

# **Philosophy of Education and Education of Philosophy: Three Styles of Teaching Philosophy according to their Conceptions of Philosophy<sup>1)</sup>**

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## *Abstract*

*What follows is an attempt to isolate the specificity of the nature of teaching and learning philosophy in which philosophy is seen as identical with or closely tied to a specific activity. Because philosophers who embrace one of certain views tend to think that learning and teaching this activity is a main aim of philosophical education, guidelines for teaching and learning practice are already implied by their own conceptions. However, discussions of the nature of the subject are conducted apart from debates about adequate teaching methods. In this paper, I want to examine how different conceptions are related to teaching philosophical practices, that is to say how methods of teaching philosophy can vary with these different conceptions of philosophy.*

*Key words: philosophy, teaching & learning, science, history, art.*

## **. Introduction**

It is a commonplace to say that opinions differ widely as to the nature of philosophy. Not only do characterizations of philosophy vary, but they are also made from different perspectives. One may, for instance, characterize philosophy as the quest for wisdom, or the search for a view of reality as a whole. But if one does so, not much is being said about the ways along which this wisdom or this view of reality can be acquired.

## **A. Three conceptions of the nature of philosophy**

In this paper I will discuss three common conceptions of the nature of philosophy in which philosophy is seen as identical with or closely tied to a specific activity. Because philosophers who embrace one of these views will tend to think that learning this specific activity is a main aim of philosophical education, guide lines for teaching and

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learning practice are already implied by these three conceptions. Usually, however, discussions of the nature of the subject are conducted apart from debates about adequate teaching methods. In this paper, I examine how three conceptions are related to teaching practice, that is to say how methods of teaching preparatory philosophy can vary with these conceptions of philosophy:

1. Philosophy as problem-oriented: according to this view, philosophizing is trying to solve philosophical problems or find answers to philosophical questions. It remains to be seen, of course, which types of problems count as philosophical.
2. Philosophy as history-oriented: according to this view, the main activity of the philosopher is the interpretation and re-interpretation of the philosophical past as expressed in philosophical texts. How the history of philosophy can be continued in the future is not always clear in a history-oriented conception of philosophy, because the activity of text-interpretation diverges radically from the way many philosophers of the past understood their own activities. If we find it so difficult to interpret past texts, we must necessarily find it even more difficult to predict how future generations may interpret our own, and still more difficult to predict what types of texts they may generate in turn.
3. Philosophy as person-oriented: this is the conception of philosophy as the attempt to create a personal, rationally articulated view of the world as a whole.

I will not take the practices which are common today in the teaching of philosophy as my guide; teaching practice often is much more restricted than it could be. I will try to elucidate how much this practice could vary in principle and will concentrate on what is feasible, not on what is usual. My purpose will have been reached when teachers who do not share my view of philosophy get some useful hints out of this paper.

### **B. The aims of teaching philosophy.**

The educational aims of teaching philosophy are only partly dependent on the nature of the subject as conceived by professional philosophers working in a universities. It is not superfluous to remind philosophers of the simple fact that the aims of any formal education are partly determined by law, by governmental regulations, by financial constraints, by the expectations of the parents and of society at large, by the motivation of the students, and -last but not least- by the abilities of the teachers who happen to be in the school. The conception of philosophy embraced by the teacher is only one among the factors determining what will be done in the classroom.

As a result not so much of the dominant conception of philosophy, but of the dominant teaching-models the academic style of teaching by lecturing and reading texts is much more widespread in secondary school education than one would expect on the basis of the wide variation in conceptions of philosophy adhered to. University teaching in

philosophy is a strong and not always beneficial model for the teaching of philosophy outside the university. As a result, the teaching of philosophy is much more monotonous than it could be. A clarification of the relations between conceptions of philosophy and teaching practice could be of some help to the teacher who wants to face the consequences of his philosophical position.

There are a number of constraints on the practical consequences a conception of philosophy can have in the classroom. In the first place, the consequences of the nature of philosophy for teaching aims and practices are not equally clear for every conception. This is an additional reason why the practice of philosophy in secondary schools is much more uniform than could be expected.

In the second place, the teacher is not free to act as he or she likes. Apart from other factors determining the aims of secondary education which I mentioned earlier, the teacher has to consider the possibilities of the schedule, the size of the group, the opportunities of the classroom and the expectations of the students, not only regarding the nature of philosophy, but also regarding the nature and duration of the learning process, etc. In the course of this paper, I will pay some attention to these factors and see how they co-operate to bring about the dilution of any clear conception of philosophy teaching and in the mixing of styles of teaching.

