

# Teaching Philosophy and the Pandemic: Disorientation and Assessment

## Enseñanza de la filosofía y pandemia. Desorientación y evaluación

## Ensino de filosofia e pandemia. Desorientação e avaliação

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**Abstract:** this article presents research findings on the experiences of university philosophy professors in Colombia during the pandemic, based on a qualitative-hermeneutic analysis of in-depth interviews. The study aimed, first, to examine how philosophy teaching adopted new forms and practices within the context of enforced virtuality, comparing these transformations with other studies at regional and global levels. Second, it sought to understand how philosophy was reshaped by the needs and inquiries of students and professors during a period that seemed to demand philosophical reflection: the role of the body in teaching, the function of observation, assessment conditions, and the meaning of the university. The concept of disorientation is introduced to comprehend a situation where didactic-pedagogical decisions had to be made without sufficient certainty. Traditional pedagogical practices that once guided educators were redefined, revealing specific dynamics concerning evaluation, classroom interactions, and the role of philosophy in life.

**Keywords:** philosophy teaching; university; pandemic; virtual ethnography; epistemic disorientation.

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**Resumen:** se presentan los resultados de investigación sobre las experiencias de docentes universitarios de Filosofía en Colombia durante la pandemia a partir de un análisis cualitativo-hermenéutico de entrevistas a profundidad. El trabajo surgió para, primero, ver la forma en que la enseñanza de la filosofía tomó nuevas formas y prácticas en los contextos de virtualidad forzada en comparación con otros estudios a nivel regional y mundial; segundo, entender cómo la filosofía se transformó a partir de unas necesidades y unas búsquedas de estudiantes y profesores en tiempos que parecían requerir preguntas filosóficas: el lugar del cuerpo en la enseñanza, la función de la mirada, las condiciones de la evaluación y el significado de la universidad. Se postula la desorientación como concepto para comprender esta situación en la que se necesitan decisiones didáctico-pedagógicas sin tener las suficientes seguridades. Entendemos que las prácticas pedagógicas tradicionales que guiaban a profesoras y profesores se transforman mostrando unas dinámicas específicas sobre cómo evaluar y entender tanto las dinámicas de clases como el lugar de la filosofía en la vida.

**Palabras clave:** enseñanza de la filosofía; universidad; pandemia; etnografía virtual; desorientación epistémica.

**Resumo:** este artigo apresenta os resultados da pesquisa sobre as experiências de professores universitários de Filosofia na Colômbia durante a pandemia, com base em uma análise qualitativa-hermenêutica de entrevistas em profundidade. Em primeiro lugar, o estudo examinou como o ensino de filosofia adotou novas formas e práticas no contexto da virtualidade forçada, comparando essas mudanças com outros estudos regionais e globais. Em segundo lugar, procurou entender como a filosofia foi transformada pelas necessidades e indagações de alunos e professores durante uma época que parecia exigir questões filosóficas: o corpo no ensino, a função da observação, as condições de avaliação e o significado da universidade. O conceito de desorientação é proposto para entender essa situação, na qual as decisões didático-pedagógicas tiveram de ser tomadas sem certeza suficiente. Observamos que as práticas pedagógicas tradicionais, que antes orientavam os professores, foram transformadas, revelando dinâmicas específicas sobre como avaliar e compreender tanto as interações em sala de aula quanto o lugar da filosofia na vida.

**Palavras-chave:** ensino de filosofia; universidade; pandemia; etnografia virtual; desorientação epistêmica.

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The power of disorientations is that they can be powerful enough to change us  
without us knowing how we will be changed.

Harbin (2016, p. 174).

## 1. Introduction

Human capacities to understand and believe in another person's discourse depend on the listener's openness to the world; the more individuals engage in dialogue, the more likely they are to bridge differences and rectify prejudices within pluralistic environments and dialogical experiences (Medina, 2013). Creating such scenarios is generally challenging, as people tend to interact within small groups of like-minded individuals. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many previously stable structures were disrupted, leading to an initial

sense of emptiness, a lack of meaning, and a closure to encounters with others. Between 2020 and 2021, humanity experienced an unprecedented situation, bringing with it feelings of insecurity and fear. The pandemic necessitated strict isolation processes, which may have impaired our hermeneutic and epistemological abilities to trust others' experiences and share knowledge.

This issue became particularly evident in classroom dynamics, which rely on profound epistemic trust (for example, trusting that what is conveyed is accurate, ensuring mutual comprehension, and fostering a shared learning environment that makes encounters meaningful). The university campus underwent profound transformations, altering its nature as an open space dedicated to intellectual exploration. Consequently, the academic community was compelled to respond to unforeseen challenges. As Aristotle notes in *On the Soul*, "Aquatic animals do not realize that one wet body touches another" (423b), similarly, universities—despite pre-existing challenges (Chamorro Muñoz, 2013)—remained robust institutions, unaware of their underlying vulnerabilities. Throughout 2020 and 2021, university campuses in general, and philosophy faculties in particular, were confined to digital spaces, which posed significant obstacles to interaction and engagement.

