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Teaching Philosophy based on We-Experience: A New Approach and Four Teaching Concepts

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Abstract

In this paper, we present a new approach to teaching philosophy based on so-called "we-experiences" (in short: TWEEX). The novelty of this approach, which bears on the concept of "we-experience" from Social Ontology and Phenomenology, is that it connects contents directly to shared classroom experience. After discussing its theoretical background, we illustrate the TWEEX approach by presenting four teaching concepts that can be adapted to different teaching contexts. They deal with the following topics: mindfulness and philosophy (ancient philosophy), the nature of scientific theories (philosophy of science), freedom of speech (political philosophy), and boredom (aesthetics, existential philosophy).

Keywords: student experience; "we-experience"; teaching concept; classroom experiment, lesson opening

1. Introduction

A well-known pedagogical and didactical principle recommends teaching in a way that encourages students to relate the subject matter of lessons with their personal life experience. Applying this principle to the teaching of Philosophy, Steven M. Cahn stresses that starting from the students' own sphere of experience is a crucial motivational factor in the learning process. This is because it allows to illuminate relevant connections between the students' life

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and the philosophical questions to be dealt with, and thereby makes sure "that the subject itself becomes their [the students'] personal concern" (Cahn 2018: 7).

This principle is often mirrored by school syllabi. For example, the Austrian syllabus for the subject "Psychology and Philosophy" in high schools recommends that the teacher "pays heed to the significance [of the topic] for the living condition of the students. In doing so, they should relate to their personal experiences […]". Likewise, the syllabus for the subject "Ethics", the first "didactical principle" states that "in designing the teaching concepts [the teacher] should relate to the life experiences of the students" (see: Gesamte Rechtsvorschrift für Lehrpläne 2022: 212, 127, our translation).

How can a teacher relate the philosophical contents to be dealt with in class to the students' life experiences? Teachers usually do it by imagining the life-world of students and by trying to address questions which arise there, or by inviting students to think about personal experiences that they associate with the lesson's contents. Although this sometimes is successful, there are some hurdles that tend to loosen the content-lifeworld connection. On the one hand, teachers find it sometimes difficult to *imagine* student's life-experience; on the other, students are often not competent in choosing and narrating experiences that are well-suited to be related to the content in question. Furthermore, students' private experiences are always very individual and specific, and constitute in many cases memories of events distant in time.

The present paper presents a didactical approach that intends to fulfill the recommendation to relate to the life experience of the students in a new way. We call it "TWEEX approach" (**t**eaching Philosophy based on **we-ex**perience), and it is inspired by the concept of "we-experience" as developed in recent philosophical literature in the field of Social Ontology. Instead of imagining it *creates a joint* experience in the classroom that is *designed to serve as an immediate starting point* for the philosophical contents that will subsequently be dealt with. The experience will belong to *all students together* as a group and it will *immediately and seamlessly* precede the engagement with the theoretical contents. In fact, one could say that these contents are initially given as an experience and are then addressed as an object of reflection, so that the students practice philosophy as an activity that is both experiential and intellectual.[1]

Further implications and the philosophical background of the TWEEX approach will be explained in the next section. In the sections that follow, we will exemplify the approach through four different teaching concepts. These cover a broad spectrum of philosophical topics, ranging from political philosophy to philosophy of science over ancient philosophy and aesthetics. This is to encourage the application, testing and further development of this approach (which is still at an early stage of conception) in different contexts of philosophy teaching: within different curricula, by different teachers having different preferences and competences, and for different learners. The teaching concepts can be adapted and used both in high school and undergraduate teaching. The latter two teaching concepts are quite radical applications of the TWEEX approach and they require some caution and additional, context-sensitive pedagogical reflection from the teacher: in fact, they imply a form of deceiving students, even if for a short time and in a playful manner.

[1] See Lahav (2021: 35). However, Lahav develops this idea in a different context than we do.

Finally, we would like to point out that we do not regard the TWEEX approach as a general or standard way of teaching philosophy. In order to do justice to the plurality and diversity of the philosophical tradition, it is advisable to use a variety of teaching methods and approaches. The TWEEX approach is meant to be only one of many and is particularly suitable as a stimulating introduction to a new topic.

2. Theoretical background

The TWEEX approach we present and exemplify in this paper takes as a starting point a *shared lived experience* in class. With the expression "lived experience" we intend to relate to the German concept of *Erleben*, a core concept from Phenomenology that focuses on the subject's 'living something through'. Even if the concept of *Erleben* emphasizes the subjective (and thus personal) quality of experiencing, recent philosophical literature at the interface between Social Ontology and Phenomenology explores the possibility of experiencing something *together*. The experience is given to a subject, but the subject is extended to a "we": "When adopting the we-perspective, we do not leave the first-person point of view behind; rather we merely exchange its singular for its plural form" (Zahavi 2015: 95). According to this idea,

> [...] a we-experience is an experience lived through by an individual subject, that (i) is partly co-constituted by the we-experience of another individual, and so (ii) exemplifies a peculiar subjective character (for-us-ness). (Salice 2022: 195)

The concept of "we-experience" hinges on the assumption that shared experiences are not reducible to the sum of individual experiences, as Zahavi explains and exemplifies:

> Sharing involves a plurality of subjects, but it also involves more than mere summation or aggregation. Even if two individuals by coincidence had the same kind of experience, this would not amount to a shared experience. Despite the similarity of the two experiences, they would not be integrated in the requisite manner. Contrast this with a situation where a couple is enjoying a movie together. Not only do they each perceive and enjoy the movie, but they also experience that the other is attending to and enjoying the movie, which is something that affects the structure and quality of their own enjoyment. (Zahavi 2015: 90; See also Salice 2022: 196)

Transferring this idea to the teaching context, the TWEEX approach suggests introducing a philosophical topic by letting the students share a we-experience, and it points to the additional value that this shared experience has in comparison to the sum of the individual experiences that the students may recall, each for herself, in relation to the topic.

