

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Philosophy as dia-philosophy: Hector-Neri Castañeda's theoretical defense of pluralism

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Abstract

This paper focuses on Hector-Neri Castañeda's significant contributions to metaphilosophy. In his 1980 work, *On Philosophical Method*, Castañeda articulates a unique perspective, characterizing philosophy as fundamentally a dia-philosophical activity. By asserting the supremacy of synthesis over analysis within the metaphilosophical hierarchy, his account provides a purely theoretical defense of philosophical pluralism devoid of any relativistic inclinations. Despite Castañeda's enduring influence and profound impact on ongoing discussions in ontology, logic, and the philosophy of language, his metaphilosophical insights have largely been neglected. In the context of today's increasingly diverse philosophical landscape, this paper posits that Castañeda's pluralist metaphilosophy retains substantial theoretical relevance.

KEYWORDS

analysis, Hector-Neri Castañeda, metaphilosophy, method, pluralism, synthesis

A main cause of philosophical disease—a one-sided diet: one nourishes one's thinking with only one kind of example.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1968, # 593)¹

¹Hector-Neri Castañeda's *On Philosophical Method* opens with an ensemble of epigraphs, among which this Wittgenstein quote stands tall (Wittgenstein 1968, # 593). It is intriguingly paired with Sherlock Holmes's call for caution in theorization—"The temptation to form premature theories upon insufficient data is the bane of our profession"—a gem mined from Arthur Conan Doyle's *Valley of Fear* (Conan Doyle 1993, 59).

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1 | INTRODUCTION

In the inaugural 1951 issue of *Philosophy East and West*, French orientalist and comparative philosophy pioneer Paul Masson-Oursel published a provocative paper entitled “True Philosophy Is Comparative Philosophy.” He advanced the view that synthetic activities foundational to comparative philosophy's methodology are not only valid and practicable but also preferable.² Masson-Oursel acknowledged that just a few decades earlier the idea of synthesis as an integral part of philosophical practices would have seemed inadmissible: “I cannot forget that back in 1923 I tried to make the notion of comparative philosophy precise. And not only did no one, in any country, regard it as both humanly significant and important, but the ‘best’ minds regarded it as purely utopian” (Masson-Oursel 1951, 8). It's evident that the early twentieth century favored analysis to such an extent that it became almost idolized, positioning it as the preferred, if not the only, method for philosophical inquiry. The pursuit of rigor and objectivity, mainly driven by concerns over biases and oversimplifications, led to widespread distrust and skepticism toward methodologies based on synthesis.³ This dominant attitude had detrimental effects on philosophical domains embracing nonanalytical approaches.

Nearly three decades following Masson-Oursel's work, analytic philosopher Hector-Neri Castañeda echoed similar sentiments. In his 1980 publication, *On Philosophical Method*, Castañeda articulates and defends the central metaphilosophical claim that philosophizing is essentially and ultimately a comparative activity. Indeed, Castañeda does not equate philosophy with comparative philosophy, nor does he advocate for a wholesome adoption of comparative methodologies. Nevertheless, a fundamental alignment exists between Masson-Oursel's and Castañeda's views: both acknowledge the pivotal role of comparative practices in philosophical methodology. This stance, coming from a philosopher renowned in the analytic tradition, is quite unanticipated, as it unequivocally advocates for the primacy of synthesis over analysis within the metaphilosophical hierarchy.

Castañeda, founder and editor of the journal *Noûs*—a role he maintained until his untimely death, in 1991—is recognized as one of the most original thinkers of the past half century. He has been particularly influential through his discovery of the “quasi-indexicals” and the development of the Guise Theory, which he applied to address fundamental philosophical problems concerning thought, language, and the structure of the world. Castañeda's work, covering a remarkable breadth of subjects, including logic, ontology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, aesthetics, and metaethics, has left a profound and enduring impact on analytic philosophy.⁴ His metaphilosophical thought, developed under the influence of his former professor and mentor Wilfrid Sellars, along with Willard V. O. Quine and Roderick M. Chisholm, has, however, largely faded into oblivion today. The neglect is further exacerbated by the unavailability and scarcity of reprints of his book *On Philosophical Method* (Castañeda 1980), rendering it inaccessible to contemporary readers.

²Interestingly, Masson-Oursel was also advocating for the benefits of comparative practices on humanity: “Henceforth, societies, on a planet rendered very small by the progress of aviation, will exist elbow to elbow and will even intermingle. Each mind is, as Leibniz said of his monads, a ‘total part’ of humanity. No one is himself; everyone includes others and even his adversary. Thus, comparative philosophy is a necessary condition not only of peace, but of human existence itself” (Masson-Oursel 1951, 8).

³In this context, “synthesis” refers to the philosophical practice of comparing different and heterogeneous data and theories to achieve more unified systems. Under this reading, the expressions “synthesis” and “philosophy as a synthetic activity” are coreferential.

⁴Castañeda was a highly prolific author, publishing more than a hundred articles and several significant books. His major contributions span metaethics (Castañeda 1974 and 1975), ontology, and the relationship between thought, language, and experience (Castañeda 1989a), along with a posthumously published collection on the indexicality of thought and consciousness (Castañeda 1999). His philosophy is extensively discussed in the works of Tomberlin (1983 and 1986), Jacobi and Pape (1990), Orilia and Rapaport (1998), and Palma (2014).