## **. Philosophy as Problem-Oriented**

The conception of philosophy as problem-oriented is widely associated with an analytic orientation in philosophy. Philosophy is seen as a set of more or less eternal problems, subdivided into different areas or disciplines of philosophy. The philosopher is the one who has learned to deal with the type of problems in this field, that is to say philosophy is a kind of craft and the philosopher is a competent craftsman. There may be parallels in dealing with problems in different areas of philosophy, but competence in one area of philosophy does not automatically imply competence in another field. The general model for teaching philosophy in a problem-oriented way is the teaching of a technique. The main purpose of teaching philosophy, then, is the acquisition of a philosophical skills. Skills are exercised on philosophical problems. The acquisition of skills starts with simplified and isolated problems and proceeds to the ever more complicated questions which are typical for the stage the subject has reached and demand the application of integrated skills.

### **A. The nature of philosophical problems**

According to the conception of philosophy as problem-oriented, philosophical problems are seen as a particular type of problem resulting from a technical transformation of

everyday questions. The nature of those problems and the particular transformation which makes them into philosophical problems will not be discussed here.

This is not to deny that philosophical problems are in a way "eternal" problems. However, even if a final solution of the problems regarded as philosophical is not expected, the professional philosopher will try to find an answer which is satisfying for the moment, or at least try to eliminate definitely wrong answers and to formulate the reasons why a particular answer can not be given. The quest for an answer begins with the formulation of the questions in a precise, technical vocabulary by which it is clearly distinguished from related or seemingly related questions. This technical transformation of the everyday question subsumes it under a definite category (problem-type), suggests certain ways of trying to find an answer and sets standards for such an answer.

Adherents of this conception of philosophy will in general see an analogy with the sciences: philosophy is one among many sciences, from which it distinguishes itself by the nature of its problems. Just like the other sciences, philosophy is a professional competence defined by mastery of a technical vocabulary, knowledge of accepted answers, ability to recognize problems and skill in applying the methods of the trade to those problems. As a consequence of the relation between problems, knowledge and skills, philosophy is -just like the science again- subdivided into a number of disciplines, each with their own specialists.

A scientific conception of philosophy is easily associated with the analytic tradition in philosophy. It is clear, that a number of the above mentioned paraphernalia are more characteristic for the Anglo-saxon tradition in philosophy than for the so-called Continental tradition. The view of philosophy as problem-oriented, or even the attempt to put it on a scientific basis is not restricted to the analytic tradition, however. The Neo-Kantian and phenomenological tradition, and even part of the hermeneutic tradition, saw philosophical problems in the same light.

Nor is the conception of philosophy as problem-oriented automatically connected with a scientific view. Even if one believes that solutions to philosophical problems are possible, it remains a characteristic of philosophy that its problems and its answers concern our view of reality as a whole, that as a consequence philosophy can never be the exclusive domain of a restricted number of specialists and that a re-translation of our answers into the language of everyday life remains necessary.

## **B. The analogy to laboratory work**

In the emphasis on the skills of the philosopher in connection with specific knowledge, there is an analogy with a craft. The philosopher is a craftsman who in a certain isolation works on the solution of problems which have already been subjected to some preparatory treatment by which they have been transformed into philosophical problems. One can also think of work in the laboratory, where there also exists a strong connection between knowledge and skills. The problems of a specific craft are of a

particular type and philosophy is no exception. And in accordance with the type of problems acknowledged as philosophical and the expectations held about solutions or answers, there exist authorized procedures to reach and establish those answers.

The craftsman or the scientist in the laboratory would subdivide his problems into many small steps to be taken one by one. There may be times when he is not working on the problem at all, but is designing new tools for the next step. The apprentice learns the trade piecemeal. The master may explain part of the problem or demonstrate the operation of a specific tool, and the apprentice may be set on a specific task as an exercise, sometimes a task which has been devised for the trainee. Only after having mastered the principal tools and having acquired some basic knowledge can the apprentice be expected to enter upon a realistic problem and try to go through the whole process of problem-transformation, examination of the problem-type, defining and refining relevant concepts, collecting relevant knowledge, etc.