This research is situated within this context and presents a virtual ethnographic study conducted with philosophy professors and students from Colombian universities, exploring their experiences in educational processes during 2021–2022. The ethnographic interpretation aligns with perspectives from social epistemology, offering an essential framework for analyzing this scenario by expanding the relationship between credibility and prejudice. Our hypothesis suggests that confinement may have exacerbated attitudes of inhospitality and epistemic closure; however, it also posits that individuals within educational settings actively seek strategies to counteract such tendencies. We argue that this crisis, which entailed various forms of disorientation, prompts reflection on how philosophy professors attempted to respond appropriately, creatively, or necessarily to contextual challenges while avoiding prejudiced assumptions. As Arendt (1954) asserts, "A crisis only becomes a disaster when it is met with preconceived judgments, that is, with prejudice" (p. 1).

## 2. Methodology

Philosophy has its own ways of approaching research objects, distinct from those upheld by other social sciences. Our general approach is hermeneutic, which supports an understanding of the world based on the horizons of meaning generated among participating subjects. It is important to remember that hermeneutics diverges from the positivist view of the subject-object division and assumes a decisively qualitative stance, grounded in the fusion of horizons of meaning (Swayne Barthold, 2016, p. 4). Gadamer (1996) challenges the positivist and Cartesian understanding of knowledge by asserting that all knowing is fluid

and mediated, as it is embedded within a horizon from which all interpretation takes place. This horizon is continuously shaped and expanded through questions and answers or through the constant engagement with the assumptions that precede any interpretation. These methodological specifications make hermeneutics particularly well-suited for qualitative educational research (Friesen et al., 2012).

We aim to make this hermeneutic approach effective through the developments of virtual ethnography, which allow philosophy to engage with fieldwork in qualitative research. This type of ethnography complements philosophical hermeneutics by recognizing the researcher's influence on the object of study and demonstrating that any human group is capable of accounting for itself (Cayón, 2013; Geertz, 1973). This means that the intentional role of the researcher in relation to the studied human group cannot be ignored. In other words, both the researcher and the researched may ultimately exchange roles: the former's prejudices can be challenged from the latter's perspective, compelling the researcher to reassess their own self-understanding within the study. The methodological shift thus acknowledges that the human group under study can ethnographically reveal the very categories by which it should be interpreted.

Following Ruiz Méndez & Aguirre Aguilar (2015), virtual ethnography focuses on the uses, appropriations, and construction of meaning that users develop through digital platforms; consequently, it allows researchers to approach realities that humans have constituted in digital environments (chats, virtual classrooms, video calls, forums, webinars) and analyze them from within virtuality itself. The idea is for the "researcher to immerse themselves in the world they study for a set period and take into account the relationships, activities, and meanings forged among those participating in the social processes of that world" (Hine, 2004, p. 13). This approach is not merely the application of ethnographic methods to new, so-called virtual environments, but rather "an opportunity to reflexively transform the method itself and reconsider the theoretical and methodological assumptions that underpin our relationship with technology" (Ruiz Méndez & Aguirre Aguilar, 2015, p. 77).

Like traditional ethnography—whether collaborative (Rappaport & Rodríguez, 2007) or shared (Cayón, 2013)—virtual ethnography primarily aims to account for social settings through the analysis of field records collected within a communicative framework. The key difference lies in the fact that communication is digitally mediated. Nonetheless, both share the fundamental characteristic of being acts of communication that the researcher weaves with the community. In line with the aforementioned ethnographic trends (Cayón, 2013), virtual ethnography also assumes a non-hierarchical relationship between the subjects involved in the research, employs qualitative procedures, and requires the researcher to oscillate between immersion and estrangement in relation to their subjects (Cayón, 2013, p. 62).

Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) into daily life has introduced a new way of establishing social relationships in spaces now identified as virtual (Bueno Gómez, 2023). The challenges posed by virtual qualitative research necessitate reflection on conceptions of corporeality, space, and time, which do not exist in the same way as they do in offline worlds. Thus, virtual ethnography takes on new dimensions by questioning how to study social relationships mediated by the internet (Ruiz Méndez & Aguirre Aguilar, 2015, p. 81). It refers to the study of our practices on the internet, from within the internet itself; as Mosquera Villegas (2008) states, “We assume the internet as a generator of meanings, values, and specific functions that account for a culture that is produced and reproduced through media” (p. 540). Following Hine (2004), we understand that virtual ethnography focuses on the uses and practices that emerge around it, rather than on the technology itself; the distinction lies in understanding the internet as both a cultural artifact and a culture in its own right (p. 25).

Among the key aspects that virtual ethnography must consider—especially in times such as the pandemic—is the relationship between research possibilities and unforeseen political changes. In our case, this is not a study on virtual education designed from the outset for digital environments; rather, we are interested in the strategies developed to sustain and navigate courses initially designed for in-person learning but that had to adapt to a new virtual space. Additionally, we examine the lessons learned upon returning to face-to-face instruction.

