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About

The *Journal of Didactics of Philosophy* is a peer-reviewed academic journal devoted to research on the teaching and learning of philosophy. It is published online twice a year. The access to all articles is free. Articles may be about any level of education, however the main focus is on high school philosophy. We welcome work with a philosophical or normative approach as well as reports of results from empirical qualitative and quantitative research. The journal also publishes reviews of books, textbooks and other educational material of international interest as well as country reports. These reports present information about ways of teaching philosophy, its institutions and activities in different countries. It is an aim of the journal to promote the dialogue among researchers and practicing teachers across the world.

Call for Papers (Volume 3, Number 2/2019)

Again we are issuing an *open* call for contributions. If you would like your article, country report or book review to be published in the next issue (Volume 3, Number 2/2019) please follow the instructions on the website (www.philosophie.ch/jdph).

Your text should reach one of the editors not later than 31st of July 2019.

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EDITORIAL

Dear readers!

In this issue two articles are focusing on the topic of philosophical problems and how to deal with them in teaching philosophy. Wolfgang Barz argues that philosophical questions arise from certain kinds of problems, which have an aporetic structure. This aporetic structure explains some of the characteristics of philosophy such as the large number of incommensurable views. Yvonne Lampert argues that teachers should pay special attention to the articulation of philosophical problems; according to Lampert it is a main point to clarify language and ask if there is a real problem – and what exactly it is. The analytical and critical reasoning about philosophical problems is not bound to a certain subject and therefore should be seen as a cross-curricular activity.

In the third article of this issue Philipp Thomas argues for a concept of teaching and learning philosophy which focuses on elaborating and dealing with ignorance (*Nichtwissen*). The article discusses the topic of negativity in the sense of the limits to knowledge and its existential consequences following Hegel, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger.

This issue also contains a country report about Italy. Clementina Cantillo describes the recent developments in philosophy education and teacher education in Italy based on ministerial recommendations. In the book review section, Jonas Pfister takes a critical look at a new online encyclopedia in French, and Philipp Richter reviews Christa Runtenberg's introduction to teaching philosophy in German.

We would like to thank Jule Bärmann for proofreading the whole manuscript of this issue.

The *Journal of Didactics of Philosophy* is now heading into its third year. Once again we would like to thank our Editorial Board and our reviewers for their very helpful work. During the first two years we have received 12 submissions. The peer review process allowed us to publish 7 of these 12 submissions in the four issues (including this issue 1/2019). This means there is an acceptance rate of about 57% so far.

However, it is remarkable that most of the authors are from Germany. In the country reports section perspectives are more international with contributions from the United States, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Croatia, France, and Italy. We hope that the word is spreading and that we will receive both research articles and country reports from many more different countries in the future for one of the aims of the *Journal of Didactics of Philosophy* is to promote the dialogue between researchers and practicing teachers across the world. Please don't hesitate to forward the current call for papers!

Again, if you have any questions or suggestions, please contact us.

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The Editors

THE APORETIC STRUCTURE OF PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS

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Abstract

The central idea of this essay is that philosophical thinking revolves around aporetic clusters, i.e., sets of individually plausible, but collectively inconsistent propositions. The task of philosophy is to dissolve such clusters, either by showing that the propositions in question, contrary to first impression, are compatible with each other, or by showing that it is permissible to abandon at least one of the propositions involved. This view of philosophical problems not only provides a very good description of well-understood philosophizing, but is also better suited than others to explain some seemingly strange characteristics of philosophy, most notably its armchair character, the large variety of incommensurable doctrines by which it is characterized, and its concern with its own history.

Keywords: aporetic cluster, Nicholas Rescher, armchair philosophizing, philosophical disagreement, skepticism

1. Introduction

The most important task for those who teach philosophy at colleges and universities is to cultivate passion in their subject. To be in a position to develop a passion for philosophy among students, teachers need to have an answer to the question “What is philosophy good for?” – because nobody wants to study a subject unless it is clear why it is worth pursuing. Thus, the question “What is philosophy good for?” is one of the most pressing questions in the didactics of philosophy. In the absence of an answer, philosophy will appear as an incoherent hotchpotch of conflicting views about all and sundry that have contingently emerged over time, lacking any common objective. As a consequence, studying philosophy will seem to be a pointless and anemic enterprise repelling those with a sincere desire for knowledge. Thus, it is of the highest importance for teachers of philosophy to be equipped with an adequate explanation as to what philosophy is if we do not want to lose our most talented students to other disciplines.

Unfortunately, but predictably, opinions differ widely on the question of what philosophy is all about. According to a view popular among those outside the discipline, philosophy is the study of the written remains of the grand old philosophers, similar to literary studies. While this is not completely wrong, it is not entirely correct either. Certainly, students of philosophy will spend a lot of time reading and interpreting the written remains of the grand old philosophers. However, doing philosophy is not the same as reading and interpreting texts of other people. Consider the ancient Greeks, who were among the first to practice philosophy: undoubtedly,

they did philosophy, but did they study the written remains of still other philosophers? No. How could they? There were no remains of other philosophers to study.

If doing philosophy is not the same as reading and interpreting the written remains of the grand old philosophers – what is it then? The answer which most people inside the discipline would agree with is that philosophy is the systematic study of fundamental questions such as “How can we know about the external world?,” “What is the relationship between the physical and the mental?,” “Do we act freely?,” “Where do our moral obligations come from?,” “What is a scientific explanation?,” and “What makes an object a work of art?,” and so on.

What, exactly, is the rationale behind these questions? Why are these questions worth raising? And what do we want to find out by addressing them? In my view, the most promising answer is that philosophical questions arise from certain kinds of *problems*, and by addressing philosophical questions we want to *solve* these problems. This essay aims to illuminate the kind of problems with which philosophers are concerned. The conception of philosophical problems that I suggest is neither new nor particularly original. It can be found in the works of Plato, Aristotle, and Thomas Aquinas. Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Ryle, and Wittgenstein also hold views similar to the notion presented in this essay. It might even be said that the conception of philosophical problems that I have in mind has been around for as long as people have pursued philosophy. However, it seems to me that it never got the appreciation it deserves. Its central idea is that one should regard a philosophical problem as a particular sort of *aporetic cluster*, i.e., as “a set of individually plausible propositions which is collectively inconsistent” (Rescher 2001: 5). The task of philosophy is to dissolve such clusters, either by showing that the propositions in question, contrary to first impression, are compatible with each other or by showing that it is permissible to abandon at least one of the propositions involved. This view on the subject matter of philosophy not only provides a very good description of well-understood philosophizing but is also better suited than others to explain some seemingly strange characteristics of philosophy. More importantly, it presents philosophizing as a meaningful and indispensable activity in our intellectual lives.

I will develop the presented conception of philosophical problems step by step. First, however, I will take a small detour by playing devil’s advocate and formulating a thought that is painful for us philosophers: that philosophizing is a hopeless enterprise, an activity not worth pursuing. I will, of course, cast away this tormenting thought as I progress. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to discuss the rationale on which it is based, for it compels us to elucidate to ourselves and others what we philosophers actually do, and what we want to know or come to know, i.e., what renders philosophy a meaningful intellectual enterprise. Thus, considering the tormenting thought is not an end in itself, but it opens our eyes to the true nature of philosophizing.

2. A Tormenting Thought

Debates in contemporary philosophy often unfold according to a depressingly simple script. One day, somebody publishes a paper on a specific topic. This paper is met with broad interest by colleagues, who produce their own papers in response. Journals fill up continually with papers discussing this subject, but views disperse in completely different ways. Fundamental

discussions flourish. Conferences are held on the topic. Monographs and anthologies are published, the debate gets more and more technical and detail-oriented, and dissertations systematically explore the topic to its most subtle ramifications. Specialists emerge who are the only ones to keep track of this increasingly differentiated debate, and so on.¹ It is certainly not inherently bad that philosophical disputes follow this pattern. What other way is there for an academic debate to unfold? Moreover, the pattern is not peculiar to philosophy. Other academic disciplines develop their debates in similar ways.

Nevertheless, there is something disturbing about this. From time to time, I cannot help feeling alienated by the fact that philosophical debates always follow the same old formula (and I hope some of my colleagues feel the same way). When that happens, I am tempted by the tormenting thought that the activity I usually practice with devotion and joy – philosophizing – is ultimately a worthless endeavor. Certainly, philosophy enjoys a very good reputation due to its venerable past. Surely, we are paid well for what we do. Publishers print our books and papers, and there is no lack of public recognition. Still, is it not possible that we, philosophers, are all caught in a collective self-deception? Is it not possible that philosophy, despite our outward pretense, is not a discipline that aims at knowledge and truth? Is it not possible that everything we do is pseudo-scientific shadowboxing, quite amusing as entertainment but in no way deserving the title it claims for itself, “love of wisdom”?

This tormenting thought might seem as though it was concocted from thin air. However, one can indeed find reasons to believe it is true. Specifically, I would like to discuss three allegations that are repeatedly made against philosophy. The first accuses it of being an armchair discipline. Most of us would agree that philosophy is an *a priori* activity. It does not require laboratories, experiments, or scientific field research yielding empirical data. The work of the philosopher is simply to *think*. The opponent might argue that this is not a sufficient certificate of quality regarding a discipline that claims to generate deep truths about man’s place in nature, the limits of our knowledge, or the relationship between mind and body. On the contrary, philosophy’s armchair character proves that philosophers produce nothing but mere conjectures reflecting their own prejudices.

The second allegation supporting the tormenting thought criticizes philosophy for not generating any progress. Philosophy is characterized by a large variety of incommensurable doctrines whose proponents are caught up in everlasting disputes. This stands in vast contrast to the natural sciences, where, after a period of competition, *one* theory establishes itself as universally accepted. There is not the slightest prospect that this will also happen in philosophy one day. The opponent might argue that this proves that philosophers desperately seek to provide answers to questions that do not actually have answers, ultimately rendering those questions meaningless. Thus, if there is any role of philosophy, it is surely not to yield knowledge about man and the world but to create confusion.

The third allegation might be the most agonizing. It denounces philosophy as being pathologically obsessed with its past. “A science which hesitates to forget its founders is lost,” Whitehead once said (1929: 107). Philosophy has never forgotten its founders. On the contrary,

¹ I borrow here from Andreas Kemmerling’s apt depiction in Kemmerling 2017: 568.

it seems to obsess over analyzing long-gone thinkers. This is precisely what provides the opponent with a target to discredit philosophy yet again. There is not a single other discipline that lavishes so much care and attention on the doctrines of its old masters like philosophy does. In this regard, philosophy resembles religion more than science.

Philosophers must face these three allegations time and again, and they fuel the tormenting thought that philosophy might be nothing but sophisticated nonsense. I admit that I experience moments of weakness in which I am sensitive to this thought, but in the end, I am convinced that we should face it most resolutely. However, there are different approaches to opposing this thought, and some are better suited to defend philosophy against its detractors than others. To support the strengths of the strategy which I prefer, first I would like to outline some alternatives that I do not consider particularly promising. The first strategy is simply to ignore the allegations that lead to the tormenting thought. This strategy rests on philosophy being a well-established academic discipline that is currently flourishing like never before. Philosophers are well-liked in public opinion, at least in Germany. Some of our colleagues' books—even if we might not appreciate their work – have made it on the bestseller list. We even get our own TV shows! Why, then, should we care about the tormenting thought? I might take the tormenting thought too seriously, but this strategy seems too easy. Even though we might consider it to be ridiculous, the tormenting thought should give us pause.

Another strategy seeks refuge in appeasing those who despise philosophy. “There is something to your allegations,” one might say. “The way we pursued philosophy in the past and still pursue it today is problematic, so we should change that.” There are several suggestions on how to change our practice accordingly. The first is already somewhat out of fashion. It recommends practicing rigid self-restraint in choosing our subjects and research methods. The participants in the Vienna Circle – although they are not the only ones – followed this approach, advising philosophers to practice only logic of science. A second example is Edmund Husserl. One could understand Husserl's phenomenology, with all its methodological precautions and safety measures (keyword: phenomenological reduction), as another program of philosophical self-restraint, enabling philosophy to progress and therefore ending all the quarrels that damage its reputation. Even though phenomenology and logical empiricism have nothing in common in terms of content, they do seem similar in metaphilosophical respects. Specifically, both hope that the adaptation of their program will free philosophy from the scandal of conflicting schools.

A second suggestion regarding how we should change our ways of practicing philosophy is that we leave our convenient armchair and take empirical action. We should at least collaborate with natural scientists. (It seems that this is the favorite suggestion of educational-policy makers and science managers, often embellished with the notion of “interdisciplinary research.”) This suggestion culminates in the emergence of experimental philosophy, which is on everyone's lips today.

One further proposal for changing philosophical practice – which responds to the claim that philosophy focuses too strongly on its own history – suggests disparaging the study of long-gone philosophers' writings. Gilbert Harman provided us with a good example when he affixed a note to his office door in Princeton. The note was jokingly based on a slogan by Nancy Reagan. Instead of “Just say no to drugs!” it read “Just say no to the history of philosophy!”

While Harman himself might have had a more subtle view on the subject (see Sorrell and Rogers 2005: 43-44), the message seemed quite clear: well-understood philosophy does not deal with its own history. Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, or Kant might be mentioned in an overview of the history of philosophy. However, if one wants to become a philosopher, the thoughts of those thinkers can be safely ignored. If one wants to become a chemist, it is likewise not necessary – and is even harmful – to study the writings of the alchemists.

None of these strategies is suitable to defend philosophy against its detractors. On the contrary, they pave the way for its downfall. First, philosophy lives on the diversity of contradictory positions. To take disciplinary action against this diversity would be poisonous for philosophical research. These aspirations aim at an idea of progress that simply does not work for philosophy. Second, it is essential for well-understood philosophizing to be pursued from the armchair. We do not have to be ashamed of that. All proposals that aim to make philosophy empirical simply do not understand what philosophy is about. Finally, philosophical debates are dependent on conversations with the dead. Thus, philosophers cannot simply ignore the history of their discipline. If they did, they would rob themselves of their most important sparring partners.