This is particularly regrettable given the compelling reasons to renew interest in his work, considering the relevance it held in his time. Castañeda's metaphilosophical views were highly regarded by his peers, as exemplified by the fact that Terrell Ward Bynum, the founding editor of *Metaphilosophy*, invited Castañeda to deliver the First *Metaphilosophy* Address, at the CUNY Graduate School and University Center in 1987. His inaugural address, including his responses to questions from Stefan Bernard Baumrin and Alex Orenstein, stands as his only published work in metaphilosophy (Castañeda 1988) following his book's release in 1980. Despite its limited availability and lack of reprints, this work deserves reevaluation and recognition for its enduring relevance to philosophical discourse. I hope the present paper will revive Hector-Neri Castañeda's standing and influence in contemporary discussions.

The aim of the paper extends beyond merely presenting Castañeda's metaphilosophical account. It seeks to situate Castañeda's proposal within the historical context of the latter half of the previous century, a period characterized by vibrant debates on philosophical pluralism. Within this context, I aim to show that the driving force behind his approach was the implicit intent to provide a novel and robust defense of philosophical pluralism, entirely free from relativistic consequences. This sharply distinguishes Castañeda from other advocates of pluralism at the time, particularly Richard Rorty, at whom he directs very harsh criticisms. Castañeda's objective is not the acknowledgment and the attribution of value to pluralism *simpliciter*; he aspires to establish purely theoretical foundations for asserting its necessity in philosophical inquiry. Unsympathetic to the relativism inherent in the pluralist stances of his contemporaries, Castañeda's account arises from a desire to harmonize methodological consistency and homogeneity with philosophical pluralism.

The fragmentation of philosophy into various specialized fields and methodologies, a key topic of discussion in the latter half of the previous century, still defines the discipline, now exhibiting an unprecedented level of diversity. In this ever-evolving landscape, Castañeda's perspective still matters, offering valuable insights for navigating the intricate interplay between methodological consistency and the philosophical pluralism that characterizes philosophy today.

2 | PLURALISM BEYOND RELATIVISM

Castañeda's stance mainly rests on the overarching metaphilosophical view of philosophy as ultimately the activity of comparing different maximal theories and systems to identify invariances. This perspective implies that philosophical pluralism is inherently necessary for philosophical inquiry. There are essential differences, however, between Castañeda's pluralistic metaphilosophy and the various perspectives advocating for a diverse, tolerant, and open-ended philosophical dialogue.⁵ While a detailed comparison of Castañeda's ideas with other pluralist propositions is beyond the scope of this paper, it is nonetheless pertinent to briefly highlight the primary distinctions between his approach and that of Richard Rorty. The focus on Rorty's approach is driven by an explicit and insistent differentiation made by Castañeda himself:

I hasten to dissociate myself from the pluralism that Richard Rorty and others have been preaching. Mine is theoretical and methodological and rational: a plurality of alternative theories must be built at the many junctures, where theoretical leaps and philosophical experiments open; those theories must be developed into

⁵Key advocates of pluralism include William James, an early pioneer (James 1977 and 1978); Nelson Goodman (1978), who argued for the coexistence of multiple valid world interpretations; and Isaiah Berlin (2013), a proponent of value pluralism. Like Berlin, Castañeda developed a metaethical framework in line with his metaphilosophical pluralism, conceiving morality as "the ideal of harmonizing everyone's interests" (Castañeda 1974, 15). For further insights into Castañeda's significant yet underrecognized work in metaethics, see Aune (1986) and Orilia (2020).

comprehensive master theories of the world and experience. ... I have no patience with the idea of abandoning philosophy as it has been practiced up to the present, certainly not, in favor of merely conversing about keeping the conversation about the human conversation going. I am too sanguine about philosophical theorization to give up philosophical creativity. (Castañeda 1988, 81)

Firmly grounded in pragmatism, Rorty's pluralism primarily questions the notion of a singular, objective truth or method that philosophy can uncover (Rorty 1979, 1982, 2007): philosophical perspectives—shaped by their historical and cultural contexts, as well as their practical outcomes—offer a variety of narratives and vocabularies that may serve specific purposes in critiquing and reshaping societal norms, values, and practices but play no role in the quest for knowledge. Castañeda firmly opposes this trend toward anti-foundationalism and anti-essentialism: the goal of philosophy has always been (and will continue to be) to attain a growing understanding of the fundamental principles of reality and human existence, as well as its situation in the world (Castañeda 1989b). Therefore, given the magnitude of the philosophical project, multiple theories and multiple approaches are indeed necessary.

Promoting tolerance and open dialogue, however, does not inherently lead Castañeda to drift toward relativism.⁶ He finds the moral implied by this form of pluralism—that philosophy is bankrupt and should be jettisoned—entirely unacceptable. Dialogue across diverse approaches, he argues, should be part of a quest for truth aimed at intelligibility, rather than just engaging in sustained conversation and open-ended dialogue for the sake of edification: “I have little time to spend in order to merely keep the conversation going about philosophical conversations about whether the only decent job left for so-called philosophers is to continue the philosophical conversation because philosophy as practiced by the great philosophers is an error based on the mistaken assumption that mind is the mirror of nature to be studied by non-empirical methods” (Castañeda 1989b, 37).⁷ Castañeda finds that the boundless methodological and topical freedom of (current) philosophizing is crucial for the generation of different theories and systems, yet he is not proposing a relativistic Protagorean metaphysics. Instead, he recommends a methodological theoretical pluralism grounded on the rather dogmatic methodological requirement of “building detailed theories on *rich data*” (Castañeda 1989b, 43). He upholds a unified philosophical methodology, whereby the generation of different theories and systems is aimed at their comparison to extract a unified overarching system of invariances. Hence, philosophers need not only a multiplicity of viewpoints and theories but also ones that are rich and *comprehensive*. Consequently, he maintains, philosophers should not refrain from assessing and criticizing competing theories. Philosophical disagreement is regarded as serving a constructive purpose: “Let us, by all means, be stimulated by the natural adversarial attitude. But let us remember that the criticisms across systems or theories are important, not as refutations or as strong objections, but as contributions of new data and as formulations of hurdles for steady development” (Castañeda 1988, 103). To those like Baumrin, who suspects that his ecumenical attitude toward other theories—an attitude that can be labeled “Let a thousand flowers bloom”—is merely a courteous way of dismissing other views without engaging in the laborious and sometimes instructive process of refutation, Castañeda responds that in discussing other views, his aim “is not to produce refuting objections—not even when I derive contradictions, for contradictions can always be eliminated. No, my purpose is to pose difficulties as tasks whose execution leads to development” (Castañeda 1988, 104).

