Students' Experiences of Philosophy Classes in Higher Education: A Case Study

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Abstract

The current paper addresses research question of how do students of one university (in our case study – Lithuanian Sports University, LSU) experience the educational effect of introductory philosophy course. To answer this question, method of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was employed. In accordance with this qualitative approach, we used method of purposive sampling. Sample of current study consist of 8 participants (3 females and 5 males). All participants are first year undergraduate students form study program "Physical education and sport" (continuing studies) in LSU. As a data collection method, semi-structured interview was applied. In our research it was found that students more tend to share their cognitive experience of philosophy classes than their emotional experience. Among nine qualitative categories (codes) which are the most prominent in our interview records, two of them were found to be especially frequent – "Philosophical technical language poses a great challenge for a common reader" and "In philosophy everything has a deeper meaning".

Keywords: higher education, philosophy classes, physical education, critical thinking.

1. Introduction

In 20th century philosophy completely lost its previous privileged status as "the Mistress Science". The very idea of hierarchy of sciences looks suspicious to contemporary educational theoreticians and practitioners. With the exception of those who dedicated themselves to the academic philosophy as their career, students make acquaintance with philosophy mostly during introductory philosophical classes (such standard courses as "Introduction to philosophy", "Central themes in philosophy", "Introduction to philosophy of science" etc.). They belong to the "General University Studies" (GUS) component of the higher education. Keeping in mind diversity of the notions and models of university (*artes liberales* university, corporate university, specialized university, research university), the relevance of introductory courses of philosophy begs a question (needs a further legitimation). There are important indications that philosophy classes, both in

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school and in university, promote critical thinking skills (Tallent, Barnes, 2015; Zare, Mukundan, 2015; Tsevreni, 2016). Recent researches suggest that philosophy classes are important for moral development of students (Torabizadeh et al., 2018). Finally, researchers point to the importance of philosophy courses for science education (Burgh, Nichols, 2011; Archila, 2015).

Not to diminish the scientific value of these conclusions, there are a few further points worth considering. First of all, we can safely assume that the effect of philosophical classes varies according to which model of university is being implemented in a particular institution and, in the case of specialized universities, what is specialization of a particular institution. To put it otherwise, philosophy, as an academic discipline, must conform to mission and strategy of a particular university. Thus, philosophy classes have different aims and outcomes in, say, technological and sports universities. Most importantly, there is an unavoidable gap between officially declared educational outcomes of philosophy courses and their effect from the subjective point of view of students. Personal experience of students is the alpha and omega of meaningful education (Ausubel, 2000).

Keeping in mind all these considerations, in the current case study we address the following **research question**: How do students of Lithuanian Sports University (LSU) experience the educational effect of introductory philosophy course?

To answer this research question, firstly, in our paper we will discuss the very concept of philosophical education. There are different conceptions of this kind of intellectual training, and one can rightfully suppose that these in one way or another influence educational presuppositions, methodic preferences etc. of philosophy teachers and, in turn, experiences of their students. Secondly, we are to focus on our empirical research, that is, describe its methodology, results, and discus their scientific significance, as well as important limitations.

In the current study, qualitative approach was employed. In accordance with this approach, we used method of purposive sampling. Sample of current study consist of 8 participants (3 females and 5 males). All participants are first year undergraduate students form study program "Physical education and sport" (continuing studies) in Lithuanian Sports University (LSU). As a data collection method, semi-structured interview was applied. Participants were asked 7 open ended questions prepared in advance and a range of supplementary questions intended to reveal their personal experience of philosophy classes. Interview took place after completion of introductory course of philosophy.

2. Literature review

In what follows, will overview major trends in philosophical education. One should be careful not to confuse "philosophical education" with "philosophy *of* education", however close these two notions are. "Philosophical education" is an actual involvement of students in the broad area of ideas and thinking techniques which belong to different western and eastern schools and traditions. "Philosophy of education" designates general ideas concerning matters of teaching and learning which were argued for in these different schools and traditions. These concepts are close, because one's allegiance to a philosophical school and tradition shapes substantially one's profile as a "teacher of philosophy".