The initial typology for conducting virtual ethnography followed a pre-classificatory criterion determined by the following variables: departments or faculties of philosophy offering undergraduate and master's programs in philosophy; programs that had implemented didactic strategies to mitigate the conditions imposed by the pandemic; and professors with different types of academic contracts and ages. It is also important to clarify that our own program is part of the study group. The final sample comprised in-depth interviews with 25 professors from six different cities in the country, categorized into three age groups (under 40, between 40 and 50, and over 50 years old). Given the specific composition of the philosophy professor community in Colombia, male professors were more represented than female professors. The study included tenured, adjunct, and hourly contract professors, as well as professors involved in both teaching and academic administration or research.

The interviews were semi-structured and conducted based on a horizontal professor-to-professor<sup>1</sup> relationship, which is an essential factor in shared digital ethnographic work. This approach allows for a closer engagement with the

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<sup>1</sup> This aspect always ensured that this was a shared virtual ethnography, as there is no hierarchy between interviewee-interviewer. On the contrary, the interviewer learns directly from the interpretations offered by the interviewee, just as the interviewee learns first-hand from the interviewer's own experience of which they are in dialogue.

analyzed social phenomenon and reflects the levels of interpretation and understanding of participants' experiences through their own narratives (Boellstorff et al., 2012, p. 93). From the concern about lived experience (how they perceived what was happening, how they felt, what support systems they relied on, and their health conditions), the categories of disorientation and evaluative penumbra emerged. The category of disorientation has been explored in previous studies, as we will see in the next section; it was the concept that enabled us to encapsulate and comprehend the challenges faced by philosophy professors. The category of evaluative penumbra, on the other hand, emerged uniquely from this study, likely influenced by our own unarticulated experiences as philosophy professors. Its development will be addressed in the results section.

### 3. Epistemic Disorientation as a Central Philosophical Concept

The phenomenon studied in this research had very few immediate references<sup>2</sup> and revealed that the emotional and epistemic dimensions expressed by philosophy professors and students could be described as disorientation. Disorientation, following Harbin (2016, p. 13), is a phenomenon continuously present in our lives, as most people can affirm that they have felt disoriented at some point—whether in space, time, or life decisions. Within disorientation, different levels and modalities can be distinguished: it can be a merely fleeting event—such as falling asleep on public transport and waking up without recognizing one's location; it can involve more extended processes related to the overextension of our usual ways of inhabiting the world—such as moving to a foreign country or starting a new job; and finally, it can be a profound and difficult-to-overcome disorientation, marking a before and after in one's biographical existence and necessitating a reevaluation of life's meaning—such as the death of a loved one, a severe illness, or an act of violence<sup>3</sup>.

This aspect always ensured that it was a shared virtual ethnography, as there is no hierarchy between interviewee and interviewer. On the contrary, the interviewer learns directly from the interpretations offered by the interviewee, just as the interviewee gains first-hand knowledge of the interviewer's own experience, which they discuss.

Despite these different levels, a general definition of disorientation is possible. According to Harbin (2016), disorientation is characterized, on one hand, by feeling overwhelmed by a situation, as if one were outside of the familiar; on the other, this sensation compels epistemic, moral, and political responses (pp. 20-21). In summary, being disoriented unfolds at two levels: first, it involves feeling situated in a reality that cannot be understood using the usual

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<sup>2</sup> This specific topic has been addressed by Prof. Alicia Chamorro in various publications and academic events: Chamorro Muñoz, 2023, 2024; *Illness: Phenomenology & Hermeneutics*, 2023; *Facultad Artes y Humanidades UCaldas*, 2023; 2024.

<sup>3</sup> The literature has wonderfully uncovered these forms of profound disorientation (Stegmaier, 2019; Stiegler, 2002).

epistemological frameworks that structure everyday responses. In this regard, we follow Grene (1974), who argues that all knowledge is a form of orientation:

It begins with the acquisition of spatial-temporal orientation in children and develops into increasingly broader dimensions of mental, emotional, spiritual, and bodily orientation, but it is always the orientation of a psycho-physical being in its totality. (p. 88)

This pluralistic perspective on cognitive ability as orientation allows us to understand the epistemic dimension of disorientation in both its bodily and mental aspects. Furthermore, if we consider that "all knowledge is an act, and what humans do is always connected to a value, then knowledge is also inherently value-laden" (Grene, 1974, p. 179), we can assume that epistemic disorientation is not merely an absence of knowledge but rather a disconnection between the structures through which the world is perceived and what that world demands.

Moreover, all disorientation involves a compulsion to act. For Grene (1974), knowledge entails "the formation of the world as a dwelling where I can move, in communion with others who have oriented themselves in a world that communicates with me" (p. 179). Consequently, dislocation requires not only epistemic actions but also moral and political ones, as what is at stake is the world itself and its viability as a dwelling.