Presently, the preceding statements are no more than confessions of faith. However, I hope that I can render them plausible in the discussion that follows. The core of my strategy consists in converting the allegations against philosophy into requirements that well-understood philosophizing must fulfill. Thus, to keep the detractors in their place, we need a metaphilosophical theory that explains (i) why philosophy must be practiced in the armchair, (ii) why it is characterized by a variety of opinions, and (iii) why its own history plays an indispensable role in the discipline.

3. Aporetic Clusters as Epicenters of Philosophical Deliberation

The metaphilosophical approach I would like to present in this section draws heavily on ideas by Nicholas Rescher (1985), who himself refers to Nicolai Hartmann (1949).² The main idea is that philosophical deliberation centers around so-called *aporetic clusters*. The concept of an

² An anonymous referee has suggested that the recent discussion between Peter Hacker (2009) and Timothy Williamson (2007) on the question of whether and how philosophy is to be understood as an armchair discipline might also be relevant for this paper's topic. However, it seems to me that the discussion between Hacker and Williamson mainly revolves around the question of whether philosophy is concerned with concepts rather than things themselves. In short, Williamson says that philosophy is concerned with things, not concepts (and thus more akin to natural science than many philosophers are inclined to think), whereas Hacker says that "being concerned with concepts" and "being concerned with things" are not mutually exclusive options. Philosophy, according to Hacker, is concerned with things *by means of* analyzing concepts. As far as I can see, neither Hacker nor Williamson, in their discussion, touches on the question of the nature of the *problems* from which philosophical thinking arise. Note, however, that Hacker gave a brief explanation of philosophical problems a few years before his quarrel with Williamson in "Verstehen wollen" (2001). There, Hacker says that philosophical problems arise out of conceptual unclarity and confusion, which, in turn, arise from our lack of overview of a concept. Although I am sympathetic to many things Hacker has to say about philosophical methodology, I disagree on this point. As will become clear in a moment, my view is that philosophical problems do not arise due to a cognitive flaw for which we are responsible ("lack of overview"), but due to an inconsistency between fundamental elements of our conceptual scheme. This inconsistency is not a mere impression that results from our being confused (and thus might be eradicated by unraveling our confusion), but it is *real* (and thus can only be eradicated by revising certain fundamental elements of our conceptual scheme).

aporetic cluster refers to a set of propositions that seem plausible individually but cannot be true collectively. Aporetic clusters are nothing unusual. We encounter them in our daily lives as well as in the empirical sciences every time two well-reasoned, but incompatible opinions collide. Thus, not every aporetic cluster brings philosophy on to the scene. To become the subject of philosophical research, an aporetic cluster must be of a *particular* kind. The special characteristic of aporetic clusters central to philosophical thought is that they cannot be solved by means of empirical research.³ This is because their conflicting propositions put very general, fundamental, deeply rooted intuitions into words. Even though those propositions are not analytically true, they enjoy a state of empirical untouchability nonetheless.

The distinctive character of aporetic clusters significant to philosophical thought is best explained by using an example. Thus, let us examine the aporetic cluster that underlies epistemological skepticism.⁴ The modern version of this problem revolves around the notion that I am in the clutches of a mad scientist who has destroyed every part of my body with the exception of my brain, which he keeps in a vat filled with nutrient solution. As if that is not perfidious enough, we shall also imagine that the mad scientist supplies my brain with electric impulses that lead me to have sensual experiences indistinguishable from those I would have had if I had not been kidnapped. Although it seems to me that I am sitting at my desk right now, I (or what is left of me) am actually in the laboratory of the mad scientist in, say, Silicon Valley. If this version of the problem is taken as a basis, the aporetic cluster consists of the following sentences:

- (1) If I know that I am sitting at my desk right now, then I also know that I am not a brain in a vat right now.
- (2) I do not know that I am not a brain in a vat right now.
- (3) I know that I am sitting at my desk right now.

These three propositions are quite complex, both grammatically and semantically. Therefore, it might not be initially obvious as to why they are incompatible, in the characteristic sense of an aporetic cluster. Thus, let us look at the sentences' propositional logic:

³ It might be objected that not being solvable by means of empirical research might be necessary, but surely is not sufficient for being an aporetic cluster central to philosophical thought since some mathematical problems can be formulated as aporetic clusters as well. There is a more and a less concessive response to this concern. The more concessive response would be to say that there are no strict boundaries between philosophy and mathematics: there is a twilight-zone of problems that are both mathematical and philosophical. The less concessive response is that aporetic clusters central to philosophical thought have the distinctive feature of incorporating propositions that revolve around notions being of high significance for human life. I tend towards the non-concessive answer. At the same time, I frankly concede that I cannot provide a clear-cut definition of "being of high significance for human life." I thank an anonymous referee for raising this point.

⁴ Another paradigm example is the mind-body problem, which is characterized by the following propositions: (1) Mental phenomena are not physical. (2) Mental phenomena can cause physical phenomena. (3) Physical phenomena have physical causes only. (See Bieri 1981: 5; see also Lepore and Loewer 1987: 630. Additional examples can be found in Rescher 1985).

- (1) $p \rightarrow q$
- (2) $\neg q$
- (3) p

The lowercase “ p ” stands for “I know that I am sitting at my desk right now,” while “ q ” is the abbreviation for “I know that I am not a brain in a vat right now.” It is easy to see the incompatibility of these three propositions now. Propositions (1) and (2) logically imply the negation of (3): $\neg p$. Moreover, (2) and (3) logically imply the negation of (1): $\neg(p \rightarrow q)$. Finally, (1) and (3) logically imply the negation of (2): q . As much as we might wish to keep all three propositions, we cannot adhere to all of them. If we want to be rational—as we should be—we must relinquish at least one of the three propositions. However (and this creates a sticky situation), all our options are equally unappealing because every single one of these propositions, taken on its own, has a significant degree of persuasive power.

First, let us take a closer look at proposition (3), “I know that I am sitting at my desk right now.” The reasons why this is true are simply overwhelming. In fact, they are so overwhelming that it seems ridiculous even trying to deny (3), at least if one is guided by common sense and not already philosophically biased in some way or other. (I will go into more detail about this restriction in a moment.)

What about proposition (2), “I do not know that I am not a brain in a vat right now”? This, too, seems undoubtedly true. The brain in a vat scenario is conceived in such a way that nobody can rule it out. The sense experiences I would have as a brain in a vat would not differ at all from those I actually have. Therefore, whether I am in a skeptical scenario cannot be judged from my perspective. There is neither a tangible sign telling me that I *am*, nor is there one appealing me that I am *not*, in the hands of a mad scientist. However, unless our experiences provide evidence to the effect that I am not a brain in a vat, I cannot *know* that I am not a brain in a vat. (Just as with proposition (3), this reasoning will not be the final, but merely a preliminary evaluation of the plausibility of (2).)

Finally, what about proposition (1), “If I know that I am sitting at my desk right now, then I also know that I am not a brain in a vat right now”? Those who are familiar with epistemology might have realized that (1) is an instance of a general maxim commonly called the *principle of closure*. Formulated crudely, it states that if a person S knows p , and p logically or conceptually entails q , then S knows q as well. Phrased this way, the principle of closure is surely wrong since there are a lot of situations where we do not know everything a particular known proposition entails logically or conceptually. For instance, just think of examples from the field of mathematics. Thus, one should formulate the principle more carefully, like this: “If a person S knows p and comes to believe q by correctly deducing q from p , then S knows q .” This is the so-called *principle of closure under known entailment*. It seems highly plausible since it describes a natural, familiar intuition that we all have. Many epistemologists even think it would be crazy to abandon it (cf. BonJour 1987; DeRose 1995; Feldman 1995).⁵

⁵ If we want to take into account the *principle of closure under known entailment*, we should phrase propositions (1) and (3) differently. We should add a clause along the lines of: “I believe that I am not a brain in a vat because I know that someone who sits at his desk cannot be a brain in a vat.” To keep the problem simple

In summary, propositions (1), (2), and (3) are not just incompatible. Seen individually, each has a significant degree of persuasive power. Thus, we face a trilemma: if we want to be rational, we must surrender at least one of the three propositions. However, no matter which proposition we choose, we will always repudiate something we find true at the bottom of our hearts.

At this point, I will probably be met with strong resistance. “Propositions (1), (2), and (3),” some will hold against me, “are not at all equally plausible!” Someone under the influence of Fred Dretske (1970) or Robert Nozick (1981) will find proposition (1) less plausible than (2) and (3). Those who have read Austin’s “Other Minds” (1961) or studied Moore’s proof of the external world (Moore 1959) may find (2) less plausible than (1) and (3). Finally, a convinced subjective idealist of the likes of Berkeley might find (3) less plausible than (1) and (2).

However, this does not mean that we are not facing a genuine aporia, but that we must adopt a certain *attitude* to recognize it: we must block out our entire laboriously-earned philosophical expertise. If one judges right from the outset that the principle of closure is implausible anyway because one believes everything Dretske and Nozick argue, then there is no problem. One is, so to speak, epistemologically at peace with the world. Similarly, if one would say, “It is obvious that I cannot know anything about the external world. Everything I can know is about me and my own consciousness,” then the aporia will not be visible for him or her. One then is in a state of theoretical bliss, which is fine. However, being in a state of bliss, one will not find access to philosophy, which requires an intellectual uneasiness resulting from a certain kind of theoretical humility, austerity, or naiveté, if one will. One must parenthesize one’s philosophical expertise to recognize a philosophical problem as a problem. Those who look at the world through specific philosophically-charged glasses are liable to be blind to philosophical problems.

This precisely is where perhaps the greatest challenge of philosophical didactics lies: opening the eyes of those who study philosophy so they may become aware of philosophical problems. This only is possible when philosophy teachers restore the philosophical innocence of their students—which may lead to paradoxical situations. On the one hand, our didactical aim is to give our students an understanding of Dretske’s and Nozick’s arguments against closure. We want them to know how Moore, Austin, and other proponents of ordinary language philosophy argue against the skeptic, and also how subjective idealism works. On the other hand, if we want them to recognize philosophical problems for what they are, we must pretend as if these theories, systems, and arguments do not exist. Thus, making philosophical problems visible is such a strenuous effort that teaching philosophical doctrines in comparison to that seems like child’s play.⁶

Quite frequently, students are already married to a certain philosophical doctrine. This poses a very special didactic challenge. Adherents of subjective idealism, constructivism, and relativism are good examples because these philosophemes are very popular, especially with

and clear, I will do without this modifier.

⁶ See Meyer et al. (2018) for a promising suggestion on how to make philosophical problems visible in high school philosophy classes. The aim of the “Strukturmodell” is to provide the teacher with techniques to animate pupils to detect dissonances in their belief system and thus to reveal the philosophical puzzles dealt with in the class. Thus, Meyer et al.’s “Strukturmodell” could be regarded as a concrete implementation of the more abstract ideas presented in this paper. Thanks to an anonymous referee for drawing my attention to the “Strukturmodell.”

first-year students. Due to their theoretical bias, these students are unable to recognize the scandalous nature of external world skepticism because they consider themselves to be in the matrix, anyway. They will also not understand the point of large-scale damage limitation exercises such as Kant's transcendental idealism. The main task of the teacher, then, is to bring such students back down to earth, for philosophical problems are recognizable as problems only from this point of view.⁷

After this slight digression, let us return to the characterization of aporetic clusters central to philosophical thought. Not only are propositions (1), (2), and (3) incompatible, even though they seem equally plausible to us (in a state of philosophical innocence), but to make things worse, we cannot delegate the decision regarding which proposition should be dismissed to the empirical sciences. Our reason is on its own with this decision. To illustrate this point, consider an empirical research project that aims to falsify the *principle of closure under known entailment*. What might the framework of such a research project look like? One might say, "That is fairly simple. One analyzes a sufficiently large group of people who know p and believe q because they know that p entails q . Then, one checks if all these people also know q . If there are some who, under the described circumstances, do not know q , then we have proved the *principle of closure under known entailment* wrong." The problem with this is that we cannot determine that a person does not know q under the described circumstances without already giving up the principle we want to falsify, since the principle warrants that every person knows q under the described circumstances. In other words, we can only disprove the principle if we presume that it is wrong. Surely that is no empirical research project worth funding.

At this point in dialectics, philosophers enter the arena equipped with an arsenal of non-empirical means to solve the problem. It is not clear from the outset what the exact means are. Some hold conceptual analysis and logical reconstruction in high esteem, while others prefer thought experiments and counterfactual deliberations. Yet others try to identify and question specific background assumptions that feed into the formulation of the problem. There are virtually no limits to methodic imagination in philosophy. Everything is permissible if it serves to achieve the goal of solving or dissolving the initial problem.⁸

4. The Explananda Explained

Regarding philosophy as a reaction to aporetic clusters allows us to refute the allegations I described at the beginning of this essay. We are now able to explain why philosophy must be done from the armchair, why the diversity of opinions in philosophy is principally irreducible, and why philosophy's own past is so important to the discipline.

We can quickly deal with the first point – characterizing philosophy as an armchair discipline. Philosophy must be practiced in the armchair because the aporetic clusters with which philosophers deal cannot be solved by empirical means.

⁷ In order to forestall possible misunderstandings, please note that I do *not* recommend confronting students with philosophical problems without teaching how to resolve them. I merely emphasize the significance of making philosophical problems visible *before* teaching how to resolve them.

⁸ One might ask, "Even empirical means?" Yes, of course! If the problem turns out to be solvable through empirical research, it simply did not belong to the class of genuinely philosophical problems.