Broadly speaking, the main aim of education in any field of expertise is to share relevant professional experience and knowledge. What about philosophy? Curious enough, Socrates, ancient Athenian philosopher, remains an iconic example of philosopher and teacher (e.g. Gose, 2009), though, as textual evidence indicates, he is inclined to believe that he "knows nothing", there is nothing he could teach about (Plato, 1997). He invites his fellow Athenians and honorable guests to discuss live ethical issues, and the mere participation in these conversations seems to be of educational value. It seems, there is no external value attached to them: almost always Socratic conversations, or "refutations" (Gr. *elenchoi*), as Plato and Aristotle calls them, end without any evident positive conclusion (Benson, 2000).

For present purposes, it will suffice to introduce two relevant attempts to revive Socratic education in the informational era. The first attempt is a class activity called "Socratic seminar" (or "Socratic circle", "Socratic teaching") and defined, surprisingly quite uniformly, as "exploratory intellectual conversation centered on a text" (Lambright, 1995: 30); "structured conversations about selected texts and the important ideas imbedded within them" (Mangrum, 2010: 41). The general structure of this activity is following (Moeller, Moeller, 2002; Copeland, 2010). Before

seminar, students are given a text which they must read at home. During seminar, a few students, that is, active disputants, composes an "inner circle" (so-called "fishbowl"). The rest of the class, that is, observers, make "outer circle". Their function is to present an objective evaluation of the discussion in the "inner circle". The main function of the teacher is to initiate and maintain lively discussion among student in the "inner circle". He introduces different text comprehension questions, but he is strongly recommended to suspend his own knowledge and judgements concerning the text he is asking about. Thus, like historical Socrates, the teacher "knows nothing" and focuses on beliefs and ideas of his students.

Many educators are excited about this efficiency of this method as a discussion and competence promotion tool, for example, in the world history classes (Thomas, Goering, 2018) or even in teachers' professional development sessions (Kayi-Aydara, Goering, 2019). Most importantly, students themselves do not identify Socratic seminars as an activity of teaching (at least, when they view these seminars on the tape, that is, approach them from the "third person perspective") (Bar Tikva, 2010). However, important differences between historical Socratic education and contemporary Socratic seminars should be noticed. Socrates (at least, as depicted by Plato) is interested in individuals, not texts. The main motto of Socratic questioning is "know yourself" (Gr. *gnothi seauton*) (Plato, 1997: 510), that is, it aims at self-consciousness of interlocutors (students). Secondly, today Socratic seminars encourages expression of personal believes, propagate the idea that in democratic society every individual has a right to entertain and share his own beliefs on very different matters (e.g. Copeland, 2010: 107). However, Socrates tries to dismiss all false beliefs, to root them out of the belief system of his interlocutors, even if they persist in holding some of these true. Socrates makes no compromises, even at cost of "pedagogical tact". Finally, Socrates lives and philosophizes in the atmosphere of the "shame culture", thus, he tries not only reveal his interlocutors' ignorance but also to make them feel ashamed of it in the eyes of an audience. Today such a "shock therapy" seems unacceptable. Thus, it is rather questionable to what extent contemporary "Socratic seminars" are "authentically Socratic".

M. Lipman has made another important attempt to revive the spirit of Socratic *paideia*. The pivot of his whole enterprise, entitled "Philosophy for Children" (P4C), is the idea of "a community of inquiry" (Lipman, 2003: 101 ff.). As we saw, Socratic dialogical teaching, somehow resembling theatrical performance, involves not only Socrates himself and his interlocutors, but also different audiences ("spectators") which export social influence on the both parts of dialogue. Lipman stresses the fact that that thinking in general and philosophical reasoning in particular is not confined to the subjective "inner" space, but proceeds in "external" world, in the intersubjective medium of shared language, values and knowledge. It is a "distributed thinking" or "shared cognition". "<...> a classroom discussion can be a good example of distributed thinking, because the members of the class answer one another's questions, emulate others' questions, build on one another's inferences, furnish each other with examples and counterexamples, help others construct definitions, and so on" (Lipman, 1998: 277).

