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## Obituary

### **“My Work is My Hobby”: An Obituary of Brazilian Philosopher Anna Carolina Krebs Pereira Regner (1947-2020)**

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“The future of humankind is unknown. We  
will become what we make of ourselves”  
Prof. Anna Regner

Anna Regner  
Belo Horizonte, Brazil. February 20, 2009



Anna Carolina Krebs Pereira Regner was born in Porto Alegre, Brazil, on 3 January 1947. As the first-born child of Joaquim de Araújo, an agricultural engineer, and Yedda, a history teacher, Regner completed her primary and secondary education at *Instituto de Educação General Flores da Cunha* in Porto Alegre. Having married Lúcio Ignácio Regner, an engineer and retired professor from the Mathematics Institute of *Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul* (UFRGS), Anna Regner was only 19 when she gave birth to her first daughter Luciana.

“While my friends were having a night on the tiles and listening to The Rolling Stones, I was already taking care of a child” (Quadros and Wolfart 2008), she commented. Regner had two daughters who became medical doctors and a son who became an advertising professional.

Regner became interested in philosophy in her early teens, having read Karl Jasper at the age of 15, developing an aptitude for existential philosophy. She began her college education in philosophy at UFRGS in 1970 when her first daughter was just beginning kindergarten. Her second daughter, Andrea, was born just before her graduation in 1975. “In order to be able to read an edition of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* I had, I would carry

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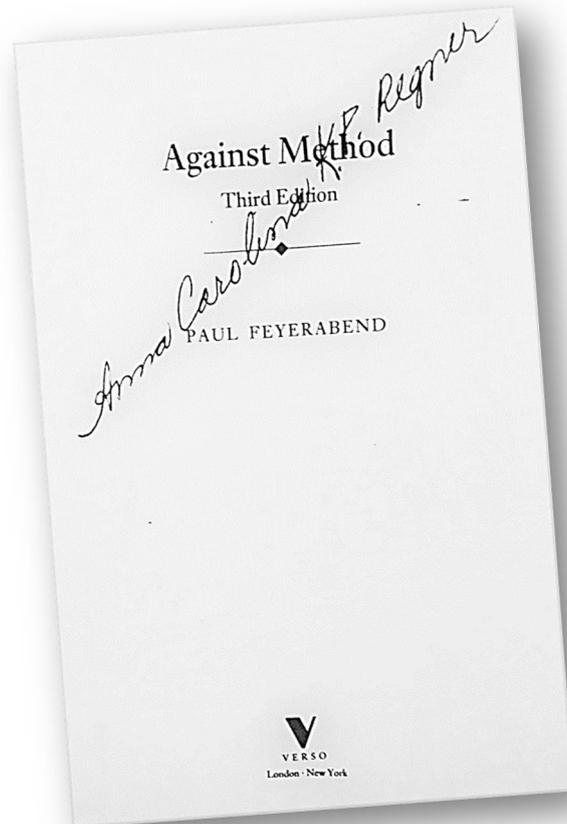
Andrea and give her a pen so that she could amuse herself drawing on the text” (Quadros and Wolfart 2008), she remembered. Regner’s first exposure to philosophy of science came about when she was made teaching assistant of a course, namely, “The evolution of scientific thinking”. She eventually took a temporary teaching position to teach this course at UFRGS soon after her graduation. It was a watershed moment for her, seeing that she would take history and philosophy of science, thereafter, as her main field of inquiry in philosophy. Afterwards, between 1976-77, she pursued her Master’s in philosophy at *Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul* (PUCRS). She was also admitted as a professor at UFRGS in 1977. She taught courses on modern philosophy, theory of knowledge, history and philosophy of science, and contemporary philosophy. Regner prepared herself for pursuing a Ph.D. in the USA. However, just as she learned she had been admitted to a graduate program in philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley, Regner also found out she was pregnant of her son Lúcio. In fact, she almost turned down the opportunity, if it was not for her husband. He encouraged her to move to the USA anyway together with a maid to help her. “It was a very hard time since we had to travel so often”, she remembered. “During this period, we had to make eleven trips within only three and a half years. My daughters, a little more grown-up, missed so much their father” (Quadros and Wolfart 2008).

