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PHILOSOPHIZING AS A PRAXIS OF VARIATION: A CONTRIBUTION TO A THEORY OF THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY IN PHILOSOPHY EDUCATION

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Abstract

The article argues that, prior to asking particular questions concerning what the history of philosophy's relevance for philosophy teaching at the pre-university level is, we first need a reference theory to explain the relationship between philosophizing and the history of philosophy in general. Only after that can it prove to be useful to think about the ways this knowledge can be made suitable in the context of philosophy education. The article traces the underlying metaphilosophical problem back to Hegel´s philosophy of the history of philosophy. But, due to theoretical shortcomings as well as practical constraints by the praxis of teaching philosophy, his theory turns out to be unfeasible. Subsequently, the article proposes to understand the praxis of philosophizing and the history of philosophy as two aspects of a structurally unified play of variations. In developing this thesis, the article deploys Jan Assmann's Theory of Cultural Memory as well as Hans Blumenberg's theory and practice of history of philosophy.

Keywords: History of Philosophy, Philosophy Education, Variation, Theory of Cultural Memory, Hegel, Blumenberg

1. Introduction

This article discusses the relationship between philosophy education (at the pre-university level) and the history of philosophy. Starting point is the educational question on which

grounds the history of philosophy can or should be incorporated into the philosophy classroom. The article mainly argues for the metaphilosophical thesis that philosophizing and the history of philosophy should be seen as two aspects of a structurally unified play of variations. On such an account, the history of philosophy is not something that can be brought into the classroom on a supplementary, optional basis, as if it were something external to the subject. Rather, the pupils are drawn into this play of variations, becoming participants in the history of philosophy to the extent that they actually do philosophy in the classroom. Consequently, the history of philosophy is unfinished in a double sense: Not only does it – self-evidently – ever come to a chronological end or lead to fixed results, but it also is unfinished in the sense of being open, approachable and accessible.

In what follows, one of the goals will be to explain the relationship between philosophy education and the history of philosophy in a way that works at a more fundamental level than any possible dichotomy of doing philosophy in either a "systematic" or "historical" mode. As we attempt to show, one of the advantages of thinking in terms of variation is that it enables us to bring into view the preexisting relationship between receptivity and productivity of philosophizing. With the help of this approach, in our view, seemingly opposed understandings of what it means to do philosophy can be made intelligible as second-order differences in emphasis.

To begin with, we will present our metaphilosophical thesis concerning philosophizing in general, and our subsequent conclusions about philosophy education will also mostly remain at the level of basic principles. At the same time, we offer a contribution to a "theory of philosophy education" in the strict sense insofar as the theoretical gap to be filled, the question to be posed as a consequence of this gap, and the criteria a successful theory has to meet all arise out of the scholarship of philosophy education.

1.1. The Theoretical Gap to Be Filled

We suppose that the majority of specialists in philosophy education today would agree that the history of philosophy "belongs" in the philosophy classroom in some way. The old demarcation between historical and systematic philosophers, which came repeatedly under scrutiny within scholarly debate and academic politics in recent decades and which continued to play an important role in German-language philosophy education[1] since the Martens-Rehfus debate of the 1980s,[2] appears to have, for the most part, given way to a pragmatic consensus in

[1] All German language quotations for which no English translation is available have been translated for the purposes of this article.

[2] Cf. for an overview of this debate Rohbeck 2022: 115.

current teaching practice at schools and universities.[3] This consensus – to the extent that it exists – nevertheless lacks a theoretical and conceptual foundation. For what purpose could or should the history of philosophy be incorporated into the framework of, e.g., problem-oriented philosophy instruction? Is such an incorporation merely optional because it happens to be useful, or is it constitutive? Some implicit answers to these questions can be found in the philosophy education discourse, but up to now there has been scarcely any targeted discussion on a theoretical and conceptual level which goes beyond methodological suggestions. However, the 2023 establishment of the working group "History of Philosophy and Philosophy Education" ("Philosophiegeschichte und -didaktik") and the organisation of an eponymous conference by the Gesellschaft für Philosophie- und Ethikdidaktik (Society for Philosophy and Ethics Education) in March 2024 show that the relevance of the topic and the existing need for for further research have meanwhile come to be recognized.

The theoretical gap is thus constituted by the fact that the observed implicit and pragmatic consensus that the history of philosophy should somehow be part of philosophy education lacks an articulated theoretical justification. Yet any attempt to answer the questions of why and how precisely the history of philosophy should be incorporated requires a prior theoretical clarification of the relationship between the teaching of philosophy and the history of philosophy.

1.2. Criteria

In order to be able to characterize the relationship between teaching philosophy and the history of philosophy, we need a metaphilosophical reference theory, but in many cases, the scholarly debates (and the academic politics) about the relationship between philosophy and the history of philosophy can only be adapted to our purposes to a limited extent.[4] This is the case, for example, when philosophy is understood in these debates exclusively as an academic, scholarly discipline. Moreover, philosophy education has to be very cautious about favoring one position over another specific conception of philosophy, something which may be legitimate and appropriate in scholarly debate. Finally, and this is the most important point, the scholarly discipline's widespread understanding of the history of philosophy as a *history of ideas* is in

[3] Along these lines, Rohbeck (2016, 41) summarizes the situation as follows: "No one wishes any longer to dispense with the elements of the other side. Just as really understanding a text presupposes an independent formulation of the problem, so also every classroom conversation, if it is not to remain at the level of vague generalities, has to bring in philosophical texts."

[4] For an overview of the scholarly controversy, see the following relevant collective volumes: Rée et al. 1978; Rorty et. al. 1984; Hare 1988; Boss 1994; Sorell / Rogers 2005; Cesalli et al. 2017 (Studia philosophica 76). Bertold's 2011 study also summarizes the debates in the German-speaking area up to that time.

our view not an appropriate foundation for philosophy education. Briefly put, a history of philosophy that is understood as a *static object* will always ultimately remain a conceptually foreign body within the *dynamic event* of philosophy teaching. For this reason, a reference theory for philosophy education, that is, one that takes the classroom as its starting point, has to be centred on *actually doing philosophy* or *philosophizing* (we use both expressions in the same sense). As we will see, it makes a difference whether we consider the relationship between the history of philosophy and *philosophy* as an academic, scholarly *discipline* or *doing philosophy* as an *activity*. The following reflections on the relationship between doing philosophy and the history of philosophy are therefore offered from the perspective of *doing philosophy as a praxis*.[5]

Moreover, a reference theory about the relationship between philosophy education and the history of philosophy also has to meet the following criteria drawn from the specific theoretical needs of the discipline of education:

a) It should be based on the weakest possible philosophical prerequisites and should avoid as far as possible privileging particular philosophical currents.

b) Where the classroom is concerned, it should not aim at or imply an unproductive standardization of the "right" way of philosophizing, the "right" way of incorporating the history of philosophy, or the "right" selection of texts to be read.

c) It should be practical in two senses; that is, it should both prove useful in the retrospective description of what happens in the classroom and provide a helpful reference point for prospective lesson planning.