We substantiate this general idea in the next Sections, where we sketch out different teaching concepts for a range of philosophical topics. The we-experiences we have designed as starting points will ideally fulfill the most important conditions by which we-experiences are defined in the literature:[2]

[2] This is a still ongoing debate and there is no consensus on all conditions and their relative importance.

i. [Simultaneity] All students have the experience together and at the same time. The experience is "out in the open" among the subjects (Blomberg 2018: §2).
ii. [Mutual awareness] Each student will also be (pre-reflectively[3]) aware that her classmates are having the same experience[4], and, also, that her classmates, too, are aware that the before-mentioned student is aware of this.[5]
iii. [Togetherness] The subject of the experience is the class, that is, most probably, a "we"[6]. To the extent that every student feels as belonging to the class, the experience will be perceived as "Given-as-Ours", rather than as "Given-as-Mine" (Blomberg 2018, 184; Salice 2022).
iv. [Emotional connotation] The experience, and the fact of experiencing it together, will most probably have also emotional connotations (Zahavi 2015; Salice 2022: 200-201).

Notably, according to current philosophical literature, in order to speak of a we-experience, it is neither necessary that each student subjectively experiences it in exactly the same way[7], nor that all students share positive emotions, such as feelings of affection, towards the class.

3. Mindfulness and philosophy

In the 1970s and 1980s, the French philosophers and historians of philosophy Michel Foucault and Pierre Hadot drew new attention to the ancient conception of philosophy as a way of life and to the fact that, in Antiquity, philosophy was conceived of as a tool for working on oneself (Hadot 1995; Foucault 2005; 1990). Pierre Hadot pointed in particular to the notion of *exercises spirituels*, referring to some philosophical practices common in ancient philosophy that were taken to shape one's worldview, habits and character. Hadot chose to call these exercises "spiritual" and not merely "intellectual" or "ethical" because they also involved the imagination and emotions of the subject practicing them (Davidson 1995: 21; Hadot 1995: 81-82). The notion and the practice of "philosophical exercises" has been currently revived by some Philosophy-practitioners.[8]

In the teaching context, we will not revive any "spiritual exercise", but we can use experiences similar to the ancient exercises as a starting point for introducing and discussing

[3] Schutz 1967: 167-170.
[4] "At least, if a state of affairs *S* is out in the open between you and me, then both of us are aware that *S* holds as well as that *S* is experienced by each of us." (Blomberg 2018: 188).
[5] "[A]wareness of sharing a view is not an additional feature of the view itself, but the particular way in which it is conscious as *ours*" (Schmid 2014: 17). "You need to experience the others' perspectives on you, you need to be aware of them as being aware of you and to see yourself through their eyes, so that you can come to experience yourself in the same manner as you experience them. When that happens, you can become aware of yourself as one of them or, rather and more accurately, you can become aware of yourself as one of us" (Zahavi 2015: 94). See also Blomberg (2018: 186-87).
[6] Whether, and to what extent, a class can be considered to be a "we" depends of course on the particular class and on the kind of bond and "feeling of togetherness" (Walther, quoted in Zahavi 2015: 90) that relates the students to each other. "To become part of a we, the prospective members have to identify with the group" (Zahavi 2015: 95). Salice, too, emphasizes that we-experiences "presuppose a specific self-understanding — this is a self-understanding as a group member" (Salice 2022: 196), and he dwelves deeper into this issue in Salice 2022: § 3.
[7] In this respect, we-experiences preserve plurality (Zahavi 2015: 92).
[8] See e.g. Amir (2015) and Niehaus (2015). We call Philosophy-practitioners those philosophers who work in Philosophical Practice.

philosophical theories and contents. One exercise that was common both among Stoics and Epicureans and has lived throughout history until today's practices of "mindfulness" consists in focusing one's attention on the present moment. This can also be practiced as a we-experience in the classroom. This exercise must be preceded by making silence, which we will consider here as a separate experience, since it can be practiced independently from focusing on the present moment. We will now describe in some more detail how to practice these experiences with students and how to link them to philosophical contents.

3.1 Making silence

The first we-experience simply consists in making silence and remaining silent and attentive together for some minutes. Sometimes it can be useful to move, if possible, to another place that is particularly apt for this exercise. The teacher may introduce the exercise gently and calmly with the following instructions:

"We now want to stay together for some time in silence. This silence will last for some minutes. I will gently tell you when this time is over and then we can start to work. Please, turn off all your electronic devices. From now on, please do not speak, and try also to avoid producing any sound. Of course, the silence will not be absolute: we will hear sounds, or even noise around us, but we will not let this disturb us. We will not react to this. We will keep listening to the silence behind the noise and focus on it. If you like, you can close your eyes. We relax and simply listen to the silence, now".

This kind of exercise has been first developed and tested by the Italian teacher Simona Alberti, who has been practicing it in class on a regular basis with students aged 16-19 (2009: 24, 64). In university teaching, it has proven to be a good way for increasing the feeling of togetherness and for getting focused[9]. In the specific context of the TWEEX approach, we use this we-experience to introduce and discuss philosophical concepts and theories in class. Here we will only sketch some examples.

Some past philosophers have made inspiring remarks on the issue of silence, some of which can be read and discussed in class after having experienced silence together. Kierkegaard (2015: 47-48) and Nietzsche (2003: III, 141), for example, have written inspiring passages describing the lack of silence as an essential feature of modernity and reflecting on its implications, especially with respect to thinking and communicating. These are particularly well suited for discussing current issues: for example, they can be well related to a joint reflection on the use and impact of social media.