The second point – the irreducible diversity of opinions – requires a more comprehensive explanation. We cannot principally reduce the diversity of opinions, because there will always be a plurality of options to solve or dissolve an aporetic cluster and different people will have different opinions on the question of which option is best.

Let us look at the problem of skepticism again. There are at least three options: dismiss proposition (1) and keep (2) and (3), dismiss (2) and keep (1) and (3), or dismiss (3) and keep (1) and (2). All these options have found supporters throughout the history of philosophy. As mentioned before, Fred Dretske and Robert Nozick sacrifice the principle of closure and thus dispatch proposition (1). This way, they can adhere to (2) and (3). In contrast, Austin and Moore sacrifice the second proposition to save (1) and (3). Additionally, subjective idealists suspend the third proposition and are thus able to sustain (1) and (2). There are certainly other solutions, as well. One is to argue that (1), (2), and (3) are actually quite compatible. This is the position of contextualism. Contextualists claim that the verb “to know” assumes different meanings within the three propositions. Thus, they claim that it is incorrect to represent (1), (2), and (3) as I did above, by “ $p \rightarrow q$,” “ $\neg q$,” and “ p ,” respectively. In fact, contextualists claim there is no inconsistency in the conjunction of (1), (2), and (3) (cf. DeRose 1995).

I will not discuss these suggestions in detail. The point of reviewing the multiplicity of philosophical approaches to skepticism is merely to emphasize that aporetic clusters central to philosophical thought always leave room for *more than one* solution – at least if you look at them open-mindedly. Moreover, proponents of each of the suggested solutions can provide *good reasons* for their preferred option: Austin, Berkeley, DeRose, Dretske, Moore, Nozick, and others did not randomly choose an option, but made every effort to support their position with reasons – they *argued* for their preferred option, and they argued *very well*. Thus, it seems that all options are equally reasonable. Unlike empirical problems, philosophical problems do not appear to have a “correct” solution that will ultimately prevail.

At this point, a difficulty may suggest itself. If all options were equally reasonable, and there was no better or worse, then philosophy, understood as the struggle to solve aporetic clusters were entirely pointless. Why should one argue for a specific solution if it is clear in advance that it will not be better than the solutions suggested by one’s philosophical rivals? If there is no better or worse, why quarrel with others about the best way to solve a philosophical problem? Doesn’t the claim that all solutions are equally reasonable amount to the claim that philosophical puzzles are *unsolvable* in the end? If philosophical puzzles are unsolvable, we could spare ourselves the effort of trying to solve them.⁹

I would like to mitigate these concerns by drawing an analogy to politics. Consider political battles in democracies. Conservatives and social democrats, say, share the aim of promoting the well-being of the whole society. However, they differ over the question of how to achieve it. For example, conservatives advocate reducing taxes in order to keep the economy growing, while social democrats champion a moderate increase in taxes in order to redistribute money to the poor. Both sides have good arguments for their cause. Moreover, there is no neutral vantage point for assessing which option is more reasonable than the other. (Surely, there are those

⁹ I owe this objection to two anonymous referees. I thank them for pressing me on this point.

economists who pretend to be the voice of reason, but closer attention reveals that even the most “neutral” economist is already driven by political motives.) Thus, in a sense, there is no better or worse: there is no independent, presuppositionless measure by which it could be determined whether reducing taxes is more reasonable than increasing taxes relative to the overall aim of promoting the well-being of the whole society. However, in another sense, there *is* a better and a worse. Regarding politics, at least regarding “big” political issues such as taxation, no one can adopt the stance of a disinterested observer – for each of us occupies a specific position, plays a certain role in society which goes along with particular needs and wants that, in turn, impose certain political norms and values on us. (If you are a well-paid CEO you typically hold other things in high regard than someone who is unemployed.) Thus, we cannot help looking at political issues from a prejudiced perspective, a perspective that suggests a certain political action as the most reasonable. So even if there is no independent measure to use to decide which action is most reasonable, political disputes over the issue of which action should be taken do not become pointless.

Something along these lines is true of philosophy as well. There is no neutral vantage point for assessing which of the possible solutions to an aporetic cluster is the most reasonable solution. In this sense, there is no better or worse. However, each of us already comes equipped with certain cognitive norms and values: for example, some are drawn to simplicity, hold empirical adequacy in high regard, and have confidence in common sense, whereas others attach greater importance to originality, theoretical elegance, and wideness of scope.¹⁰ Thus, we cannot help looking at philosophical puzzles from a prejudiced perspective, a perspective that suggests a certain solution as most reasonable.¹¹ For example, if you have confidence in common sense, you will find subjective idealism repellent. In contrast, if you are deeply suspicious of common sense, you may find subjective idealism attractive. In this sense, there *is* a better and a worse. A dispassionate stance towards the multiplicity of incompatible solutions to a philosophical puzzle is quite impossible. From *our* standpoint, the solutions preferred by our philosophical rivals seem utterly unreasonable. Thus, even if there is no independent measure to use to decide which solution is most reasonable, philosophical disputes over the issue of which solution should be preferred do not become pointless. By the same token, it is quite impossible to reach an agreement: since subjective differences in ranking and applying cognitive norms and values are pervasive, different people tend to prefer different solutions to one and the same aporetic cluster. To enforce an agreement (by whatever means) would counter human nature.

It might be objected that this diagnosis vitiates philosophy even more. If philosophical disagreement about the “correct” solution of an aporetic cluster stems from differences in cognitive norms and values, then *arguing* for a specific solution would be entirely pointless.

¹⁰ Other examples of cognitive (or, as they are sometimes called: epistemic) values include coherence with other accepted theories, completeness, internal consistency, explanatory power, precision, and predictive accuracy. Cognitive values also manifest themselves in our judgments about what is, relative to a certain issue, significant or unimportant, obvious or far-fetched, and so on. For more on cognitive values, see Rescher 1985, chap. 6. The *locus classicus* on cognitive values and their role in theory assessment is Kuhn 1977.

¹¹ Thus, the stance, described above, that should be adopted in order to recognize philosophical problems for what they are is highly artificial. It requires much effort: not only bracketing one’s philosophical background knowledge but also restraining one’s cognitive temperament, so to speak.

Preferring one over another solution would be just a matter of taste, not open to rational assessment. However, this objection confuses norms and values with mere preferences. Norms and values are not mere preferences. Whereas mere preferences cannot be rationally assessed, norms and values can be. The question “Is it rational to prefer coffee over tea?” does not make sense. However, the question “Is it rational to have confidence in common sense?” does make sense. Moreover, preferences are not judgment-sensitive, whereas norms and values are: thinking thoroughly about common sense may *change* my attitude towards it. However, thinking thoroughly about the taste of coffee does not change my preference for (or aversion to) coffee. Thus, arguing for a specific solution to an aporetic cluster is not pointless at all, because our preference for a specific solution is not a blind reflex, determined by factors that are rationally impenetrable, but is a reason-driven decision, determined by factors that are yet again open to rational assessment (cf. Rescher 1985: 145-151).

Allow me to add a didactic corollary. Here lies a profound challenge of philosophical didactics: to convey the idea that there is no neutral vantage point for assessing which of the possible solutions to a philosophical puzzle is the most reasonable, and at the same time to encourage students to systematically think about which of the possible solutions is the most reasonable. Again, there is something paradoxical about it. On the one hand, we want students to develop (and defend) a well-justified view on the question of which solution to a philosophical puzzle is the best. On the other hand, we want our students to remain open-minded and sensitive to the thought that their preferred view – even if brilliantly argued – might not be the last word on the issue. The ideal student of philosophy unwaveringly follows the voice of reason, but at the same time wonders whether it leads the right way. Probably the best a teacher can do to achieve this ideal is to promote intellectual integrity: encourage students to put up a bitter resistance to philosophical views that seem unreasonable to them after carefully weighing all the pros and cons, but at the same time admonish them to be prepared to convert as soon as the rival’s argument seems cogent. One gets the impression that the attitude described has a poor reputation in public opinion (even though, in driveling speeches, one frequently hears speakers pay lip service to it). Public opinion generally prefers people who rigidly stick to their views, once formed, throughout their life (as if persistence was an intrinsic value). Thus, in philosophy classes, it is important to lead by example: do not pretend to know it all, but be self-critical, admit errors on your side. Moreover, familiarize students with intellectual biographies such as that of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Laurence Bonjour, or Frank Jackson (to cite just a few), who, at some time or other in their career, rebelled against views they formerly held or even converted to views they once had fought against.

Let me end by adding a few remarks about the relation between philosophy and its history. Philosophy is so concerned with its own history because both formulating (or should I say: discovering?) an aporetic cluster and exploring its various solutions is an utterly lengthy process. The timeframe in which these processes take place is neither comparable to a talk show nor a term of office. Usually, it takes decades to centuries to fully develop a particular solution to an aporetic cluster. There is no single person who can accomplish this task in his or her limited lifetime. Thus, we must regard philosophy as a conversation spanning over centuries, as an intergenerational enterprise for which the thoughts of philosophers who lived hundreds of

years ago are still systematically relevant. The idea of ahistorical philosophizing fails to recognize this. If we did not care about the thoughts of our ancestors, we would cut off important conversational threads and would thus be unable to run through ideas that might just be emerging.

Ultimately, there is no reason to despair of philosophy. The discipline might have its oddities, but they are due to the nature of the problems with which philosophy is concerned. The tormenting thought and the motives from which it arose lack any reasonable foundation.¹²

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WHAT IS A PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEM? A PLEA FOR AN ANALYTICAL, CROSS-CURRICULAR APPROACH

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Abstract

This article sketches out a picture of philosophy that indicates the relevance of exploring not only what we think but especially how we think. From the perspective of analytic philosophy – as an approach to philosophical problems – the way we think and talk should be given more attention in secondary school to resolve ambiguity, inconsistency and incoherency in our understanding in any subject. Attention should be paid to (1) the application of philosophical competencies and (2) philosophy as a cross-curricular activity. Analytical activities, not as being the only viable philosophical activities but as being major and reputable activities in philosophy, contribute distinctively and substantially to the development of students' reflective and critical thinking which is a necessary condition for doing philosophy. Consequently, issues of meaning and justification take priority over “big philosophical questions” and they should be discussed in any (school) subject.

Keywords: philosophical problem, analytic philosophy, trans-disciplinary learning, scientific literacy, *Bildung*, fragmentation

1. Introduction

“Are there philosophical problems?” is the title of a lecture Popper held 1946 at the Moral Sciences Club in King's College. This lecture was leading to a poker-involving confrontation between Popper and Wittgenstein, which has become part of philosophical legend ever since. However, opinion is divided over the match-up.¹ Popper follows up his question later on in his Chairman's Address, delivered 1952 to the Philosophy of Science Group of the British Society for the History of Science (Popper 1952). He also mentions Wittgenstein's reaction at this “stormy meeting” (p. 128, fn. 1) and criticizes Wittgenstein's point of view. In contrast to Wittgenstein, Popper puts emphasis on the significance of genuine philosophical problems such as the relation between body and mind, the truth of moral norms, the existence of causal relations or questions concerning infinity. The understanding of what a philosophical problem is has been varied and conflicting. It is directed by the particular conception of philosophy. Contrary to Popper, Wittgenstein does not characterize philosophy in terms of any subject-

¹ Cf. Edmonds/Eidinow (2001) who offer an account of evidence from witnesses.

matter. “A philosophical problem has the form: I don’t know my way about” (Wittgenstein 1958, I §123).

According to Wittgenstein, the major source of philosophical problems lies in misleading features of language. These problems are to be solved, or even dissolved, by conceptual clarification. Thus, the purpose of philosophy was to unmask and dissolve puzzles. Wittgenstein holds that philosophical problems “are not empirical problems, they are solved, rather, by looking into the working of our language [...]. The problems are solved not by giving new information, but by arranging what we always have known. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language” (Wittgenstein 1958, I §109). Philosophy, then, is an elucidatory and critical activity of finding, solving and resolving problems in sciences and in public life.² It has no subject matter of its own in the way empirical sciences do. According to the analytical approach, “Philosophy is a contribution not to human knowledge, but to human understanding” (Hacker 2015: 45).

Analyzing language to dissolve philosophical problems does not mean to question the importance of common or scientific knowledge for our understanding of problems, claims, decisions or actions. Domain-specific knowledge is needed to recognize conceptual linkages, to evaluate the plausibility of various positions and to take a well-justified stand one is able to defend. The use of knowledge goes hand in hand with analytical activities that clarify the understanding of what is at issue. We have to attain knowledge of what is relevant to decision and action. This knowledge stems from science or reflects our common sense view of the world and the way we talk about in ordinary language. However, philosophical knowledge is not genuinely knowledge of certain facts, i.e. the knowledge that certain propositions are true, but, rather, deals with inferences from general propositions or observations and perceptions and with naming, defining and classifying. Philosophical knowledge is characterized as knowledge how to do philosophy by paying explicit attention to concepts and forms of reasoning in any discipline so that fallacies and circular explanations can be revealed. Philosophy’s domain in this sense is not so much about what to think, but, rather, how to think.

2. “Big philosophical questions”

According to this view, philosophy is not answering questions like: “What is the meaning of life?”, “Should I be afraid of death?”, “How do I know that God exists?” “What is there?” These questions presume that their underlying concepts are clear and that there is a clear answer referring to reality. Even given these presumptions, philosophers do not know more about life, death, god and existing things than any other. Philosophers, however, can clarify these questions. Instead of asking: “What is there?” philosophers should rather ask: “What are the objects of our assertions?”, “What do we quantify over?”, “Is existence a property of individuals?”, “Are there individuals that lack of it?” or “What is the logical form of sentences that state the existence of some individual?” Only these questions aim at a careful scrutiny of

² Cf. Hacker (2015: 51): “Not only do philosophical problems arise when language is hard at work. They arise ubiquitously in science, and in public life – in economics, politics, law, and in moral debate. It is one of the great tasks of philosophy to struggle against the corruption of science, law, politics, economics, art and moral discourse by conceptual confusion.”

underlying assumptions and concepts. This is a necessary condition for a rational debate. Natural language often is misleading and this is why analytic philosophy challenges us to reflect on what we are asking about. Before looking for answers, it is useful to clarify what we are asking about, whether the question can be answered and if so how. This holds for academic philosophy as well as for doing philosophy at school – asking questions presupposes an understanding of them.