### **C. Progress in philosophy**

If carried to the extreme the problem-oriented conception of philosophy could regard the history of philosophy in the same way science sees its history: as a continual evolution in which an ever growing body of knowledge and procedures is amassed. In fact no conception of philosophy is as a-historic as this. Even in an analytic tradition philosophy is seen as a collection of problems which in themselves are eternal and to which no definite solution will ever be found. There is no ultimate philosophical truth. Nevertheless the problem-oriented conception of philosophy admits a notion of progress in philosophy in the sense that the answers given by the past and especially the reasons adduced for them cannot be ignored. The argumentations of philosophers from the past can even exclude certain answers; there may be no ultimate philosophic truth, but there can be discovered ultimate philosophic falsehoods. To ignore the achievements of the past is a sign of philosophical incompetence. From this follows a programme for instruction in philosophy. To say it in the words of an eminent representative of the analytic tradition:

It is precisely and only because it is in this and other ways possible to assess philosophical expertise independently of any judgment of the truth or falsity of some particular position that we are able to conduct non-partisan university examinations which set questions in philosophy as opposed to questions asking only what some philosopher as a matter of fact said.<sup>2)</sup>

Nevertheless the relation of philosophy to its history poses a problem for a problem-oriented conception of philosophy. History is more than a simple stock of answers and arguments, because the relation of technical expertise to everyday questions remains vital and these questions cannot be understood out of the context of everyday life. And everyday life changes in the course of history.

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2) Antony Flew, *An Introduction to Western Philosophy; Ideas and Argument from Plato to Sartre*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), p.33.

#### **D. The aims of instruction in philosophy: Philosophic skills**

What does it mean to learn philosophy according to a problem-oriented conception of philosophy? Obviously it means the acquisition of (part of) philosophical competence or expertise. This could be restricted to obtaining knowledge only. But as we have seen, there is little definite knowledge in philosophy. Knowledge of the opinions of a number of philosophers from the past or elsewhere is a poor substitute. And as soon as their reasons for having those opinions are taken into consideration conceptual and procedural knowledge is required to be able to understand and evaluate the argumentations.

Translated into everyday language, this means that learning philosophy always to some extent means learning to philosophize. How far this aim goes is dependent on the exigences of the educational institute under consideration. But even to be able to understand the problems of philosophy and some proposed answers it will be necessary for the student to acquire some philosophical skills.

The skills necessary in philosophy are often understood as general intellectual skills which can in principle be applied to a broad area of subjects. They comprise skills like conceptual analysis, argumentation, interpretation, evaluation of presuppositions, problem solving skills, etc. Skills like these -such is the assumption- can be learned in one area of thought and successively applied in another areas.

For teaching philosophy this means that an analysis of the expertise in a certain area of philosophy is a prerequisite for a structuring of the learning conditions in that area. Such an analysis is unusual. Conventional description of the structure of the disciplines of philosophy and of philosophical expertise are unfit for the purpose.

#### **E. Teaching philosophy in a problem-oriented way**

Teaching philosophy in a problem-oriented way will show a number of characteristics:

1. Attention will be paid to the acquisition of skills. Skills have to be explained and demonstrated. The aim will be proceduralisation, that is to say automatically "knowing one's way around" in the discipline.
2. To this end, complex skills have to be subdivided into a number of steps for which separate exercises are necessary. The teacher will spend a lot of preparation time on the design of useful exercises and activities.
3. Lecturing will only be used to provide the knowledge necessary for the use and application of concepts, recognition of problems and problem types, demonstration of specific types of argumentations, etc.
4. The role of the teacher will be central, not only because he delivers and structures the instruction, but also because he controls and judges achievements.
5. The philosophical disciplines will be taught separately.
6. History of philosophy is relevant only to provide some insight into the relationship

between the 'eternal' questions of philosophy and the transformations of those questions. For the teacher history can be a source of simplified problems and implementations which can be used in exercises.

### **F. Drawbacks of the problem-oriented conception**

Teaching philosophy in a problem-oriented way can at times be academic in the bad sense of the word and even boring. No inspiring lectures in grand style here, no great visions, no pondering over the riddle of existence, but painstaking analysis and patient exercise. Between the quest for wisdom, which could well form part of the motivation of the students, and the rigid school discipline to which they are subjected in the classroom lie oceans. For just this reason there has been a massive flight from analytic philosophy in recent years. Intellectual modesty is not always attractive.