A further possible path is to discuss the question about whether everything can be expressed in words, or whether there are limits to what can be said. Is there anything that cannot be said and must be passed over (or expressed) in silence? Here one could relate to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (2021: § 6.41; 6.42) and *Lecture on Ethics* (Wittgenstein 2014)

[9] On "settling down" and silence as a pre-condition for philosophical work, see: Brenifier 2022: 21 and 87. We can also use silence for then introducing what Ran Lahav calls "precious speaking": "speaking concisely, limiting our speech to a few precise words, formulating each word as if it was a precious gem" (Lahav 2021: 21). Even if it cannot be expected from students to continuously speak in this way, it can be a good exercise in itself to be practiced from time to time in philosophy classes: it fosters a particular awareness of one's speech and of the words chosen to express possibly complex thoughts.

for explaining and discussing his radical conviction that ethics and values belong to the realm in which things cannot be said.

A further possibility is to go into phenomenology and conduct with the students a phenomenological analysis of the experience (*Erleben*) of silence they just had. A good text that can be used in this case is Max Picard's *The World of Silence* (Picard 1952), and in particular the very first Section. This Section ("The nature of silence") also contains hints to other, related philosophical topics, like the nature of time.

3.2 Focusing on the present moment

As mentioned earlier, after the shared experience of silence it is also possible to linger on with the students in a state of "mindfulness" and introduce a further we-experience, consisting in focusing one's attention on the present moment. The students are given 5 to 10 minutes to write down a description of the present moment. They are free to decide whether they want to write in prose, in poetic form, in form of a diary entry etc. Most important: it must be (i) an attentive and detailed description of what they perceive, feel and think in the present moment, (ii) without any reference to the past or the future and (iii) without value judgments. The teacher participates in the exercise and writes a text as well. At the end, some texts will be read aloud or shared in some other form (of course, no student should be obliged to share, and the exercise must not necessarily be graded).

This exercise, too, has been both practiced on a regular basis by Simona Alberti (2009: 69-74), and tested by us with undergraduate students at the university. Experience shows that most students are not able to stick to the points (ii) and (iii) of the instruction: comments on what happened before, expectations about what will or should happen later, as well as value judgments on present states, feelings and perceptions very often find their way into the texts. This should not be seen as a failure of the exercise: in fact, it is rather a good starting point for introducing philosophical contents.

To begin with, the teacher can focus on the instruction (iii) and take the we-experience as an occasion to deal with the philosophically most relevant distinction between descriptive and evaluative sentences, or between facts and values. Feelings and perceptions may turn out to be 'tricky' with respect to this distinction: The teacher can certainly claim, for example, that "I experience boredom" is descriptive, and "It is wonderful to be bored because I never have this opportunity in everyday life" is evaluative. Still, predicates like "boring" (or "lazy") do in fact challenge the distinction between descriptive and evaluative. Furthermore, some ethical positions (e.g. hedonism) tend to conflate facts like pleasant or unpleasant feelings with values. These and other philosophical questions may be discussed afterwards.

A further possibility is to trace back the we-experience to its origins as an exercise in Hellenistic philosophy (Hadot 1995: Ch. 8) and illustrate the connection to the kind of ethical and existential questions it was related to at that time - which are still interesting to discuss today. In the context of Epicureanism, for example, the exercise of focusing on the present moment was related to the doctrine that is often summarized in the often-misunderstood motto *carpe diem*, which can be explained in class and used as a good starting point for introducing and discussing other aspects of the Epicurean ethics (Nussbaum 1994: Ch. 4 and 5; Hadot 1995: 222-226). The Stoic version of the exercise is interesting, too, as is related to the Stoic concept

of *prosoché*: a state of strong vigilance and self-attention that is required, according to Stoicism, especially for the formulating of objective judgments, for behaving ethically (that is, in a way that fosters the common good) and for avoiding to desire things that are not within one's power (Hadot 1995: 226-230).

Finally, also in this case, it is possible to follow the path of phenomenology. Even if Schopenhauer was not a phenomenologist, the following passage (§34) from his *The World as Will and Idea* may be used as a bridge between the exercise and the theoretical part:

> If […] a man relinquishes the common way of looking at things, […] if he thus ceases to consider the where, the when, the why, and the whither of things, and looks simply and solely at the what; if, further, he does not allow abstract thought, the concepts of the reason, to take possession of his consciousness, but, instead of all this, gives the whole power of his mind to perception, sinks himself entirely in this, and lets his whole consciousness be filled with the quiet contemplation of the natural object actually present, whether a landscape, a tree, a mountain, a building, or whatever it may be; inasmuch as he loses himself in this object […], i.e., forgets even his individuality, his will, and only continues to exist as the pure subject, the clear mirror of the object, so that it is as if the object alone were there, without any one to perceive it, and he can no longer separate the perceiver from the perception, but both have become one, because the whole consciousness is filled and occupied with one single sensuous picture; if thus the object has to such an extent passed out of all relation to something outside it, and the subject out of all relation to the will, then that which is so known is no longer the particular thing as such; but it is the Idea, the eternal form, the immediate objectivity […]. (Schopenhauer 2011: 238-239)

The teacher may then introduce and discuss the classical phenomenological attempt to perceive things as they are immediately given to the subject by "bracketing" any judgment about them, even about their actual existence in the external world (*epoché*). Also, the peculiar understanding of the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity inherent to phenomenology may be discussed in class and may constitute a bridge towards further issues in the Theory of Knowledge or towards interdisciplinary classes where Philosophy 'meets' Psychology.

4 About pencils, invisible goblins and Philosophy of Science

The following exercise falls into the area of Philosophy of Science. Its main aim is to connect a shared experience in the classroom with the philosophical ideas of underdetermination and demarcation. This is not only to provide students with a theoretical understanding of these concepts, but to connect them to their personal (yet shared) involvement in the underlying philosophical inquiry, puzzle and problem.