⁶Rorty's pluralist account has faced criticism on several fronts, not necessarily limited to the often-mentioned issue of relativism. Crispin Wright, in particular, has extensively engaged with Rorty's pragmatic interpretation of truth and his dismissal of representationalist metaphysics (Wright 1992 and 1995).

⁷Incidentally, Castañeda (1989b) expresses his disagreement with Rorty's interpretation of traditional philosophy as based on the assumption that the mind is the image of nature to be studied by nonempirical methods. Since the goal is to understand this world as we experience it, Castañeda contends that philosophy is empirical.

3 | DIA-PHILOSOPHY: UNDERSTANDING ITS NATURE AND BOUNDARIES

In stark contrast to his contemporaries, Castañeda portrays philosophy's identity as predominantly rooted in comparative practices, and thus it is inherently and ultimately a synthetic activity rather than an analytic one. The concluding statement of his *On Philosophical Method* encapsulates the essence of his main metaphilosophical thesis: "Philosophy just is different things to different persons. Philosophy is diaphilosophical all the way through" (Castañeda 1980, 133).

The term "dia-philosophy," as used in Castañeda, specifically refers to the act of comparing different philosophical systems. This conception of philosophy as fundamentally dia-philosophical seems to mirror Masson-Oursel's assertion that "true philosophy is comparative philosophy." Castañeda's goal, however, extends beyond simply advocating for the prevalent methods of comparative philosophy—he posits that philosophy, in its essence, is comparative. His framework proposes a distinctive approach to philosophical methodology that is applicable and adaptable across all philosophical disciplines and practices. Accordingly, the scope of comparative practices in philosophy is as broad as philosophy itself. I examine the underpinnings of Castañeda's compelling framework in the final section of the paper, where I elucidate, in the context of his argument, why and to what extent comparative practices shape the very method of philosophizing. In the meantime, it suffices to note that the core of the problem concerns the philosophical method. Given the diverse range of philosophical traditions and subfields present in philosophy departments globally and given the variety of methodologies employed in philosophical practices, one might question the utility of debating the "proper" method of philosophy, dismissing such discussions as irrelevant, redundant, or even utopian. On the other hand, proponents of methodological uniformity may view pluralism as intrinsically problematic or as an obstacle to overcome for methodological integrity.

Are we compelled to choose between "methodological pluralism" and "methodological monism"?⁸ I maintain that Castañeda's proposal rescues us from such an uncomfortable dilemma, by showing a way in which diversity in philosophical method (methodological pluralism) can coexist with methodological homogeneity (methodological monism). The main argument unfolds as follows: if philosophy is fundamentally a dia-philosophical activity, then pluralism forms its essential condition. Nevertheless, Castañeda's framework accommodates methodological monism, in that synthesis-based practices should characterize the activities of philosophers at various points in their work, particularly at the final stage of philosophizing.

In Castañeda's view, this ultimate stage is dia-philosophical theorizing, in which different maximal theories are compared to establish a system of invariances. Adopting such a stance may require the elucidation of some of its most significant principles and components, which I expound on in the concluding part of the paper. Meanwhile, it is pertinent to focus on the underlying effects of Castañeda's proposal: by framing philosophy as fundamentally comparative, it lays the groundwork for the *theoretical justification* of philosophical pluralism. Castañeda intends pluralism not merely as a phenomenon to be tolerated, arising naturally from the diverse cultural and sociohistorical features that differentiate individuals across time and space. Rather, he contends that without pluralism the collective philosophical project becomes futile. Since a multiplicity of diverse philosophical traditions results in a broader

⁸In this context, the expression "methodological monism" refers to the belief that philosophy should employ a uniform method to which philosophers are expected to adhere in their work. Conversely, "methodological pluralism" denotes the absence of uniform, shared methodological principles in philosophical practices. The lack of shared methodological principles aligns methodological pluralism closely with a form of (epistemological) "anarchism" à la Feyerabend.

spectrum of theories for comparison, and because the accuracy of the system of invariances derived from comparative activities is strictly dependent on the quantitative and qualitative diversity of the theories being compared, pluralism is deemed inherently valuable.