Another problem is the history of philosophy. Some knowledge of the philosophical past was always considered part of the intellectual outfit of the educated man (and woman). Even if this means no more than being able to join the conversation at a birthday party a strong expectation like this cannot be completely neglected.

### **. Philosophy as History-Oriented**

Although different conceptions of the history of philosophy exist, many philosophers would agree that the historical nature of philosophical problems is somehow essential to philosophy. Some would even say, that the nature of philosophical problems changes with historical periods and that the only constant in the history of philosophy is the continuity of philosophical discourse. In this respect there is a difference in kind between philosophy and the sciences; teaching philosophy is more like teaching literature than like teaching science. Learning philosophy is learning to appreciate philosophical works as an expression of their time. Following this conception of philosophy, it would be natural to concentrate on the reading of important philosophical works from the past, to explain these by embedding them in the general culture of their time and to show, how they influenced our time.

### **A. The historical character of philosophical problems**

In a problem-oriented conception of philosophy, it is not denied that philosophical problems originate in the history of philosophy and are shaped by temporal circumstances as well as by the tradition of the craft. The historical character of the problems is not, however, stressed. The professional philosopher may feel free to neglect whole periods of the history of philosophy and to ignore the chronology of problem-development. In fact the complete history of philosophy can be rewritten as a systematic account of the achievements which we have at our disposal. In fact some

introduction to philosophy -not always the most inspiring ones- do just that.

The history-oriented conception of philosophy, however, gives priority to the historical development of philosophical problems. Philosophy is shaped by its past, but also by the specific cultural, social and political circumstances of its time. Even the degree to which these factors influence philosophy may vary. It is not even certain that problems are at the core of philosophy; this may sometimes be the case, but other periods may stress 'visions' or the defence of cherished creeds.

Carried to the extreme, this conception means there may be very little relationship between the philosophy of a given historical era and the preceding one. Although the philosophical past is the one of the determining factors, it is the past as conceived by the present in the perspective of its own conception of the nature of philosophy and its own formulation of philosophical problems. There are thus no "eternal problems" in the history of philosophy which are being transformed by each period in its own way. Terminological continuity suggests a continuity of content which does not exist. An "eternal" problem like that of free will for instance, when analysed properly in its historical context, will be seen to have such different connotations in different periods as to be a completely different problems. Some periods may even not see the problems at all, although they have a vision on the matter.

Not everybody will go so far. But even in a more moderate historical conception doubts exist as to whether philosophy can be separated from its history. So the natural subject matter for philosophy as a school subject is the history of philosophy.

## **B. The analogy between philosophy and literature**

Central in a history-oriented conception of the nature of philosophy stand the texts, the great philosophical works of the past. After all, there is not much else left. It is a curious coincidence that the significance of the past is evidently enhanced by its radical divergence from the present. The more radically historicist our conception of the past, the less clear it is why we should be interested in it at all. This paradox of historical knowledge, to which Nietzsche drew attention in his second *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtung*, is an uneasy one: why should we pay any attention to the past if our preoccupations are determined by the present?

The dominant activity in a history-oriented conception of philosophy is the interpretation of philosophical texts. There is a strong parallel with history of literature here. Systematic procedures for the interpretation of philosophical texts are often strongly influenced by or even directly derived from the study of literature. The focus of a particular interpretation shifts according to the general conception of literature adopted. Existing texts and traditions, the biography of the author in question, the conditions of academic life, the political situation of the moment, sociological conditions, progress in the sciences and trends in literature and art all compete in providing tools for the interpretation of a particular philosophical text. Whatever the focus of a

particular method of interpretation, the role of extra-philosophical factors in the interpretation of the work tends to be cardinal or even overwhelming.

Another paradox of a history-oriented conception of philosophy is the fact that the more extra-philosophical factors come into the foreground, the more interest tends to be restricted to a few great philosophers of the past, the "Ahnengalerie" of philosophy. They seem the greater the less clear it is wherein exactly they were great. The more dwarfish statures are reserved for the Ph.D. theses of not over-ambitious graduates.

Of course there can be no question of philosophic truth in a history-oriented conception of philosophy; even the notion of truth is meaningless out of its historical context. This does not mean that a work of philosophy cannot be judged. It can be more or less significant, typical, influential, inspiring, etc. Even the answer to the questions it poses can be more or less adequate. But there are no trans-historical standards for this judgment. Standards shift between those of our time and those of the time from which the work dates.