4.1 Procedure

The exercise starts with dividing the class into four groups. The teacher explains that a very short physics experiment will be demonstrated for which each group should find a different explanation: The first group should use the commonly accepted scientific theory which was probably already taught in school. The second group is asked to invent a creative, fairytale-like explanation for the experiment. The third group is encouraged to invent a 'spiritual' explanation

('spiritual' in the sense of religious or religious-like – not necessarily drawing on a specific religion but involving some kind of divinity or spiritual element). Finally, the fourth group should come up with an alternative scientific theory, differing from the first one. If it appears that this task is too difficult, the teacher may help this last group by having them read a short text about an alternative scientific theory instead, and then ask them to use this theory to explain the phenomenon.

In the next step, the teacher demonstrates a very simple experiment by holding up a pencil in the air and opening the hand. Experience tells us that the pencil would fall down to the floor. It is now the students' task to describe the witnessed phenomenon according to the instructions they have received. Each group, then, presents their explanation to the class. As a result, four different descriptions of the pencil-experiment are offered, only one of which is accepted by contemporary physics (namely, that gravitation causes the pencil to be attracted by the earth). The following examples for the other three explanations could serve as an inspiration for teachers or students, if needed: A creative, fairy-tale explanation could be that every time a person with a pencil in their hand opens their fingers, a tiny invisible flying goblin takes the pencil and carries it down to the floor. A 'spiritual' explanation could be that some kind of deity created pencils (and other material objects) in a way such that they fall to the ground, so that humans discover a world that works with regularity. An alternative scientific explanation could be that pencils (like other material objects) have an internal tendency (lying in the object itself) to shift to a place where their movement would stop because of some bigger object which could carry their weight. So, the pencil has the inner tendency to shift to the floor, which could carry its weight so that the movement of the pencil stops. To help the students with this alternative scientific theory, the teacher could hand out a text about Aristoteles' theory of four causes (e.g. a section of Falcon 2022: "Aristotle on Causality") as a description of a (pre-) scientific theory, in which Aristoteles argues that every object has an inner tendency to reach its natural aim (*causa finalis* or *final cause*). One could argue that besides the aim or *telos* of the pencil being used as a writing instrument, its *telos* is to rest on a surface that could carry its weight until moved by some intervention (like other material objects).

The next step would be to encourage the class to discuss whether one of the four explanations is somehow better than the others – and if so, why? The aim of the discussion is to let the students realize that, due to the underdetermination by empirical evidence, any of the four explanations could be used to describe the observed phenomenon, at least *prima facie*, if the explanations are logically possible and if one suspends the belief in commonly accepted physical laws. The puzzlement this insight triggers in the students constitutes a first shared and direct experience. The second experience students will make in what follows is that the search for a criterion of demarcation between scientific and non-scientific theories is much more difficult than it seems.

If the class is on board with this important first realization, the teacher is able to link this shared experience about different possible explanations to philosophical ideas and theories in the domain of Philosophy of Science. Here, different paths are feasible. For instance, one could connect the experience to theories of Bas van Fraassen, Pierre Duhem and Karl Popper, as will

be shown below. Regardless of whether the teacher decides to work with these or with other texts, we recommend that they be guided by the following two key questions:

1. What do philosophers have to say about the fact that more than one explanation for an observed (physical) phenomenon seem possible (underdetermination)?
2. If one knows about the underdetermination of scientific theories, how could one still decide which explanation seems to be 'better' or at least 'more scientific' than the others (search for a criterion of demarcation)?

This second point seems especially important in the age of fake news, conspiracy theories and distrust in scientific experts. While the shared experience outlined above and the philosophical considerations about underdetermination can be regarded as deconstructing the students' initial belief in the truth of scientific theories, this second step is needed to (re-)construct a deeper understanding of how science works and what makes scientific theories reliable in comparison to, e.g., fairytale-like or pseudo-scientific ones. If a teacher ignores this second question, some students might end up believing that science is nothing but storytelling and scientific theories are arbitrary.

4.2 Philosophical engagement with underdetermination and demarcation

One possible first step into Philosophy of Science is to introduce Bas van Fraassen's (1998: 1069, 1071-74) idea that the goal of science should be to formulate theories that are empirically adequate, that is, theories that contain only true statements about perceptible phenomena (directly perceivable with our senses) – and abstain from judgment concerning the existence of unobservable entities, like gravitation.

The teacher could now use this distinction to encourage the students to take another look at their four different descriptions of the pencil-experiment and analyze them in more detail: Which parts of their explanations contain perceivable phenomena and which parts assume the existence of certain, not directly observable entities? A reformulation of the commonly accepted scientific theory would thus clearly differentiate between the observed ("the experimenter held a pencil in their hand, opened it and the pencil moved to the floor") and the physical explanation, involving unobservable entities ("the assumed reason for the movement of the pencil is a not directly observable force, namely gravitation, which results in the attraction of the pencil by the earth").[10] In this process, it should become clear that the description of what was observable would be the same in all four explanations. Only the assumptions about the unobservable entities that *cause* the phenomenon would differ between the four versions. Thus, Van Fraassen's ideas and definition of an empirically adequate theory can be used to

[10] In the reformulation of the other three explanations, the part about the observed phenomena would be the same, while the assumed unobservable entities would differ. If one takes the aforementioned examples, the following unobservable entities would serve as explanations for the observed: the tiny, invisible, flying goblin (fairy-tale explanation), a deity which created the world involving certain regularities ('spiritual' explanation) and an inner tendency in material objects to shift to places where their movements come to an end (alternative scientific explanation).

demonstrate *why* different theories all seem to be able to explain the same phenomenon *prima facie*.