1.3. Methodology

First, we will formulate the problem more precisely through a brief look at Hegel's philosophy of the history of philosophy (2). Next, we will discuss several examples of current strategies for dealing with this problem (3). Then, in the main part of the article, we will develop our metaphilosophical thesis on the foundation of Jan Assmann's theory of "cultural memory," from which we take the idea of doing philosophy as composing variations (4). As the basis for a metaphilosophical reference theory, however, this is only a building block in need of supplementation. So, in the subsequent section, we will use Hans Blumenberg's theory and praxis of the history of philosophy as an example of how our thesis can not only be made more concrete and more easily visualized but also given greater substantive depth (5).

[5] We use 'praxis' here in a broad sense to characterize philosophizing as an activity, without thereby intending to identify it as a praxis in the strict sense in which *praxis* is opposed to *poiesis*.

2. Formulating the Problem More Precisely Based on Hegel's Theory of the History of Philosophy

The question about the relationship between doing philosophy and the history of philosophy, as we will now make clear, points to the more fundamental question, whether we should see the two as a *duality* that has to somehow be brought together into a unified whole or as a preexisting *unity* within which we simply distinguish two (always interconnected) aspects. We will illustrate this by looking at Hegel's theory of the history of philosophy:[6] On the one hand, he postulates that historical and systematic ways of doing philosophy are unified in their results. On the other hand, he draws what appears to be an almost uncrossable border between them on the philosophical map, traces of which can still be found in philosophy and philosophy education today.[7]

As is well known, Hegel sees the history of philosophy as far more than a component of the knowledge to be attained by a well-educated, cultivated person; rather, for him, engagement with this history is itself philosophy in the emphatic sense of "Wissenschaft." In Hegel's words, "the study of the history of Philosophy is the study of Philosophy itself" (Hegel 1995: 30). And again:

> Such knowledge is […] not learning merely, or a knowledge of what is dead, buried and corrupt: the history of Philosophy has not to do with what is gone, but with the living present. (Hegel 1995: 39)

Hegel thus categorically granted a title of nobility to the engagement with the history of philosophy as a genuinely philosophical activity. At the same time, though, he introduced a strict bifurcation between two "modes of manifestation" (Hegel 1995: 29) of philosophy, distinguishing between philosophy's manifestation as "sequence in the systems of Philosophy in History" and its manifestation as "sequence in the logical deduction of the Notion-determinations in the Idea" (Hegel 1995: 30). This second manifestation of philosophy, as "unhistorical," systematic, constructive reflection of the kind Hegel himself claimed to pursue

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[6] There is broad agreement that even if Hegel did not found the philosophy of the history of philosophy, he elevated it to a previously unattained level of reflection, so that subsequent theoretical approaches, not only nineteenth-century ones, take his conception as their starting point (cf. on this, e.g., Geldsetzer 1968, Schneider 2007, and on the philosophy of history in general Schnädelbach 1974; for twentieth-century developments Bertold 2011). Engagement with Hegel remains central even in systematic studies of the topic in this century (e.g., Angehrn 2003; Stekeler-Weithofer 2006).

[7] For a concise overview of the set of issues we sketch below, see Angehrn 2014: 206–214.

in the *Science of Logic*, is not only substantively autonomous from the study of philosophy as "sequence in the systems of Philosophy in History" (ibid.). For Hegel, a systematic study is also chronologically prior to the historical study of philosophy within a possible subjective philosophical process of cognition. Both conclusions follow from the fact that in order to study the history of philosophy, already possessing "knowledge of the Idea is absolutely essential" (Hegel 1995: 30f.).[8] It is also clear, as a result, that for Hegel, the active and productive moment of philosophizing is primarily found on the side of philosophy as a logical discipline, while the study of the history of philosophy, even if it has the advantage for teaching of sometimes offering an attractive "spectacle" ("Schauspiel"; Hegel 1971: 48), is in the last analysis, from the perspective of someone who has gone through it, merely something that the person philosophizing has to *retrace*. A further consequence of this bifurcation is that Hegel also tends to oppose reviving and updating philosophical models from earlier ages. For example, he says about studying earlier, especially ancient, philosophy for the purpose of reviving it:

> Satisfaction is found in them to a certain extent only. We must know in ancient philosophy or in the philosophy of any given period, what we are going to look for. Or at least we must know that in such a philosophy there is before us a definite stage in the development of thought, and in it those forms and necessities of Mind which lie within the limits of that stage alone are brought into existence. There slumber in the Mind of modern times ideas more profound which require for their awakening other surroundings and another present than the abstract, dim, grey thought of olden times. (Hegel 1995: 48)

As we can see, Hegel does affirm the substantive unity of the history of philosophy and systematic philosophy (and tries to demonstrate it in his lectures on the history of philosophy), but he also undertakes a thorough bifurcation in his philosophical praxis (and related theory).

A theory of the philosophy of history from the perspective of philosophy education, however, cannot adopt Hegel's assumption that these two ways of doing philosophy, divided in practice, coincide *in their results* as a consequence of the unity of reason: The necessary prerequisite of the teleological course of the history of philosophy is too strong a metaphysical framework assumption. In addition, the assumption of a linear course of history is likely to lead to an educationally unproductive standardization and hierarchization among the various styles

[8] "But in order to obtain a knowledge of its progress as the development of the Idea in the empirical, external form in which Philosophy appears in History, a corresponding knowledge of the Idea is absolutely essential, just as in judging of human affairs one must have a conception of that which is right and fitting. Else, indeed, as in so many histories of Philosophy, there is presented to the vision devoid of idea, only a disarranged collection of opinions." (Hegel 1995: 30f.)

of philosophizing. Due consideration of the empirical multiplicity of voices in the history of philosophy outside of canonical "turning points in philosophical development" (Fulda 2007:9) will also scarcely be possible on such a basis.

At this stage of our problem, after "inheriting" from Hegel the practical bifurcation of two ways of doing philosophy without being able, like Hegel, to metaphysically reconcile both sides in the end, there appear to be only three options to continue:

1. We give up the assertion of the unity of philosophy that Hegel articulated (understood here as the unity of doing philosophy and engaging with the history of philosophy) and accept the fundamentally unbridgeable duality of these two modes.

2. We maintain this assertion and the thorough practical bifurcation and look for another basis on which to establish the unity of philosophy.

3. We maintain the assertion of the unity of philosophy but give up the conviction that the practical bifurcation is fundamental and justified.

These three options allow us to classify possible answers to the question on which basis to incorporate the history of philosophy into the philosophy classroom from a systematic perspective. We will next consider three conceivable strategies for establishing such a basis that can be classified under options 1 and 2, before we will argue for choosing option three.

3. Three Possible Strategies from Philosophy Education[9]

3.1. Secondary Goals of Philosophy Teaching

An answer following this strategy might go something like this: "It is true that knowing the history of philosophy is not absolutely useful or required to do philosophy, but acquiring a philosophical education traditionally includes more than the sheer ability to do philosophy." A look at examination practices at schools and universities and the importance that was long ascribed to knowing the history of philosophy in those exams suggests that such an argument, framed in terms of theories about what it means to be a well-educated person, is at least not an obviously mistaken one. In terms of the classification outlined above, it clearly belongs under the resigned option 1: We make no attempt to consider doing philosophy and knowing the history of philosophy from a single conceptual and educational perspective, and we assign two independent goals to philosophy instruction: teaching how to do philosophy and transmitting

[9] The following reflections serve to show that three initially plausible and attractive strategies are not conducive to the purpose from a systematic perspective. We present the three strategies alongside one another in schematic form and do not claim that they represent the views of particular philosophy educators or groups. For this reason, we refrain in this section from documenting the relevance of each view by corresponding literature citations.

a particular body of knowledge seen as culturally significant. The extent to which these two goals can be pursued together or only separately in practice will ultimately remain an incidental consideration under this set of assumptions.