We can also understand the epistemological challenges posed by disorientation through the metaphor of shipwreck. Hans Blumenberg (2018) begins his study on the metaphorology of human existence by contrasting the human desire for security with the enduring metaphor of navigation as a way to conceptualize life's unfolding. Human life is metaphorically afflicted by uncertainty, given the inherent risks of navigation and the ever-present possibility of shipwreck (Chamorro Muñoz, 2023, 2024; *Illness: Phenomenology & Hermeneutics*, 2023). Blumenberg thus constructs a compelling narrative on the metaphor of shipwreck, which can be compared to the sensation of disorientation we have been exploring. The loss of security associated with the shipwreck metaphor aligns with the crisis of not knowing how to respond, characteristic of the most intense forms of disorientation. The German philosopher illustrates that shipwreck is not only a process of despair but also one of learning and self-relation (Blumenberg, 2018, p. 91). Through this metaphor, we can grasp our precarious and fragile existence, akin to living with the remnants of a shipwreck (Torregroza, 2014).

Although the figure of the castaway may seem extreme—since disorientation rarely manifests as someone clinging to a wooden plank in the middle of the sea—it nonetheless encapsulates the ambivalence and compulsion to act that characterize cognitive instability. More importantly, disorientation is embodied; like the castaway adrift, one must act in a difficult situation where survival is at stake. Disorientations are felt and compromise our bodily being,

making us feel lost and at risk. The most challenging aspect of epistemic disorientation is the loss of trust, which, in its most severe degrees, can prevent individuals from forming social bonds or leading flourishing lives.

During the pandemic, disorientation was manifested as a drifting between inside and outside, reflected in isolation and confinement. Butler (2020) argued that the pandemic imposed a new space and time (p. 59), marked by the disruption of the traditional relationship between these two dimensions. Similarly, Ratcliffe (2021) demonstrated that, amid the coexistence of the established and the new, epistemic drift can emerge in the pandemic world when one cannot trust information or accept something as true to guide actions within a framework of trust. This uncertainty stems, among other factors, from being confronted with constantly shifting and often contradictory information (Cuddy et al., 2007; Casero-Ripollés, 2020).

Ratcliffe (2022) highlights that: "This can add to a social world that is not only disorienting but also lacks forms of social and interpersonal support that would otherwise help negotiate the disruption" (p. 3). In other words, disorientation is not solely determined by a sudden life-changing event or an overload of new information that overwhelms cognitive orientation processes. Additionally, epistemic drift or disorientation can be exacerbated by a growing lack of trust in the world, particularly when social structures erode and safe spaces within close communities disappear, reaching the level of trauma.

The more securities we possess, the less we recognize the feeling of "being at home," precisely because being at home is taken for granted and does not demand our reflection. With a stable framework of references, emotions, and affections, individuals can act without experiencing excessive demands from their environment or doubting their abilities. Conversely, when facing epistemic drift—feeling as disoriented as a castaway—the subject encounters a moment in which the solid becomes unstable. This epistemic drift can dangerously lead individuals to cling to explanatory frameworks that oppose the development of a pluralistic and diverse society. The sense of isolation is thus framed as a virus that transforms sociability, referred to as "the virus of isolation" (Butler, 2020, p. 62).

Therefore, resolving epistemic disorientation is a process that entails profound transformations in how the world is understood. This process is often linked to the need for broad support networks and social, ethical, and political innovations that enable the disoriented subject to regain lost security. In fact, group disorientation can lead to significant political transformations within a society. Consider, for instance, the case analyzed by Fricker (2017) regarding hermeneutical epistemic injustice in relation to sexual harassment. Beyond the injustice itself, the philosopher identifies an epistemic disorientation that occurs when naming the harm causes both victims and witnesses to realize that something has been disrupted and that previous epistemic frameworks are losing



validity. In such cases, a disoriented society must seek new epistemic orientations, navigating the discomfort, difficulties, and even violence that may arise in the process.

#### **4. Background**

Several studies have addressed the topic of university education during the pandemic, similar to our research. Recognizing the novelty of the situation and the complexity of its analysis, these studies present their results as tentative, preparatory, or preliminary. Most of them employ quantitative analyses, primarily developed through digital surveys (Bernardo & Duarte, 2020; Junus et al., 2021; Díaz-Noguera et al., 2022), focusing on specific populations, whether students (Alvarez Jr., 2020; Elnikova et al., 2020; Díaz-Noguera et al., 2022) or professors (Junus et al., 2021). Some studies adopt a multidimensional perspective, while others concentrate on a specific aspect of analysis. For instance, Keser Aschenberger et al. (2023) examine students' home learning environments in Austria. Fewer studies opt for an ethnographic perspective, yet we find some that align with our approach by valuing individual experiences and giving voice to specific narratives, such as research conducted at universities in Belém, Paraná, Brazil (Vasconcelos et al., 2020), in Indonesia focusing on university instructors (Junus et al., 2021), or in the Philippines through in-depth interviews with five students. Additionally, Elnikova et al. (2020) combine surveys and interviews to analyze three Russian universities.

No studies were found in philosophy that employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods. However, some works offer philosophical reflections on what education should entail, such as Onebunne et al. (2020), who present an African philosophical perspective. Rudnick (2020) highlights the need for philosophy to address the dilemmas and challenges faced by universities upon returning from isolation. Finally, Jackson et al. (2020) take an original approach to the topic of the pandemic by compiling snapshots of different philosophy professors' experiences during 2020, emphasizing the importance of personal narratives and the role of philosophical reflection in understanding life.

