

Helge Kminek, Christian Thein, René Torkler (Hrsg): Zwischen Präskription und Deskription – zum Selbstverständnis der Philosophiedidaktik. Opladen/Berlin/Toronto: Budrich 2018.

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The didactics of philosophy have a special status. While other didactics are open to empirical classroom and teaching research, as for example the didactics of political education, the didactics of philosophy remain restrained – even after the *empirical turn*. The recently published book, “Zwischen Präskription und Deskription – Zum Selbstverständnis der Philosophiedidaktik” (“Between Prescription and Description – Reflexions on the Self-Conception of Didactics of Philosophy”), arose from the First International Workshop on Didactics of Philosophy and Ethics. The book offers a snapshot of current attempts to include the methods of empirical and non-empirical approaches in didactics of philosophy and their respective location between the poles of description and prescription. Taking a stand on the status of empirical, purely descriptive research became necessary for the didactics of philosophy due to critical voices claiming the current didactics to be detached from practice.

Besides a fundamental statement for a didactics of philosophy based on empirical research the book contains five diverging approaches. In his paper Helge Kminek argues for the claim that the current question “what *should* be taught in philosophy classes?” should be replaced by the question “what *is* taught in philosophy classes?” (21). In doing so, Kminek changes the focus to a descriptive stocktaking based on an approach of qualitative social science. According to Kminek, it is necessary to “reconstruct the praxis”, as the ongoing didactics are based on non-valid empirical assumptions. However, how would a first model of a data-based didactics of philosophy manifest itself? Kminek refers in this context to the desire for “independent empirical didactics”. Although the empirical data may be analysed by research methods taken from scientifically related disciplines, an empirical didactics of philosophy should maintain “in and through research the peculiarity of philosophy” (24).

Julia Dietrich intends to generate new and distinctive features for the didactics of philosophy by conceiving it as a variety of Applied Ethics. Since didactics have to be interested in the outcome of their interventions – as their manner of mediation is deeply permeated with prescriptive elements – the didactics of philosophy have to take responsibility for their interventions too. As a consequence, the didactics of philosophy have to be understood as part of Applied Ethics (44). More precisely, this implies that teachers have to explore the following topics: the emergence and the meaning of morality, the history of morality and the development of morality (46). Nevertheless, the purpose of analysing this content does not lie in a later discussion with pupils. In analysing these areas, teachers are also reconsidering and clarifying their own self-understanding as teachers. Thus, the impact for didacticians lies rather in the need to justify the validity of prescriptive didactical statements.

René Torkler's paper points out that there is a lack of what he calls a "narrative approach" in the didactics of philosophy. It is striking that related didactics, as in the didactics of history or of political education, not only integrated narrativity into their self-concept, but developed it out of genuine philosophical positions. However, no such approach emerged out of the reference discipline itself. Also, the empirical social sciences refer to philosophical positions, as with Fritz Schütze in his evaluation methodology for narrative interviews. Therefore, the question arises whether the notion of narrativity might be a nexus for an empirical access within the didactics of philosophy (84). However, regarding Bourdieu, Torkler points out the limits of this empirical access. According to Torkler, the didactics of philosophy have to reflect the very notion of narrativity as a central medium of philosophizing itself (86). Besides the prevalent reductionist understanding of rationality, reflected in the concept of *logon didonai*, the didactics of philosophy ought to include narrativity to facilitate an unravelling of the human praxis through stories. Considering the ideas of Ricœur, who suggests that stories might equal thought experiments that enable us to train our faculty of judgement beyond decision-making in real life, and the ideas of Nussbaum, who favours the narrative power of imagination, Torkler outlines that a concept of a narrative didactics of philosophy is not restrained to philosophizing in class on the basis of stories. In fact, stories and narrations constitute only the initial texts helping to train the pupil's (inter-) acting and judging competencies.

Philipp Richter considers the question whether, and if so, how, the act of philosophizing might be empirically investigated (52). This is of particular interest as the act of philosophizing does not only consist in using typical conversation methods and being able to make a judgement. One of the particular components of philosophizing is its impact on the constitution of subjectivity. Therefore, one cannot infer from the use of indicators such as "balancing formulations" (e.g. "as well as"/ "although") that an act of philosophizing has taken place. The only possibility of proving a philosophical performance is to infer by abductive inference: If a pupil's answer does contain balancing formulations and, if we agree on the use of balancing formulations in actions of philosophizing, then the answer is a philosophical answer (62). To enhance the probability of the validity of abductive inferences, it is then necessary to get a more in-depth insight into normality assumptions of the praxis.

The starting point in Anne Burkard's still ongoing study is the investigation of teachers' practice: How do teachers respond to students' sceptical comments? Do they perceive these sceptical comments as an opportunity or as a problem? The aim of the study is to generate and test educational material offering a successful way of handling sceptical remarks (105). The research design, based on the Grounded Theory, is modelled as follows: At first, twenty-nine philosophy teachers were asked online to list sceptical comments they were confronted with during lessons and to estimate their respective value. This allowed for categorizing students' comments and gathering possible teacher reactions. In a second step, the teachers discussed the collected data in groups to find, on the one hand, possible answers for the emergence of these students' comments and, on the other hand, strategies for dealing with the situation. Then in a third step, in order to include the students' perspective, students were confronted with some sceptical remarks and requests for comments. Additionally, the students were

invited to give ideas on possible teacher reactions. Thus, this study offers an insight into the different approaches to dealing with sceptical remarks in class from the view point of both the students and the teachers. First results show that while many teachers still struggle in dealing with sceptical comments, they nevertheless perceive them as an opportunity. Therefore, some teachers ask for more didactical support in discussion strategies.

Jonas Pfister has chosen a different starting point. Pfister tries to prove an impact between attending philosophy classes and high marks in all school subjects (137). Although he could not verify a positive effect in attending philosophy classes in the form of higher marks, this does not imply that philosophy does not have any positive effects on students (141). In a closing commentary, Christian Thein summarises what unites all the papers in this book: “From a perspective of scientific theory it is striking that all papers try to answer the question of the appropriate scientific method within the didactics of philosophy [...] starting with the philosophical praxis itself, which is constituted by specific normative aims” (150, translated by C.H.).

Given the diversity of the papers, the volume not only offers a differentiated vision of the present debate on the self-conception of the didactics of philosophy but is also the starting point for a discourse that has to be promoted. This discussion is needed as uncontroversial “ways out of the conflictual relation of philosophy and empiricism” (9) cannot yet be found. In this way this book can inspire the reader to take up his or her position in the tension field between description and prescription.