As a next step, the teacher proceeds to the very heart of the problem. The aim is here to make students realize that, as long as two different theories (or, in case of the pencil-experiment, four different ones) agree about the observed facts and only disagree about unobservable entities which explain those facts, it is possible that experiments alone are not able to decide between those theories. In order to properly understand this, the students could try to invent experiments, which would determine which of their initial theories was correct. Some theories seem to be consistent with new observations and experiments, although they are at odds with commonly believed physical explanations – e.g. that every time somebody opens their hand with a pencil in it, there is a tiny invisible flying goblin who takes the pencil and carries it to the ground.
This problem of underdetermination was identified amongst others by Pierre Duhem. Duhem (1991: 185, 187) argues that, even if one tries to test a single hypothesis or theory, it will not be possible to test that hypothesis (or theory) alone. In fact, in an experimental setting, a theory will always be interconnected with other theories and assumptions. The commonly accepted physical explanation for the pencil-experiment is intertwined with assumptions about gravitation as a fundamental force. At the same time, an explanation about an invisible goblin would assume the existence of such creatures and their role in making pencils fall to the ground. The class is now able to conclude with Duhem that experiments alone cannot determine which of two (or more) empirically adequate theories is correct – as long as both theories fit the observed phenomena.

Yet, this conclusion seems highly unsatisfactory – after all, science should be able to find explanations that the public usually accepts as true, quite unlike stories about invisible goblins. So, how can one decide which theory better captures the observed phenomenon, while being aware of unobservable entities (Van Fraassen 1998) and the problem of underdetermination (Duhem 1991)? Here, a famous answer is given by Karl Popper – an answer which allows us to decide at least between scientific and non- or pseudo-scientific theories. Popper's main point is that scientific theories are formulated in a way that allows to experimentally show that they do not meet their predictions (1985: 122) – while non- or pseudo-scientific theories lack this possibility and thus could always be "compatible with everything that could happen" (1985: 128). Here, it is important to note that there seems to be a tension between Popper's main point and Duhem's claim that an experiment that does not fulfill the expectations could never clearly show which part of a scientific theory or hypothesis is false. While this tension cannot be fully resolved, one can still try to bring the two approaches into accordance by focusing on Popper's aim to find a criterion for the demarcation between scientific and non- or pseudo-scientific theories (instead of trying to find a criterion to decide why a specific scientific theory did not fulfill the predictions).

So, according to Popper, the important difference between a scientific and a non- or pseudo-scientific hypothesis or theory is that only a scientific theory allows for the derivation of predictions that could *possibly* clash with future observations. Non- and pseudo-scientific theories, by contrast, could always be interpreted or reformulated in a way that matches new observations. In other words, only a scientific hypothesis or theory would truly meet the

challenge posed by Duhem: that an experiment shows something that was not predicted, which, in turn, shows that *something* with the initial scientific assumptions was wrong (even though, according to Duhem, one is not ultimately able to decide which particular aspect of it).

Thus, a scientific theory like the theory of gravitation could *in principle* be proven not to fulfill the predictions by future experiments: if the pencil suddenly stopped in mid-air, the concept of gravitation would become questionable. However, the theory of the invisible goblin could easily be modified by saying that the goblin sometimes chooses to not carry the pencil to the ground – so this theory could be adapted to become compatible with *any* future observation, thus rendering it non-scientific in Popper's understanding. As a last step, the class could test their four theories against Popper's criterion – and find out if both "scientific" theories (the usually accepted and the invented one) meet his criterion. If so, it would become clear that the decision between those two theories is somehow undetermined – while the fairy-tale and spiritual explanations can be ruled out as non-scientific.

Altogether, the shared experience in class described in the beginning could be the starting point for students to question and reflect upon their initial beliefs about scientific theories – and Popper's criterion for demarcation could (for the moment being) serve as a helpful reference point for delivering at least one quality feature that all scientific theories (ideally) share.

5 Righteous indignation and freedom of speech

Most of our fellow citizens believe in freedom of speech; indeed, we accept it as a given fact of life. We consider ourselves free to express our views and opinions, and we accept that others, including a free press, are free to do likewise.

More than just a way of sharing personal feelings, public criticism has proven a powerful political instrument and plays a key role in democratic societies. However, a quick look at actual political developments and into history shows that freedom of speech cannot be taken for granted. Throughout the history of philosophy, we meet fierce battles and powerful arguments for (and against) the right to speak freely. Not few of them were born out of personal experience of censorship and political repression.

This exercise is designed to give students the experience of being censored and hindered from expressing themselves freely by an institutional authority – the teacher[11]. *L'État, c'est moi!* The goal is to let them understand first-hand what has led philosophers to engage with freedom of speech in the first place, to motivate them to build their own arguments and to critically engage with philosophical literature on the issue.

5.1 Procedure

The exercise is a three-step process that can be adapted to the respective level, content and time frame of the course.

In the first step ("muzzle the critics!"), the teacher has the students write and submit an opinion essay on a specific question of choice, telling the students that the objective is to collect ideas and transform them into a joint contribution. Important is that the topic promises polarizing opinions and a strong personal involvement by the students, e.g., "Is our school a

[11] Our special thanks go to Snezana Rajic, who originally came up with the idea for this exercise.

good educational institution?", "Are the school rules fair?", "Does your school respond to students' needs and interests?". The teacher should encourage students to express their views openly and instruct them to submit their text anonymously using a pseudonym. Once the essays have been collected, the teacher transforms them into one single document, e.g. a newspaper article that cites students under their pseudonyms. However, particularly critical statements are left out and/or are considerably weakened. One may also add a 'biased' conclusion that downplays the criticism and emphasizes the positive aspects.