From the reviewed studies, we identify four key lines of inquiry that we seek to develop:

##### **4.1. Novelty of the Educational Phenomenon**

From a reflective perspective, Daniel (2020) argues for the necessity of implementing flexible educational methods as the only viable way to sustain education during the pandemic: "COVID-19 is the greatest challenge that these expanded national education systems have ever faced" (p. 91). Although Kalimullina et al. (2020) conducted their research prior to the pandemic, their findings highlight how previous studies inform the new challenges posed by the unprecedented educational context. Vasconcelos et al. (2020) raise the question of whether professors were teaching in a moment of chaos or experiencing chaos

in their teaching, arguing that the disorder caused by the pandemic affected not only education but also the universities' responses, leading to an educational crisis without clear strategies to navigate these challenges.

Regarding the impact on students, Alvarez Jr. (2020) analyzes the case of the Philippines, explaining that the crisis in universities during these uncertain times was multidimensional, involving transformations in curricula, spaces, and resources. Most referenced studies underscore the importance of listening to students during these times to better understand their processes and reshape post-pandemic education.

#### **4.2. Ordinary Virtual Education vs. Emergency Remote Education**

Nuno Bernardo and Emília Duarte (2020) differentiate between ordinary virtual education and the mandatory remote education implemented due to the pandemic. The latter lacked the preparation and epistemological foundations of the former, which, despite ongoing debates about its meaning and scope, has spent decades refining its pedagogical strategies (p. 578). The primary challenge faced by emergency remote education was the absence of face-to-face interaction between professors and students. Class designs struggled to adequately address this issue, and academic social networks, forums, and online collaborative work remained rigid and task-oriented compared to the richer interactions typical of in-person university education.

This observation aligns with Elnikova et al. (2020), who argue that most digital tools are still rooted in rote learning and fail to foster creativity. This limitation became evident when universities had to adapt entirely to these models, causing a loss of student individuality and professor identity, especially in asynchronous classes (p. 3527). Similarly, Vasconcelos et al. (2020) suggest that emergency remote education responded in precarious yet creative ways to the urgent and contingent conditions in which universities and schools found themselves, exposing stark inequalities between students with access to technology and those who were left isolated due to technological barriers. Conversely, Díaz-Noguera et al. (2022) emphasize the role of motivation as a crucial factor for emergency education, even suggesting that it is more important than variables previously considered decisive, such as access to technological devices and comfortable learning spaces.

#### **4.3. The University Crisis Beyond the Pandemic**

The pandemic revealed structural issues within universities that extended beyond the health crisis, highlighting deeper concerns about higher education in the 21st century. One notable issue was the widespread perception that online and distance education are of lower quality, which undermined the credibility of remote education from the outset (Junus et al., 2021). Although an efficient system was eventually implemented in Indonesia, professors still felt uncertain about whether students were truly learning. A second issue was the differing

experiences of various age groups in online education. Keser Aschenberger et al. (2022) highlight that the home study environments of children, university students, and working adults with household responsibilities were vastly different. A third issue was the economic and psychological segregation experienced by students. Safonov & Mayakovskaya (2020) argue that higher education institutions (HEIs) often disregard students' psychological well-being and economic conditions, viewing these as private matters. The pandemic exposed this neglect, not because universities did nothing, but because it became evident how little was being done. The crisis also demonstrated that the idea of digital inclusion as a transformative force in education was largely an illusion. Gomes et al. (2021) were among the first to examine the post-pandemic period, connecting the emergency education phase to future educational models. Their work highlights a fourth issue: discrimination. Beyond the pandemic's impact, concurrent crises such as violence underscored the need for a more inclusive education system. Jackson et al. (2020), focusing on the U.S. and Canada, link the COVID-19 crisis to racism and the Black Lives Matter movement, illustrating that the pandemic's challenges were not limited to confinement but also included political and cultural tensions that escalated into profound stress and crisis. Alvarez Jr. (2020) also addresses this crisis:

The faculty members should step up and let the student feel their socio-emotional presence, especially in this difficult period of our generation. For instance, they could ask their students if they are still doing well and what learning remedies or alternatives they could agree on as a class, and not just impose a one-way ERT approach. Significantly, since we are not in a normal situation, learning should not be highly regarded as a matter of grades and content-based education; rather, a pedagogy of compassion and care must always be present. (p. 150)

#### **4.4. The Pandemic as an Opportunity to Transform the Future University**

There are no definitive conclusions on the impact of virtual education. Universities may choose to integrate more asynchronous classes (Daniel, 2020) within a primarily synchronous educational framework. As Green et al. (2022) suggest, education must be designed to function effectively in both stable and crisis conditions, requiring an adaptive university model characterized by cooperation, inclusion, and flexibility.

Letyagina (2020) argues that post-pandemic universities must fully embrace digitalization and the renewal of ICTs: "Thus, we can state that the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the need to 'digitalize' universities and redefine the existing traditional contact-based learning process, as well as the role of the teacher in this process" (p. 6). Similarly, Xin Xie and Fui-Hoon Nah (2020) advocate for a post-pandemic education system that embraces hybrid

models, mobile-accessible higher education programs, and fosters student self-motivation and self-regulation.