There might be sentences in which the word “exists”, although grammatically a predicate, is not logically a predicate, so we have to ask: “Is there any difference of a grammatical sense and a logical one, and if so what is it?” One might say in order to predicate something of *x* its existence must be presupposed. Therefore, sentences which state the existence of some individual object *x* are tautologous/nonsensical and those which deny it self-contradictory. Kant discusses the issue of existence this way in the Critique of Pure Reason (A596/B624 – A602/B630) and rejects the claim that existence is a real predicate. Part of his argument can be traced back to Hume and has been endorsed by a long line of philosophers, including Moore, Russell, Frege and Strawson.

Some questions take the form of questions about essence or existence of things. However, they are to be answered by conceptual clarification. We may find some sort of logical trick ensuring that the question is unanswerable. Philosophical questions, then, are not big questions of humankind that cannot be answered, but philosophy rather poses questions about these questions.

Doing philosophy this way is inspired by “big fundamental questions” that lead us to ambiguity, equivocation and contradiction. It starts off with putting underlying philosophical questions on these questions for which the answers variously proposed to them are arguably without any hope of non-controversial agreement. It reveals a network of concepts, beliefs and doctrines which have not been articulated. Once these “fundamental questions” are clarified – not prematurely answered – and once our concepts are ordered so that more particular questions are identified and distinguished, many further questions belonging to the domain of empirical sciences and involving an explanation of phenomena can be asked.

3. Priority to analytic enquiry

A wide range of philosophical questions cannot be answered by gathering more knowledge of facts. Philosophy strives to attain some elucidation of questions drawn from aspects of our experience in ordinary life and science and it always did. Concepts and their analysis mattered to philosophy ever since Plato and must continue to do so. Philosophical questions

are not questions in search of an answer, but questions in search of a sense. For the task of arguments in many domains of philosophy is not to answer questions, but to show that they lack sense. Commonly the first mistake we make in a philosophical investigation lies in the philosophical question itself (Ms. 124, 278). (Backer/Hacker 1988: 280)

Many problems discussed in philosophy and everyday life can be resolved by providing clarity of words and grammar because some questions may have traps in them and lead to

insoluble puzzles. We may find that a conceptual framework is too narrow to contain the content we want to express in. Contradictions, inconsistencies or cognitive dissonances can be removed within a new framework. If so, analysis is a necessary condition for looking for answers and for any inquiry into values and matters of fact.

An approach to this idea is offered by Hardy and Schamberger (2017). They state that philosophical questions aim at the specification of the general conditions of the specific use of words in sentences. Hardy and Schamberger convey three features of philosophical questions (p. 18-19):

1. “What is X”-questions as they were asked by Socrates asking for what is the same to all X’s. They ask for an explanation or definition.

2. We come to philosophical questions by having the greatest possible distance to our familiar practice to act. Philosophical questions are not related to some specific experience, but to general conditions under which we gain experience.

3. Philosophical questions are not to be answered by experience alone. The focus is on the way we speak and think about phenomena.

The study of philosophy is not to be reduced to proficiency in the identification of fallacies or the clarification and evaluation of arguments. Analytical enquiry encompasses a wide range of approaches mainly understood in procedural terms rather than in products of philosophy. By “analytic philosophy”, I here understand primarily the practice of conceptual analysis using historical and cultural background knowledge with strong ties to other sciences and to history and philosophy of science. It is opposed to proposing grand systems and discussing unanswerable questions. Analytical enquiry should be given priority in the sense that philosophical work starts off with it since there is no sense in debating questions without considering “rules for forming statements and for testing, accepting, or rejecting them” (Carnap 1956: 208). So, competencies to do so are to be developed in school as well as in university.

4. Teaching philosophy – an analytical approach

The connection between academic philosophy and didactics of philosophy has been taken into question (cf. Tiedemann 2011: 17-18). However, a “complex and productive interchange” between philosophy and its didactics is perceived (cf. Nida-Rümelin et al. 2017, introduction by Spiegel, p. 11). Philosophy education is supposed to be part of academic philosophy. Notwithstanding, a connection between analytic philosophy in its tendency to bridge sciences, to analyze concepts and grammar and to apply logic on the one hand and didactics of philosophy on the other does not seem to be very popular in Germany, neither in school practice nor in the didactic literature. One reason for this might be a “practical turn of philosophy” (cf. Nida-Rümelin et al. 2017: 10). (School) Philosophy has become more and more practical, i.e. discussing society, culture and politics. However, it is seldom asked how to do so best.³ Another reason for neglecting an analytical approach in didactics of philosophy might be the view that the acquisition of skills that enable us to think and articulate clearly were not considered to be the primary aim of a philosopher (cf. Meyer et al. 2016: “[...] one learns there [in philosophy

³ A commendable exception is the introduction to analysis and argumentation in secondary school by Pfister (2013).

class] to speak and to think clearly, and this pays off in many respects. But the acquisition of these skills is not the aim of those who are doing philosophy. Instead, it is about finding answers to philosophical questions”⁴). Teachers as well as students should be concerned with philosophical insight (“philosophische Einsicht”), Meyer rightly claims. However, it is notoriously unclear what this insight is about. It depends on the view on what a philosophical problem is.

From an analytical point of view, a typical philosophical problem is characterized by underlying unclear or contradictory assumptions and the desired insight is reached by analysis. It is some sort of “preliminary conflict resolution” (“Konfliktloesungsvorbereitung”).⁵ Thus, the particular idea of philosophy in the classroom is to encourage students to pay attention to what they learn and to their own thoughts in any subject.

Teaching in the tradition of analytic philosophy does not mean to be anti-historic or not to be affected with moral questions nor does it primarily mean to study analytic philosophers. Teaching philosophy in the logical-analytical tradition involves the systematic and rigorous investigation into fundamental questions across a wide array of disciplines. However, teaching and doing philosophy does not primarily aim at reaching knowledge of the world we live in – this is to be achieved by the natural sciences and humanities – but at a distinct form of understanding the knowledge students get acquainted with in school and elsewhere. It is particularly to be concerned with questions or statements which look as if they are about the nature of things, but actually are conceptually unclear.

Students should develop and apply their philosophical skills in all areas. They should reconnect their activities and knowledge in other subjects to philosophical activities. Philosophy, then, is aiming at exploring concepts and methods of enquiry used in everyday life as well as in disciplines students learn in secondary school. By doing philosophy this way, the classical philosophical themes such as norms, values, principles, knowledge, justification, testimony or causality will turn up by themselves. Philosophy in this sense strives for attaining an overview of the field of interlocking concepts students already use or are supposed to use. According to this, to say that analytic philosophy has a rather narrow subject-matter is off the point.

Philosophy in secondary school should be a method to develop more interchange among subjects – contrary to the fragmentation in the field of what students learn in secondary school. Science education, along with philosophy classes, can act as a counter-balance to a narrow form of learning. Priorities in education can be shifted from learning to thinking and understanding if lessons in any subject are accompanied by doing philosophy. Analytical enquiry gives the opportunity to develop skills not frequently offered in school subjects but to be used there. It helps students to understand disagreement on a more fundamental level by providing a kind of understanding, particularly of presuppositions, standards of evidence, and modes of

⁴ On the other hand, cf. Mayer (2015: 104): “Competence-oriented lessons aim at the promotion of competencies which are important for working on philosophical questions and problems. This is not just a matter of solving these problems. Rather, the ability to develop a deep understanding of these problems and to discuss them in an adequate way is already a subject-specific competence.”

⁵ Hardy/Schamberger (2017: 25f.). Hardy and Chamberger explain how theoretical conflicts, e.g. about the free will, can be solved by conceptual analysis.

explanation. Eventually, it enhances students' abilities to build consistent systems of statements, to navigate successfully through a diversity of information and misinformation and it extends their understanding of interdisciplinary questions. This will be useful not only in any career but also in personal life. It helps to meet current academic standards, too.

Practical philosophy is concerned with more than conceptual elucidation, to be sure. However, Moore's *Principia Ethica*, e.g., gives an example for the moral philosophy's important task of clarification of ethical concepts (e.g. "good") in order to avoid troubles in our thought, e.g. the naturalistic fallacy.⁶ Hare even states in his classic of analytic metaethics: "Ethics, as I conceive it, is the logical study of the language of moral" (Hare 1952, preface). Analytic activities should go along with investigations in ethics as in any subject. "For confusion about our moral language leads, not merely to theoretical muddles, but to needless practical perplexities" (Hare 1952: 1-2). Examination of the grounds of claims is needed. Language is evidently one of the principal instruments of thought and understanding is the primary aim of philosophy. Mill already crystallized this view by the title of chapter one of his *System of Logic*, "Of the Necessity of Commencing with an Analysis of Language". In §1 of this chapter he states:

But before inquiring into the mode of resolving questions, it is necessary to inquire, what are the questions which present themselves? what questions are conceivable? what inquiries are there, to which man have either obtained, or been able to imagine it possible that they should obtain, an answer? This point is best ascertained by a survey and analysis of Propositions. (Mill 1846: 12)

5. Competence orientation, problem orientation, *Bildung*

Analytical enquiry has to take place in any school subject. Anglophone philosophy and didactics always had a tendency to underline this. In the English-speaking world many teachers struggle to engage students in critical thinking activities – not only in philosophy class. The focus is on students' equipment with skills that can be identified and practiced. Students learn to express themselves, to formulate good arguments, to evaluate whether they should be convinced that some claim is true, and to defend against some unfair and tricky attempts to convince. This requires some background knowledge depending on the question, e.g. knowledge about historical and cultural context or scientific methods. Competencies involve certain activities using knowledge and skills which are mutually interactive. The concept of competence, including knowledge, skills and dispositions, focuses not only on possessing knowledge and skills but on being able to use them according to questions that deal with some content that has to be clarified.

However, in Germany the skills approach in education science was greeted with deep reservations.⁷ Competence orientation in education is notoriously discussed in Germany since

⁶ Cf., e.g., Moore (2004, preface): "It appears to me that in Ethics, as in all other philosophical studies, the difficulties and disagreements, of which its history is full, are mainly due to a very simple cause: namely to the attempt to answer questions, without first discovering precisely *what* question it is which you desire to answer."

⁷ For general reservations see contributions of the *Gesellschaft für Bildung und Wissen* that vehemently oppose

educational research has begun to render educational productivity (the “output” and “outcome”) measurable. The basic task of education in the German tradition is encompassed by *Bildung*. The concept of *Bildung* has been used to combat the demand for measurability in education. This concept refers to Wilhelm von Humboldt’s idea of *Bildung* as an interplay between an individual’s receptivity and self-activity. Even school laws – as a guideline to what should be taught generally – in this tradition describe quite concretely the expected outcome of ideas. This shows the highly normative program of schooling in all federal states in Germany. School laws of many federal states refer to *Bildung* and contain the educational task (“Bildungs- und Erziehungsauftrag”, mostly found in §1 or §2) in general to transport general fundamental ideas. In some federal states these ideas are strongly related to ideas of Christianity as Christian charity and reverence for god or love to the homeland (“Ehrfurcht vor Gott”/“Verantwortung vor Gott”, “Liebe zu Volk und Heimat”; e.g., in Baden-Wuerttemberg, Nordrhein-Westfalen, and Bayern), in others there is reference to ideas as freedom, justice, responsibility, democracy, and human dignity (cf. *Schulgesetze der Länder in der Bundesrepublik*), All students in Germany are to be educated (cultivated) in any subject in the set spirit, apart from basic knowledge and skills. This is why “Bildung” (“culture”) sometimes is explained as being used in the sense of moral training (cf., e.g., the English translation of Kant’s *Über Pädagogik*, Kant 1960: 1, footnote). From a philosophical perspective, the core concepts that are interwoven with the concept of *Bildung*, e.g. god, love, responsibility and freedom, have to be clarified, and this requires the use of competencies. So, competencies have to be developed anyway in a reflective and philosophical learning context.

Applying philosophical competencies specifically means to deal with these ideas that are to be transported in German schools in any subject, as it is prescribed in the school laws (*Schulgesetze*) of the federal states. Philosophers do not have any privileged knowledge about these ideas. However, their specific competencies to analyze them are required.

The concept of *Bildung* is particularly prominent in the German-speaking pedagogical literature and relatively unknown in the English-speaking world. In Germany, it is regarded as a fundamental concept of education science, loaded with cultural demands of the eighteenth century. As a national construct it focusses on the development and formation of personality (formation of the self, self-cultivation, self-determination) and has become an “educational slogan” as well as a “political fighting word” in education policy debates (cf. Horlacher 2012 and 2015). Debates in the United Kingdom and North America went in entirely different direction.

Whether the strong opposition of *Bildung* and competencies is rational and whether it can be brought into agreement still has to be figured out precisely. Apparently, the idea of personal and cultural maturation of a rational subject includes the individual’s cultivation of competencies as individual abilities in terms of dispositions to think, act and judge from which students would benefit long after graduation. Heinrich Roth suggests in his Pedagogical

“competence orientation” (Kompetenzorientierung) und formulate fears of loss of *Bildung*. For these reservations concerning education in general cf., e.g., Ladenthin (2011), describing “competence orientation as an indication of pedagogical disorientation” or Liessmann stating that competence orientation reveals “the practice of illiteracy” (Liessmann 2014). For reservations within didactics of philosophy see, e.g., Roeger (2016) who states: “competence orientation prevents doing philosophy” (p. 8); cf., e.g., Tichy (2016).