3.2. Usefulness Arguments

By nature, strategies that emphasize the usefulness of knowing the history of philosophy take an *accumulative* approach: "Knowing the history of philosophy can be helpful for philosophizing in many ways. We are better able to locate particular philosophical positions in their historical context and may therefore understand them better; we know and understand the historical background of current debates; we learn from great philosophical models how to formulate precise and exact arguments." For simplicity's sake, these and many other conceivable usefulness arguments can be reduced to the following claim: knowing the history of philosophy contributes to *improving* the ability to do philosophy. Scarcely anyone would seriously dispute this claim. Nevertheless, there are reasons to resist basing the explanation of why the history of philosophy "belongs" with doing philosophy exclusively or even mainly on usefulness arguments. In terms of the classification outlined above, this strategy falls between options 1 and 2: If knowing the history of philosophy is not required for philosophizing but merely useful, the practical bifurcation of philosophy is acknowledged as a matter of principle. However, usefulness in itself, as a positive characterization of the relationship between knowing the history of philosophy and philosophizing, scarcely provides a stable bridge toward solving the problem of the unity of philosophy along the lines of option 2. Because every conceivable usefulness argument must consider whether the desired usefulness might not be obtained in some other way, and possibly in a more targeted or efficient one,[10] usefulness arguments always remain subject to well-founded doubts concerning their validity. In the worst case, a string of such arguments might even come across as an evasive rhetorical manoeuvre aimed at covering up the lack of a sound foundation.

3.3. Eternalism

The characterization of this strategy is taken from a presentation by Manuel Lorenz.[11] Briefly summarized, eternalism sees philosophy as a discipline that concerns itself with timelessly

[10] An argument against the assumption that engagement with the history of philosophy is especially useful for doing philosophy is found in Sauer 2022.

[11] Presentation on this topic at the 2023 annual conference of the Gesellschaft für Philosophie- und Ethikdidaktik.

relevant problems arising from determinate, unchangeable, anthropological basic structures.[12] In terms of the classification outlined above, eternalism appears to choose option 2: The practical division between philosophizing and its relationship to the history of philosophy is acknowledged as a matter of principle, but at the same time, an explanation for the unity of philosophy is offered: "We who do philosophy today and the philosophers of earlier times concern ourselves with *the same problems*."

For philosophy educators, eternalism appears at first to offer an attractive option for several reasons: It appears to provide an elegant conceptual bridge over the dividing line between doing philosophy and the history of philosophy. In addition, it is in perfect harmony with the educational principle of problem-oriented instruction: the arguments of earlier philosophers can be organically integrated into the instructional process in the function of an "expert consultation" (Ekkehard Martens). Rolf Sistermann's "candy model" (German: "Bonbonmodell"), still frequently used in German universities and teacher-preparation programs even as it has come under criticism, also appears to implicitly assume eternalism as its reference theory.[13]

We will not discuss here whether eternalism can be philosophically justified or not. It is worth noting, however, that, following the already classic account of Rorty (1998), the anti-eternalist position has recently received considerable support in a special issue of *studia philosophica* (Cesalli et al. 2017) devoted to the topic. Saporiti (2017: 122–127), who provides a lucid and up-to-date discussion of the issue, summarises the main arguments of both sides and consequently argues for the historical "contingency of philosophical problems". Explicit arguments against eternalism are also presented by Schulthess (2017) and Kann (2017). A common feature of these approaches is the importance they place on referencing the "linguistic nature" of philosophy as implying the (relative) contingency of its problems, although all three authors make different argumentative use of this reference.

Given the complexity of the matter, we will restrict ourselves to questioning whether it meets the criteria for a suitable reference theory for philosophy education formulated above. This, however, is not the case. First of all, the assumption of a timeless set of problems addressed by philosophy requires, once again, too strong a set of philosophical framework

[12] The first sentence of the preface to the first edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* can be read as a paradigmatic formulation of eternalism in this sense (Kant 1998: 99): "Human reason has the peculiar fate in one species of its cognitions that it is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human reason."

[13] In this model, the phases of discovering the problem, refining the problem, and solving it independently are followed by a fourth phase of "engaging with the solutions of past and present thinkers" (Sistermann 2016: 213); for a critique of the bonbon model's understanding of philosophy, cf. Paret 2023.

assumptions. The above-mentioned arguments on the "linguistic nature" of philosophy at least show this: Even if we were to accept the eternalists assumption that there are unchanging basic anthropological structures (such as mortality or rationality), so that philosophers in different eras might indeed deal with the same *subject matter*, it is a much stronger claim that they also address the same *problems*. One of the well-known challenges for such a theoretical approach is, for example, the confrontation with the possibility of historically new philosophical problems, which ultimately have to be negated within a consistent eternalist framework. In addition, the assumption of a timeless set of problems addressed by philosophy implies the assumption of a timeless "essential core" of philosophy as a discipline concerned with these problems. Like Hegel's teleology, therefore, eternalism is faced with the problem of lacking an adequate way to give due consideration to the empirical multiplicity of how philosophizing is practiced. The assumption of a timeless essential core of philosophizing, if spelled out, further threatens to lead to a substantively inadequate and practically unproductive standardization of philosophizing.

Finally, engagement with the history of philosophy also remains merely useful for eternalism, not constitutive: When we do philosophy, we can bring in positions from the history of philosophy – but we do not have to. The mentioned weaknesses of pure usefulness arguments, consequently also apply to eternalism: It may enable a better explanation of why engagement with the history of philosophy could be useful for philosophizing, but the conceptual dividing line between the two ways of doing philosophy nevertheless remains in place for this strategy as well.

4. Doing Philosophy as Composing Variations: Jan Assmann's Theory of Cultural Memory and the Philosophy Classroom[14]

4.1. Variational Reference to the Past and the History of Philosophy according to Assmann

We would now like to present a strategy that chooses option 3, that is, one that maintains the assertion of the unity of philosophy but also, unlike the approaches just discussed, seeks to unpack this assertion by giving up the practical dividing line that Hegel drew between the systematic doing of philosophy and engagement with the history of philosophy and instead taking the *unity of the two in the practice of philosophizing* as its starting point. Our thesis is this: doing philosophy (or teaching philosophy) and the history of philosophy are to be seen as two aspects of a unified play of variations. As previously mentioned, we take the concept of

[14] The following section builds on and expands the reflections found in Wellmann 2023, a first attempt to make the theory of cultural memory fruitful for philosophy education.

variation from Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory.