As a second step ("let the people rage!"), the students are handed out the censored article in class. They should have enough time to read, find their own contribution and notice the censorship. Some of them will perhaps protest or ask for an explanation. The teacher then "justifies" the censorship making arguments against freedom of speech (by saying, e.g., that one should not badmouth the institution, that it is not nice to say nasty things about other people's work, that it is better for our mental health to focus on what is positive, or that we must weed out negative comments and false beliefs before they spread). The goal is to provoke feelings of 'righteous indignation' in the students and to motivate them to defend their right to express their opinion freely. Once the students experience feelings of anger and being wronged, it is the teacher's task to facilitate the passage from their emotional engagement with the topic to a theoretical, critically reflective one. Depending on the students' ability and willingness to do so, this could be achieved, e.g., by engaging them in a conversation or by assuming the role of an *advocatus diaboli* to get them into discussion.[12]

By the end of this class, students should have moved from the experience of being censored and the emotional reaction it entailed to a state where they start to reflect on the topic more generally. They should understand that their mere wish to express themselves freely, or their anger about being censored, is not enough to justify such a right theoretically. Arguments are needed. The subsequent classes will be dedicated to developing such arguments, doing some conceptual work and engaging with philosophical literature on freedom of speech.

The third and major step ("make the rebels philosophers!") consists in engaging with freedom of speech as a topic in political and moral philosophy. The choice of material will depend on the teacher's preferred approach (historical or contemporary sources, or both), the time frame of the course, and the performance level and skills of the students. In what follows, we will present three historical texts by three authors – Milton, Kant and Mill – and make further suggestions on contemporary literature for more advanced students.

5.2 Philosophical engagement with freedom of speech

Regardless of the choice of materials for the following lesson, we recommend to begin the lesson by reactivating the students' reflections from Step 2 (Why is freedom of speech important?) and link them to conceptual clarifications and differentiations from related concepts, such as freedom of thought, conscience and religion, press freedom (the right to publish), as well as the difference between pre-censorship and post-censorship (in democratic societies it is mostly the latter we are concerned with).

[12] Alternatively, students can work in pairs to come up with arguments for the joint discussion in the end.

This can be realized before or while engaging with philosophical literature on the issue. In what follows, we will outline the main points and arguments on free speech in the following three texts: (1) John Milton's *Areopagitica,* (2) Immanuel Kant's "What is Enlightenment?", and (3) John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*.

We have chosen the three texts firstly because they are classics in the history of philosophy, and secondly because they address different aspects of the philosophical discourse on freedom of speech – as explained below. Students should understand that albeit important, freedom of speech is not a 'value in itself' but a 'package deal of social goods' that makes appeal to and negotiates between different – and often competing – ideals, such as autonomy, privacy, security, equality, liberty, the prevention of harm. As notes Haworth (1998), free speech is not something we have or owe in the same way as we possess arms and legs, but, as suggest Fish, a political prize we accept to pay (1994: 102). A sensible discussion on the issue is therefore not about whether, but to what extent we should grant or limit freedom of speech. Paradigmatic negative examples that make this compromise character more apparent are, for instance, hate speech, slander or pornography.

Among history's most impassioned philosophical defences of the principle of a right to freedom of speech, the *Areopagitica* offers not only compelling arguments on freedom of speech that "laid the foundations for thought that would come after and express itself in such authors as John Locke and John Stuart Mill" (Willmoore 1960), it also constitutes an example of what Milton is advocating for. Appealing to English Parliament to repeal the ordinance of 1643 subjecting all publications to pre-censorship, Milton points out that bringing forth complaints before the Parliament is – and should be seen – a matter of civil liberty and loyalty. Milton defends free speech as the absence of any censorship because it is, as he intends to show, counter-productive. Consequently, he does not refer to freedom of speech as an individual right a person has, but as a question of method for dealing with pluralism of opinion, the spreading of untruths, and polemics.

In his speech, Milton pursues two main strategies. First, he makes arguments why there must be a right to free speech. Second, he counters and refutes common objections to such a right, such as the weakening of state authority or the decline of morality. Both are based on two main claims: (i) censorship is antithetical to a free and democratic society, and (ii) censorship is antithetical to the advancement of knowledge. He thus offers a consequentialist defence of freedom of speech that makes appeal to both epistemological and political concerns, not seldom by pointing to the connection between the two. A concise treatment of his four arguments, along with reflections on how they can be made fruitful in today's context, is offered by Sullivan (2006). When it comes to limiting free speech, he makes a telling proposal that comes close to the way democratic societies operate today: every publication should contain the names of its authors and the printer and can be subjected to post-censorship if necessary.[13]

Unlike Milton, who justifies freedom of speech in terms of the state's handling of pluralism of opinion and intellectual progress, Kant's essay "What is Enlightenment?" focuses on

[13] While this appears to be a good way of dealing with free speech in the realm of science, it is worth highlighting that this might not be an effective measure for dealing with false opinions about people and their actions (slander). Especially in the era of the internet and social media, such opinions tend to 'linger on', even after the original publication has been deleted.

individuals as free and moral agents. In order to free themselves from their "self-inflicted immaturity", people must have the opportunity to make public use of their own reason. Kant's essay is particularly interesting because he not only advocates freedom of speech, but also ties such a right in with reflections on autonomy and the idea of "self-legislation" of the responsible and free agent. For Kant, the "making public use of one's reason" consists in there being no restriction on the topics that are discussed in public. In order to think for oneself and not be patronized, it is necessary to be able to express doubt and criticism in all matters.

Freedom of speech in Kant can thus be understood as a vehicle and real possibility condition for the Enlightenment that is based on his conception of (i) human beings as "reasonable creatures", and (ii) the steady improvement of state conditions through the public use of reason by enlightened people. What makes humans essentially different from other animals is free will: their ability to think and set goals for themselves. He infers that they must have the right to live according to this nature. Censorship and repression of free speech stand in the way of such freedom because they make people coward and idle. By threat of punishment, they have led to people being afraid to use their reason (cowardice). Over time, they have created a culture where people have become accustomed to being patronised and not taking responsibility for their own thoughts and actions (idleness).