Regner studied philosophy of science at UC Berkeley between 1980-83. It was right around the time when another controversy between evolutionism and creationism had been put in motion in California. Therefore, the Brazilian philosopher was attracted to investigate these phenomena she dubbed the “cellars of rationality” (Rosa 2005, 12). Accordingly, she studied deeply the theory of evolution ending setting up what would be the topic of her research, namely, the thought of Charles Darwin. Philosopher Paul Feyerabend was to become her advisor at UC Berkeley and, thereafter, one of the most important influences on her intellectual trajectory.

I went to Berkeley with the aim of studying under Feyerabend. Having read the first version of *Against Method* (the Spanish edition) in 1976, I had been struck by his ideas and became very motivated by this reading. As I was admitted to the graduate program at UC Berkeley, and having been awarded a CAPES scholarship, in 1980, I moved to Berkeley with my children and with the support of my husband who, albeit could not remain there with us all along, could visit us every now and then.

Feyerabend was a very vivid person, dynamic, despite his disability, very caring for the students, witty, and almost insolent with his ironic comments about the institution and some colleagues. He was the most well-organized professor I ever had, his classes, having the largest audience, were carefully structured. We were free to choose the topics of the seminars, but Feyerabend demanded a commitment from the students, providing materials in advance for our colleagues. He was strict in regards to how to lead the presentations and discussions. If there was anything that was not clear, Feyerabend would interrupt the presentation and surprise everyone in the room with his relevant counter-examples. I attended his courses on the philosophy of science and theory of knowledge, usually given to enormous audiences, as well as to his seminars for a smaller number of students. Among these seminars, I participated in a seminar on Aristoteles, having been assigned to give a presentation on the movement of the celestial bodies. However, there is no doubt that it was the experience of having individual topics of study under Feyerabend that impressed me the most. I suggested studying Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*. He accepted it under the gracious condition that he would learn it from me as his focus was primarily on physics and astronomy. It was out of these studies that came out a long paper that eventually

would be turned into my Ph.D. dissertation. He was always very thoughtful to every point we discussed and his comments turn out to be very useful to me until today. He would tell me, for instance, that if I wanted to find something afresh, speaking in terms of epistemology, I should look for it before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (ROSA 2005, 12-13)



Photocopy of the cover of Anna Regner's personal copy of  
*Against Method* (3rd edition), by Paul Feyerabend

In fact, it was the author of *Against Method* who not only supervised Regner throughout her writing of this “long paper” which would become her Ph.D. dissertation as well as he graded it an A+. However, she did not graduate in the USA. She returned to Brazil as soon as she finished her coursework at UC Berkeley, recovering her teaching activities at UFRGS, and, after validating at Unicamp in São Paulo the credits from her coursework at UC Berkeley, began to write her Ph.D. dissertation. It was over 1,000-page-long at the time. However, due to an institutional issue which impeded her to defend an investigation of the epistemology of “On the Origin of Species” at the graduate program in logic and philosophy of science at UFRGS, she ended up defending her Ph.D. dissertation at the faculty of education at the same institution in 1995. “As I had been working by my own on the dissertation for so long, besides working on several different fronts at the same time, it thus took me that long to conclude it” (Quadros and Wolfart 2008), as she recalled it in hindsight. It required an interdisciplinary Ph.D. dissertation committee to evaluate her thick work, entitled “The teleological nature of the Darwinian principle of natural selection: an articulation between epistemology and metaphysics in *On the Origin of Species*”.