In his book *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization* (2011), which first appeared in German in 1992, Assmann studies "writing, remembrance, and political imagination" (as explained by the subtitle) in early societies. In the final chapter, "Greece and Disciplined Thinking" (Assmann 2011: 234–267), he theorized that in Greece between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE, a way of engaging with earlier texts developed that was significantly different from forms of referencing past texts that can be found in other early civilizations. As this new type of reference became increasingly established, it first led to the emergence of philosophy as a discipline and has remained a fundamental structure of the history of philosophy ever since.[15] The starting point for Assmann's argument is the thesis, first articulated by E. A. Havelock in his 1963 *Preface to Plato* and most familiar in Germany in its adaptation by Niklas Luhmann, according to which the truly explosive development of Greek culture between the sixth and the fourth centuries, including the emergence of philosophy alongside of it, can be traced to the particular characteristics of the medium of Greek alphabetic writing.[16] Assmann modifies this thesis at a central point: what was decisive in his view was not the medium of alphabetic writing as such, which was only one of several prerequisites, but its cultural embedment, i.e., the *use* of this medium in Greek culture.[17] In order to more precisely characterize specifically philosophical engagement with earlier texts, which he believes gradually led to "disciplined thinking," Assmann first distinguishes it from two other forms of referencing the past he previously identified as characteristics of other early civilizations: reference to texts as "canonical" and as "classical":

> Calling Platon and Aristotle "classics" emphasizes their unmatchable exemplarity. Their writings set the standard for what we mean by philosophy […]. Calling these writings canonical highlights their absolute authority. […] From this brief summary, it is clear that both forms of retrospective reference fail to cover the full range of philosophical interaction with these texts. A third form of

[15] The extent to which Assmann's theory gives, or even intends to give, a plausible answer to the much debated question concerning the reason(s) for the historical emergence of philosophy is not relevant here. Assmann's explanation nevertheless agrees with the current scholarly consensus insofar as he neither traces the emergence of philosophy to one or more single causes nor to outstanding founders (such as Thales, Parmenides, or Socrates) or a supposed Greek genius, but instead considers it as a gradual intersubjective process conditioned by the interplay of a variety of factors (cf. on this Laks 2018).

[16] Havelock 1963; a concise synopsis of the theoretical approach is found in Havelock 1996; on its reception by Luhmann, see Assmann 2011: 255 note 45.

[17] Assmann's theory is thus very much part of the same line of thinking as critics of the "myth of writing," like Jäger (2004), who argues against a monocausal ascription of particular cultural phenomena to the distinctive characteristics of Greek alphabetic writing.

> reference is necessary that can distinguish between classic and canon, even if it also establishes connections. (Assmann 2011: 260)

Assmann calls his own attempt at characterizing this "third form of reference" "hypolepsis" (Assmann 2011: 255). What he understands by this is linking up with something said in a text as if it were something said by a previous speaker, not just by repeating what was previously said but through "progressive variation" (Assmann 2011: 256).

This kind of variational linkage to something written as if it were something said by a previous speaks rests on (at least) three prerequisites, according to Assmann: first, the medium of *writing*, without which it would simply be impossible to refer to something previously said as a position open to criticism (for which reason it would be impossible for a discipline of "philosophy" to emerge in primarily oral cultures); second, the possibility of a *reference to truth or to the subject matter*; and third, a *framework* that manages possible forms of reference and provides criteria for deciding questions of truth. Where the reference to truth or the subject matter is concerned, Assmann argues that its appearance in the train of "disciplined thinking" in ancient Greece was also linked to specific historical and cultural prerequisites. On the one hand, there was the "experience of difference" provoked by the use of the medium of writing, which first brought about a separation between *information* (the truth of which is not subject to question) and *communication* (the truth of which must first be investigated). On the other hand, reference to truth or the subject matter also presupposes the absence of (secular or religious) authorities who establish particular texts as ultimate sources of truth. This can be described in positive terms as a certain *openness* of the discursive space, present in Greek culture to a higher degree than in cultures that were, for example, marked by the influence of revealed religious texts defined as canonical. Finally, Assmann draws attention with his prerequisite of a *framework* to the fact that linking up with something said in a text as if it were something said by a previous speaker is based on a complex performance of discourse organisation. An earlier author thought and wrote *in* their situation and *for* their situation. If I am now going to make critical reference to what they said in relation to questions of truth, what they said,

> if it is to survive beyond that situation and make itself accessible for future reference […], as the linguistic component of a complex process of interaction, has to be taken out of its situational context and given independent form as a text. However, once removed from its context, the meaning of the statement would be lost if the situation as such was not "extended." In other words, a new situational framework must be created to guide and organize both the act of passing on the statement and the hypoleptic linking up with it. Once it has been uprooted, abstracted from its situation, and left helplessly exposed to all misunderstandings and rejections, the original text

> must have a new framework to compensate for its loss of situational determination. (Assmann 2011: 259)

In the contemporary context, philosophy teaching at both pre-university and university levels, along with scholarly journals, conferences, and the like, can be ascribed the function of a framework of this kind, one that makes the texts that have been handed down readable and interpretable in a particular way in the first place, by "extending" the communicative situation in such a way that what was said by the previous speaker may have been said more than two thousand years ago, and by providing criteria, i.e., rules of discourse governing both possible forms of reference to the past and "truth-testing."[18] Assmann does not reduce the hypoleptic reference enabled by such a framework to (literary) intertextuality or absolutizes it along the lines of a one-sided fixation on the receptive reworking of earlier texts. Rather, in his view, every philosophical praxis that on occasion finds expression in the production of texts exists

> in a threefold relationship: (1) to earlier texts; (2) to the common subject matter or concern; (3) to criteria that check the claim to truth and monitor the distinction between communication and information. (Assmann 2011: 261)

Assmann thus argues that the exploitation of the possibility of referring to earlier texts was constitutively important for the historical emergence of philosophy in ancient Greece. At the same time, however, he also considers this form of reference to be a fundamental structure of the history of philosophy that persists unchanged, even if its realisation depends on complex prerequisites. In the next section, we will show that the concept of variation can in fact be used to formulate an understanding of the history of philosophy that avoids a bifurcation of what it is to do philosophy.

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[18] A criticism of eternalism might be that it fails to recognize the significance of such a framework or to provide one, because it assumes in advance the identity and permanence (at least in philosophically relevant aspects) of the philosophical communicative situation. Cf. Assmann 2011: 262: "This subject matter belongs completely to the frame of the 'extended situation'. After hundreds of years, it would be just as impossible to refer to the subject matter as to refer to what the predecessor had said, if special precautions were not taken to institutionalize permanence, so that the subject may remain present in the consciousness of later generations. This amounts to a trans-situational retention of relevance. It is not enough merely to write down what was said. It is not even enough to keep the relevant subject matter in view, if the significance is left out of the frame."

4.2. History of Philosophy and Philosophizing as a Unified Play of Variations

Variations are, like repetitions, actions. If we talk about the history of philosophy as a history of variations, then, it is less a matter of a history of ideas and thoughts than one of a history of actions or "doings" (Hegel 1971: 38: "Taten der Geschichte der Philosophie"). An understanding of doing philosophy as composing variations, thus, not only takes into account the primacy of the praxis of philosophizing but also considers the history of philosophy as a play of variations from the perspective of praxis.

More precisely, 'variation' can refer either to an action or to the result of this action. This act-object ambiguity makes the concept of variation also suitable for the classification of textual products. Nevertheless, it is clear from what we have said that primacy has to be given to the praxis aspect: Every philosophical text is the expression of a philosophical praxis, and every text is intended to be received in the course of this praxis. The concept of variation therefore enables a description of philosophy that makes reference both to philosophizing as a praxis and to philosophical texts as fixed results and permanent points of reference for such a praxis.