Díaz-Noguera et al. (2022) demonstrate the possibility of integrating various virtual education methodologies within the traditional university, even though they point out the difficulty that, while it is possible to achieve more efficient learning, it is not always meaningful due to the lack of physical contact and classroom life. Therefore, learning for posterity lies in the interests of the students; the curriculum must consider what impacts and interests them if it aims to achieve effective and meaningful learning:

Higher education cannot forget that the impact of Industry 4.0, characterized by the digitalization of cybernetic processes and systems, is based on three trends: artificial intelligence, immersive transparent experiences, and digital platforms. It is necessary to promote motivation and autonomy in the learning processes of future educators. The fourth industrial revolution is also a challenge, as it requires the development of disciplinary and transversal competencies that can only be acquired in learning processes throughout their life, constantly preparing them for a changing and demanding work reality. (p. 12)

Vasconcelos et al. (2020) show that post-pandemic education must involve not only the use of hybrid forms of education but also accepting and recognizing the diversity of the population that is part of the university:

On the one hand, there are newly graduated professionals, natives to the digital era, and many are aware of the educational trends towards the use of DICT; and on the other hand, the experts, with many years in the teaching career, specialists in their fields and who frequently use traditional pedagogical practices of content transmission. Hence, it is necessary for students and professors to accept the academic environment as an intergenerational space for the exchange of knowledge, favorable to deep processes of co-education. (p. 9)

## 5. Results

We now aim to demonstrate how, in relation to the pandemic and lockdown of 2020-2021, we found in the narratives of professors and students a sense of disorientation that implies a drift between the inside and the outside, between the consolidated and the new.



still had a lot to do. It was extremely demanding because we had to prepare much more for classes, and the university didn't take that into account. The workload tripled, including evaluation and effort. I felt completely drained from virtual teaching. (Interview 5)

The non-traditional preparation of classes represented both an overload and a psychological burden for professors:

As a professor, you have to support yourself; you cannot break down in class. That first semester, despite all my effort in preparing activities, nothing worked. One day, the class started like that, with no one speaking, and I felt an overwhelming urge to cry. I completely broke down. (Interview 14)

This distress extended beyond teaching, also affecting research:

One of the effects I have experienced is the difficulty in starting any task. I lack the energy to sit down and write. The confinement has worsened my sleep issues, and mustering the strength to create now is extremely difficult. Writing is tough and painful; it demands the strength of a Hercules or an Atlas. We are simply not in the right circumstances to write. (Interview 3)

Furthermore, physical presence conveys information that we cannot fully classify but that shapes experience. For most professors and students, an in-person class is more enriching because they can observe facial expressions: We are beings who live to coexist with others, and when this is reduced to a camera or a screen, the absence is felt (Interview 3). In contrast, the screen presents an opaque mediation devoid of the gestures involved in classroom interactions.

It was truly spectacular to be back in the classroom, and students affirmed this as well. It's not just about being on campus; seeing me through a camera was not the same as seeing me in person. My movement was no longer limited to sitting in front of a screen. Now, standing up, I could transmit more of the passion for the knowledge I was teaching, and students really appreciated that. (Interview 4).

However, there remains a sense that something is missing in face-to-face interactions. Another professor remarked. I feel that we still lack the co-presence with students—that tension of eye contact, for instance. Otherwise, we have simply become very skilled lecturers or talkers. We need that gaze. A Spanish philosopher of education once said that he enjoyed reading Plato not just for the discourse but for the gestures. The body is what's missing. What we have now is a 'remote-controlled' body, which is different. What we long for is co-presence". (Interview 5)

Despite this longing for in-person interaction, neither professors nor students can fully articulate what they miss the most, as they also acknowledge the advantages of virtuality: expanded campus access, a repository of recorded

lectures, and the inclusion of diverse didactic approaches. Yet, the desire for presence seems to be intertwined with a yearning for the past. Empathy emerges as a key aspect for overcoming this crisis, as it enables the recognition of shared struggles: "Sharing the challenges of the pandemic, which affected everyone, exposed a sense of equality, reducing distance and fostering solidarity" (Interview 3). Another professor highlighted this process of mutual support:

During classes, a great deal was learned, but the biggest allies in the learning process were the students. When we didn't know how to use a platform, students would teach us. Some of them were incredibly kind and understood that we were all learning together. It was truly a collaborative effort. (Interview 2)

The crisis likely led university professors to develop various explanations or proto-theories regarding the pandemic, lockdown, and emerging needs. In some cases, these discourses provided an orientation framework. In our research, philosophy professors expressed numerous reflections in this regard, offering perspectives on the global situation and education. One professor shared their reflections on global injustice:

I have several thoughts on this. First, I see the deep-seated injustice in how the world operates, something evident in daily news reports. There isn't a day when we don't hear about political maneuvers, funding allocations, or inequitable vaccination priorities. What's happening in Colombia, for example, is unacceptable to me. Some nations proclaim themselves as the guardians of morality, ethics, and human rights, yet their actions reveal their self-interest above all else. (Interview 7)