A further clarification is necessary. The term “dia-philosophy” as used in this paper and Castañeda's writings should not be equated with “comparative philosophy”: while both involve comparative activities, they are not interchangeable. It is also important to recognize that “comparative philosophy” can be defined in various ways. According to one of its broader interpretations, perhaps the most inclusive, it may be suggested that all philosophical activities are comparative. For example, Hans-Georg Moeller writes: “Of course, philosophy had always been comparative: Aristotle had already compared himself with Plato and other Greek philosophers he knew of; medieval Christian philosophy had compared itself with the Greeks. Likewise, the book of Zhuangzi concludes with a whole chapter on early Chinese comparative philosophy, and the Neo-Confucians of the Song and Ming dynasties were busy comparing themselves with the Buddhists” (Moeller 2018, 31). But contemporary applications of “comparative philosophy” are not much concerned with such forms of intra-European or intra-Chinese comparative activities. Rather, the term has come to represent a field in philosophy that emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century and that engages, although not exclusively, in comparing theories and traditions from the East and from the West. In contrast, Castañeda's notion of dia-philosophy has a pronounced metaphilosophical implication, whereby dia-philosophy, or meta-comparative philosophy, is an advanced level of comparative analysis, one that is undertaken at a higher stage of philosophizing. In this sense, dia-philosophy is meta-comparative philosophy, which takes maximal theories—independently and regardless of the cultural-historical context in which they emerged—as the objects of the comparison.

4 | CASTAÑEDA CONTEXTUALIZED: PHILOSOPHICAL PLURALISM AND METHODOLOGICAL PUZZLES

The metaphilosophical reflection posited by Castañeda, as well as his account of the philosophical method, addresses the pivotal question of the optimal approach to practicing philosophy. This inquiry into “how” philosophy should be conducted, along with the “what” and “why,” contributes to establishing the identity criteria for the discipline of philosophy and demarcating its specific confines. Notably, in the 1980s—at the time of the book's release—philosophers were extensively engaged in discussions about the discipline's identity and limits. As the century ended, philosophy experienced an unprecedented and continuously growing influx of newly emerging subfields and areas, each with its own philosophical agenda and objectives. The term “philosophical pluralism” was coined to describe this historically unique and fragmented panorama, prevalent in many philosophy departments both in the United States and around the world. In 1978, the “pluralist revolt” within the American Philosophical Association underscored the extensiveness of this trend. The issue of disciplinary boundaries was not just about differentiating philosophy from adjacent fields (such as history, psychology, sociology, and so on) but also pertained to the delineation of subfields, research programs, and areas within philosophy itself.⁹

Pluralism presents many challenges, and the newly emerging subfields also contend with the generalized anti-integrative and skeptical attitudes of fellow professionals. The process

⁹For instance, in his 1986 Presidential Address to the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, Gerald Larson discussed the boundaries of comparative philosophy, highlighting its multifaceted challenge: “What is the ‘boundary’ between philosophy and comparative philosophy? Some among us informed me that there is no such boundary. ... Still others wondered about the boundaries of philosophy itself. Is there ‘philosophy’ in Asia? ... Is there ‘philosophy’ in India? Is there ‘philosophy’ in China? Is there ‘philosophy’ in Japan?—fortunately, no one asked ‘Is there ‘philosophy’ in Kansas City?’” (Larson 1986, 132).

of fragmentation, which gradually intensified in the latter half of the twentieth century, was on a trajectory for continued expansion. An indicator of this phenomenon is offered by Macmillan's *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, a major and comprehensive English-language source for philosophy. The first edition, edited by Paul Edwards, was published in 1967. A mere few decades later, the second edition, published in 2006, was supplemented with more than 450 new articles. In the preface to the second edition, editor Donald Borchert notes that the additions were intended to mirror the changes that had occurred within the discipline over forty years:

The presence of all this new material is a clear indication of the vigorous and innovative philosophical activity that has occurred within the discipline. ... Entirely new subfields have appeared such as feminist philosophy, the philosophy of sex and love, and applied ethics. ... In addition, enhanced cultural diversity is evident in the major space we have provided for topics relating to Buddhist philosophy, Chinese philosophy, Islamic philosophy, and Indian philosophy. ... The very large number of new philosophical bibliographies, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and journals that have been published in a multitude of languages during the last half century testifies not only to the vitality of philosophy but also to the increasing cultural diversity on its landscape. (Borchert 2006, xiii)

Castañeda also views this change as an enormous improvement on the recent past and as a sign that philosophy is flourishing, with new problems posed and old problems reopened (Castañeda 1989b). Of course, there are many non-metaphilosophical reasons for favoring philosophical pluralism. For instance, exposing students to different ways of doing philosophy is often considered beneficial. While pluralism may offer advantages, the division of labor and inconsistent methodologies can render the field prone to controversy. This sometimes leads to friction and poor communication among colleagues, especially among those in nonmainstream traditions. An extreme expression of this attitude is the claim that some philosophers are not genuinely doing philosophy:

As if being overlooked were not enough, thinkers who do not take the starting point or fail to follow the procedures currently in vogue are denounced as not doing philosophy. There is hardly a greater insult to philosophers than to be denied the benefit of standing as a respected colleague. Yet exclusion has become standard in the profession in the Twentieth Century, supported by such movements as logical positivism that declare much of what philosophers say literally nonsensical. Even those who manage to move past juvenile charges are quite prepared to relegate much philosophy to psychology or literature, and to treat colleagues who think in those ways with condescension. (Lachs 2004, 6)