In terms of content, variations are characterized by the fact that, unlike repetitions, they include elements of continuity and change. In this regard as well, it appears that the broad spectrum of ways that philosophical activity links up with what has come before (for example, continuing, reformulating, building on, critiquing, rejecting, overcoming, deconstructing...) can be described in general terms and its basic structure using the concept of variation:

> At the core of the historicity of philosophy is the reciprocal interplay between change and continuity. On the one hand, a hermeneutical linkage to the tradition includes changes, solutions, and redescriptions; on the other hand, new interpretations and reformulations also take their place in a continuity that is singularly distinctive of philosophical discourse. (Angehrn 1999: 1140)

The concept of variation may therefore make it possible to overcome the conceptual dividing line that Hegel's philosophy drew between the history of philosophy and the contemporary doing of philosophy: If we describe philosophy as a structurally unified play of variations, then the texts we refer to in the course of composing variations appear themselves as variations, that is, (interim) results of a philosophical praxis that refers to texts and proceeds by composing variations. Additionally, every act of variational linkage is aimed at future acts of variational linkage – the monograph just as much as the oral contribution to a discussion. Whether a philosophical praxis of variation itself aims at the trans-situational permanence of its results or leaves this possibility open consequently matters very little for the question of whether it participates in this play of variations at the fundamental level. From this perspective, then, the history of philosophy no longer appears as an external object of knowledge or a kind of

shuttered treasury from which one can draw when occasion demands. The corpus of theories found in the library is only part of the history of philosophy, understood as a play of variations, to the extent that links are made to it and variations built on it. Any trans-situational fixation in any medium also remains historically internal and finite, reliant on the conservation, reproduction, and transfer of the medium in question, its cataloguing, systematizing, and accessibility, or in brief, on the active promotion of its transmission and on "framing" institutions. The texts that we consider belonging to the history of philosophy hence do not form a firm pedestal on which we can build. What is foundational is far more the cultural, which is to say also the philosophical, *use* that is made (or could be made) of these texts and out of which the need for fixation and transmission arises in the first place.

4.3. History of Philosophy and Philosophy Teaching

Having established this foundation, we are now able to show that even the pre-university philosophy classroom has a constitutive relationship to texts of the history of philosophy. If we refrain from assuming a timeless essential core of philosophizing (unlike eternalism, for example), we must also see the forms of praxis through which philosophy teaching takes place as variations of existing forms of praxis of philosophizing. This means that we are dealing with variations not only when in the course of philosophizing we link up with a particular statement, thesis, position, argument, or theory, but also when the act of philosophizing is accompanied and shaped by a specific understanding of what it means to do philosophy. To say, for example, that "a philosopher is not someone who stands in a particular line of transmission but someone who poses particular substantive questions" (Tugendhat 2006: 166) is to link up with a specific way, one that has been handed down, of understanding and pursuing philosophy as the posing of substantive questions. In fact, philosophizing does not mean *standing* in a particular line of transmission, but rather *linking up* with a particular line of transmission while composing variations, thereby actively *positioning* oneself within the history of philosophy. It needs to be kept firmly in mind, therefore, that not only does variation take place *within* a framework that governs the forms of discursive reference and the discovery of truth, but also *the shaping of the framework itself*, insofar as it is not a matter of unavoidable environmental conditions, *is a variation* from the perspective of a particular understanding of philosophizing.

In the context of philosophy education, one example of this type of variation, not in the content of philosophizing but in its form of praxis, is the "didactical transformation" of philosophical "schools of thought" ("Denkrichtungen") into methods of philosophizing called for by Johannes Rohbeck (Rohbeck 2016). What Rohbeck urges teachers to pursue is nothing other than the conscious production of variations of given philosophical forms of praxis. Ultimately, however, this kind of "methodological" variation also takes place even if not consciously pursued. In order speak of such a variation, as we have said, it is enough that the act of philosophizing is accompanied and shaped by a specific understanding of what it means

to do philosophy. To be able to speak about doing philosophy as composing variations, therefore, the variational character of their own act of philosophizing need not be transparent to the person philosophizing.

This also makes it clear that in considering the importance of the history of philosophy in the philosophy classroom, we cannot limit ourselves to what is explicitly characterized or made visible for pupils and observers as a reference to the past or individually engaged in as such through the reading of texts. It is precisely variational linkage not only to given philosophical positions but also to forms of praxis that is in view here. It is to a certain extent provided by the "framework," especially as this framework is prescribed by preexisting institutional factors (curricula, government regulations, textbooks, examination requirements, educational traditions, etc.). In the end, however, the decisive factor is the teacher, who needs to actualize this framework in the classroom, make it concrete, and fill it with life. Mediated by the teacher's lesson planning[19] and by how the teacher – variationally linking up with given philosophical forms of praxis – conducts the lesson, the history of philosophy thereby enters into *every classroom situation* – even when it is entirely invisible to the pupils philosophizing.[20] If we claim that philosophy should happen in the philosophy classroom, then consequently, reference to earlier acts of philosophizing is an essential part of that. However, it also follows from what we have said that philosophy teaching and the history of philosophy are not just two structurally analogous plays of variation but *one and the same*.

4.4. Open Questions

Another reason why Assmann's theory is of interest for philosophy education is that it does not claim to offer an independent philosophical proposal within the discourse field of the philosophy of the history of philosophy and is also not primarily interested in philosophical content and ideas but is instead dedicated, as a descriptive and reconstructive theory in the field of cultural studies, to philosophy as a historically developed cultural *form of praxis*. Consequently, it has the advantage, compared to genuinely philosophical theoretical approaches, that it operates with weaker philosophical framework assumptions than, for

[19] Even if a teacher without any knowledge of the history of philosophy merely relies on methods acquired by observation of professional practitioners, we must still speak of a variational reference to the history of philosophy (albeit a mediated and to this extent likely nontransparent one).

[20] Cf. along these lines also Richter 2016: 62: "In order to be able to meaningfully take up Rohbeck's suggestion of a transfer of methods [...] from a philosophical and educational perspective in the first place, detailed subject knowledge and competent handling of the positions found in the history of philosophy and the scholarly literature [...] is a prerequisite. Philosophy/ethics and instruction in teaching methods cannot be seen as two separate areas. There is no sensible way to separate what to teach from how to teach it."

example, Hegel or an eternalist account does.

The price for this, however, is that what philosophizing consists of is still underdetermined by the concept of variation, and it remains so even if, like Assmann, we take the reference to truth or subject matter, along with the reference to a previous speaker, as constitutive of philosophy. On a closer look, it also appears that his concept of progressive variation, which he explains as an advance towards a truth that "can never be more than an approximation" (Assmann 2011: 261), implicitly continues to uphold the paradigm of continuous development towards a transcendental and superhistorical ultimate goal, even if that goal is as such unknowable.[21] An understanding of philosophizing as composing variations should indeed be capable of *being made concrete* in the form of a teleological conception of the history of philosophy, but it should not itself presuppose such a conception.