Anthropology (*Pädagogische Anthropologie*) how to find a compromise between *Bildung* and competencies. He views competencies as individual abilities that lead to maturity (*Mündigkeit*). He interprets a competence in a threefold sense: a) as self-competence – the ability to be responsible for your own action, b) professional competence – the ability to act and judge in a particular profession, and hold responsible, c) social competence – the ability to act and judge, and hold responsible, in professional or social areas that are relevant in social, societal or political terms. (Roth, cited and translated by Hartig et al. 2008: 6)

By teaching philosophy within the analytical approach we can focus on the connection of *Bildung* and competencies, rather than on the contrast of these ideas. Doing philosophy requires reflective thinking leading to the competence of autonomous and responsible action. This involves competencies which lead to

- (1) a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty, in which thinking originates, and (2) an act of searching, hunting inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity. (Dewey 1933: 12)

The educational aim is to reveal important relationships between knowledge, language and judgement and to break the boundaries of disciplines which prevent trans-disciplinary learning.

Given this, there is no need for a strict differentiation of competence orientation and problem orientation (*Kompetenzorientierung vs. Problemorientierung*; cf. Tiedemann 2015), since philosophical competencies are applied in order to solve philosophical problems of meaning, understanding and reasoning. Philosophy (in the classroom and elsewhere) aims at solving problems (problem orientation) by applying philosophical competencies (competence orientation) and this is not so much revealed in students' judgements as in the characteristic way in which judgements are reached.

6. Against fragmentation

These thoughts lead to the idea of contextualization and trans-disciplinarity in the teaching-learning process apart from postulated normative ideas philosophy often is supposed to convey. Knowledge and skills are currently separated and organized in disciplines. Science education is largely separated from the discipline of philosophy and, e.g., philosophical questions about the relationship between evidence and models and between models and reality rarely turn up in natural sciences and humanities as taught in secondary schools in Germany. This culminates in a fragmented learning process that fails to stimulate curiosity, philosophical questions and critical thinking about content knowledge: Why is it worth knowing?, Why is it deemed warranted?, How is it related to other ideas? Philosophy as a principle of teaching can make classrooms more challenging. It can provide the foundation for a trans-disciplinary approach that overcomes fragmentation (cf. Lampert 2009: 150f.).

Thus, communication between disciplines has to be promoted. This is especially relevant to the teacher education process. On the basis of an analytical approach of philosophy, a collaborative concept of teaching and learning on the basis of doing philosophy can be developed. This contextual tradition of education has been contributed by educators and

scientists such as Ernst Mach, Pierre Duhem, Alfred North Whitehead, John Dewey and Martin Wagenschein. Whitehead writes in his essay called *The Aims of Education*, delivered as his Presidential Address to the Mathematical Association of England 1916:

[...] we must beware of what I call ‘inert ideas’ — that is to say, ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilized, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations. [...] The result of teaching small parts of a large number of subjects is a passive reception of disconnected ideas, not illumined with any spark of vitality. [...] The solution which I am urging, is to eradicate the fatal disconnection of subjects which kills the vitality of our modern curriculum. (Whitehead 1967: 1-3)

Though written more than hundred years ago, it still pinpoints the education problems of our days in which a serious challenge is to cope with pseudoscience, fake news and some sort of uncritical or dogmatic common sense. Ideas remain inert and isolated from one another when they are simplistically presented to be learned and not analyzed. Whitehead’s educational commandment “What you teach, teach thoroughly” can be followed by doing philosophy in any subject against “the fatal disconnection of subjects” (Whitehead 1967: 6).

Analytic philosophy contributes to students’ ability to understand the concepts, characteristics and the significance of science as well. It also contributes to science progress skills (e.g. observing, inferring, and hypothesizing). It promotes the idea of the educational goal of scientific literacy, which has a long tradition in the English-speaking world and has been reemphasized by the PISA-Konsortium (2001) and in major reform efforts in science education.

Scientific literacy is an evolving combination of the science related attitudes, skills, and knowledge that students need to develop inquiry, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities, to become lifelong learners, and to maintain a sense of wonder about the world around them. (New Brunswick Department of Education Curriculum Development Branch 1998: V)

Doing philosophy can create linkages among disciplines. It can contribute to scientific literacy in so far philosophers have a “sense of wonder” and basic skills for “asking and answering meaningful questions”:

A science education which strives for scientific literacy must engage students in asking and answering meaningful questions. Some of these questions will be posed by the teacher, while others will be generated by the students. These questions are of three basic types: “Why ...?” “How ...?” and “Should ...?” There are three processes used to answer these questions. Scientific inquiry addresses “why” questions. “How” questions are answered by engaging in the problem solving process, and “should” questions are answered by engaging in decision making (New Brunswick Department of Education Curriculum Development Branch 1998, introduction: 3).

A cross-curricular (inter-disciplinary) approach in teaching and learning means to cross disciplinary boundaries and to integrate other subjects in order to transfer knowledge and competencies from one field onto another. This supports skill development, effective and lasting

knowledge as well as critical engagement in school and high-school. To achieve that, collaborative teaching is required. Cross-curricular teaching is sensitive towards knowledge, skills and understandings from various disciplines and offers a more holistic perspective.⁸ Hence, philosophy teachers need sound knowledge about the history and philosophy of science. Similarly, science teachers have to be open for questions about the history and philosophy of their domain and for a deeper scrutiny of student's preconceptions as well as of core concepts of the domain. Philosophy can be understood as an enrichment that provides rigor and clarity and an understanding of science as being in progress and contentious. It can be seen as being in auxiliary relationship to other disciplines as these are to philosophy. A philosophical reflective practice of teaching and learning takes into account that the learning of science needs to be accompanied by asking and learning about science. Its value lies in the development of deeper understanding of the nature and methods of science in the context of history, society and technology. This involves philosophical questions about how knowledge is generated, tested and justified. Hence, an incorporation of historical and philosophical dimensions in the teaching of school science as well as in the training of teachers is required. Teaching philosophy means to encourage students to clarify what they are supposed to learn in a variety of contexts. They have to be encouraged to challenge beliefs and to ask how the knowledge they are supposed to acquire is reached, how it is justified and how it is used. These questions are to be asked not only once a week in philosophy class but in all subjects and real life contexts all time.

As teachers of any subject, from time to time, we wish students to speak out words like those Berkeley put into the mouth of Philonous:

I am not for imposing any sense on your words: you are at liberty to explain them as you please. Only, I beseech you, make me understand something by them. (Berkeley 2016: 83)⁹

Students are to be encouraged to analyze problems so that it will be apparent whether some disagreement concerns matters of fact, the use of words, or is, as is frequently the case, a purely emotive one. Students should be encouraged to ask on what presuppositions knowledge they are supposed to learn is based on and whether there are other methods to acquire knowledge about the subject in the history of science.

Given this, the fundamental question all teachers should ask themselves is: "Are we willing to face these questions and are we willing to answer now and then: 'I don't know yet, it might be some nonsense'?" If so, we start a closer scrutiny to all we learn and teach and we begin, in fact, doing philosophy.

⁸ Interdisciplinary research in science is generally acknowledged as being rewarding. Research across disciplinary boundaries is stimulated by science policy. Programs such as Horizon 2020 promote the collaboration of philosophers and scientists (cf., e. g., Massimi 2018 and the project *Perspectival Realism* which combines the philosophy of science with scientific practice, the history of science and the history of philosophy. It has received funding from the European Research Council under the European's Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program).

⁹ Whitehead has had quoted this passage from Berkeley's *The First Dialogue between Hylas and Philonous* on the title page of his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge*.

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NEGATIVITY AND WISDOM AS PART OF PHILOSOPHY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Negativity is understood here as the theoretical insight into the limits of knowledge as well as the practical, even existential consequences of this insight. The tradition of philosophical wisdom reflects negativity in this sense since antiquity. The concepts of negativity in Nietzsche, Hegel, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger are also reconstructed in the article as part of this tradition. The text tries to make these philosophies accessible to philosophy education. The starting point here is the question about a way of life that has dissociated itself from ideological certainties.

Keywords: Negativity, lost confidence in certainty, ancient philosophical wisdom, Hegel, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger

1. What is negativity and why should it be part of philosophy education?

1.1. On the meaning of negativity between theory and practice

Negation and negativity have had a rich tradition in Western philosophy since antiquity. While in Christian metaphysics up to Spinoza negativity is understood as the infinite in the horizon of God's creation of the finite, Spinoza sees the being of objects in what they are not (Ritter 1984: 671). Montaigne and Kant determine the finiteness of our knowledge in very different ways. In the 19th century, German idealists, especially Hegel, describe negativity as a dialectical force that Kierkegaard explicitly relates to human existence. In the 20th century, phenomenology describes phenomena above all in their inexhaustibility. Existentialism discovers the radical indeterminacy of man and the "thrownness in existence" and "fateful freedom". Albert Camus illustrates the human situation determined by futility through the myth of Sisyphus. Less tragic than ironic, Richard Rorty sees humans' post-metaphysical situation, in which the belief in being able to attain an absolute truth through philosophy is lost. Rather, it is important never to completely trust one's own certainties of truth and to revise them again and again (Rorty 1989). Scientists like Werner Heisenberg or Ilja Prigogine destroy the myth of absolutely certain scientific knowledge. The thought that the highest being, or God, is unrecognizable and unspeakable has occupied negative theology since antiquity. Plato, Plotin, the church fathers as well as the negative Christian theology (e.g. Nikolaus von Kues) and mysticism (e.g. Meister Eckhart) articulate the experience of thinking that reaches insurmountable limits in different ways and thus describe that which it actually aims at as the other to the conceivable in different ways.

The term negativity has different meanings. In addition to ignorance, phenomena such as antinomy, antagonism, opposition or contradiction are also referred to. The latter are addressed in this text only in the section on Hegel, otherwise it is primarily addressed as ignorance. Here I use the term negativity in the sense of the practical consequences of ignorance. More precisely, it is about the theoretical insight into the impossibility of knowledge and the existential consequences thereof, which also mean a potential for one's own further development. This connection can be illustrated indirectly by the phenomenon of disillusionment: What happens when something is suddenly seen through as merely imaginary? An everyday case is when we are mistaken in the explanation of a phenomenon and have to realize that not explanation *a*, but explanation *b* applies. For a physical symptom, e.g. certain pains, we have prepared an explanation. After a medical examination we realize that we have a certain disease that we had not expected. In a certain sense, for example in the interest of the right therapy, disillusionment seems to us to be an asset. We may judge in a similar way if we fell in love unilaterally, but for a long time believed that the love could be mutual. We will not welcome the painful disillusionment, and yet it may give rise to further development. On a large scale, we can think of the loss of certainties suffered by people who grew up in a state system with strong ideology, such as a dictatorship, and whose state collapsed, as it was the case in Germany in 1945. Soon people look at what happened with completely different eyes and judge earlier certainties as imaginary.

The meaning of negativity as a philosophical term can now be distinguished from these examples. This is no longer about the insight that everything is completely different (explanation *b*) than initially assumed (explanation *a*). But it is about the insight that explanation *a* does not apply because in principle an explanation is not possible since our knowledge reaches a limit here. This limit is in principle: knowledge of the type 'explanation *a*' or 'explanation *b*' is generally seen through as an illusion, for example when it comes to ideological certainties. This theoretical insight can also have practical, even existential consequences, which, similar to the non-philosophical examples, can prove to be the potential of a transforming development. In the following I will try to briefly show this for different philosophies in which negativity plays an important role.

1.2. On the utility of negativity for educational processes

I would like to plead for negativity in its philosophical meaning to be regarded as an important part of philosophy education. We are used to thinking only culturally and philosophically about the loss of certainty, we are also concerned about plurality and the social coexistence of ideological certainties on the one hand and the lack of ideological certainties on the other. But we do not ask enough about a way of life of one's own for those people who have dissociated themselves in principle from certainties. A small but presumably not unimportant part of such a way of life of missing certainties could be offered by the potential of philosophical thinking of negativity. I would like to argue in favor of looking at the loss of certainty not so much from the outside, for example from a perspective of cultural philosophy, but from the inside. What practical consequences can insight into ignorance in principle have? By this I mean much more than a compensatory art of living. Such a way runs the risk of closing the gap caused by the

missing certainties by new concepts, perhaps even by a new big picture (Thomas 2006: 189ff.). For me it is about something else, namely, first of all, the transformation of the apparent knowledge into the deep consciousness of ignorance. And second about the possibility that on the ground of this consciousness of ignorance we open ourselves to other forms of knowledge which are no longer of the type ‘explanation a’ or ‘explanation b’. This whole intellectual movement is by no means neutral for the thinker as would be for example a mathematical proof. Rather, it concerns the thinker in his existence and life practice. The transforming movement of turning knowledge belongs to the rich tradition of philosophical wisdom. Why should negativity be part of philosophy education? Because the question of a way of life having abandoned ideological certainties is relevant for our society and for young people. And because we can only address this question philosophically if we take up the tradition of philosophical wisdom and its negative thinking in philosophy lessons.