Suspicion and dismissal, which may be manifested as either intentional ignoring or active oblivion, can sometimes escalate into derision. Rudolf Carnap, a staunch advocate for linguistic analysis as the method for philosophical practice, offers one of the most paradigmatic examples with his well-known comment “Metaphysicians are musicians without musical ability” (Carnap 1932, 80). As Carnap excluded from philosophy those who did not adhere to the method of logical analysis, for decades other philosophers echoed this sentiment, convinced that engaging in philosophy without the language of *Principia Mathematica* was utterly useless. This exclusionary stance, though mainly seen in the analytic tradition, presumably extends to varying degrees across all philosophical groups: phenomenologists might prioritize descriptive language of human experience, whereas postmodernists could

discount those neglecting the relevance of “simulacra” and “deterritorialization.” Historically, the debate on pluralism has unfolded mainly within Western philosophy.¹⁰ But we may now be in a new era that expands the debate to include philosophical traditions from the East, as Philip Quinn suggests: “The more inclusive pluralism I favour would consist of conversation that contains many more non-Western philosophical voices” (Quinn 1996, 171). Finally, one might be inclined to speculate about the more immediate future of philosophy. At the dawn of the millennium, Graham Priest ventured such speculation, proposing the idea that the discipline is advancing toward a new era of “true globalization of philosophy”: “I speculate that the 21st Century will see, for the first time, the true globalisation of philosophy. Whether that will exacerbate the fragmentation of philosophy, or whether it will allow the development of exciting new syntheses, or whether something entirely different will emerge, only time will tell” (Priest 2003, 99). Regardless of the degree of accuracy of Priest's forecast, the notion of a globalized philosophy certainly possesses appeal. Also, it makes the issue of methodology more relevant: philosophical pluralism is a material cause for the existence of methodological pluralism. When considering the well-being and prosperous future of philosophy as a discipline, however, one must question whether methodological pluralism is beneficial and thus should be defended and possibly enhanced or whether it is detrimental and ought to be limited, or even eliminated, in favor of some form of “methodological monism.” In a climate characterized by hyperspecialization and diversity, methodological monism, while conceivable, does not seem achievable. But even if it were, would it be desirable? Philosophers undoubtedly hold varied opinions on this matter, and many, from different fields and thus utilizing diverse methodologies, consistently confront the challenge of selecting and agreeing upon evaluative criteria for the quality assessment of research outputs (for example, in peer-review exercises), research project proposals, and the collective work of their students and academic peers.

On the one hand, there are compelling reasons to favor inclusivity and, consequently, advocate for philosophical pluralism; on the other hand, the push for quality standards, contingent upon well-defined methodological principles and practices, may engender the notion that methodological monism could be suited to the disciplinary tasks and objectives. This dilemma encompasses both practical and theoretical dimensions: practically speaking, it is worth considering the advantages and disadvantages of both methodological monism and pluralism, as well as their influence on the current and prospective historical-cultural evolution of the discipline; theoretically, the dilemma highlights a particular facet of the enduring metaphilosophical inquiries regarding the proper conduct of philosophical practice.

Is this dilemma truly insurmountable? Is it feasible for philosophical pluralism—and, consequently, methodological pluralism—and methodological monism to coexist? Can uniform, high-quality standards be maintained within the contemporary globalized milieu that extends philosophical pluralism to its utmost? I address these questions in the following section, and subsequently clarify that these issues precisely reflect some of the central worries at the heart of Castañeda's metaphilosophy.

5 | THE PROBLEM OF *THE METHOD: THEORIA AND PRAXIS*

It is difficult to reconcile the extreme diversity in philosophical methods with the professional drive to establish homogeneous and unified quality criteria, which play crucial roles in developing curricula, shaping careers, and allocating funds. Nonetheless, the recognition

¹⁰In particular, the dispute in the United States mainly concerned the three traditions of analytic philosophy, American philosophy, and Continental philosophy.

of methodological heterogeneity as a by-product of pluralism, though potentially bothersome, scarcely raises concern; this is under the general belief that methodological differences across various fields in philosophy are inconsequential to the discipline's overall health. Indeed, while debates on methodology are a constant in specific philosophical fields, the more fundamental metaphilosophical inquiries into the appropriate conduct of philosophy have fallen out of fashion. For the sake of harmonious coexistence, recognizing philosophical pluralism is paired with tolerance toward methodological diversity. This tolerance often goes hand in hand with the nebulous conviction that the “problem of the method”—that is, deciding on a method for practicing philosophy—is not worth further discussion.

On a closer look, and considering the theoretical and practical issues previously discussed, the acknowledgment and acceptance of philosophical pluralism make the reflection on philosophical methods more compelling and urgent than ever. Recognizing the centrality of the problem of the method doesn't entail the endorsement of methodological monism, nor the promotion of a single, universal method as a panacea for the “ailments” of methodological diversity. It should be noted that practical issues stemming from methodological diversity don't intrinsically prove methodological pluralism to be problematic, nor do they imply that methodological monism would be more beneficial for philosophy. Instead, I suggest that within specific metaphilosophical constraints—those proposed by Castañeda—philosophy can effectively house both methodological pluralism and monism under the same roof, without paradoxical results.