Or about teaching:

What struck me was that everyone lamented and longed for a return to in-person classes, ultimately concluding that a lot was lost. However, I believe much was also gained. Conducting a phenomenological analysis of education in these virtual environments, I would highlight the sensory modality. We tend to privilege vision, yet engaging auditory and proprioceptive senses in online learning cultivates interesting cognitive processes. I haven't written about this yet, as I have been contemplating these ideas since before the pandemic. (Interview 4)

However, there is a transversal aspect of reflection on the need to resort to *software*, either through personal learning or through training courses offered by institutions, in which they wonder about the role of technology. Positive or negative, teachers do not align themselves with the idea that technology is neutral or that it depends on its use. They really know and recognize that they have integrated, some more, others less, in their pedagogical work the possibilities offered by technology, as well as the limitations it imposes.

## 5.2. Didactic Disorientation and Evaluative Penumbra

Another aspect where disorientation was abruptly marked was evaluation, referred to here as *evaluative penumbra*. There was uncertainty about whether evaluations were being conducted properly and whether they fulfilled the proposed objectives. This penumbra relates to the difficulty of achieving fair assessment, the expansion of evaluative practices, the lack of knowledge about the situation of the person on the other side, questioning pedagogical practice, the emergence of aspects more important than classes, and the need to justify the relevance of the subject. Additionally, there was mental and physical exhaustion due to virtual classes.

Professors might feel that evaluative standards were relaxed, which led some to express concerns such as: “so, one wonders how to maintain an optimal level of education” (Interview 18). However, more important was the effort made by professors to introduce new forms of evaluation. Of course, there are evaluative methods yet to be improved, such as oral, in-person assessment. However, this very impossibility has led professors, knowing that cameras turned off prevent them from considering facial reactions during assessment, to seek compensatory mechanisms for this bodily feedback by developing new interests in the student’s situation.

Nevertheless, for professors, this flexibility is detrimental, and they wish to restore rigor in evaluation, to “be strict.” Confirming this aspect would require new post-pandemic research to weigh what has truly changed and how. It is clear that the category of evaluative *flexibility* carries a negative aspect that conceals the situation of disorientation. Thus, we find it more appropriate to think in terms of evaluative penumbra because there were adjustments in pedagogical practice resulting from the evaluative problem. To the extent that we can identify a sort of densification of the relationships between professors and students.

The first manifestation of this penumbra was the physical separation between students and professors. The sense of control during an exam is lost because students are not present; they have the possibility to consult their notes, texts, classmates, or the internet, without the slightest suspicion of infringement. In this sense, other types of activities were prioritized to achieve a fair evaluation.

Consequently, the measure of fairness in evaluation was broadened. While for most professors, it primarily involved determining who understood or mastered the studied knowledge, the evaluative penumbra implied considering personal conditions and adjusting evaluation: granting more time, simplifying assessments, using online activities, and adopting work modalities that demonstrate cognitive aspects supported by social and technological competencies. The change in the student’s situation served to justify the use of a tuning mechanism that expanded evaluative techniques:



[...] students made extensive use of digital tools. During that period, I was teaching a seminar on (omitted for anonymity), so it was no longer a presentation in the traditional German seminar format, but rather a weekly product that could be a podcast, photograph, infographic, or video. Meetings were held on Tuesdays, and the idea was that by the weekend, we were already circulating the task on social media. (Interview 18)

The student's situation involved making the body's situation visible; before the pandemic, the body was mobile but barely visible within the realm of philosophical education. Paradoxically, the body gains visibility when it ceases to move, opening the possibility of questioning not only the traditional German seminar format and evaluation methods but also the very primacy of the professor-philosopher. A critical gaze turned towards philosophy reveals that, indeed, corporeality and affectivity had not been considered factors of philosophical education (Hadot, 2004; 2009). This epistemic disorientation, which we identify as evaluative penumbra, deeply impacted the pedagogical practice of philosophy because it undermined what is considered the tradition of philosophical education. It seems that the student's body and affectivity are being reclaimed as part of philosophical education through a rethinking of pedagogical practice:

[...] that accentuated the reluctance towards mediations and discourses that believe the teacher's word in the classroom is the center of the educational process. It exposed the shortcomings of prevailing but outdated pedagogical models that are deeply rooted in philosophy: the model of the teacher who brings the book, knows everything about it, and speaks in the first person. For me, it is an authoritarian model that should be reconsidered. However, despite the fact that most people thought this way, they opted to make videos, use the platform, and grade exams differently. (Interview 12)

I think it changed a lot in the sense that it allowed for the use of electronic media that were not previously used. The possibilities we had or used to have in the classroom were very limited: poor internet service, no screens for projection, no sound, a lot of noise, and generally, the technological conditions of audiovisual media were not available. I practically never projected anything, at most a movie. For example, being able to show a YouTube video and modify it as one does on the screen. It forced me to use PowerPoint practically all the time. In other words, it opened up many possibilities that were previously very limited. (Interview 28)

