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Christian Thein: *Verstehen und Urteilen im Philosophieunterricht. Wissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Philosophiedidaktik und Bildungsphilosophie*, Band 3. Opladen, Berlin, Toronto: Barbara Budrich 2017.

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In his recent book *Verstehen und Urteilen im Philosophieunterricht* (Understanding and Judging in Philosophy Education), Christian Thein aims at a philosophical substantiation of the basic structure of philosophy as an educational enterprise. His starting point is to conceptualize philosophy not as a static conglomerate of ideas but as a process of reflection. But this way of reflection, as Thein puts it, is to a large degree based on the reception, transformation and critique of already existing philosophical schemes.

Thein starts with a general outline of the scope and limits of philosophical didactics. He argues that didactics of philosophy serves three objectives: it is a theory of subject-specific education, it functions as a generic term for all philosophical practices, and it is a mode of reflection concerning the impact philosophy can have. Focusing on philosophy as a subject in primary and secondary education, Thein claims that the purpose is neither the acquisition of general skills nor the accumulation of factual knowledge, but that philosophizing is to be conceptualized as a process of understanding and judging critically while looking into a philosophical topic that stems from experience in the living environment.

The general question arising from this outset is how didactics of philosophy can contribute to a fruitful passage from concrete and tangible experiences made by students to a factual examination of topics, problems and pertinent questions that are at the core of what philosophy is as a discipline. Or simply put: how can one induce irritation and philosophical reflection based on the problems that children and young adults have?

The development of a problematizing and questioning demeanour opens up processes of critical thinking and can provide a basis for the development of a capacity for judgement. This sums up what Thein presents in three propositions about the two main aspects of his approach: 1) education in philosophy has to start from questions: questions are written out philosophical problems that are inherently controversial. 2) The orientation towards problems must have a basis in the lifeworld of the students and must relate to their experiences, which are the starting point for a thorough examination with philosophical means. 3) Because every problem demands some kind of judgement, units in philosophy classes should be designed to foster the capacity for judgement through orientation towards problems. A requirement for the success of this enterprise is that teachers and students likewise maintain a philosophical attitude throughout the series of lessons.

How the lessons can be structured is therefore the main contribution of Thein's book. Before sketching an ideal sequence he locates the didactic concept of judgement in the broader realm of philosophy. He focuses on the tension between preconceptions, common sense and

philosophical judgement and shows how the first mentioned are constitutive to understanding in general and for philosophizing in particular. Employing Aristoteles and Kant as two positions ascribing different significance to judgement, Thein can theoretically argue for a concept that incorporates rather pre-reflective judgements from everyday life and the faculty of judgement as an ideal benchmark. This classical appreciation of judgement is complemented by the approaches of Arendt, Gadamer and Habermas to substantiate the central role of judging for learning philosophy. Special emphasis is laid on the significance of preconceptions – which are understood as the starting point for processes of judging in accordance with hermeneutics. Preconceptions are framed as the basic ideas, theories and hypothesis that students bring into the classroom. And the main task of a philosophy class is to critically examine the respective claims to validity that come along with these preconceptions.

On this theoretical foundation, Thein develops a four-phased model of how judgement can progressively take shape in philosophy education. This model can serve as a very useful blueprint to have in mind when drafting units or lessons.

Introduction is the first phase and aims at acquainting the students with general aspects of a philosophical problem. This getting-to-know has to be derived from the questions, problems and dead ends that students experience themselves, especially from examples coming from their lifeworld. This puts them – as the subjects of education – into the centre of the philosophical action and can contribute to the perception of forming a community of inquiry. To trigger their attention and imagination, Thein proposes exemplification via controversial content. Material like a picture, statistics and so one can define the problem and initiate a first discussion that leads to a guiding question.

The students' preconceptions should be collected and organised in a map that Thein calls the Pre-Conception-Map ("Vor-Urteils-Map"), a primary structured output that the following steps can be based on. This map with arguments and counter-arguments concerning the guiding question and common principles derived from the reasoning presents a network of aspects that is related to the topic in question. The following stages all serve the purpose of reflecting the results that are recorded on the Pre-Conception-Map: they can be tested, revised and substantiated. In the process of formulating statements and hypotheses, the students transform their preconceptions into propositional arguments, rules or principles and locate them in the space of reason (Brandom).

To deepen the understanding of the problem and the first attempts to deal with it, the third phase examines scientific and philosophical material, mainly by working with texts. The students re-formulate their arguments with the help of established positions and see their first attempts in a new light. Thein argues for different types of reading texts, distinguishing primarily between analytical and hermeneutical approaches.

For the conclusion of a unit, Thein suggests to let the students formulate their own argumentative judgements concerning the guiding question. One form this verbalization can take is in an essay or a debate. From Thein's point of view, especially essay-writing is a very good way to achieve cohesive results because it combines the need for argumentation with a relatively large freedom of presentation.

Thein's project is to show that the hermeneutic circle is present in all four stages and leads to productive results: the confrontation of preconceptions with scientific and philosophical material – all dealing with the initial problem that is formulated in the guiding question – aims at developing sound judgements. As the students work out these judgements by themselves with the help and professional support of the teacher, the learning situation focuses on their skills in philosophizing. So what Thein argues for is that learning philosophy is best achieved by doing philosophy. His proposal for a four-phased model with the pre-conception-map at its core is a good foundation of, and guideline for, a form of teaching that focuses on philosophical problems. For those who plan lessons in philosophy it can be quite useful because it collocates a number of ideas on organizing education in a tight and comprehensible way. The roughly 100 pages are a good read for everyone looking for a tightly arranged state-of-the-art overview of the didactics of philosophy.