Thus, Lipman's educational desideratum is a creation of community (at least, at the scale of a classroom) in which rational and collaborative inquiry is the main form of social existence of individuals. Such a community has following attributes (Lipman, 2003: 95-100): "the quest for meaning" (students "try to squeeze the meaning out of every sentence, every object, every experience"); "reasonableness" (disposition to base one's decisions and judgements on reliable facts); "questioning" (education centers on what students are perplexed and puzzled about); "impartiality" (eagerness to overcome limitations of one's subjective perspective); "thinking for oneself" (avoidance of conformity and blind inertness of thought). In many of these aspects Lipton's project resembles that of so-called "the critical thinking movement", as represented by R. Ennis and others, though Lipman claims that "the critical thinking approach was, by itself, narrow and skimpy" (Lipman, 2003: 3). "Critical thinking" (which involves logical and evaluative powers) should be supplemented with "creative thinking" (dedicated to both inventing and discovering), as well as "caring thinking" (involving empathic, emotional, pro-active and normative dimensions) (Lipman, 1995). Lipman clearly prioritize ideal of philosophy over that of critical thinking: "Philosophy helps children become imaginative, creative and appreciative, caring thinkers, and not just critical, analytical thinkers" (Lipman, 2008: 150). He insists that philosophy is not a body of *theoretical* knowledge which needs a vertical transmission from teacher to student,

but an actual and collaborative *practice* of thinking, that is, horizontal interaction between teacher and student (Ibid.). Thus, Lipmans' project exemplifies "learning by doing" *par excellence*.

Some scholars argue for intrinsic affinities between Lipman's P4C project and Socratic-Deweyan practical philosophy (Daniel, Auriac, 2011). Others explore the benefits of the "dialogical approach", as implemented by Lipman and others, in contemporary education (Barrow, 2010). Even if Lipmans' project is deeply rooted in the soil of western (inherently "Greek") culture, it appears to be effective in different cultural settings: from example, Hong Kong secondary school students, who received P4C lessons, had better scores in *New Jersey Test of Reasoning Skills* (NJTRS) than their peer who were not exposed to educational intervention (Lam, 2012). Of course, in contemporary apology of "philosophical education", nor Limpan himself, nor his admirers, intend to revive ancient Greek notion of "philosophy for the sake of philosophy" or "philosophical way of living" (Gr. *bios theōretikos*). It would be an anachronism. As in the case of "Socrates circles", ancient origins of philosophy and philosophical education, still captivating examples of Socrates dialogues and of Socrates himself, do not preclude philosophical *paideia* from development and adaptation in the ever-changing social-cultural environment. "Philosophy for Children" implies philosophy serving children's needs which are nothing but the needs of inherently rational and social beings.

In sum, both "Socratic circles" and Lipman's project of "philosophical community of inquiry" draw inspiration from Socratic *paideia*. In accordance with the values and interests of modern democratic society, these educational initiatives aim at the formation of self-conscious, socially active and morally responsible individual. Philosophy classes are intended to habituate students in the inquiry for meaning and rational argument.

3. Materials and methods

In the current paper **qualitative approach** was adopted. Broadly speaking, in social science research this approach enables to focus on the lesser-scale phenomena in its immediate context (real word situations), gather a preliminary data for further empirical investigation and theory development (Creswell, 2016). Methodologists distinguish different designs of quantitative research serving different purposes. Our research was designed as **interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).** As such, it focuses on lived personal experiences of participants and how participants themselves are making sense of their experiences (Smith, Osborn, 2003). As for terminology, here "phenomenological" means that a researcher intends to suspend his own point of view and let participants "speak for themselves"; "interpretative" means that researcher is not satisfied with particularities and tries to reveal basic structures immanent in participants' experiences; that is, he intends to make sense of participants' subjective perspectives in more general terms (Frost, 2011; Pietkiewicz, Smith, 2012; Creswell, 2016).