In order to address this underdetermination, we will now turn to Hans Blumenberg's philosophy of history, which offers a concrete example (among others) of what Assmann, as a cultural historian, diagnoses in general terms. We wish to emphasize that our aim is not to recommend Blumenberg's philosophy of history as *the* reference theory for philosophy education. All the same, Blumenberg's reflections on the history of philosophy and his way of philosophizing are an especially suitable reference for our purposes for three reasons. *First*, a Blumenberg-inspired model of variation enables us to avoid falling back into a model of history as continual progress, without becoming trapped on the other hand in a relativistic view of history (or the history of philosophy) as an endless series of entirely arbitrary variations that lack foundation, goal, and any truly philosophical standard of quality. *Second*, Blumenberg engages in metaphilosophical reflection on the variational structure of the history of philosophy and develops it in his research in a way that makes a striking impression on the reader. And *thirdly,* his activity of philosophizing can therefore serve as an especially suggestive example of the unity of doing philosophy and the history of philosophy.

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[21] Assmann explains what he means by "progress" with reference to the historian Johann Gustav Droysen and the latter's adoption of the Aristotelian formula *epídosis eis hautó*, which Assmann translates as "adding to itself" (Assmann 2011: 256). Droysen turned the phrase (only mentioned once by Aristotle in a parenthetical remark at *De anima* II, 5, 417b6–7) into a key term in his own theory of history, making humanity's continuous "self-supplementation" (*epídosis eis hautó*) a fundamental principle of history itself (this theory is most clearly laid out in the introductory chapter of Droysen's *Historik* 1958: 9–20; on Droysen's reception of Aristotle cf. Hackel 2019). However, for Droysen, the idea of progress, as expressed in the concept of *epídosis* or supplementation, is inseparably linked with the assumption of a superordinate and rational goal of human history as a whole. In his interpretation of history as a history of progress, Droysen, who attended Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of history as a student, adopts most of the central assumptions of Hegel's philosophy of history, rejecting only Hegel's assumption that history's ultimate goal is knowable (for more on this, see Bauer 2001).

5. Philosophizing as a Praxis of Variation in Blumenberg

5. 1. Blumenberg's Critique of an Idealist Model of History and His Own Approach

Blumenberg's approach is developed in critical engagement with Edmund Husserl's philosophy of history. With an Enlightenment style and an idealist model of history not dissimilar to Hegel's, Husserl responded to the modern age's increasingly pressing recognition of the contingency of history and its historicity by the emphatic resort to a timelessly valid meaning prescribed by reason, as well as by resort to the caprices of individual philosophers tasked with realising this primordially preexisting unified meaning of reason (Husserl 1970: 16-18). Blumenberg's concern in his phenomenology of history, in contrast, is first of all to understand the *historicity of history* – that is, to understand how the historical comes to appear in the first place, how it can be made perceptible and understandable *as* historical.[22] Consequently, he also tries to uncover the more general structures that characterize the historicity of history through the description and intensive study of the (primarily textual) material left by the history of philosophy. Blumenberg does not ascribe to the history of philosophy a timeless meaning in the idealist mode, one that – as in Hegel – necessarily determines or – as in Husserl – should intentionally determine its empirical course, but instead directs his attention to the complex relationship between *continuity and change* that characterizes the material course of history on closer examination.

One of Blumenberg's suggestions for conceptualizing the course of the history of philosophy and its changes across time is to think of it in terms of a *question-and-answer scheme*.[23] He starts from the assumption that the historical textual documents produced by the history of philosophy contain possible answers to more fundamental questions and problems. The underlying questions are not always explicitly formulated as such in the textual witnesses; instead, the historian of philosophy must often be the one to pose the problem of which question a particular textual witness is answering in the first place, what exactly it is or was that should have been understood at the time. It is also characteristic of these fundamental questions that they are not in themselves necessarily specific to a particular age. They do not have to persist across historical eras, but they may do so, passed down from earlier ages to subsequent ones.

[22] In the introduction to *Die ontologische Distanz* Blumenberg calls "the historicity of the 'history of philosophy" the "most obscure" and "perhaps ultimate topic of philosophy." Cf. Blumenberg 2022: 9.

[23] On the question-and-answer scheme: This is a scheme or principle for describing the dynamics of intellectual history that Blumenberg introduces in several places in his writings, potentially for heuristic use in further research (cf. its first appearance in Blumenberg 1961: 85-87; cf. Blumenberg 1983: 63-66). It is not intended to stipulate an unconditionally valid transcendental, a priori, essential relationship that would necessarily determine the course of intellectual history. Blumenberg's approach takes a critical attitude toward the substantializing of problems, the historicity of which tends to be ignored in doxographically oriented histories of ideas, which is not to say that his own model does not also include the (critical) history of problems in its methodology.

They may be relatively constant questions that have occupied human beings almost from the beginning and that need to be posed over and over in similar terms.[24] What changes across time, according to Blumenberg's work, is therefore not necessarily the questions and problems that we pose to ourselves – although these are also essentially historical. Rather, what fundamentally changes from one historical period to another is the 'background', that is, the frame of reference or the horizon of meaning against which these questions are posed. As with Assmann, then, we find ourselves confronted with Blumenberg's emphasis on the importance of the framework within which every act of philosophizing takes place. This framework is itself a historical phenomenon and contributes to deciding what can be thought and what not, what is considered meaningful or true and what not at a specific time. In a particular time, given a particular frame of reference, particular answers appear possible, meaningful, and functional, while other, earlier answers appear to no longer be suitable, in need of correction, even absurd, suggesting need to generate new answers.[25]

The question now is: How exactly can this process of change in the history of ideas, during which particular answers (as well as particular questions) become obsolete and new ones arise, be described in precise terms, and what form it concretely assumes in the history of philosophy and its individual productions. Blumenberg himself introduces the term 'reoccupation' (*Umbesetzung*) to describe this process more precisely:[26]

> '[R]eoccupation' means that different statements can be understood as answers to identical questions. (Blumenberg 1983: 466)

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[24] Cf. Blumenberg 1983: 466: "It is enough that the reference-frame conditions have greater inertia for consciousness than do the contents associated with them, that is, that the questions are relatively constant in comparison to the answers." Yet, the questions are historical themselves: "[I]n the new reorganization, certain questions are no longer posed, and the answers that were once provided for them have the appearance of pure dogma, of fanciful redundancy." (Blumenberg: 1983, 467) The question of immortality for example, as Blumenberg illustrates, has not been asked at all times. Not every philosophical problem is equally relevant at all times. Blumenberg 1983: 65: "We are going to have to free ourselves from the idea that there is a firm canon of the >great questions< that throughout history and with an unchanging urgency have occupied human curiosity and motivated the pretension to world and self-interpretation."

[25] As Blumenberg shows in his works *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* and *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, threshold periods between historical eras are especially prominent as times when breaks or radical changes in such horizons of meaning become perceptible. It is thus also especially noticeable during threshold periods how particular answers given by one era may increasingly turn out to be inadequate for the next one and make variations on prior answers necessary. Cf. also on this Weidner 2022: 408-409.

[26] On the term 'reoccupation' cf. also Kopp-Oberstebrink 2014: 350–363. Cf. in greater depth Paret 2022: 269-288.