In order to take up their moral responsibility as free agents and actively engage in the improvement of state and society, people must overcome these vices, make use of their reason, and participate in public discourse. This can only be realised if there is no reason to be afraid of or excused from speaking one's own mind. However, Kant imposes two important limits to freedom of speech by distinguishing (i) between the public vs. the private use of reason[14] and (ii) the freedom to speak vs. the freedom to act accordingly (i.e. complaining vs. revolting). In both cases only the former is granted.

Strongly influenced by both Milton's speech and Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian ethics, Mill's *On Liberty* is to this day considered the most important historical reference source in philosophical treatises of freedom of speech. Unlike Kant, Mill is not primarily concerned with the extent to which the freedom of the individual may be restricted by the state, but with the censorship exercised by societal oppression in the form of social pressure, informal customs and norms of decency. He defends freedom of speech in a liberal context from a utilitarian viewpoint by discussing three different scenarios in which an opinion is expressed that differs from the prevailing view and shows that, regardless of the truth of this opinion, granting freedom of speech is beneficial to society overall.

In the first case, he takes up Milton's argument of fallibility. In a case where the prevailing opinion is false and the suppressed opinion is true, it is essential that the latter is expressed. The same is true for the second case, where the suppressed opinion contains partial truths. Finally,

[14] Using a somewhat counter-intuitive terminology, Kant makes clear that freedom of speech comes with a political prize: controversy and pluralism of opinions often creates insecurity and instability. In the case of what he calls "public use of reason", where *people as free citizens* publicly speak their mind, it is a prize worth paying since it is the only way to constantly improve community life. However, in cases where persons hold public offices (e.g. officials), they must subordinate themselves to the functionality of the institution in order to maintain public order and refrain from speaking their own, private mind ("private use of reason"). Kant understands by freedom of speech only the public use of reason, and not the private one.

even if the opinion is clearly false and the prevailing view is true, the former is useful to help justify the truth of the latter (Mill understands "truth" as justified true belief).

The only restriction on freedom of speech is justified by the harm principle. Restrictions are legitimate if they serve to protect the welfare and interests of third parties. This principle does not apply to speech itself. However, if speech takes on "a character of action", it can fall within this scope. Mill gives two example cases where freedom of speech should be restricted: In cases of harassment[15] and incitement to crime.

There is a wide body of contemporary literature on freedom of speech that may be of further interest, especially for more advanced students. A concise overview of approaches and articles is provided by Van Mill (2021).

6 Do you dare to bore your students?

The following teaching concept takes as a starting point a shared experience of boredom. Out of this experience, the teacher initiates a joint reflection on this inner state that entails some stimulating philosophical insights into boredom and its existential significance.

6.1 Boring students on purpose

The starting point is a writing exercise that places students in a state of boredom. The exercise should be designed in such a way that the boredom is brought about by the low level of difficulty of the task and the long duration of the exercise. We suggest an easy multiple-choice-kind of exercise: for example, the students are given a short text about the life of the philosophers who shall be discussed later and have to fill in a cloze on the issue.

After a while, the students will most likely become restive or start asking questions, trying to get the teacher to move on. It is now up to the teacher to make sure that the students are bored and 'alone with themselves'. They are not supposed to talk to one another or do something else. After a much too long time has passed, the students are asked to share their impression of the exercise. They may talk about the task being too easy or pointless or complain that the exercise lasted too long. Maybe some of them already come up with the term "boredom".

Afterwards, the teacher reveals to the students the philosophical background of the task. Thinking about boredom philosophically means developing an increasing awareness of this inner state and at the same time asking (oneself) questions about its possible meaning and implications. The students may be asked to think about what boredom actually is, where it begins and ends. The teacher may ask them to pinpoint when and how the boredom became noticeable to them by helping them recognize and formulate their perceptions, emotions and thoughts related to this "we-experience" of boredom.

As a further step, the teacher can introduce philosophical ideas and definitions of boredom and use these thoughts for discussing the issue further. The aim is to help students reflect on a possible existential dimension of boredom.

[15] For example, one is free not to read a book or a letter. This possibility of evasion must be given in the context of freedom of speech (e.g. one must not be persecuted by people who tell one something one does not want to hear).

6.2 Philosophical perspectives on boredom

Which philosophers, texts, and ideas will be introduced at this stage depends on the kind of "we-experience" previously made in class and on the points raised by the students in the discussion. The general aim is to encourage students to see their own experiences in the light of philosophical concepts. Doing so, they achieve new perspectives on boredom.

One philosopher the teacher may want to relate to is Immanuel Kant. In the discussion, the students may have said that nothing is worse than doing nothing. But would they even prefer to do hard work, instead? Would they rather read some difficult philosophical text? Would they be willing to carry out an analysis of arguments or write an essay? Finally, the teacher may ask the students: "Why would you do all that? What are you doing this work for?" This is where Kant holds an argument. He defines boredom as "void of sensations", or "presentiment of a slow death" (Kant 2006: 129) and concludes that its essential characteristic is that it has to be overcome. According to Kant, boredom makes life a burden. However, he does not think that life is all about pleasure and leisure. Kant advocates for work instead. While working, one occasionally has time to enjoy things in small quantities. In this way, boredom is overcome, and some delight remains for the rest of one's life. (Kant 2006: 133)