Regner worked at Saint Mary's College of California as a Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence until 1996 where she taught the courses "Philosophy of Science: How and Why to Do It", "Darwin's Voyage on the Beagle", "The Role of Metaphor in Science", and "The Explanatory Power of the Darwinian Principle of Natural Selection". Regner expressed the importance of teaching in English to make her ideas clearer. She returned to the USA as a visiting scholar in the Program in History and Philosophy of Science of Stanford University in 2001 under the supervision of Timothy Lenoir. She had back then attended a course by Lenoir on the Darwinian revolution. Having been awarded a CAPES scholarship, Regner visiting research at Stanford aimed at reconstructing the Darwinian arguments *On the Origin of Species*. She was looking for the concept of "rationality" behind the rhetorical arguments of the British naturalist. However, due to health problems, she had to interrupt the collaboration with her supervisor at Stanford. Unexpectedly, Regner had a heart attack that made her suspend her visiting research at Stanford. "I was there by myself and had a heart attack. I had to interrupt my research. My husband came to the USA to take me back home. As soon as we landed at the airport, we headed straight away to the Institute of Cardiology. I then underwent coronary bypass surgery" Quadros and Wolfart 2008.

Regner retired from UFRGS in 2002. About a year later, she took a position as a full professor at the *Centro de Ciências Humanas* of *Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos* (UNISINOS). It was there that she began her research project, "Reconstructing the argumentation of *On the Origin of Species*: a study of the strategies of scientific rationality (language and praxis in the constitution of science)". To put it in a nutshell, Regner investigated the cognitive role played by the resource of metaphor in science as a *process* and *product* of the framing of scientific knowledge, having as an example the Darwinian theory of natural selection. For her, to assign explanatory power and foundational capacity to metaphors meant to tackle the traditional rationalist dichotomy between logic and rhetoric. In this vein, the Brazilian philosopher kept loyal to that Feyerabendian understanding, i. e., that progress in knowledge often involves the use of "irrational" procedures, namely, procedures that are not "argumentative" in any way (*Against Method*, 1993, 3rd. ed. Chap. 1, pp. 15-16). Accordingly, Anna Regner included Argumentation Theory in the list of her teaching activities at UNISINOS. She also became a member of the research group *Filosofia e História da Ciência* of *Instituto Latino-Americano de Estudos Avançados* (ILEA-UFRGS) in 2013.

Regner spearheaded a number of research groups in history and philosophy of science in Brazil as well as abroad. Two of them should be included and pointed out in any list, namely, *Associação Brasileira de Filosofia e História da Biologia* (ABFHIB) and *Associação Brasileira de História da Ciência* (SBHC). In addition, one of the most important of her initiatives was her participation in the foundation of the *Associação de Filosofia e História das Ciências do Cone Sul* (AFHIC). AFHIC has ever since been instrumental in consolidating interchanges among researchers philosophers, scientists, historians and sociologists of science in neighboring countries of South Brazil. *History and Philosophy of Science in the South Cone* (Lorenzano, P., Martins, L. A.-C. P., A. C. Regner (eds.). London: College Publications, 2013) is the work that better epitomizes the importance of this initiative. As for editorial work, Regner was responsible for founding the journal *Episteme: Filosofia e História das Ciências em Revista* in 1996. She also worked as chief editor of the collection "Filosofia e Ciência" of UNISINOS Press as well as on the editorial board of a number of journals in Brazil and abroad. Last but not least, Regner promoted, both as organizer as well as coordinator, a number of scientific events, resulting in important publications, such as *A filosofia e a ciência redesenham horizontes* (Anna Carolina Regner e Luiz Rohden. – São Leopoldo, Editora Unisinos, 2005.) and *Ecos de Darwin* (Adriano Naves de Brito, Anna Carolina K. P. Regner. – São Leopoldo, RS: Ed. UNISINOS, 2012).