Consider the possibility that we are faced with a genuine dilemma, requiring a choice between two evils: excessively permissive methodological pluralism and rigidly intolerant methodological monism. Opting for methodological monism over pluralism carries numerous disadvantages: legitimate divisions in perspectives on how philosophy should be practiced can hinder the discipline's full development. In the bleakest scenario, these divisions could even pose a significant threat to philosophy's future. The coexistence of diverse philosophical traditions, fields, and approaches within global philosophy departments isn't always smooth. Advocating for methodological monism could unfortunately result in counterproductive outcomes, such as those presented by John Lachs while serving as chair of the American Philosophical Association's Centennial Committee:

The contempt philosophers feel for colleagues who do not share their values and techniques is nothing short of bizarre and has served to undermine the honor and integrity of the discipline. In serving on National Endowment for the Humanities committees, I noted that members of the panel from English and history and anthropology tended to support applicants from their fields. Philosophers, by contrast, couldn't wait to light into their colleagues: they tore research proposals apart, presenting their authors as fools or as champions of out-of-date, inferior ideas and methods. As a result, scholars from other fields garnered much of the money that would, under normal circumstances, have gone to philosophy. These gatekeepers to our profession thought their actions were justified by the imperative to maintain high standards. (Lachs 2004, 8)

Undoubtedly, maintaining high standards of quality and rigor is crucial for the discipline's well-being, but the precise nature of these standards is intrinsically linked to disagreement over the proper methodology for philosophy, encompassing preferred methods and, crucially, the kinds of data deemed valid in philosophical research. Choosing the lesser of two evils is not simple; if the dilemma were truly real and insurmountable, it would offer no straightforward solution, as either choice leads to a host of undesirable consequences.

One might argue that methodological diversity is not a problem for philosophers, given that such diversity is common across many disciplines, not just philosophy (misery loves company). While it's true that methodological variations are found in numerous fields, this issue has particular significance in philosophy, where discourse on method has always been fundamental to philosophical inquiry. Historically, Western philosophy has grappled with the belief that there should be one single approach to philosophy—not merely the best among many but *the* method of philosophizing. This perspective, which I here call “methodological monism,” has at times been described as the “Royal Road assumption,” that is, the view that there is one correct way to engage in philosophical thought. As a direct consequence of the Royal Road assumption, philosophers who deviate to pursue alternative paths are often deemed illegitimate. This assumption not only perpetuates traditional controversies over philosophical practice but also fosters suspicion toward unconventional and nonmainstream approaches, potentially exacerbating conflicts between different philosophical camps.

Let's now address two questions. First, the easier one: Is there a Royal Road to philosophy? A look back quickly dispels the notion of a Royal Road as nothing more than a chimera: the transcendental method of Kant, Spinoza's geometrical approach, and Hegel's dialectical process are just a few among many competing, sometimes mutually exclusive, methodologies that have been posited over the centuries. The fathers of the analytic tradition argued for starting with the analysis of propositions, while Husserl's techniques for accessing phenomena laid the groundwork for the phenomenological tradition. The search for the right philosophical method continues, as seen in current debates on the nature and role of intuitions in philosophical inquiry and the rise of experimental philosophy. Second, the more difficult question: *Should* there be a Royal Road to philosophy? Before exploring this within Castañeda's metaphilosophical framework, two preliminary considerations are in order.

First, the integrity and identity of philosophy do not necessarily depend on a shared and unified method. The cohesion of a discipline can also be achieved through other means; for instance, Graham Priest, among others, suggests that philosophy should be defined not by a particular method but by its role and its spirit of *unbridled criticism*: “One should expect philosophers to challenge, question, object. . . . We all need to be challenged out of our mistakes, stupidities, complacencies—especially when it is our own intellectual blinkers that prevent us from seeing them as such. This is the preeminent role of philosophy” (Priest 2006, 207). Nonetheless, although methodological pluralism has its appeal, the potential benefits of a unified philosophical methodology should not be underestimated. Quality standards, critical to a host of academic practices, including peer evaluations, job applications, research proposals, and promotions, often hinge on methodological principles, placing these at the core of foundational discussions.

The two considerations outlined above are not in contradiction, although they may seem so at first glance. The ability to establish methodology-independent criteria for a discipline's identity does not render the methodological inquiry trivial, nor does it refute the feasibility of methodological monism's aspirations. Arguments for methodological monism should, however, steer clear of relying on the Royal Road assumption, given its problematic implications. Exploring an alternative model that eschews this assumption would be more productive—one that can constructively navigate the apparent impasse between an intolerant and illusory monism and a relativistic, potentially chaotic methodological pluralism. In the next section, I detail how this dilemma dissolves in light of Castañeda's metaphilosophical principles.

6 | DATA AND THEORIES: CASTAÑEDA'S SYNTHETIC AND INTEGRATIVE ACCOUNT

In *On Philosophical Method*, Castañeda advances his proposal for harmonizing methodological monism and pluralism within a system called “semantico-syntactic structuralism.” This

system, the crux of his reflection on philosophy, has been largely overlooked. It's noteworthy to mention one of the rare acknowledgments of his book by Jay Rosenberg: "The fruitfulness of Castañeda's 'semantico-syntactic structuralism' as a strategy of philosophical inquiry can hardly be gainsaid—given his illuminating applications of it to such diverse philosophical problems" (Rosenberg 1982, 617).

Castañeda's unique perspective encompasses the broader spectrum of experience by integrating observation-based empirical disciplines. This comprehensive stance is encapsulated in the concluding sentence of *On Philosophical Method*: "Philosophy just is different things to different persons. Philosophy is dia-philosophical all the way through" (Castañeda 1980, 133).

This perspective centers on a theoretical, rather than analytical, approach to philosophical method grounded in two primary assumptions: (i) philosophical pluralism is intrinsically valuable; (ii) ontology and other "sciences" form a *continuum*. Assumption (i) contrasts the notion that pluralism is a discipline's fragility to be merely tolerated: Castañeda does not seek to advocate for a singular method as the ideal choice for philosophical inquiry. Instead, he aims to introduce a method that, due to its fundamentally inclusive nature, can adapt to various philosophical traditions and subfields. It's imperative to recognize that assumption (i) and the Royal Road assumption are irreconcilable: embracing the first necessitates the dismissal of the latter; conversely, endorsing the Royal Road assumption implies the denial of the intrinsic value of pluralism, which bears the implications already presented in the preceding discussion.