### **C. Philosophy in the continual conversation of mankind**

If we deny constancy to the problems and methods of philosophy and instead recognize only historical continuity, then we get a conception of the history of philosophy for which R. Rorty has coined the phrase "the conversation of mankind":

The fact that we can continue the conversation Plato began without discussing the topics Plato wanted discussed, illustrates the difference between treating philosophy as a voice in a conversation and treating it as a subject, a *Fach*, a field of professional inquiry. The conversation Plato began has been enlarged by more voices than Plato would have dreamed possible, and thus by topics he knew nothing of.<sup>3)</sup>

Although one can drop in and join an existing conversation, understanding the conversation as a whole can only result from beginning with the start of the conversation and follow its course up to the present. If philosophy is no subject, it has no history, at least not in the sense that physics has a history - as Rorty stresses on the same page. A precondition for a history as the gradual development of the factors which shaped a field of professional inquiry presupposes an identity of the subject. The history of philosophy can only be told and retold.

Of course not all history-oriented conceptions of philosophy are as radical as this. A conception which tries to unite the merits of a problem-oriented and a history-oriented conception of philosophy is what German is called *Problemgeschichte*: understanding philosophical problems means tracing their history. *Problemgeschichte* as it was written by, for instance, Wilhelm Windelband in his famous *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie* presupposes a parallel between the logical development of a problem and its historical awakening. Knowledge of the history is not only a convenient tool for the acquisition of philosophical craftsmanship, but a necessary condition, because the

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3) Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton 1979, p. 391

historical nature of philosophical problems belongs somehow to their essence. Studying the history of philosophy is the key to the ability to join in a topical discussion.

#### **D. The aims of teaching philosophy: Interpretation**

There is a nice symmetry between educational aims and teaching practice in the history-oriented approach to philosophy: the ability to interpret historical texts is acquired by constantly practising just that. Knowledge of the facts of the history of philosophy will mostly be seen as subordinated to the ability to interpret them in a history-oriented conception of philosophy. Furthermore it is clear that knowledge of the past can not remain restricted to intimacy with the history of philosophy only, if the situationally determined character of philosophy is taken seriously.

Text-interpretation will have a further aim: stimulating the appreciation of the great works of philosophy. Also in this respect there is a parallel with teaching literature. The object is never knowledge and skill as such, but skill in order to be able to appreciate.

#### **E. Teaching philosophy in a history-oriented way**

Teaching philosophy in a history-oriented way will clearly comprise two types of practice: providing the general background and interpreting texts. It is difficult to see how the necessary knowledge of an outline of the history of philosophy could be acquired otherwise than by means of the lecturing method supported by a textbook. What the teacher chiefly needs are the virtues of a good narrator. The same can be said of a textbook and can be summarized as a negative quality: teacher and textbook should not be boring.

There are a number of frameworks for the interpretation of philosophical texts. Whichever plan is followed, the student will always be heavily dependent on the teacher and the annotations in a text-collection. The relevant background for the understanding of the text derives from a number of different areas and it is simply impossible first to master the political, social, intellectual and artistic history of the period before one can make a start at understanding and interpreting a text. Consequently the role of the teacher is even more central than is the case in the problem-oriented conception of philosophy and a larger part of student-time is consumed in taking notes.

The history-oriented teaching of philosophy automatically goes beyond the borders of philosophy proper. It provides therefore unique possibilities of cooperation between different school-subjects, for instance in the form of project learning.

#### **F. Drawbacks of the history-oriented conception**

Teaching the history of philosophy can begin either way: with a survey of the history

of philosophy, or with the interpretation of a particular text. Each practice has its drawbacks. Starting with the survey means lecturing and all educational tricks will be necessary to prevent boredom. The re-organizing of the historical materials is generally more instructive for the teacher than for the student. Nevertheless, the students may be thankful: historical surveys are in demand. If one starts with the reading and interpretation of a particular text, the necessary background tends to fall apart in an un-organized mass of facts. Probably the best way probably is to work in parallel sessions; in one a historical survey would be given, while in the other a text or text-collection from the relevant period would be read.