In our research, method of **purposive sampling** was applied, as it is recommended for IPA (Frost, 2011). The group of first year undergraduates from study program "Physical education and sport" (continuous studies) was purposively chosen for our research. Total size of this group is 15 students, however 7 of them refused to participate or were unavailable at time of research. Thus, actual sample of our research – 8 (3 females and 5 males). Average age of participants is 20 years. All participants had an introductory course of philosophy and were interviewed thereafter. In this research, as in other IPA, the basic motive which lies behind sampling procedure is to find "a more closely defined group for whom the research question will be significant" (Smith, Osborn, 2003: 56).

For a data collection, method of **semi-structured interview** was employed, again, in accordance with basic methodological recommendations for IPA (Frost, 2011). Participants were asked 7 basic questions (for example, *Wat was your conception of philosophy before your philosophy classes?*), prepared in advance, and a range of supplementary questions intended to reveal various specific aspects of participants' personal experience (for example, *What do you mean by "shocking claim"?*). Basic questions were prepared taking into account conclusions of the previous studies on the effects of philosophy classes (Marnburg, 2003; Rashtchi, 2011; Lam, 2012; Morais et al., 2017). Participants were interviewed face to face for 42 minutes in average. All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim. In the research, each participant was given a code names to meet anonymity requirement.

4. Results

Application of IPA in social sciences starts with acquirement of primary data, usually in a form of "first-person narrative". "Within IPA, language is taken to be a conventionalised expression of experience <…>" (MacDonald, 2016: 24). Then, IPA proceeds as an interpretative attempt to reveal common patterns in idiosyncratic pieces of information through (a) distinguishing and (usually) coding explicit and implicit units of meaning (significant propositions), (b) examination of similarities and differences between all these units, discarding repetitive codes, (c) subsuming codes to broader categories (themes, "meta-codes") (Charmazet al., 2011; Frost, 2011; Creswell, 2016).

In our research, three main themes were distinguished – "Philosophy as unique cultural phenomenon", "Philosophy as an intense intellectual effort", and "Philosophy as experience of bafflement and uncertainty" (see Table 1).

Table 1. Students' experiential views on philosophy after introductory philosophy classes in the university

Themes	Codes	Distribution of codes among participants
Philosophy as unique cultural phenomenon	Philosophy deals with texts, not real things	A3, A7, A8
	Philosophical enquiries are imaginative and inconclusive	A2, A3, A5, A8
	The nature of philosophy is mysterious, undefined	A1, A5, A7
Philosophy as an intense intellectual effort	Philosophical technical language poses a great challenge for a common reader	A1, A3, A4, A6, A7, A8
	Philosophy requires to use a common language more cautiously	A1, A3, A5, A6
	"In philosophy everything has a deeper meaning"	A1, A2, A3, A5, A6
	Philosophizing demands (teaches) logical argumentation.	A2, A3, A4, A8
Philosophy as experience of bafflement and uncertainty	Philosophy questions the basic moral values	A1, A2, A4, A6
	Philosophy contradicts personal religious convictions	A1, A7, A8

Thus, the first theme "Philosophy as a unique cultural phenomenon" encompasses three codes (sub-themes). The most illustrative example of the first code is following:

"By 'philosophizing' I mean reading a lot. Really, a lot. If you want to be a good in philosophizing, you must run away from whole world else and read, read. <…> You must read, because you must know that one philosopher had said this and this, but another philosopher had written something contrary. If you just mention what the first philosopher has said, anyone can come to you and ask: 'Why didn't you mention what another philosopher had thought?' <…> the one wins [an argument] who has read more than others." (A8)

The second code is quite frequent among participants: as we can see, it is a notion common for half of participants. The best exemplification of the second code is the following fragment:

"I just imagine how these [contemporary] philosophers do their discoveries. They don't need microscopes, telescopes, anything of the kind. They just can sit on the chair and imagine that the world is not real, that people and things are not real. Then they write articles, books, and student must read them." (A5)

On further questioning, participants A2, A3, A5, and A8 agreed on the importance of imagination for scientific education and scientific discovery. For two of them (A5, A8) the major

role of "thought experiments" in philosophy remained a rather negative aspect of the later. Other two participants described this feature of philosophy more positively: as a "training of imagination" (A2) or as "something that helps scientists to discover new things" (A3).

