safatle, who graduated in 1994, adding that “some leaned towards the

neopragmatism of the Frankfurt School, others sought to push for a dialectic with a strong theoretical grounding in psychoanalysis, while still others looked to the Marx-Spinoza connection. It’s true that Porchat’s skepticism attracted no followers in the department.” Safatle’s own focus, among other interests, is the work of the Frankfurt School and that of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan.

The particular style that became the legacy of the French pioneers, with their resistance to amateurish thinking—and which, according to Arantes, encouraged a “prophylactic” practice whereby the department protected itself against “Brazil’s fever for novelty”—was the training of historians and critics of philosophy, and not of philosophers as such. “There is, in fact, some difficulty in taking this step forward,” says Bolzani. “But better to face this problem than the alternative, because the current model does not discourage the idea of practicing philosophy while at the same time studying it through readings of original texts.” Another common criticism points to a certain resistance by the department to more current contemporary philosophy, although Safatle mentions efforts in the other direction, “especially the philosophy developed over the past 40 years.” ■



Gérard Lebrun: classes at USP throughout a number of periods in its history