Text-interpretation presents its own difficulties. The activity presents itself as a whole and can not be easily divided into steps. Nor is there an easy beginning. Beginning to learn does not necessarily mean beginning with a simple philosophical work and a simple text is not necessarily one from the beginning of history. Text-interpretation in the classroom assumes the form of all kinds of disparate information, linguistic, structural, historical, philosophical, etc. All these fields of knowledge are seemingly without internal connection and it is not even clear to the student which kind of information is relevant at a particular moment; nevertheless they cannot be separated. Another problem is, that text-interpretation can -like argumentation or problem solving- easily be misconstrued as a general intellectual, subject-independent skill. We have seen, however, that the interpretation of a particular text is only possible on the basis of extensive knowledge the limits of which are not even clearly defined. No quick transfer to the interpretation of other texts may be expected. Without the relevant knowledge it is not even possible to understand why a particular text is of any importance, what it is about, or even why it is a philosophical text (if we assume that the meaning of "philosophy" changes through the ages).

### **G. The problem of teaching history**

Text-interpretation as the main activity of philosophy may be seen as an attempt to connect the trade of the philosopher to a definite skill or set of skills in correspondence with a particular model of professional expertise and a model of school-education. Professional skills which can be taught should be tied to specific activities which can be subdivided, they should be reproducible and meet objective standards, and they should be testable in a uniform way.

We have seen, however, that the essence of history if taken as a defining characteristic of philosophy is the story. The problem is not simply one of the conception of philosophy adopted. There is no place for story-telling in the model of school-education which is generally, but unconsciously adopted. A rehabilitation of the story in education would thus involve a re-orientation of the whole school-system. And this is not enough: teachers are not prepared to tell stories, which demands quite another set of abilities than instruction. Clearly that is the reason why lectures can be so boring and at the

same time superfluous when measured by the standards of instruction.

Stories clearly have an important function in education. It is very difficult, however, to indicate what exactly the function of stories is and in which sense they even could have explanatory value. I will not try to give a philosophy of narrative thinking here.

## **. Philosophy as Person-Oriented**

A third conception of philosophy is to regard it as the way in which an individual, making use of ideas of his contemporaries and of the past, deals with life and reality in a more or less coherent way. In this sense an individual can be said to develop his or her own philosophy and the word "philosophy" can be used in the plural. Different philosophies would be incomparable and although the past can be highly important for individuals, the chronological development of philosophical ideas is not. As individual thinkers borrow from and react to related minds, a typology of philosophies is more relevant to an understanding of the nature of the subject than a survey of history.

The aim of teaching philosophy from a person-oriented perspective would be to enable students to build their own philosophy. Thus there is an analogy between teaching philosophy and teaching art. In the philosophy classroom, students would work on their own creation, either fulfilling tasks assigned to them by the teacher or setting their own objectives. The teacher would function as an adviser, whose empathy and broad knowledge of techniques and styles in philosophy would enable him to help each student in reaching her or his personal aims. The activity of the student would thus be more central than in the other two conceptions of philosophy.

### **A. Philosophical problems as the perplexities of an individual**

If philosophy is seen as the way an individual copes with the problems of life, then there are no fixed problems in philosophy. What is a problem for one individual is completely unproblematic for another. The best one can say is, that certain themes recur regularly in the history of philosophy, that there are related philosophies and related problems.

Even the notion of problem changes. Philosophical problems are existential problems and therefore to a certain degree beyond the reach of language. The formulation of a problem is in this sense misleading; an individual answer to the problem can be completely unsatisfying for another individual because the formulation of the problem, and also answer, is only the tip of the iceberg.

The consequence of this conception is that there can exist no general standards by which philosophical theories, systems and ideas can be judged. This does not mean that professional competence plays no role at all, but that standards of better and worse are relevant only within a certain type of philosophy. From a different perspective they

may be completely irrelevant or even obnoxious.

Within a specific type of philosophy reasoning or argumentation can be relevant (the measure of importance is also dependent on the type of philosophy). Argumentation, or vision, can be the gist of philosophy, just like drawing, or colouring, can be regarded as the essence of art.

### **B. The analogy to artistic creation**

The comparison between the person-oriented conception of philosophy and artistic creation is not fortuitous. In each case the central activity is the creation of a personal style or view ("Weltanschauung"). The professional philosopher is the one who does this in a grand style, inspiring for many other people who simply borrow his ideas or make variations on them. There is a radical divergence between philosophy and its history; the historian of philosophy stands to the philosopher as the historian of art to the artist. History of philosophy is a part of the trade of history. For the real philosopher it is no more than a reservoir of ideas. Being faithful to what the ideas of the philosophers of the past really meant is of concern to the historian, but irrelevant for the creator.