Alternatively, the teacher may ask the students to mention some famous people whom they find boring. A good idea might be to ask what it is, exactly, that makes these people, in their eyes, boring, and create a mind-map with these characteristics – e.g., "not edgy", "always nice", "never complains", "does everything right" etc. At the end, the teacher may ask: "Would you rather be watching the life of a person who always acts in a morally good way or of someone who sometimes fails in this respect?" This aspect of boredom is addressed by the German philosopher Roland Lambrecht. Lambrecht speaks of the good as "something boring". He argues that imperfections or danger are much more appealing to us humans. They leave room for action, for hope, and for being thrilled. (Lambrecht 1996: 218) The German philosopher Martin Seel argues in a similar way in his so-called "Bogart-Theorem". He points out that being entirely good is not as interesting (and even not as aspirational!) as being only partially good, like Humphrey Bogart in his films. (Seel 1997: 113-17)

A further possible didactical path opens up a more existential dimension of boredom. After the we-experience of being bored, the teacher may write on the blackboard: "Necessity is the mother of invention" and ask the students to explain this saying. This leads up to the question about whether they invented sources of amusement out of the necessity of not being bored. In this sense, the students are asked to show or tell what they 'invented' to avoid boredom. Maybe they were drawing something or wondering about something in the classroom they had never noticed before. This is an aspect of boredom which the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard discusses in *Either/Or*. There, he develops an "aesthetic", hedonistic view of life which he exemplifies in the writings of a young man named *A*.

In the words of *A*, Kierkegaard describes boredom as something essentially human. The aesthetician *A* claims that the greatest good for humans is to laze around and enjoy it, while animals always have to be occupied. Life should not be business: someone who falls in love or admires a piece of art is living fully but is not 'busy'. (Kierkegaard 2013: 288-290) Kierkegaard also employs the distinction between boredom and idleness: while boredom is "the root of all

evil", idleness is identified as the true good (Kierkegaard 2013: 289). In contrast to Kant, Kierkegaard thinks that only idleness can be annulled by work, for the busiest people usually are the most boring too. (Kierkegaard 2013: 290)

The way out of boredom is then not just to have fun. According to *A*, it is *change* that does the job. *A* puts forward the method of "crops rotation": this is a metaphor from agriculture and, generally, it means bringing about a change in routine in order to escape boredom. However, never ending change is not the most effective solution to boredom. So, *A* suggests the "principle of limitation": The more we are limited, the more resourceful we become. Kierkegaard gives the example of schooling: The students are bored by their teacher, and all of a sudden, they see sources of amusement all around them. When bored, one becomes a careful observer who enjoys watching a fly, listening to the dripping of rain or playing with a piece of paper. (Kierkegaard 2013: 291-292)

Let us go back for a moment to the idea of boredom as the root of all evil. *A* is fascinated by the fact that boredom, which itself has a "calm nature", has such power over people. Boredom is the driving force that, from the very beginning, has caused the world to develop and evolve, and at the same time to become worse and worse:

> The gods were bored; therefore [sic!] they created human beings. Adam was bored because he was alone; therefore [sic!] Eve was created. Since that moment, boredom entered the world and grew in quantity in exact proportion to the growth of population. (Kierkegaard 2013: 286)

This is the beginning of a sequence in Kierkegaard's text that may be interesting to read in class. It tells a quite peculiar story of the origin of the world as embedded in boredom.

Another philosopher who opens up an existential dimension of boredom is Blaise Pascal. Actually, in the English translation of *Pensées*, he does not speak of "boredom", but of "weariness". When not feeling or doing anything, humans become aware of their finite condition and deficiency, which makes them feel sorrow and despair. This unbearable feeling essentially defines the human condition, and it results in melancholy. (Pascal 1901: 41)

Aware of their own misery, Pascal goes on, all humans are in search for happiness. Nevertheless, they do not know how to find it and, therefore, mainly try not to think about their own finiteness. Accordingly, the only way to fight boredom is distraction, which is itself dangerous, because it distracts one from oneself. From Pascal's point of view, humans are aware of their lost happiness; however, true happiness is to be found neither in external things and nor in oneself, but only in God. (Pascal 1901: 39-40)

Independently of the content the teacher chooses for the lesson, we recommend asking the students along the way to compare their own experience in all its concreteness with the philosophical theories discussed.

Summing up, this teaching concept starts with a "we-experience" that is, on the one hand, quite familiar: Young people are confronted with boredom only too often and especially at school. On the other hand, to bore them on purpose creates a carefully intended irritation that promises to be a good starting point for changing their perspectives on and conception of boredom in the future.

7 Concluding remarks

Teachers are often recommended to relate the contents of their lessons to the life experience of their students. In this paper, we have presented a didactical approach, the "TWEEX approach", that suggests a new, original way to do this. It relies on the concept of "we-experience" as it has recently been developed in Phenomenology and Social Ontology. According to this concept, joint experiences ("we-experiences") display four special features: simultaneity, reciprocal awareness, sense of togetherness and emotional connotation (see §1). Experiences shared in class can easily be designed to show these features.

In this paper, we have presented four different applications of the TWEEX approach. They have in common the idea of designing a "we-experience" as a starting point for introducing students to philosophical contents. In contrast to purely abstract reflection on a philosophical topic, they are thought-provoking in an immediate sense: students jointly experience something that irritates them in their ordinary thinking about the respective topic and are thereby spontaneously stimulated to reflect on it. In this way, the TWEEX approach builds on wonder as the starting point of philosophy, which makes apparent both the relevance and authenticity of the philosophical discussion that follows. Finally, joint experience enables joint reflection in that it serves as a better reference point than purely individual experience.

The four teaching concepts we have presented deal with very different philosophical subjects: Ancient Philosophy, Phenomenology, the nature of scientific theories, freedom of speech, and boredom as an aesthetic and existential experience. This variety is meant to show the broad range of applicability of the TWEEX approach. Each teaching concept consists of a general outline and provides suggestions for different possibilities for adaptation to different curricula, learners, and preferences of the teacher. The TWEEX approach is particularly useful in school and undergraduate teaching, where students' need to relate the philosophical contents to experience is particularly strong.

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