2. Ancient wisdom: sophists, sceptics, Ecclesiastes

2.1. Sophists and sceptics: two ways of dealing with ignorance

While for Parmenides being is a unity and non-existence cannot be thought of, the sophist Gorgias of Leontinoi argues for the non-existence, non-recognizability and non-communicability of being (Flashar 1998: 50). The sophists spoke of negativity, but of a very weak one: If there are no absolute truths and everything is basically relative (Protagoras according to Plato, *Theaitetos* 152 a), then one can draw quite pragmatic conclusions from this. Values apply to a community (according to Plato, *Theaitetos* 167c), people give themselves law and order for practical reasons and not because they love to be just (Trasymachos according to Plato, *Politeia* 358a ff.). The laws benefit the weak more than the strong (Kallikles according to Plato, *Gorgias* 483b). Here the sober diagnosis that there is no higher truth leads to equally sober considerations about which lifestyle is successful. Yet the insight into something negative (that there is no absolute truth) has no transforming power here, but it finds a practical answer.

This changes with the skeptics: pyrrhonian skepticism, as handed down by Sextus Empiricus, sees through our explanatory models of the world *as images*. All systems of true propositions about the world are rejected. The path to happiness itself cannot be derived from a system of reasons and pursued with power. And already knowing this can greatly relieve us human beings who are strenuously searching for happiness Sextus Empiricus writes:

The Sceptic, in fact, had the same experience which is said to have befallen the painter Apelles. Once, they say, when he was painting a horse and wished to represent in the painting the horse’s foam, he was so unsuccessful that he gave up the attempt and flung at the picture the sponge on which he used to wipe the paints off his brush, and the mark of the sponge produced the effect of a horse’s foam. So, too, the Sceptics were in hopes of gaining quietude by means of a decision regarding the disparity of the objects of sense and of thought, and being unable to effect this they suspended judgement; and they found that quietude, as if by chance, followed upon their suspense, even as a shadow follows its substance (Sextus Empiricus 1967: 19-20).

If we consistently bracket certainties, then we are freed to an existence that no longer focuses on conceptually mastering the world. But happiness can also find us if we realize that we cannot

understand ourselves, our life and the world. Wisdom here means the search for other forms of knowledge and life practices. This is also related to the skeptical concept of isosthenia. The insight into not knowing arises from the observation that in every philosophical question equally good arguments can be found even for contradictory positions. The conflict is undecidable. To make this isosthenia visible and to abstain from judgment is the goal of Pyrrhonian skepticism (Riedweg et al 2018: 219). In his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (§§ 79-82) Hegel similarly determines the equilibrium of the reasons as the negative-reasonable moment of philosophy. This is due to a dialectical negativity, but goes beyond mere negation and naïve skepticism.

2.2. Ecclesiastes: wisdom at the bottom of ignorance

The author of the book *Ecclesiastes* from the Old Testament probably lived in the third century BC and was influenced by skeptical, epicurean and stoic teachings (Lohfink 1980: 7, 9). The thinking of negativity here is even deeper than in skepticism. It begins with the melancholic thought of the total futility of our actions. No matter how great our efforts and success may be, we will soon be completely forgotten: “No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them” (Ecclesiastes 1, 11, New International Version). Secondly, it follows from this that all wisdom in the sense of a wise mastery of life is also null and void (6, 11f.). Trust in justice has been broken: “the righteous perishing in their righteousness, and the wicked living long in their wickedness” (7, 15). At this low point, the reflection reverses. The pain of incomprehension and futility is transformed into a silent practice that actively pursues neither happiness nor meaning, but is more receptive to the world. “For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun” (9, 9). “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom” (9, 10). Only when we have experienced cynicism and desperation and realize that we cannot see any context behind the things, our life and the world emerge strangely foreign, precarious and at the same time valuable, and we can try to correspond to them, figuratively speaking: not with our thinking, but with our existence. Negativity can unfold a great transforming force here.

2.3. Ancient wisdom as an element of philosophy education today?

As teachers we have doubts or are even desperate in face of the injustice and senselessness of the world. This also goes for our students: Promises of happiness fail, the adults are powerless, the right of the strongest seems to apply everywhere. But instead of courageously making this the starting point of our discussion, we teachers often cling to pragmatic solutions and clever rules like the sophists. My thesis is here: Only if we open ourselves completely to negativity, as Pyrrhonic sceptics and Ecclesiastes have done, we can incorporate the transforming power of negativity into our thinking. No big picture can solve the world like a math problem. Our existence has no meaning in the sense in which a sentence has a meaning. If the practice of conceptual coping with the world repeatedly runs into the void and we bracket it and adopt it selectively, there will be room for new practices. Our place, our time and the people around us, all this is accidental. And yet this coincidence can become the most important point in the world

for us. In his book on wisdom the philosopher Andreas Luckner mentions in this sense the fairy tale of *Frau Holle* (Mother Holle). Goldmarie (Golden Mary) is convinced by the apple tree that the ripe apples want to be picked and by the bread in the oven that it wants to be pulled out, otherwise it becomes black. In the fairy tale, the Goldmarie is later richly endowed by Mother Holle. “It is her attitude towards the people and things that ‘gild’ Marie’s life and her happiness is not a reward for the good she does and has done, but a surplus” (Luckner 2005: 61). With our students we can work with texts such as this one, or with Sextus Empiricus’ anecdote of the painter Apelles. In class we can disappoint the usual expectation that philosophy can lead to secure knowledge of the whole and to understanding the world. The practical insights of skepticism and Ecclesiastes show: When thinking opens itself to its own impotence, i.e. to the impossibility of ultimate justification and to the limits of meaning, then thinking loses this impotence in another way at the same time - in that it points into the other of itself. This movement is meant by the transforming power of negativity.

3. Dialectical negativity and the formation of the self: Nietzsche and Hegel

3.1. Nietzsche: liberation to oneself

Nietzsche on the one hand is the philosopher of the ‘big yes’. In *Zarathustra*, affirmation is the goal, and it is not possible for either the camel or the lion, but only for the highest form of existence, the child. On the other hand Nietzsche is also the philosopher of denial: the cultural assets of his epoch are destroyed, whether Christianity, morality of compassion or the historical conception of history. The truth in its classical concept of a metaphysical transcendence is lost, Nietzsche’s philosophy is regarded as nihilistic. But here nihilism is the condition for a transformation. What remains is that other form of transcendence that is achieved in the transformations of life. In the end, Nietzsche can speak of *amor fati* and of a path to the superhuman. Nietzsche is concerned with the liberation of man from the burden of culture, which always comes to man from the outside, e.g. in the educational process. As long as our values are determined by others, we cannot become ourselves, life appears to us as dead, as a desert. “Especially the strong load-bearing man in whom reverence resideth. Too many EXTRANEIOUS heavy words and worths loadeth he upon himself – then seemeth life to him a desert!” (Nietzsche 2009, section “The Spirit of Gravity”). Only when man has completely freed himself he can set out in search of himself. If this search were guided by classical Western reason again, it would perhaps lead to the same results again. Instead, man should entrust himself in his search to his very own, individual reason, he should accept himself lovingly. Nietzsche calls this physical reason.

“But he who would become light, and be a bird, must love himself” (ibid.). “Dare only to believe in yourselves-in yourselves and in your inward parts! He who doth not believe in himself always lieth” (ibid., section “Immaculate Perception”). “The body is a big sagacity” (ibid., section “The Dispersers of the Body”).

Nietzsche strives for a different form of reason, a different form of knowledge, namely a physical and individual one. Where are negativity and transformation here? Certainly, in the dizzying insight into the permission to allow one's own self to be allowed to the world.

3.2. Can Nietzsche's message of self-liberation be part of philosophy education?

Do we dare to discuss what this can mean with our students in the context of the school: to say goodbye to the foreign values, to love oneself, and to become light as a bird? What does it mean to trust your own needs and 'inward parts'? Do we perhaps even know it from our own experience, this space of freedom that suddenly opens up when in a clear moment we feel what it means to be allowed to lead an individual existence? It's not about being special, it's not about heroism. It is about being able to exist as a self that does not have to be able to immediately say who it is and which may above all be curious about itself. Nietzsche does not offer us a program with regard to content. "This-is now MY way, where is yours?' Thus did I answer those who asked me 'the way'. For THE way-it doth not exist!" (ibid., section "The Spirit of Gravity"). Can we adopt the explanatory models and develop a sense for ourselves with the help of bodily reason? And can and do we want to give our students an idea of this process?

3.3. Hegel: negativity as the engine of development

Hegel describes the transforming power of negativity as the inner motor of thought, human development and the development of the world. In contrast to negativity as non-knowledge, here we encounter a different meaning of negativity. But Hegel's philosophy encompasses and unites both meanings. In the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (§§ 79-82) Hegel defines naive skepticism as mere negation. In the dialectical moment of reason, the unilateral of mere negation is cancelled out. There is no outside in Hegel's thinking, and this is what makes it so radical. Not only do the 'right' thoughts and the finished results belong into this thinking, but especially also do the errors on the stages in the thinking process. Therefore, Hegel's thinking is a good way of describing processes of personal development and education.

The course of *Geist's* development towards self-knowledge lies through the initial confusions, misconceptions and truncated visions of men. These cannot therefore lie outside the system. Rather this initial darkness reflects something essential about the absolute, viz., that it must grow through struggle to self-knowledge (Taylor 1975: 127).

This double negation is described by Hegel as a process of transformation. About the first negation:

The Thing is posited as being *for itself*, or as the absolute negation of all otherness, therefore as purely *self-related* negation; but the negation that is self-related is the suspension of *itself*; in other words, the Thing has its essential being in another Thing (Hegel 1977: 76).

Something gains its identity from the fact that it is not everything else, that it negates everything else through its existence. This is a contradiction and it will be this contradiction

that drives forward a development process. The contradiction is that the thing gains itself entirely from the other, namely from its negation. It doesn't seem to have a self of its own.

About the second negation. The second negation refers directly to the contradiction and impossibility that something has its "essential being in another Thing". If this is the sentence: "It is not possible that 'the Thing has its essential being in another Thing'", then this sentence is negated in the second negation. We realize that – when understood in a different or more developed way – it is nevertheless possible that something has its essence from something else. Namely, when this thing evolves into something that embraces a kind of inner otherness without breaking it. The engine for further development is the contradiction and the lack which lies in the formula "being for itself, the absolute negation of all otherness". At the same time, this lack is a potential in which something perishes and then arises anew, becomes different and yet remains the same.

3.4. Negativity as an engine of development: what does it mean for philosophy education?

The example of adolescence is relevant to our work with pupils (Erikson 1953, 1956). During adolescence we discover ourselves. But the main reason for this is that we are beginning to reject the world. As children, we saw the same world through our parents' eyes. Now we see everything super-critically and consider it an imposition to continue to be the well-functioning people that society wants. Society offers us professional or family roles. But we may feel that we lose ourselves when we get involved in these offers. Here one could say that we derive our identity from the negation of society and the roles it offers us. The inner contradiction of this situation would be that although we have a particularly strong feeling of being ourselves in rejection, we can only refer to what is negated and rejected in the question: "And who are you?". This could be the perplexity of adolescence. It does not seem possible that "the Thing has its essential being in another Thing".

During this phase we may at some point have the idea that we can also change society. We do this through the development and the letting become effective of our own talents and predispositions. However, this work and change presupposes taking on a task or an offered role. In the first negation it seemed impossible for us to be ourselves if we diminish the negation of society. In the second negation, selfhood seems possible to us in the moment when we shape the material that society offers us (e.g. the profession we take on) in a way that only we can do it. Then we have gained our identity in this other one, which has been newly designed by us individually. The shift from impossibility to the possibility that "the Thing has its essential being in another Thing" describes the painful and at first not considered possible further development of our identity in view of the other.

Philosophy never lets go of critical questioning: It finds shortcomings in every definition. This means progress in philosophy. At the same time, however, this force of criticism can mean progress in our lives and in our world. Something 'does not fit', is contradictory, or has the character of a false solution. The critical, destructive force of thought means the transformation of our view of the world. Even in adolescence in this sense we criticize not only the world but also ourselves. Thinking thinks against itself, destroys familiar knowledge, and destroys itself. It leads into a powerlessness in which the potency of the conceptual seems broken – and it leads

out of this powerlessness again by changing our self-image, our existence, our practice. Such a philosophy can open up new spaces. It is this movement, whose engine is negativity, which should be part of philosophy education. In philosophy lessons, students can practice thinking against themselves and thus set development processes in motion. The horizon here is the tradition of wisdom, in which the movement from fictitious knowledge over ignorance to other forms of knowledge is thought.

4. Constitutive negativity and life practice: Wittgenstein and Heidegger

Typical of the concept of negativity in 20th-century thought is the strong awareness of ignorance, of lack of ultimate justification, of fundamental limits of knowledge, and of a lost security of the subject. Negativity is no longer dialectical, as with Hegel or Kierkegaard, it no longer drives developments. Rather, the contemporary negativity resembles that of pyrrhonian skepticism in which a dominant form of knowledge is bracketed and abandoned. It is the differentiated and self-founded images we make of the world, our models and constructs, which we ultimately consider to be the reality itself that destroys contemporary philosophical negativity. But unlike ancient skepticism, ignorance is not raised to an insight. The situation is not described from the outside by saying something like: Our big pictures are not possible. It is described from within: how we always move in worlds of meaning and constitutive paradigms and how no final justification is possible for them. The limits of knowledge, which play such an important role, cannot be viewed from above or even from the outside, as relativism claims to be able to, but only as the certainty of always moving in meaning constituting paradigms. This also eliminates the construct of a reality in itself, which distinguishes between the world as it actually is and the world as we see it, and in doing so again takes up an external point of view. The consciousness of the finiteness of our speaking, understanding and knowledge is an awareness of irreversible immanence: “there is no thought that encompasses all of our thought”, writes Merleau-Ponty (2014: xxviii).

4.1. Wittgenstein: life forms cannot be explained from the outside

In his linguistic analyses Wittgenstein comes to the conclusion that the meaning of linguistic terms radically depends on human practice. It is not the connection to the essence of a thing that ensures their meaning; rather, it depends solely on the rules that certain practices impose on terms. One can therefore give reasons for the meaning of terms, but the reasons refer to language games and are thus ultimately part of forms of life. The forms of life themselves cannot be further explained. And thus we cannot say of the most fundamental structure of our world of meaning in which we move that it is reasonable nor unreasonable.