In fact the relation between the creator and the great philosophers of the past is the same as that between the master and the student. Style and vision of a great master can be inspiring and besides many different details of his craft can be learned by careful study of his works, but only on the basis of an already existing common view. Martin Buber could learn very little from Frege, just as Turner could not learn much from Hans Holbein.

Criticism of particular philosophers, ideas, opinions, conclusions and solutions are all subordinate to understanding the work of others as an expression of a particular perspective. Creative activity is in the foreground. No arguments need to be adduced for past preferences. One can specialize in being very self-willed. Whole provinces of the philosophic past and whole areas of philosophical problems may be ignored with impunity.

In the problem-oriented conception of philosophy specialization can be sensible or even unavoidable, but it will usually follow the accepted divisions of the subject-area. According to the history-oriented conception specialization will be less meaningful, because the unit one studies will be a text, a period or a particular philosopher and they will often not respect the nowadays accepted boundaries of the disciplines. In the person-oriented conception one may specialize freely, not in the sense of knowing even more about an ever smaller area around which knowledge spreads and thins in hierarchial circles, but in the sense of being completely free in the choice of problems, models and relations. The object of professional activity is not truth in a limited area, but personal vision or style of experiencing in the world with others.

### **C. The history of philosophy as reservoir of styles**

As we have seen, the history of philosophy is not unimportant in the person-oriented conception of philosophy. History, however, is not important as the repository of eternal problems, as the logical prehistory of our own situation, or as illumination of the radically different, but as reservoir of opinions, views, and techniques. We can summarize this as saying that history is the embodiment of different styles of philosophizing, styles which may originally have been tied to a particular historical period or phase of development, but which may have lost all concrete historical ties. History may have begun as a succession of style-periods but in the course of the centuries these have developed into streams running beside each other. Chronology may have lost all meaning, like in Chinese landscape-painting, where one can choose to work in Sung-style nowadays and where the difference between original and fake has lost significance.

For an artist the place to find history in this sense is the museum, not the historiography of art, which can be no more than a superficial guide to the museum. The philosophical museum is the library where the great works of the past are kept. As in the history-oriented conception text has central importance, but in a very different way. No historical or textual interpretation here. Historical circumstances and conditions have no, or only limited significance. The greatest works have lost any clear historical ties and are of all ages.

### **D. The aims of instruction in philosophy: Development of style**

When teaching the history of philosophy the above-mentioned conception of the history of philosophy may never be fully absent. In fact the parallel with artistic creation may be one of the main reasons for the exceptional attention the great thinkers get in the history of philosophy. But the obvious conclusions from this view are seldom drawn. Just as the great art of the past is reduced to art-history as a subject the history of the great philosophers is just told as the history of philosophy.

The point of a person-oriented conception of philosophy is, however, that the history of philosophy is subordinate to the development of an individual style and technique, and the knowledge of this history should not be present in the mind of the student as a collection of relatively meaningless facts, but in the teacher as a palette of possibilities. Knowledge of the past, that is knowledge of styles, techniques, solutions, etc., has meaning insofar as it enables the teacher to choose the right advice for the student at a particular moment.

### **E. Teaching philosophy in a person-oriented way**

No clear alternative to the dominant teaching practices presents itself in connection with the history-oriented conception of philosophy. A person-oriented conception, however, opens the door for a teaching practice very far removed from usual practice. The obvious analogy here is the workshop. Just as students of art work at their own painting or sculpture under supervision of the teacher, students of philosophy could work on their own problems, visions, conceptions, phantasies, speculations, etc. The teacher would not be an instructor, but a supervisor. He would read the draft, comment on them, refer the student to works of philosophy which could be of help, and would only occasionally give instruction when he perceives a recurrent problem.

The teacher would have no general method or styles of teaching. Each student has his or her own problems, preferences and styles, and there will be no general recipe for all cases. Apart from wide knowledge of techniques and styles the teacher requires empathy. Being able to listen will be a quality at least as important as being able to talk.

#### **F. Drawbacks of the person-oriented conception**

Problems with the person-oriented approach to philosophy have to do with the circumstances under which teaching based on it would be possible. The teacher has to pay time and attention to each individual student and therefore it is difficult to see how teaching would be possible in large groups. Room and material means have to be available too, especially a good library. The teacher has to be empathetic, but at the same time he or she should have a profound knowledge of the trade and of different styles of philosophy. These are demands which are difficult to meet and they are certainly not always stimulated by university studies in philosophy or by teacher training.