The concept of reoccupation points in two directions, as this brief formulation already suggests. On the one hand, it points to possibly identical questions that may form a line of continuity in history. On this, we quote Blumenberg once again:

> The concept of 'reoccupation' designates, by implication, the minimum of identity that it must be possible to discover, or at least to presuppose and to search for, in even the most agitated movement of history. (Blumenberg 1983: 466)

On the other hand, however, the term 'reoccupation' also points to the places left empty in a particular conceptual constellation or repertoire of motifs, places that have to be refilled because of historically changing knowledge, needs, and expectations. As Blumenberg shows in his detailed textual studies, textually demonstrable expansions, deletions, and new contextualisations of the historically available material take place within the framework of each such process.[27] Against the background of changing horizons of understandings and needs, particular motifs, concepts, metaphors, myths, and anecdotes from the history of philosophy are taken up, overwritten, altered, and newly reworked. Or, in other words, reoccupation turns out to be a play of variations, as generally characterized in our discussion of Assmann above. As we are going to show more clearly in an example, not only can reoccupation be identified as a play of variations, but the textual witnesses produced by this play of variations, to the extent that they refer to preexisting material, can also be described as variations of prior variations.

5.2. Hermeneutical Implications of Blumenberg's Philosophy of the Historicity of History

Blumenberg's approach to the philosophy of history, just sketched, has significant hermeneutical implications that are of interest for our context. We will draw explicit attention to five of them here:

1. Blumenberg's radicalization of the historical understanding of philosophy, which also historicizes the meaning and the evaluative standards applicable to the history of philosophy, leads to a pluralistic understanding of philosophy. This forbids us from interpreting the past only from the perspective of a presumed timeless meaning or of today's questions. The history

[27] We can trace this process of reoccupation in an especially striking way alongside Blumenberg, if we follow the different variants or reworkings of the same story (e.g., the Thales anecdote) or the same motif (e.g., the exit from Plato's cave) or the changing meanings and contexts of the same metaphor (e.g., the 'naked' truth) across time.

of philosophy as a whole and the particular horizons of meaning within which we move exceed our grasp. As a play of variations continually open to further reoccupations, philosophy is just as pluralistic as the multiplicity of approaches and variations it has produced or (still) could produce.[28]

2. Against this background, textual witnesses from the history of philosophy are not read merely as documents of a history (of development) that extends beyond them, in which they may represent from today's perspective interim results that have since been surpassed. Rather, the history of philosophy is nothing short of the historical manifestation of the play of variations.

3. Ultimately, in the pursuit of understanding history, Blumenberg is concerned with uncovering one era's horizon of meaning, i.e., the available *latitude of thought*, which conditions the possibility, the significance, and also the empirical influence of the texts.[29]

4. This uncovering of the texts' historical background, which cannot be articulated by the texts' contemporaries because for them it is self-evident, demands not only historical knowledge and analytical precision but also speculative abilities of the historian of philosophy. To uncover the various possible interpretations of a historical textual witness, "cautious variation," as Jürgen Goldstein says, is needed to exhaust the range of possibilities (Goldstein 2004: 35).

5. The activities required for a productive engagement with the philosophy of history make clear that hermeneutics of this kind do not stop with a purely historical and philological engagement with past writings but rather demand an active, living, engaged way of dealing with what is said in the texts, one that is itself philosophizing. It is ultimately the recipient who rediscovers or (re-)formulates the implicit philosophical problems that the historical texts answer and who maps out the constellation of the historically given answers and further possible answers. As we will see still more emphatically in the example of praxis to which we turn in the next section, the historian of philosophy enters into the historical philosophical process and, stimulated by and in interaction with the history of philosophy, becomes a person philosophizing.

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[28] This point is also directed against a developmental historical approach, which claims that the only significance lies in that which gets (linearly) developed. That is, dead ends, detours, mere possibilities, approaches that are not further pursued, motifs that can now only be understood from a historical perspective (among others) are completely irrelevant for developmental historical models. Blumenberg, in contrast, is interested in exactly these things.

[29] Cf. on the term 'background' Blumenberg 1965: 7: "The background is that which opens up a certain latitude of possible changes, which allows certain steps and excludes others. The background sets narrowness or breadth, restriction or freedom of movement, the horizon in which new possibilities can be sought, or the enclosing wall on which the familiar images and shadows of the existing are repeated."

5.3. Example: A Socrates notecard

Many of Blumenberg's longer and shorter works, in which he traces historical processes of reoccupation or variation and simultaneously pursues the process of philosophical variation himself, could be used to illustrate the concrete procedure.[30] Here, however, we will consider one of Blumenberg's notecards ("Zettel"), found in card index no. 24 of the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marburg (DLA), alongside other notecards on Socrates. The notecard contains philosophical historical variants of the formula classically associated with Socrates: "I know that I know nothing."[31]

> Socrates – variants of his formula.
>
> Socrates: I know that I know nothing.
> Nicholas of Cusa: I know by this that I know nothing (by the fact that I know why I cannot know anything).
> Freud: I do not know that I know
> Ideal of epistemological theory: I know that I know because I know how I know.
> Dogmatic scepticism: I know that I cannot know anything.
> Pyrrhonian scepticism: I do not even know whether I can know.
> Kant: I know what I cannot know because for what I can know, I know how I can know it.
> God: I know that I know everything, but I do not know that I know this.[32]

An analysis of Blumenberg's variation of the Socratic formula, presented here as an example, allows us to identify several distinguishing features that could also be considered as ideal types of doing philosophy by composing variations:

1. Blumenberg's collection and refinement of different variations of the Socratic formula from the history of philosophy is not simply a list of positions and developments from the history of ideas, motivated purely by historical interests, but also proves to be at its core a constructive engagement with various historically produced possible answers to a philosophical question, specifically "What do I know?" It is this question that invites, even requires, a variational approach to the historical material. Thus, for example, concerning Immanuel Kant's appearance as a previous speaker, he does not answer exactly the same

[30] In *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman*, he subjects different variants of the Thales anecdote – from antiquity to the present – to a philosophical analysis. In *Cave Exits* (*Höhlenausgänge)*, he discusses the motif of exiting the cave as a central metaphor for processes in the history of education on the basis of historical variations of Plato's allegory of the cave. In the "case studies" (*Fallstudien*) of *The Completeness of Stars* (*Die Vollzähligkeit der Sterne*), he traces the metaphorical "fall" of Adam and Eve up to the present and analyses its relationship to and difference from other such variants.

[31] As is well known, this proverbial formulation is itself already a variant of the words that Plato puts in Socrates's mouth in the *Apology* (21d).

[32] Cf. Blumenberg Papers, DLA, Box 24, Socrates Section, quoted here from Brázda 2020: 58.

question that Kant posited in his own time ("What can I know?"), but instead the authorial question that implicitly underlies Blumenberg's list ("What do I know?"). At this point, the historian of philosophy Blumenberg, who is concerned with shedding light on the past's problems, gives way to the philosopher Blumenberg who, as a composer of variations, practices a creative engagement with the history of philosophy that is also completely motivated by his own questions.

2. The initial appearance of Blumenberg's series of illustrious male philosophers notwithstanding, this list of possible answers from history is neither necessary nor complete, or canonical. It is rather one that is put together by its variational composer provisionally and as the occasion requires. It seems to be easy to add possible answers or delete some. In this particular example, the composer, in his (ironic?) highhandedness, even goes as far as expanding the hypoleptic horizon to God Himself – a fiction that suddenly pops up here as if being one such "previous speaker" in the philosophical discourse. This kind of maximal openness concerning who might be a suitable previous speaker is evidently contrary to canonical prescriptions and enables a creative, constructive, even an experimental treatment of other (preceding) trains of thought.