The subject's situation became evident in the closeness established with students, which might well have been present in other social spaces such as work or family. However, it must be considered relevant to the pedagogical practice in philosophy precisely because the normalized distancing had excluded the body and affectivity. For female professors, this aspect was essential:

It is absolutely crucial to talk to the students, but arranging a 30-minute video call with them, even individually, is extremely important. It has happened to me many times that time passes by as we listen to them, as if they are venting; I think it is very important to establish that communication. Those separate spaces matter. (Interview 29)

This does not mean that this truth concerning body-affectivity was previously unknown:

We were aware that the strength we had with our students and our processes lay in having established a very close connection. Moving into the digital realm was something they would perceive as an opportunity, and it would not be so painful because experiences of proximity were already familiar, which is very important in the problem of direct interaction. (Interview 15)

Perhaps the pandemic served to materialize this connection:

I believe that this year of the pandemic and the awareness that emerged amidst the pandemic, concerning so many difficulties that have always existed in this country but have been overshadowed by a functioning daily life, should lead us back to classrooms in different ways. Becoming even more aware of the need for the exercise of thinking and a commitment to the lives of others. It should not be merely about specializing in an author or topic but remembering that the life of life, which is the life of thought, depends on a commitment to everyone's life. This is how I see it, and I have been thinking about it for some time. (Interview 23)

The very idea of technological connection, through the internet, with audio and video, served as a metaphor for human connection: *"The greatest challenge was for students who did not have good connectivity, not only in the pedagogical sphere but also emotionally, regarding the student-teacher relationship."* (Interview 18) Thus, the closeness and change are real:

I used to be a somewhat distant professor who always tried to maintain this separation, (...) as time went by, I would say "see you soon" with gestures accompanying the phrase and even add "a hug to everyone." I have become much closer to the screen. Somehow, the fact of sharing the problems of the pandemic that affects us all exposes a sense of equality, reducing distance, and fostering greater solidarity. This effort to remedy the remoteness of traditional upbringing makes me feel more kind and understanding. (Interview 10)

This journey through didactic disorientation—emerging from the whirlwind of assessment, quality, rigor, seriousness, and strictness—ultimately leads us to recognize the truth of the bond inherent in all human relationships, no matter how distant. It allows us to understand and accept that pedagogical

practice can always be renewed, not only in its didactics but also in its most fundamental assumptions.

## 6. Conclusions

We have argued that one of the effects of the 2020–2021 pandemic and its periods of confinement is finding ourselves in a situation of disorientation. Likewise, we have demonstrated the relationship between this disorientation and a process of closure, which may involve behaviors of inhospitality, as we have specifically observed among Philosophy professors and students. Now, in conclusion, we wish to focus on the possibilities of overcoming this disorientation. The process of overcoming a state of disorientation leads to a form of self-understanding that is neither complete nor necessarily better, but rather confrontational, wherein perplexity and disorientation must enable us to learn how to live in a changing world and respond to unexpected situations. Following Harbin (2016), acting morally during moments of disorientation is characterized by the fact that moral action requires extra-moral capacities, as disruptive experiences can contribute to their development, along with moral competencies that can be cultivated in environments where morality is put to the test. Therefore, how can these two aspects be integrated into this new normality of the university?

Every *virtual* class must meet the minimum technological requirements. Innovation must not overlook inequality, and it is essential to find a balance in developing appropriate skills for education within a fragile society. In the specific case of assessment, the conclusion seems as classic as it is disruptive, for assessment in philosophy must be meaningful for the lives of both students and professors. We must embrace the challenges faced by the post-pandemic university, which involved assessments conducted without the professor serving as a *disciplinary* gaze within the classroom. The circumstances thus required changing the rigidity of assessment, prompting questions about the possibility of a more “empathetic” education. Creating spaces of proximity within distance, and managing empathy and trust, raises questions such as: How can I trust that they are paying attention if I cannot see them? How can they know I am speaking to them if they cannot see me?

Regarding didactic challenges, the disorientation of the pandemic revealed that all didactics require ways to maintain joint attention. Moreover, virtual spaces allow for new forms of horizontality that must not be lost. Finally, it is crucial to preserve the possibility of an expansive classroom that includes students and professors external to the class. However, these positive aspects face the need for physical presence that both professors and students have expressed. As we have shown, presence is a highly valued aspect and one viewed with nostalgia. This opens up future research avenues concerning the role of the body within university education.

Concerning the transformation of the campus's meaning, disorientation revealed aspects that previously seemed invisible. Professors and students found in that *blended* space of inside and outside that they are parents, family members, and that not everyone has the same economic conditions, responsibilities, or support systems. A professor notes: "I may be far away virtually, but I know more about their story" (Interview 2). The university should no longer be blind to this aspect that has become visible. Even in the pursuit of academic excellence, the pandemic has exposed how different it is for each person to achieve it. It will require considerable administrative patience, tenacity from mental health professionals, and institutional reorientation to accept that years, perhaps decades later, the pandemic continues to affect its entire community. Thus, recognizing the vulnerability and fragility of the world we live in—and that we are a part of—must be integrated into every philosophy program.

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