From the student a high degree of motivation is required. In the problem-oriented conception the regular discipline of tasks set by the teacher guarantees that at least something will be learned, even if the student is not highly interested in the subject. Possibly the student discovers only afterwards that he or she learned something quite sensible. In the history-oriented conception the problem of motivation is left with the teacher: he should inspire the students, and lack of motivation can safely be regarded as failure of the teacher. But in the person-oriented conception there has to be some motivation at the beginning, otherwise nothing will be learned. Because student activity here is at the heart of teaching practice, the problem of motivation cannot ultimately be solved by the teacher, although he or she may seek to persuade the student. This is one reason that a rather strict selection of candidates is generally accepted in art-studies - even though the criteria of acceptance are in constant debate.

#### **. Choice or Combination of Styles of Teaching?**

I have made several remarks from which one could draw the conclusion that it would be unwise in teaching philosophy to stick to merely one conception to the exclusion of others. This may be true, but the difficulties in combining more than one style of teaching should not be underrated.

In the first place my account should be made clear, that for all three conceptions to be valid there must be a long way to go for the student. The learning difficulties of the first conception are frequently underrated, because the teacher usually forms no concrete and complete representation of teaching aims and methods. This is not only due to choosing the wrong path in teaching, but also to heavily underrating the amount of time necessary to master certain skills. If a careful analysis of learning steps is neglected, not much more than vague reproductive abilities will result.

In philosophical education according to the history-oriented conception the difficulty we have already stressed is the enormous amount of historical knowledge necessary to be able to interpret a philosophical text, added to the unpredictability of the pieces of the knowledge one will actually need in a concrete case. In teaching according to the person-oriented conception it is clear from the start that the acquisition of an individual style is the result of a long development. Interest and preferences change over a long time and the integration of knowledge, personal interests, techniques, and creative ideas into one view is time-consuming.

Up to a certain point, however, the combinations of styles is not only desirable, but unavoidable. Even if the teacher himself has strong preferences, demands put on teaching by the subject, by the school, by the expectations of the students cannot be ignored. Nobody denies the claim to competence which is embodied in the first conception and even the most historically minded teacher will concede that precise formulation of a problem, analysis of the relevant concepts and careful reflection about the kind of answer one expects are part and parcel of the philosophical craftsmanship. On the other hand, not even the most hard-headed analytician denies the relevance of history of philosophy. But even if history were irrelevant for the philosophical problems as such, attention to the history of philosophy would be unavoidable, because it so clearly belongs to the general intellectual stock-in-trade of the well-educated human being. Not even the cultural supplement of the daily newspaper can be read without some knowledge of the history of philosophy.

The third conception stresses what can be important for the student as an individual and is as such expected by many students of philosophy. A philosophical education which presents only impersonal knowledge or stresses only general skills will be a deception for those students. Most important in philosophy -and this is a real difference with science education- is the feeling of the student that philosophy is somehow important for the conduct of life.

## **. Concluding Remarks**

It was to be expected, of course, that the aims of teaching philosophy would vary with different conceptions of the nature of the subject, although it is also important to realize that teaching aims are not exclusively determined by the subject or by the teacher. It was the aim of my paper, however, to show how strongly teaching styles would differ according to these conceptions. Having a different conception of the nature of philosophy means more than just telling different stories in our lectures or reading different texts with our students. Under some circumstances it might mean a completely different atmosphere in the classroom, affecting activities and roles for student and teacher alike. In one ideal classroom the students would be quietly at work while teacher gives them their assignments, in another one the teacher would give a lively performance in which the students are be absorbed, and in another case again there might be busy talking and exchange of ideas.

It will also be noted that all three conception put heavy, though diverse, demands on the teacher which are not easily met by teacher training. Teaching philosophy in a problem-oriented manner requires the ability to make an analysis of philosophical concepts, theories and problems from an instructional angle. This results in a subdivision which is completely at variance with the kind of analysis one would find in a textbook of philosophy. For the history-oriented way of teaching the teacher should have a wide range of rhetorical and even theatrical abilities at his disposal which many people think cannot be learned by training at all. And the third conception demand from the teacher that he is a master of the art himself, but at the same time sympathetic towards the sometimes completely different style conceptions of his students and capable of guiding them by means of his wide knowledge. Being a teacher of philosophy is no light task.

## References

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