Reflecting on the assumption (ii) clarifies Castañeda's choice of presenting one among various methods. The book is fundamentally a study of the method that most aptly aligns with a particular philosophical program, namely, ontology. Castañeda distinguishes between metaphysics, which he terms "metaphysical ontology," and ontology, or "primary ontology," and "phenomenological ontology": while metaphysics investigates conjectures about reality itself, ontology is concerned with the world as it appears to us. Thus, assumption (ii) pertains to his unique perspective on ontological investigation and its relationship to other sciences: "We place the study of ontological problems in the context of both scientific investigation and the use of language. This brings out the two sides of our method: its empirical foundation and its linguistic character" (Castañeda 1980, 14). Ontology is not only situated on a continuum with other "sciences," encompassing a broader scope of empirical inquiry, but also maintains a codependent relationship with them. This idea widely shapes Castañeda's model, especially regarding the role that data play: "Philosophical method is structurally like scientific method and also needs an empirical base. Indeed no fact and no scientific hypothesis or theory is irrelevant to philosophy" (Castañeda 1980, 14). Data and theories serve as the foundational elements—akin to building blocks—of all sciences, philosophy included. But how to account for philosophy's distinctness within the *continuum* of sciences? In terms of methodology, Castañeda perceives no discontinuity between philosophy and the other sciences; all are empirical, exegetical, hypothetical, and cumulative. Also, he does not believe that philosophy's objectives differ from those of other sciences, as *all* ultimately study structural aspects of the universe; that is, they study the universe as it appears to us. Consequently, what sets philosophy apart as a distinct science is not a unique method or an exclusive subject matter, since it shares both its methodology and its domain—everything that exists—with other sciences.

Instead, Castañeda views philosophy as distinguished from other sciences by its exceptionally wide scope of investigation and the pervasiveness of the structures it seeks to theorize. Its distinctiveness lies also in the choice of evidential base, that is, its data. What kind of data? Three main sources for philosophical data are identified: language (our discourse about reality and experience), direct experience, and reality itself. Within this framework, language, experience, and reality are interwoven in a complex interplay: foundational connections exist between language and experience, as well as between language and our assertions about reality. Castañeda assumes specific, intricate relationships among these three evidential sources, namely, "that experience is structured, that all the contents of the world

are inter-related, and that language is wholly unified and integrated. The way language is integrated constitutes the system of clues to the structure of the world” (Castañeda 1980, 14).¹¹ Furthermore, he distinguishes between philosophical data of an empirical kind and philosophical data of a linguistic kind. About the former, he writes: “Philosophical data... are provided by each of the entities we find in the universe and each of their properties and relations. Ordinary facts of experience, general facts discovered by observation, and more general facts postulated by science, are all philosophical” (Castañeda 1980, 32). The relation between individuals' language and their experience of the world generates linguistic data. The prominent role assigned to linguistic data in his framework demonstrates Castañeda's alignment with the analytic tradition. Natural language is identified as the gateway to primary ontology, and it supplies the fundamental data that philosophers theorize about.

Lastly, Castañeda differentiates among four types of philosophical activities. Three correspond to theorizing stages that denote the maturation process of philosophical theories and require methods suited to each stage. The fourth is “meta-philosophy”—a general study of the nature and validity of philosophical methods. He identifies the stages of theory development as “proto-philosophical” theorizing, “sym-philosophical” theorizing, and “dia-philosophy.” In proto-philosophical theorizing, the practice is fundamentally about collecting empirical and linguistic data and analyzing these data to extract criteria of adequacy for theories.¹² Sym-philosophical theorizing generates philosophical theories, which are intended as systematic hypotheses about the general structure of the world and experience.

At the stage of sym-philosophizing, pluralism serves the critical function of increasing the quantity and diversity of the generated comprehensive systematic hypotheses. The more varied these systematic theories are, the better. It becomes evident why philosophical pluralism is not just a phenomenon to be passively accepted and tolerated but a necessary condition for the act of philosophizing itself. Castañeda emphasizes this point by explicitly advocating for philosophical pluralism: “The main desideratum of our time is systematic pluralistic philosophical activity, that is: the construction of many different and very comprehensive theories” (Castañeda 1980, 14).

The speculation about any extra-theoretical motivations that may have influenced Castañeda's emphatic endorsement of philosophical pluralism is intriguing. It is reasonable to interpret his words as indicative of his ardent involvement with the themes of the pluralist revolt that emerged within the American Philosophical Association in 1978, just two years before the publication of his book. Regardless of the accuracy of the proposed contextual interpretation, the notion of sym-philosophical theorizing, being the source of multiple comprehensive systematic theories, relates to contemporary philosophical practices, where scholars from various traditions and methodological backgrounds develop systematic theories to explain the data at hand.

7 | THE PROBLEM OF COMPETING THEORIES

It could be argued that while sym-philosophical theorizing establishes a foundation for philosophical pluralism, it also introduces new dilemmas. For instance, when competing comprehensive systematic theories appear to explain the same set of data equally well, how

¹¹Castañeda rejects the view of language as the limit of either our experience or the world. He also suggests that experience, and therefore the “privacy” of the experience, must have a dimension that transcends language.