3. Finally, this example clearly indicates the significance of (knowledge about) the history of philosophy for philosophizing. We can particularly perceive three aspects here: a) Individual answers acquire their specific substantive profile and unique significance through comparison with and distinctions to other variations. The deeper one's knowledge about the history of philosophy reaches, the more expansive and liberated one's space for variation or latitude in thought becomes while philosophizing. b) Variational recourse to the history of philosophy gives due consideration to historical-philosophical textual witnesses through a differentiated engagement with these sources, while still respecting their inherent value. This engagement is both critical and creative in a way that still recognizes these witnesses as products of their own time. At the same time, it is continuously being receptive to further revisions and corrections by their compiler to the extent that she may ultimately be able to bring other possible answers into consideration or even to produce them herself. c) Within such a hermeneutical framework, the person engaging with the history of philosophy is not just an outsider telling a story of the past, evaluating it after the fact based on contemporary standards. Indeed, she is rather someone who, through variational adaption of past ideas, constructively participates both in continuing to write the history of philosophy as a history of variation and in producing its continuity. Hence, the philosophical play of variations is also a praxis that is carried out by a free, active subject driven by their own philosophical motives. The relationship between (the history of) philosophy and the person philosophizing is neither between an authority and its passive reception nor conversely between a subject and a history subordinated to that subject; instead, the history of philosophy and a subject's – or community's – praxis of philosophizing are the results of a single philosophical process of variation.

In summary, given his conception of the philosophy of history and his hermeneutical

approach to historical documents in the fields of cultural and intellectual history, three senses of variation can be found in Blumenberg's work: 1. Variation may refer to the form that reoccupation takes from one era to another. 2. Variation is also the appropriate label for the products or results of these reoccupations as expressed in historical textual documents, in which concretely determined themes, concepts, motifs, and metaphors appear as having undergone variation. 3. Finally, variation also describes the procedure of philosophizing of a historian of philosophy or a person philosophizing and their way of referencing past variations.

For Blumenberg, as should be clear by now, there is no standard of measurement that is external to history (or the history of variation) or applicable to the past after the fact, such as that we might form a final judgment on history as a whole or its individual productions. Because nothing is outside of history, it seems that it is ultimately none other than history itself who judges the importance of its productions. Whether a particular philosophical variation is considered "good" or "successful" can therefore only emerge through the discursive play of variations itself (and may possibly change in the process of the ongoing praxis of philosophizing and receptive composition of variations). It is these criteria – immanent to the play of variations or the aspirations arising out of these variations themselves – according to which individual variations can be measured. Finally, it also matters to which extent the variations prove to be intersubjectively "satisfactory" and functional for the discourse participants, that is, to which extent they satisfy particular historically and situationally conditioned expectations and needs. The question here is whether these variations are intelligible to us, whether they provide us with a better view and ease our understanding of something that (still) appears questionable or in need of explanation.

6. Prospects

In conclusion, we would like to specify the purpose of our article by examining two critical questions the reader might be provoked to ask.

Our aim has been to give grounds for the thesis that teaching philosophy and the history of philosophy should be seen as two aspects of a unified play of variations. This is not least a matter of crossing the dividing line between systematic and historical ways of philosophizing that Hegel drew. To further concretize our thesis, illustrate it, and give it greater depth, we have turned to Hans Blumenberg's theory of the history of philosophy and his praxis of writing that history. Blumenberg could, with some justice, be cited as a prime example of a philosopher with an especially receptive way of working. Particularly philosophers who describe their own work as systematical or analytical might, therefore, ask us if doing philosophy understood as composing variations – and choosing Blumenberg to illustrate this – we have not taken a one-sided position in favour of the hermeneutical tradition.

However, the assertion that a philosophy that understands itself as, for example, aprioristic

also proceeds by composing variations, in that it links up with earlier positions (agreeing with them, rejecting them, or whatever the case may be), but also with particular philosophical forms of praxis, and that these links presuppose a (cultural and institutional) framework, does not yet say anything about whether this philosophy's internal claim to validity is justified or not. In addition, the assertion that every philosophical variation is aimed at future acts of variational linkage is not yet relativistic about truth. We can readily take Descartes's *Meditations* seriously in their systematic claim to be First Philosophy while at the same time rejecting Descartes's claim to have historically restarted philosophy from scratch. The possibility of a priori knowledge is hence not excluded by an understanding of doing philosophy as composing variations. Rather, the self-understanding of philosophers who work systematically is only in need of correction if it is accompanied by the supposition that philosophical praxis takes place in a vacuum, that is, if the constitutive relationship of the philosopher's own praxis to the history of philosophy remains unacknowledged. The specific historicity of philosophy manifests itself not in the fact that philosophers are beginning with a tradition that determines (and limits) their ways of thinking, but rather in the fact that during the course of philosophizing, they are actively linking up with the history of philosophy and in this way "enter into" it.

Now for the second question: if our thesis is accepted, then the consequence for philosophy education is above all a shifting of coordinates in the way that we think and talk about the relationship between philosophy teaching and the history of philosophy. It is not that the history of philosophy is brought into the classroom but that the pupils become participants in the history of philosophy. But isn't it an exaggeration to talk about pupils in the classroom as participants in the history of philosophy when they are encountering philosophy for the first time? They often have no new or original, let alone "historic" ideas to contribute, and are presumably for the most part also not participating in public philosophical debates through publications. So, isn't this idea based on an idealized vision of the philosophy classroom and pupils philosophizing?

Given the realities of academia, it may indeed be easy to assume that particular prerequisites must be met for someone to participate in the history of philosophy and that it is really only possible to speak of such participation once a philosophical contribution has been judged as "historic" by those who come after. However, this assumption (especially from the perspective of philosophy education) is unjustified. In contrast to the Catholic Church, for example, there cannot be an exclusive order of "clergymen" who have special privileges compared to a group of laypersons in philosophy. For this reason, one of the goals of our argumentation was to describe the history of philosophy as structurally unresolved and accessible. Whether philosophical praxis becomes effective through participation in the public philosophical discourse or by influencing the practitioner's own life – if only through the fact that they do philosophy in the first place – is irrelevant to the question of whether they participate in the history of philosophy understood as a play of variations.

It is indeed the case that pupils in the classroom should first of all *learn* to philosophize. But at what point have they learned enough to be qualified to participate in the history of philosophy? It does not seem reasonable to try to establish a particular threshold. Our suggestion is therefore to understand the learning process itself as a process of *becoming involved in the philosophical play of variations*. Where classroom practice is concerned, this might lead to an argument, for example, that becoming involved in a praxis of variational linkage with a previous speaker should also have a media component that takes into consideration the empirical significance of texts within the philosophical play of variations. We might further conclude that this process should be accompanied by an expansion of the "hypoleptic frame" (Assmann) that increasingly makes the philosophical play of variations transparent and in the literal sense of the word *accessible* as an ongoing process over thousands of years.

To understand philosophizing as composing variations naturally does not yet imply a judgment about where the instructional emphasis should fall – to what extent, for example, the receptive aspect of philosophizing should be made explicit, and to what extent this requires the reading of (primary) texts. Nevertheless, we hope to have shown that the history of philosophy is not just another external object in comparison to pupils' activity of philosophizing, something to which reference may be made in the classroom from time to time – or not. Understanding pupils as participants in the history of philosophy offers a suitable point of departure, we believe, from which to rethink the concrete educational questions of whether, why, and how the history of philosophy should be "integrated" into philosophy teaching.

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