“What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – forms of life” (Wittgenstein 1953: 226e). “You must bear in mind that the language-game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there – like our life” (Wittgenstein 1969: 73e, No. 559). “The difficulty is to realize the groundlessness of our believing” (ibid., 24e, No. 166).

The groundlessness meant here is the insight: What we experience as world is always our world of meaning, and we know this only from within.

4.2. Heidegger: the meaning of being depends on human practice

In *Being and Time* Heidegger asks about the meaning of the concept of being. Heidegger discovers that this meaning varies and that it cannot be separated from the most fundamental human practices. For example, if we speak of our being, then we cannot ignore the fact that this is always our own and that we *must* exist, so to speak: Because we are not just there like things, but we have to somehow manage our existence, we care about it and have to shape it. Heidegger calls this meaning of being existence (*Existenz*) (Heidegger 1996: 10). However, when we talk about everyday objects, e.g. tools, we realize that in everyday life we hardly notice them as such any more, but simply use them. Heidegger calls these things useful things (*Zeug*) (ibid.: 64), and being now means something else again, namely handiness (*Zuhandenheit*) (ibid.: 65). But if we just look at such a thing without it being part of our everyday action, then it would lose its handiness and become something objectively present (*Vorhandenes*) (ibid.: 69). Being would now mean objective presence (*Vorhandenheit*). And what does being mean when we speak of living beings? “Life is neither pure objective presence, nor is it Da-sein.” “Life has its own kind of being” (ibid.: 46). The meanings of being described so far cannot grasp what life is. As in Wittgenstein, the connections that determine the ever-new meanings of the concept of being cannot be further explained. They are related to basic human practices that entail human existence. So there is no last meaning of being. Negativity can be understood as such in Heidegger’s early philosophy: Our thinking cannot exceed our human being, it always remains bound to our temporal-spatial and physical existence and its practices. The world is always our world of meaning. And we only know it from the inside.

4.3. How can the insight ‘we only know the world from within’ deepen philosophy education?

Awareness of an immanence that cannot be lifted means to be at a critical distance from our own secure views of the world, but also from the secure views of all other people. This applies in particular to practical knowledge, e.g. worldviews and concepts of identity and meaning of life. Theoretical, e.g. mathematical knowledge or empirical data are not concerned to the same extent. Now, we no longer see worldviews and world models as true in the most comprehensive sense, and we no longer believe in the bird’s eye view. Shouldn’t the defenders of certainties consistently bracket their world models and always understand them only *as models*? This departure from the big pictures also has consequences for the question of one’s own identity and meaning of life. In the field of political, religious, historical, economic or scientific ideologies, we tend to represent the world through a big picture (to create a big picture of the world) and to draw ourselves into this picture in a second step: in an important place, in a certain role. The function of one’s own existence in the whole of the picture (and thus the world) is then something like one’s own meaning of life. This figurehead can be described with Ricoeur as ‘narcissistic reconciliation’ (Thomas 2006: 103ff.). But if we begin to suspect that the big picture is not absolute, but above all an image, then our own sense of life can also lose its

stability, because this ‘technique’ of securing our own identity and meaning no longer works. In the context of philosophy education, this destruction of apparent certainties and of the meaning of life supported by them means asking the question for a much more modest identity and way of life. We only know the world from within: Our practical knowledge, our view of things, our values, our models of understanding, they still provide certainty. Our ethics and values seem still without alternative. But this is a questioned certainty, for it cannot be absolutely justified or justified ‘from outside’. This applies at the level of culture, the milieu and the individual. This movement of shifting from apparent certainty to the consciousness of ignorance can continue into an openness to other forms of knowledge. I would like to give three examples of such other forms of knowledge.

(1) The other side of the ungroundability of one’s own and other worlds of meaning is a certain dignity of these worlds and the call to recognize and protect them. Realizing negativity can help us to create a feeling for the contingency, fragility, and finite nature of our values. Their validity is no longer seen as absolute, but conditional on someone who represents and articulates these values and someone who appreciates them. All human beings seem to share this very situation of a certainty which is embedded in uncertainty. This may give rise to a quite special solidarity. Based on Heidegger and Wittgenstein’s analyses, Thomas Rentsch describes the ethical relevance of negativity in this sense.

An essential ethical insight consists in the recognition of the unavailability and inexplicability of fellow human beings; personal unavailability is constitutive for relationships of non-instrumental, ‘positive’ interpersonal, for personal freedom and dignity. Respect for the unexplained being of the other is constitutive for moral conditions (Translated from Rentsch 2003: 465).

In philosophy lessons we can try to reconstruct what conditions and prerequisites must be given in order to feel recognized, accepted, and free in this sense. Conversely, a practical knowledge is addressed here that goes beyond rational argumentation but is nevertheless part of philosophy. Philosophy teaching should also be devoted to practices of recognition, non-instrumental relationships, and the mutual granting of freedom and dignity. These are also examples of other forms of knowledge mentioned here time and again.

(2) Although self-criticism and questioning oneself is typical for many philosophies, the tradition of negativity and wisdom displays a quite special approach. Where ideological certainties are abandoned and where one’s own meaning in life and identity are no longer secured by signing oneself into a big picture, one’s own identity becomes an open question again. Here, negativity becomes relevant in the sense of Nietzsche’s philosophy. We may exist as a self that does not have to understand, justify, and construct itself. We can leave open who we are. At the same time, we may expect the world to understand our own peculiarities, and we may be curious about ourselves. For this we can shift our attention from discursive reason to what Nietzsche calls physical reason. This means our needs as well as the sense of our idiosyncrasies and the ‘solutions’ that do not apply to the whole world but only to our lives.

(3) Where the world no longer has a final reason, we can marvel at things again. In specific moments we can even experience them as miracles. Although any philosophy knows amazement, again, negativity opens a specific understanding and practice. Here other

approaches to ourselves, to our lives and to the world are addressed. These other approaches can find our interest more easily when we no longer rely on the discursive knowledge of the explanatory models over and over again. In this sense, the awareness of ignorance can mean that we open ourselves to the world, especially in so far as it is unexplained and mysterious. The fact that we also perceive them as unresolved, precarious and contingent no longer appears exclusively threatening, but rather as the price of their depth. We can develop a sense for what the explanatory models differentiate and for how they make more precise our experience of the world (the example of a botanist on an excursion), but also flatten it (the botanist on a walk who can no longer switch off explaining and seeing through and is lost for an aesthetic-contemplative perception of nature (cf. Seel 1991: 53, 66-67). Explaining the world sometimes impoverishes our experience. Here we can speak of an over-understanding of discursive knowledge (Thomas 2006: 212-214). Moments in which we feel the depth of the world and of our lives are often moments in which explanation recedes.

Earlier (see 1.2.) I said: Why should negativity be part of philosophy education? Because the questioning of a way of life in saying goodbye to ideological certainties is relevant for our society and for young people. And because we can only address this question philosophically if we take up the tradition of philosophical wisdom again in philosophy lessons. I have tried to show what a central role the concept of negativity plays for this tradition. In the 20th century authors such as Wittgenstein or Heidegger add to this tradition, i.e. we can receive them and think beyond them also from this perspective. I argue for a philosophy education that is challenged by the unresolved issues of our culture, including the question of certainties and of farewell to certainties. In order to open up new spaces of understanding for young people, philosophy lessons can also be devoted to the tradition of philosophical wisdom, for which the concept of negativity in the facets described here is central.

5. Didactic considerations

How can we awaken a sense of negativity and wisdom in our students? Here are some possibilities.

(1) *Thought experiments*: In philosophy classes one may go through transformative thinking experiences. In thought experiments the students can vividly experience the limits of their world and their own thinking, and they may emerge from this experience changed: Try to imagine what was before the Big Bang or what is outside the universe. Why did the universe come into being and what is its purpose? Biologically, each one of you is the product of chance of a random combination of your parents' germ cells. So your individual talents, your susceptibility to disease, etc. are also random. This randomness seems to be like a boundary beyond which no gaze is possible. Doesn't this apply to the whole life? Here one can read excerpts from the Ecclesiastes (2.2.). It is about the experience that we are thrown into an existence that does not follow a 'higher plan'.

(2) *Ambiguity as lack of certainty*: Examples from the history of medicine can be used to illustrate how up to today fundamentally different ideas of the causes of illness and necessary therapies have been represented, in each case with the supposed certainty and authority of science. Thus, bloodletting was continuously prescribed as a panacea by the highly paid doctors

of the nobility. Today there are dietetic fashions: Which food is regarded as healthy, which as unhealthy? Which dietary supplement is recommended against the background of which theory? One gets the impression that even simple questions in the field of nutrition cannot really be answered by science, that different theories compete with each other. Students can easily discover this ambiguity as a lack of certainty in health forums on the Internet. There has obviously been some progress in modern science. But the closer you look, the more the clarity and certainty of supposedly scientific ‘truths’ seems to relativize. This connection touches on the skeptical concept of isosthenia, which can be included here.

(3) *Uncertainty about one’s own identity.* Our interests, views about our life and the world and our last certainties change again and again in our lives. We evolve. If we read old diary entries, this becomes clear to us: We have become others. In addition, there is the question of what things belong to our own identity? Are our actions part of our identity, although their effect goes far beyond the ‘here and now’ and our body borders? Conversely, we must ask ourselves whether our identity did not develop entirely in contact with others. Everywhere the supposed security gives way to the impression of a fundamental uncertainty. It seems that we cannot say who we actually are any more than we can say what kind of water a river actually consists of. These thoughts lead to the insight into a certain aspect of negativity. The question of how to deal properly with this insight concerns the tradition of wisdom.

(4) *Modern literature, art and music:* Franz Kafka has created an impressive image in his short story *Vor dem Gesetz* (“Before the law”): A man patiently waits in front of the gate to the law (the most important goal of his life) and is prevented from entering by a gatekeeper. Everyone wants to get to this most important place, but there is a gate for everyone. The man’s lifelong efforts are ultimately unsuccessful. Kafka’s story can serve to illustrate that the promise of modernity that reasonable certainty is attainable and thus autonomy is possible often remains a promise. Likewise, the promise of romanticism that there is an inner truth in every human being and that it can be found in life often remains unfulfilled. Here negativity can be experienced as insight into existential ignorance.

In modern art Mark Rothko’s paintings offer a good example of the limits of the representational. The sight of these paintings, which represent nothing, can also have something meditative for students. If you look at the pictures for a longer time, you think you are in front of an almost insurmountable border of understanding – which at the same time invites you to cross it. That this border stands in the tradition of negative theology becomes clear in the Rothko Chapel, completed in Houston, Texas, in 1971. On the one hand it is about spiritual experience, on the other hand the chapel is interdenominational, and it does not follow any concrete idea of God. Negativity in the sense of the perception of a border here enables other, possibly meditative forms of openness to the world.

Negativity can also be experienced in modern music as ignorance, uncertainty and a lack of meaning, which invites a change of experience of the world. Music pieces by the composer John Cage disappoint our expectations as listeners. The tones do not form a melody, but seem to stand by chance and only as individual tones side by side or on top of each other. In addition, in the piece *Five* (1988), the individual notes can be taken over either by voices or by instruments. In the piece *4’33”* (1952) even the silence and the random noises coming from the

listeners are part of the music. Cage thus frees us from intentionality, both the composer's intentionality and our intentionality as listeners. Things become audible and conscious in their seemingly meaningless lives of their own, and at the same time the world can be experienced more strongly as an event that remains incomprehensible but nevertheless constantly reveals itself in this incomprehensibility.

All these experiences can form a bridge to the view of the world as described by the skeptical philosophers. Negativity means the impossibility of understanding the being of things, the world and ourselves. Philosophy shows itself here as what it was traditionally, among other things, namely as an attitude of wisdom and changed life practices in the face of the principle unrecognizability of the world.

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Country Report: Italy – The Teaching of Philosophy in Italian Schools. Some Recent Orientations

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Reconnecting to the European and international scene, in the last decade the national education system in Italy has underlined the centrality of the idea of competence, recognized as a functional tool to contribute to the conscious action of the person and to the maturation of an active and responsible “global” citizenship.¹ The various documents and normative interventions, from the “National Recommendations” (*Indicazioni nazionali*) of 2010 to the Law 107 of 2015 up to the most recent legislative decrees, have affirmed the importance of a didactics able to combine the learning of knowledge with the acquisition of key competences. In line with the general framework, the debate on the specific contribution that the teaching of philosophy can make to this end has been animated. In the “General Profile and Competencies” of the *Indicazioni nazionali*, the general objective of the teaching of philosophy is identified in the fact that “at the end of the school year the student must be aware of the philosophical reflection as a specific mode of human reason”, practiced throughout history and in different cultural traditions. Already from this formulation it is possible to evince the essential role of philosophy for the formation of the person and for inter-subjective action. On the one hand, philosophy, like the other particular subjects, qualifies according to an autonomous specific configuration, with its own statute and language; on the other hand, philosophy assumes a universalistic characteristic, which concerns humans and their qualification as rational beings, constitutively open to the question about the meaning of his own being and knowing, acting and producing in the world and in history. Precisely for this reason, the *Indicazioni* renew the recommendation to teachers to foster the maturation of the student’s sense of historical development, learned through the knowledge of the historical-cultural contexts in which the different philosophical positions have matured in the light of the needs and main questions that each age poses to thought and submits to its instruments of analysis and understanding.