Regner's works, covering a wide range of subjects, were published in several different languages. I would like to highlight here only few books, book chapters, and papers. (A) On the philosophical aspects of the Darwinian theory and the life sciences – (1) *Charles Darwin, notas de viagem: a tessitura social no pensamento de um naturalista* (Porto Alegre: EST/Grafosul, 1988. v. 1. 92 p.), (2) O conceito de natureza em *A Origem das Espécies* (*História, Ciência e Saúde – Manguinhos*, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil, v. VIII, n. 3, p. 689-712, 2001.), (3) “The correspondence of Charles Darwin - 1864, vol. 12” (In: HSPS, vol.33, Part 2, p. 406. *Historical Studies for the Physical and Biological Sciences*, U.C. Berkeley (California), v. 33, n. Part 2, p. 406-406, 2003.), (4) “The Correspondence of Charles Darwin, Volume 13: 1865. Supplement 1822-1864” (*Historical Studies for the Physical and Biological Sciences*, U. C. Berkeley (EUA), v. 34, p. 400, 2004.); and (5) *Ciências da Vida: Estudos filosóficos e históricos* (Campinas: AFHIC, 2006). (B) On the scientific rationality and the philosophy of Paul Feyerabend – (1) “Feyerabend/Lakatos: adeus à razão ou construção de uma nova racionalidade? (In: Portocarrero, Vera (org.). *Filosofia, história e sociologia das ciências 1: abordagens contemporâneas*. Rio de Janeiro, 1994, v. 1, p. 103-131.); (2) “Feyerabend e o pluralismo metodológico” (*Caderno Catarinense de Ensino de Física*, Florianópolis, v. 13, n.3, p. 231-247, 1996.); and (3) “Uma nova racionalidade para a ciência?” (In: Boaventura de Sousa Santos. (Org.). *Conhecimento prudente para uma vida decente*. São Paulo, 2004, p. 291-324.).

The interface between rhetoric, argumentation theory and scientific rationality was a significant epistemological concern in these and other works by Regner. A systematic reconstruction of the body of work by this important Brazilian philosopher is an endeavor yet to be done.

I met Prof. Anna Regner in person around 2004. I had previously read with great interest her papers on Paul Feyerabend's philosophy before we began a fruitful email exchange. As a result of this exchange, Regner was invited for the composition of my Master's thesis committee in philosophy, entitled “Paul Feyerabend's incommensurability thesis” (2009). I keep up to this day the notes of her inquiring on the occasion of my Master's thesis defense. It was also due to this collaboration with her that I ended up publishing in 2014 a selection of papers by Paul Hoyningen-Huene on Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend translated into Portuguese and published by UNISINOS Press. I met her afterwards at several conferences. She invited me in 2014 to participate in a roundtable discussion on Feyerabend's philosophy at the *XIV Simpósio Internacional IHU – Revoluções Tecnocientíficas, culturas, indivíduos e sociedades*. It was on this occasion that we realized we had another interest in common: dogs. Regner was especially cheerful when talking about her three dogs, two Labradors and one Border Collie dog (not quite a purebred Border Collie, as she used to quip). She was also fond of gardening and became fascinated with plants over time. We met again when I defended my doctoral thesis, “Paul Feyerabend's Global Pluralism”, in 2015. I showed her on the occasion a CD, *Stories from Paolino's Tapes*, with audio recordings of Feyerabend singing operas and citing poems.

Regner was definitely an enthusiastic popularizer of Feyerabend's philosophy in Brazil. The number of readers of Feyerabend in Brazil influenced, directly or indirectly, by Regner is massive. We all learned with her that Feyerabend was a dynamic thinker whose philosophy invited to overcome old-fashioned dichotomies (such as rationality/ irrationality).

Regner passed away on January 31, 2020. Regner's contribution, always with great enthusiasm, in congresses, seminars, and other academic events worldwide used to be captivating for every participant. She was a professor, a writer, and a researcher, but, above all, a Brazilian philosopher held in high regard by her peers across, unfortunately, a male-dominated academic field, for her competence and capabilities. Having been raised in a Catholic family, she did not accept that human beings are the result of an especial act of divine creation, but, nevertheless, she beseeched for tolerance. She did not live long enough to witness the mismanagement of the current federal Brazilian administration in dealing with

the COVID pandemic. However, she did leave us, by means of her oeuvre, a lesson about how to deal with denialism and religious fundamentalism, namely, by advancing more rhetorical skills, and less argumentative discussions.



Anna

Regner, Patrícia Kauark-Leite and Renan Springer de Freitas.  
Belo Horizonte, Brazil. February 20, 2009



Mauro L. Condé and Luiz Abrahão (above); Osvaldo Pessoa-Jr., Anna Regner  
and Patrícia Kauark-Leite (below). Belo Horizonte, Brazil, July 15, 2015

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