¹²In this sense, protophilosophy may be seen as depending upon the specific chosen domain, nature, and specification of the data, as well as notions about philosophical theory.

should we proceed to assess these theories and identify the most valid one? What is the metaphilosophical status of refutations and counterexamples in the evaluation of different theories? Or should we rather refrain from making such evaluations altogether? The latter question, in particular, may raise the worry that dia-philosophy provides ground for conceptual relativism.

Castañeda anticipates the possibility of competing, comprehensive philosophical theories that all adequately account for the available data. He rejects, however, the idea that the existence of competing systems necessitates the task of determining the “superior” theory. Refutations, objections, and counterexamples are valuable tools for philosophers' engagement in disagreement, yet these tools do not have to serve the traditional purpose of assessing theories and identifying superior theories among competing ones; their purpose lies in the contribution of new data and innovative formulations. Indeed, since counterexamples refute local theses but lack the power to refute a whole approach, Castañeda views criticism as locally potent, yet holistically inert (Castañeda 1988, 103).

The apparent rivalry fostered by sym-philosophical activities dissipates in the subsequent phase, where the comparison of different maximal systems is not about competition but rather about enhancing our understanding of the ultimate structure of reality, given that dia-philosophical comparison of the competing theories yields a deeper comprehension of reality (Orilia 2014, 104). In dia-philosophical theorizing, the “ultimate aim is the comparative study of maximal theories in order to establish, through isomorphisms among them, a system of invariances” (Castañeda 1980, 15). The problem of how to evaluate competing theories that explain the same set of data is solved, as dia-philosophical theorizing does not—and should not—aim at assessing theories to discern the “best” hypothesis. Again, the diverse maximal systems are not genuinely adversaries, given that valid criticism *must* be dia-philosophical: it is a kind of holistic criticism that collectively augments our comprehension of the ultimate reality.

Without committing himself to any specific position to the relation between the realm of the world and the realm of the thought, Castañeda maintains that progressing through the three stages provides a robust method for examining “both the most general structures of the world one finds oneself in and the most pervasive patterns of one's experience and thinking of the world” (Castañeda 1980, 13). Indeed, the uniquely extensive scope of philosophy encompasses all of reality, as well as the whole of what can be thought and experienced.¹³ Castañeda refers to his approach, considering the types of data that philosophy should gather and utilize, as “empirical semantico-syntactical structuralism.”¹⁴ This model serves a regulative heuristic but is not meant to provide a definitive algorithm for the practice of philosophy.

In sum, Castañeda's methodological pluralism does not stem from a Carnapian principle of tolerance, nor is it a matter related to people's freedom to disagree with one another: “It is not that I am a liberal concerning different theories. I need them myself to satisfy my romantic desire to see the world in as many different ways as possible” (Castañeda 1989b, 58). This kind of pluralism goes far beyond the libertarian idea that individuals have the “right” to think—to borrow Bertrand Russell's example—that they are not humans but merely poached eggs. It rests on the fundamental and purely theoretical reason that pluralism is the condition for dia-philosophizing, since to compare maximal systems and theories, various theories must be available for comparison.

¹³Castañeda does not consider the problem of the status of patterns of experience and thought, or their correspondence, as this would lead—in his words—to metaphysics (what he calls “metaphysical ontology”), whereas ontology (or “phenomenological ontology”) should be conceived as independent from metaphysics.

¹⁴Castañeda distinguishes his “empirical semantico-syntactical structuralism” from other models that have prevailed at different times. For instance, he refers to the approach prevalent during Moore and Frege's time as “definitional methodology” (Castañeda 1980, 58–75) and labels the model associated with Austin and Wittgenstein as “methodology of syntactic atomism” (Castañeda 1980, 87–99).

Castañeda envisions philosophy as ideally culminating in a unified, rich, and comprehensive system of philosophical theory achieved by dia-philosophically advancing from subtheories to more comprehensive systems, where “every piecemeal analysis and every theory must be expanded into larger and larger theories” (Castañeda 1980, 20).¹⁵ His view of philosophy hinges on two pivotal claims: that philosophy is inherently *synthetic* and *integrative* rather than analytic, and that it should pursue theoretical unification by seeking a single overarching, general, and intelligible structure. The quintessential task of the philosopher is to hypothesize these integrative structures, a process that can be effectively accomplished through the comparative practices of dia-philosophical activities. After all, Hector-Neri Castañeda used to describe himself as liberal with respect to views but dogmatic concerning philosophical method.

8 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have shed light here on Hector-Neri Castañeda's metaphilosophical perspective, a relevant aspect of his thought that rarely finds mention in contemporary philosophical discussions. The exploration began by addressing the traditional question of whether there should be a singular, correct method in philosophy and the role of synthesis *versus* analysis in philosophical practices. Castañeda's view of philosophy as ultimately a dia-philosophical activity, as argued, dissolves the dilemma around the method and allows for a purely theoretical defense of philosophical pluralism. By conceiving philosophy as dia-philosophy, one may contend that diversity in philosophy is not just an acceptable or tolerable phenomenon but a necessary condition for the success of collective philosophical inquiry.

Given the increasing diversity within today's philosophical landscape, Castañeda's metaphilosophical proposal maintains its enduring relevance in contemporary discourse. Undoubtedly, there is ample room for further exploration of Castañeda's contributions to metaphilosophy, especially concerning its metaphysical underpinnings. It is hoped that this essay will contribute to stimulating efforts in this direction.

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¹⁵A crucial feature of Castañeda's account, “comprehensiveness is required to approximate a worthwhile vision of the most pervasive patterns of the world we seek to understand” (Castañeda 1980, 103).

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