To provide an example of the third code ("The nature of philosophy is mysterious, undefined"), we can make the following quotation:

"I thought that philosophers believe in the existence of God and mostly talk about these matters, that, in fact, everybody believes in something, and you can all it "God" or "Buddha" or "Jesus" or "Nature". But during lectures we learned that many philosophers deny God. <...> Philosophy is nether religion nor a science. 'Neither fish nor meat', as saying goes. <...> or maybe it is both [religion and science]." (A7)

In two cases (A5, A7) of three, "mysterious" nature of philosophy, its undefined position among other social-cultural institutions was identified (after supplementary questioning) as its negative aspect. Only in one case (A1) it was given a positive evaluation noting that "unclear things are attractive to most people".

As to the second major theme, it covers four codes. The first of them, that is, "Philosophical technical language poses a great challenge for a common reader", marks the point which appeared to be the most significant for participants. Even six (A1, A3, A4, A6, A7, A8) out of nine interviewed students found it difficult to read philosophical texts because of technical terms and specific style employed in them. The following quote can be given as an illustration:

"I like reading. I read constantly. Books, internet, phone ... Now we must read a lot of scientific papers for psychology classes and for other teachers. I read something on my phone even taking a bath. <...>. But when tried to read something for philosophy seminar, I realized that I understood less than half of what I had read. <...> You need to translate it from Lithuanian into 'normal Lithuanian'. And you must put an enormous effort in it. Reread many times almost every sentence." (A1)

After being reminded that scientists also use difficult terminology, all six participants showed little inclination to change their opinion about philosophical language. One participant noted (A1) that "scientist cannot call <...> catalysis by another term, because otherwise confusion would occur". Other two participants remarked that philosophers can change their mode of expression at will (A6, A8). Three others (A3, A4, A7) showed no inclination to discuss the point further.

Code "Philosophy requires to use a common language more cautiously" marks another quite frequent (A1, A3, A5, A6) notion in participants' responses. In this case, the main idea appears to be that philosophy is occupied with "recognizing different senses of the same word" (A1). It tends to "make communication better by sorting out everything into different boxes" (A3). Philosophers are sensible to the fact "that one cannot know what another person has in mind when he says that something is 'bad', 'fashionable' <...>" (A6). In general, participants (A1, A3, A6) identified it as a positive aspect of philosophy. However, one participant (A5) insisted that philosophical concern about flexibility of language is "an extreme exaggeration", because "we can communicate without any problems, even we haven't read a dictionary or know nothing about teachings of philosophers".

Code "In philosophy everything has a deeper meaning" refers to notion which is the second in frequency and importance (A1, A2, A3, A5, A6) after earlier mentioned emphasis on "unreadableness" of philosophical texts. The basic idea can be illustrated with following quote:

"In philosophy everything has a deeper meaning. <...> They [philosophers] always suspect that something lies beneath a surface. Say, I decided to post on Facebook that, for example, I have a depression today. Just feeling upset, staying at home and watching TV. <...> Some will necessary bombard me with questions about the cause of my depression. It can have a cause. Or it can just happen, without any cause. <...> Philosophers are doing the same thing, in my opinion. <...> We had to do the same thing." (A5)

In this case, four students (A1, A2, A3, A6) agreed that it is a positive aspect of philosophy because "it is common to philosophers, scientist and <....> all reasonable persons" (A2), it "teaches to recognize what is foolish to believe" (A3), it encourages "to be like a detective <...> in various situations" (A1). On further questioning, one participant (A5) insisted that philosophy resembles "looking for black cat in black room" (A5). However, two participants explicitly reported negative personal experiences associated with their attempts "to think in philosophical way" (A4): it was "exhausting" (A4), "unthinkably difficult" (A6).