As is well known, starting with the Gentile Reform of 1923, the historical structure represents a fundamental characteristic of the teaching of philosophy in Italy which, however, having lost its original theoretical depth, has flattened over the decades into a simple chronological succession of authors. Since the 1990s, the experimentation conducted by the Brocca Commission as part of a project to reform the upper secondary school had hoped for a profound didactic renewal based on the union of the historical-diachronic dimension of thought with an approach based on themes and problems (prevalent in other countries). In particular, on the methodological level, there was a return from the use of manuals (synthesis of the life and thought of philosophers) to the reading of philosophical texts (central in Gentile himself),

¹ In this direction goes the Recommendations of the European Council of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning, see: [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)). As well as the Recommendations of the European Council of the same day on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching, see [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0607\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0607(01))

recognized as a privileged tool for understanding the author's thought and for analyzing its logical-conceptual force and argumentative styles. The Brocca programs, however, have never gone beyond the experimentation phase. It is only in 2010 that the scenario changes: new criteria for the teaching of philosophy are indicated; the school autonomy and the free programming of the teacher is recognized, no longer obliged to respect the ministerial program; the teaching of philosophy is extended to all upper secondary school paths.

On the road opened by the *Indicazioni*, in 2015 the Directorate General for Schools and the Evaluation of the National Education System of the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) established the Technical-Scientific Group of Philosophy (*Gruppo tecnico-scientifico di Filosofia*), composed of professionals in the philosophical field in schools, universities and research. The Group has produced the document *Orientamenti per l'apprendimento della Filosofia nella società della conoscenza*² (Guidelines for learning philosophy in the knowledge society) with the aim of enhancing the learning of philosophy in a perspective of lifelong learning, as an indispensable background of knowledge, skills and abilities for the training of young people in a complex society such as the present one. The document, which also contains attached didactic proposals and concrete investigations with respect to the theoretical lines expressed, in 10 chapters addresses some of the main themes, outlining future actions and projects. In particular, it emphasizes the main skills promoted by the teaching/learning of philosophy: it contributes to the acquisition of the ability to exercise thought with a view to the creation of a critical and creative mental "dress", open to confrontation and dialogue with others; it encourages conscious action by providing the tools for the development of a proper structuring and understanding of expressive and communicative strategies, crucial today in the face of the pervasiveness of digital; it creates the conditions for ethical and inclusive action, based on respect for other individuals and cultures, as well as the environment.

To educate to the critical exercise of thought also means to transmit the sense of the dynamism of thought, the idea of a reason and a culture that are not absolute nor bounded in univocal forms, but embodied in the multiplicity and richness of the fields of human production. Outside an empty rhetoric – which, however, is often witnessed – this is also the fundamental and productive sense of learning philosophy by competence. As Plato said at the very origins of Western thought, philosophy is the use of knowledge (*sapere* and *conoscenze*) for the benefit of humans, which is possible to acquire thanks to a "straight" education, that is, in our contemporaneity, through a teaching that does not transmit knowledge sterilely closed in on itself but opened to the awareness of the complexity of reality and the relationship between the different spheres of knowledge in view of acting. In the light of these assumptions, the document intends to be a contribution to the discussion, open to the different subjects which are involved in various ways, around an innovative teaching, on its forms, tools and methodologies, giving back to the education and training system a central role in the development of the overall personality of the individual and in its maturation as the subject of an active and conscious citizenship. For this objective to be achieved, it is necessary to create

² Carmela Palumbo et al. (2017), *Orientamenti per l'apprendimento della Filosofia nella società della conoscenza*, MIUR. <http://www.indire.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Documento-Orientamenti.pdf>

a real cooperation between education, universities, research and the world of work, established on the basis of mutual needs and resources as well as the specific needs of local realities. Today Universities and research institutions are, therefore, called to pursue, in addition to the traditional objectives of teaching (“First Mission”) and research (“Second Mission”), also a “Third Mission”, helping to create the conditions so that culture and knowledge also become engines of social growth through activities related to technology transfer and the development of innovative production processes as well as in those cultural and social activities that promote the welfare and cohesion of the community. The university also has the task of contributing to the adequate training and professional development of school teachers, oriented according to some of the main skills concerning educational and organizational autonomy, monitoring and evaluation systems, digital innovation, internationalization, global citizenship, inclusion and social cohesion. In addition to the organization of specific professional refresher courses for teachers, Italian universities have recently been directly involved, through the establishment of specific modules, in outlining the path to access the teaching profession, recognizing, as far as philosophy is concerned more directly, the formative role played by philosophical disciplines related to the moral field or related to a specific didactics and methodology of philosophy (*Decreto Ministeriale* 616/2017). There are, however, still few universities that include in their study offer also special teachings of didactics of philosophy. A MIUR initiative (POT, *piano finanziato di orientamento e tutorato*) is dedicated to the enhancement of the synergistic action of universities and schools in order to help students make a correct university choice and successfully complete university courses. For the first time, the initiative is specifically aimed at the humanities, including the philosophy degree classes.

In conclusion, the *Orientamenti* formulate some proposals for “the renewal of the teaching of philosophy in schools and the diffusion of philosophical learning as an opportunity for all”, underlining the importance of debate and productive confrontation between the main institutional subjects and all stakeholders who participate in varying degrees in the learning processes. In this direction, the Ministry has promoted a series of seminars on the teaching of philosophy on the national territory to share the Document and contribute, thanks to the comparison and the concrete exchange of experiences, to the outline of new and effective strategies for the enhancement of philosophy and its teaching/learning.

Maxime Kristanek (ed.), *L'Encyclopédie Philosophique* (URL: <https://encyclo-philo.fr>)

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The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta and hosted by Stanford University, is arguably the world's best online open access reference work for philosophy. Now there is a similar product in French, *L'Encyclopédie Philosophique*, edited by Maxime Kristanek. According to the website this is the first online open access academic encyclopedia for philosophy in French.

The editorial structure consists of four groups: the authors of the articles, the reading board composed of members who review the submitted articles and give feedback to the authors, the editorial board who assures that the review process is double blind, and finally the scientific board who advises the editorial board in relation to the choice of articles and authors. Unlike the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, *L'Encyclopédie Philosophique* does not only offer one type of article but two, one for academics (students, researchers, professors) and one for the general public (and in particular high school students). The encyclopedia presently offers some 200 articles on philosophical terms, theories and philosophers, and new articles are published every two months. According to the website an impressive number of over 60000 readers have visited the site.

The idea is without any doubt a good and laudable one: to build an open access encyclopedia of philosophy in French. Such a reference work is particularly helpful for students and researchers working in French, for example in order to get an overview of a particular field in a short time. It is also an important tool for helping to spread the findings of philosophy beyond the limits of the academic field and even beyond academia. It can therefore also be a way of developing the French language.

A cursory reading of some paragraphs of different articles reveals that the quality of the articles is very good. However, there are also some deficiencies in the implementation of the idea. I would like to point out three of them.

First, the website does not mention by whom it is supported financially. It also does not mention any postal address. It seems as if the project was not supported by any institution, neither financially nor structurally. I suppose that this is not the case, and more transparency would be very welcomed.

Second, the idea to distinguish between two types of articles, one for academics and one for the general public, is interesting. But to include the two types of articles for the same term in one and the same encyclopedia forces the reader to decide which one to consult. Without knowledge of the precise contents of both articles it is not possible to make a good choice. One wonders: Is the one for the general public a mere summary, or are some aspects simplified or left out, and do some aspects only appear here? Should one start with the one for the general public and then continue with the other? Or should one start with the one for academics and if need be switch onto the other? To answer such questions and make a good choice one would

need to have a closer look at both articles, if not read them completely. Furthermore, the articles for the general public are quite long. They seem to have a standard length of about 3000 words – this is much longer than in a general encyclopedia. One wonders who would read such a long text who is not already interested in the topic and who would not also be interested in reading the longer and more in depth article (which are on average only about three times the length).

Third, compared to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, *L'Encyclopédie Philosophique* does not offer the same features. In particular, the following are missing: hyperlinks in the content menu of each article to allow for a direct access to a particular paragraph, links to other internet resources and to related entries, and the possibility to convert the text into a pdf.

I conclude: *L'Encyclopédie Philosophique* implements a very good idea with high quality articles but also has some deficiencies: it lacks editorial and financial transparency, it lacks clarity in regard of the guiding distinction between articles for academics and articles for the general public, and it lacks some features one would expect of an online encyclopedia such as hyperlinks in the content menu and links to other articles and internet resources.

Runtenberg, Christa (2016): *Philosophiedidaktik. Lehren und Lernen*, Paderborn: Fink/UTB.

Reviewed by Philipp Richter, WWU Muenster, prichter@uni-muenster.de

Lately, there has been growing interest in theories about teaching philosophy and teacher training in Germany. Following this trend the recent book by Professor Runtenberg aims for a brief overview of academic reasoning in didactics of philosophy considering the last decades in German speaking academia; the book is meant to be an introduction into theories and practical methods of teaching philosophy, mainly focusing on the works of the editors, editorial board and debates in *Zeitschrift für Didaktik der Philosophie und Ethik* (= ZDPE).¹ Overall, the intention of the book is to offer lots of material and different perspectives to develop one's own concept of teaching philosophy in class (p. 9 and 11-12). Students in bachelor programs aiming to qualify themselves as philosophy teachers might find the book helpful, especially for its big variety of proposals for different activities and tasks to practice at school.

Runtenberg starts by presenting some classical positions on teaching and practicing philosophy (e.g. Socrates, Kant). In Chapter II she recaps positions (Martens, Rohbeck, Steenblock) and issues from the discussion in German *Fachdidaktik der Philosophie* (= didactics of philosophy). The following chapter highlights some marginalized approaches of teaching philosophy, for example philosophizing by using images, by playing theatre or by using so called production oriented methods (engaging students in creative tasks like writing or drawing etc.). Chapter IV provides an overview of recently discussed issues in German speaking didactics of philosophy, which according to Runtenberg could be seen as items that necessitate a rethinking of philosophical education (empirical approaches; political claims and new laws). Chapter V offers information and advice concerning methods in creative reading of different types of texts to provoke philosophical thoughts in class (besides philosophical texts, there is a focus on literary genres like fairytales and aphorisms). The author moves on to describe practical methods of creative writing in Chapter VI (e.g. essays, letters, and autobiographical texts) and also methods of philosophizing by musical inspiration. Chapter VII reconsiders pictorial approaches in teaching philosophy by pointing out ways of how to make use of photographs, comic books, movies, games and video games in teaching philosophy. After reading about this interesting variety of practical activities, chapter VIII is somehow disappointing, since it re-narrates some general concepts of organizing, planning and evaluating philosophy lessons, praising only their achievements but not focusing on open questions or any problems.

Overall the book by Christa Runtenberg is to be seen as a collection of information about selected theoretical approaches in didactics and lots of practical ideas of teaching philosophy.

¹ The journal exists since several decades: 1979-1993 as *Zeitschrift für Didaktik der Philosophie*, since 1994 *Zeitschrift für Didaktik der Philosophie und Ethik*. Since 2000 there is also an adjoining yearbook *Jahrbuch für Didaktik der Philosophie und Ethik* by Johannes Rohbeck and others. There is another journal in German language *Ethik und Unterricht*, which focuses more on practical advices and material for teaching practice.

In fact, a more systematic and structured overall composition would have been helpful to grasp all these interesting practical ideas for the sake of further reasoning and its use in practice (for example Runtenberg's discussion of pictorial methods is divided into three parts without offering any interconnection, starting from p. 38, p. 53, p. 111). While the description of practical methods is very inspiring (V-VII), the outcome of the first two chapters about philosophy and the didactics of philosophy is indeed questionable. It seems that these chapters were supposed to function as a theoretical background to develop the leading assumptions of what practicing philosophy is and should be: But, what exactly do we learn from reflecting on our concepts of practicing philosophy following Hegel, Nietzsche or Foucault? Furthermore, why should we for instance follow Johannes Rohbeck's concept of transforming academic methods of philosophizing into practices at school – or why shouldn't we? Readers might also ask according to which principles or concepts they should dig deeper into the recommended further reading (at the end of each chapter) to develop their own concept of teaching philosophy.

However, it seems to be a major deficiency of the book that there is no attempt to unfold its own position on teaching philosophy. Runtenberg does neither develop an explicit concept of practicing philosophy nor a coherent theory about how to teach it. Furthermore, it is left to the reader to reveal the reasoning which led the author to her conclusions guided by an implicit theory of philosophy teaching. If one follows Runtenberg's selection of the cited literature, the glossary and the chosen emphases in the chapters, it seems that for her philosophy is mainly an activity. To be more precise, it is a group of activities, which are means to elaborate the lifeform of critical thinking. But what this exactly means and how this ties in with authors as diverse as Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Foucault on the one hand and phenomenological approaches to body and embodiment, or sensual-somatic ways of self-reflection on the other hand, does not become clear. According to Runtenberg further research can only be successful if philosophical means are supported by qualitative social research (p. 74-75). But in her book there is no elaboration of the theoretical and empirical foundations of a science-based didactic of teaching philosophy at all.

Let me explain, why I put that much emphasis on this last point; I have to explain myself since I am about to leave immanent criticism of the book discussed. In my opinion, an introduction into a certain field of theory and practice should present ways of how to get into the certain kind of reasoning. It should also provide help, which readers would need to develop their own theory based position in the considered field and to do further research by themselves. Therefore, it seems necessary that the author of an introduction into teaching philosophy begins with explaining herself to the reader: The starting point should be a reflection and critical evaluation of the "state of the art" and a theoretical and empirical well-informed explanation why readers should follow the author and finally convince themselves that the author's position on teaching philosophy is a good one – acknowledging both its achievements and its limits. As mentioned before, Runtenberg's book is a collection of what in her opinion is important in teaching philosophy. But she does not tell us why the collected items are important and how we – with or against her implicit position – should develop further reasoning about teaching philosophy. However, it seems that this is exactly what an introduction should offer.