The final notion covered by the second theme can be given a following illustration:

"I never thought that it can be so difficult to argue for my opinion. Not just saying something on the topic, but finding proofs, very strong proofs. <...> It is a very good lesson that you must know in advance what do you want to say. You need strong logic. <...> Yea, philosophy can tech it." (A 6).

Four participants (A2, A3, A4, A8) initially emphasized argumentation as an essential aspect of philosophical education. Three of them characterized it in overwhelmingly positive terms. It is argumentation skills that everybody must possess in order "not to get lost in discussion and in one's own thoughts" (A2). Moreover, "many students will forget everything about teachings of Japers [i.e. Jaspers] <...>, but they will remember that if you want to find truth you should look for evidences" (A4). Only in one case philosophical occupation with arguments was seen as an important flaw: philosophical reasoning resembles "a puppy who tries to catch his tail", philosophers argue not to find a truth, but "to rise their prestige" (A8).

Let's discuss two codes included in the last theme, that is, "Philosophy as experience of bafflement and uncertainty". The first of two, namely, "Philosophy questions the basic moral values", can be illustrated with following quotation:

"For everybody the most important thing is his health and the next important thing is money. <...> Philosophers teaches that money is not important at all. <...> At first, it was ridiculous. Why are you working if not for making money? <...> I just lied down [at night] and tried to find at least one proof why it [money] is not important" (A6).

Two participants expressed puzzlement with the "fact" (as they saw it) that philosophers deny value of material goods (A4, A6). After reminding that, for many philosophers, material goods are only "second order goods", both students insisted that philosophers' value system is unthinkable. They are "UFOnauts" (A4) in an offensive sense. Other two students (A1, A2) described their encounter with philosophical reflection of morality in positive terms. Philosophy encourages to reevaluate one's moral priorities "at the face of illness and death" (A2) or "listening to one's conscience" (A1).

Finally, as to the last notion included in the third theme, three participants (A1, A4, A7) stressed the point that their encounter with philosophy has more or less confronted with their religious convictions thus bringing about specific experience. This notion can be illustrated with following example:

"I believe in God and it helps me in life and in sport. <...> it is more philosophy than religion because you cannot believe blindly without any proof. <...> you must seek for evidences that what you believe is true. <...> it bothered me [during philosophy lecture] how they [philosophers] can speak about meaning of something, about having a morality <...> when they hold it possible to deny reality of God" (A7).

Two participants (A7, A8) described philosophical reflection of religious beliefs (during their classes) in negative terms. Philosophers fruitlessly try to find rational arguments for everything, but "there is something you cannot proof and can only believe", for example, "you cannot proof that you will be alive tomorrow or a day after tomorrow" (A8). One participant (A1) pointed out that philosophical criticism is useful for one's spiritual development. Some philosophical arguments make one face important questions about motivation one's religious beliefs and practices: "Maybe you believe in something what Bible says only because it helps you to cope with psychological stress?", "Look, I am going to church, I am a good person!" (A1).

In general, participants tended to talk more about their cognitive experience – that is, "meaning-experience, thought-experience, understanding experience" (Strawson, 2011: 286) – than their emotional experience, "sense/feeling experience". Among all nine codes, two of them were given especially strong emphasis by participants – "Philosophical technical language poses a great challenge for a common reader" and "In philosophy everything has a deeper meaning".

5. Discussion

In what follows we briefly address a question how our findings square with results of other studies. The main point of interest here is a multidimensional view of the phenomenon one can get by connecting quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

In general, studies report positive effect of philosophical classes on the intellectual and moral development of students. Usually this effect is being described in terms of promotion of "critical thinking" or "argumentation skills". For example, in quite recent study (Morais et al., 2017)

conducted in Portugal researches report that during their philosophy classes (as a complementary discipline), in which "the constructive controversy method" was being applied, secondary school students improved in argumentative essay writing. The effect was determined by measuring such parameters as an "Clarification of the issue", "Construction of arguments with support the thesis", "Consideration of objections" (suggested by Toulmin's model). According to another study (Burke et al., 2014), psychology classes, designed to promote critical thinking skills, only reduce undergraduates' beliefs in paranormal phenomena, whereas philosophy classes also increase general critical thinking skills (on *Watson–Glaser Critical Thinking Test*). Attempts to integrate philosophical approach into environmental education results in increased students' abilities to "research, analyze and synthesize their own knowledge", their "their critical thought and collaborative skills" (Tsevreni, 2016: 10). "Socratic dialogue" was recognized as efficient tool for promotion of critical thinking, as well as social and emotional skills in teacher education (Knezic et al., 2010). These findings square well with the important result of our current study, namely, that five (A1, A2, A3, A5, A6) out of eight participants emphasize the search for "deeper meaning" as an essential feature of philosophy. In this respect, one important point should be mentioned, namely, that "critical thinking" itself can be defined as "sense-making" activity (Maloney, 2015) or as "in-depth thinking" ("deep thinking") (Mullins, 2002). These are modern reflections of the same ancient idea that "the unexamined life is not worth living for men" (Plato, 1997: 33). Philosopher is an exemplary critical thinker who is used to ask "What does it mean?", who's main concern is "to question and understand very common ideas that all of us use every day without thinking about them" (Nagel, 1987: 5). Participants themselves used "to philosophize" (or "to do philosophy") interchangeably with "to think critically" (A1, A2, A6). As we saw they emphasized a close link between philosophizing and argumentation (A2, A3, A4, A8), with the last being the most important concern in the ideology of "critical thinking movement".

As we saw earlier, two-thirds of participants (A1, A3, A4, A6, A7, A8) emphasized "unreadableness" of philosophical texts in the first contact with this kind of literature (all participants admitted that they hadn't been familiar with philosophical texts before their philosophy classes). It is important although unexpected finding of our research. For example, authors of *The Philosophy Skills Book* (Finn et al., 2012) suppose that various reasons can render philosophical texts "impenetrable": abstractness of philosophical terminology, flexibility of natural language, innovative usage of natural language, poor translations etc. In our study participants were not explicit about particular reasons and reflected problem in rather general terms: for example, "I just cannot understand what I read" (A1), "it is a mash of words" (A4), "a bird language" (A4, A7), "there is no chance to understand it" (A7). At this point, we can only speculate, because in our study no preliminary test was conducted to evaluate participants' reading and text comprehension skills. It remains an open question to what extent philosophical texts poses more challenges for participants than other types of texts. In the absence of necessary data, we must leave this question for future research.

6. Conclusion

It has been commonly recognized that philosophical classes at colleges and universities has something to do with "reasoning", "critical thinking", "deeper comprehension" etc. In rapidly developing informational world philosophy, despite its "ancient spirit", remains competitive among other academic disciplines, as far as it can offer analytical tools to make one's experience and one's social-cultural habitat at least a little more sensible and meaningful. Even if long ago philosophy ceased to be "theory of everything" in terms of providing content, it appears to remain "theory of everything" in terms of supervising "logical form". Thus, unsurprisingly, participants of our study emphasized that, in their experience, philosophy addresses various "deeper meaning" questions, although often leaves them unanswered. In general, for students, who had their first philosophy course, the very notion of "stepping out of the box", "looking beneath the surface" appears to be attractive, as well as notion of "proof" (strong argument). However, coming into contact with philosophical text, they tend to characterize it as "unreadable", even if they acknowledge that philosophical text is an exemplary case of argumentation and "digging for meaning". This, dissonance is an interesting phenomenon which needs to be examined in further studies.

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