ON FILTER BUBBLES, ECHO CHAMBERS, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

In the light of changes caused by digital media, some media scientists are speaking of an "epochal" or "structural break" leading to a challenge for education. Using the examples of so-called filter bubbles and echo chambers, this article shows that digitalization reveals some well known problems in new clothes and thereby offers them a new topicality. The present article calls attention to specific limits of the media studies' viewpoint (1), it shows what contribution philosophy can bring to the mentioned problems (2), it connects the approaches of media studies and philosophy (3), and it draws some didactical conclusions (4).

The spread of digital media has profoundly changed the forms of social interaction and public discourse. The assessment of these changes, however, remains controversial. For example, Internet platforms enable fast communication in social networks, so that individual participants can maintain a large number of contacts. Although these are declared to be "friendships," media critics suggest they often only serve new forms of self-presentation. In terms of public discourse, the Internet initially seemed to expand the possibilities for political participation, though it is now regarded as a typical medium of a "postdemocratic" society. Communication and media studies are confronted with a broad spectrum of questions. Many of these, according to media scientists, should be addressed in school. Roberto Simanowski calls for digital media not only to be used as teaching aids and to teach how to use them effectively, but also to make the media a separate topic and to investigate the changes they

bring about in the way we see ourselves and the world (Simanowski 2018: 204). Bernhard Pörksen proposes the goal of "media literacy," an "interdisciplinary subject" that should function as a "laboratory of the editorial society" and in which "the mechanisms of the public are studied" and the "journalistic ability of those involved" can be trained (Pörksen 2018: 205-206).

From a viewpoint of didactics of philosophy, this constellation raises the question of whether the topics addressed should be left to media studies, i.e. to a new school subject, or whether philosophical questions, albeit under different titles and in different contexts, are not also hidden here. This question has urgency. The call for a new subject in schools draws attention to itself in education policy discourse and, as a consequence, the concerns and potentials of traditional subjects, including philosophy, are diminished. However, it must be admitted that "the way educational institutions deal with the new media is not only characterised by frightening ignorance, but also by a disappointing lack of imagination, exaggerated fear, and considerable opportunism" (Simanowski 2018: 12). A look at the effects of digital media on forms of interaction and public discourse shows that a mere introduction in how to use media effectively, known in Germany under the title "*Informationstechnische Grundbildung*" ("Basic Education in Information Technology"), excludes important aspects from the outset. The same applies, however, to a socially and culturally critical approach of describing individual problems - such as the increasing dependence of media users on the number of likes on social platforms - and discussing possible remedies. These developments only form the surface under which fundamental problems are hidden. It is the task of philosophy to uncover these and put them in relation to current developments. It is important to look beyond the boundaries of the current discourse on digital media, which is kept in motion by considerations of expediency on the one hand, and by cultural-critical fears on the other.

This article is limited to questions that can be found under the keywords "filter bubble" and "echo chamber" in media and communication studies. These problems can be explained by a comparison with classical mass media. Newspapers, radio and television are aimed at a broad audience and represent a relatively broad spectrum of opinions, so that recipients are confronted with different views and, ideally, are encouraged to test their own convictions against recognised standards of rationality. In addition, information and reports have already been checked for relevance and reliability by professional editors or scientific experts, so that they can generally be considered trustworthy. In social networks, on the other hand,

information is personalized – and thus "filtered" – with regard to a user's preferences.[1] This creates filter bubbles and echo chambers in which one can live as if in one's own world, without having to endure cognitive dissonances and putting personal convictions to the test.

According to Eli Pariser, filter bubbles create a "unique universe of information for each of us [...] which fundamentally alters the way we encounter ideas and information" (Pariser 2011: 9). C. Thi Nguyen speaks instead of "epistemic bubbles," defined as "informational networks from which relevant voices have been excluded by omission" (Nguyen 2018). The danger is that no "sufficiently broad and representative coverage of all the relevant information" is available and that the participants, due to the recurring confirmation by like-minded people, develop an "excessive self-confidence." However, if those involved are open-minded about new information, epistemic bubbles – according to Nguyen – can easily burst: "We can pop an epistemic bubble simply by exposing its members to the information and arguments that they've missed." Echo chambers, "social structures from which other relevant voices have been actively discredited," are more difficult. In these, the affirmative comments of like-minded people serve as justification for ignoring conflicting views by disqualifying their supporters as unbelievable from the outset. The mere confrontation with new information or divergent views is therefore not sufficient for a liberation from an echo chamber.

The distinction between filter bubbles and echo chambers is important in order to classify the arguments of media scientists appropriately. Pörksen, for example, believes that the thesis of closed filter bubbles is simply wrong; rather, the flood of information leads to a "filter clash," since bubbles can easily break up in an "intensively networked society and be flooded by news of all kinds" (Pörksen 2018: 118-119). Pörksen's argument does not apply to echo chambers, however, since distrust of certain sources already prevents the knowledge of corresponding information. No irritations or cognitive dissonances arise that could become the starting point of an educational process. It seems that the phenomena of flood of information and segregation in particular communities can coexist.

The shift of opinion formation from the public to particular communities ultimately leads to a dissolution of "facts" and "truth." In completely closed filter bubbles or echo chambers, a fact is what the members of their own community accept and disseminate as such. However,

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[1] Personalization of websites was initially a strategy of search engine providers in order to make available suitable search results to users; these techniques were later adopted by social networks, cf. Stalder 2016: 188-189.

that knowledge about reality is gained not through one's own perception, but through listening to or reading other people's statements is not new. In fact, most of a person's current knowledge is based on hearsay and not on his or her own observation or on the acceptance of a proof. For reasons of efficiency, there is hardly any other way of dealing with knowledge in the scientific and technical world. Measured against epistemological standards of rationality, this way of dealing with knowledge is quite legitimate as long as the system of knowledge generation and distribution fulfils its task, especially in the sciences and journalism. However, the influence of these fields has been significantly reduced, according to media sciences, due to the increase in the direct exchange of information on the Internet. Social networks therefore endanger the critical handling of knowledge and also for deliberative democracy, which is dependent on rational opinion formation.[2]

This sketch of the problem shows that "filter bubbles" and echo chambers" are by no means fundamentally new problems, but developments whose quality and extent have been changed by the spread of digital media (1). Ultimately, it is also a question of whether or how direct access to reality, which is not predetermined or distorted by media, is possible, i.e. the basic problem of epistemology (2). This consideration leads to the conclusion that, with didactic intent, several questions or perspectives regarding the "prisoners" in filter bubbles and their observers have to be distinguished (3). Against this background, the approaches critical of the media are proving incomplete, and the contribution of philosophy is also indispensable from a didactic point of view (4).

1. Classical and digital media

Some analyses of digital media's social effects recall motifs from cultural criticism of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Increasing dependence on new machines, namely computers and smartphones, is also lamented for the the tendencies to experience the present less and to fixate present moments for the purpose of dissemination instead (Simanowski 2016: 40-47 and 60–70). The growing incapacity for longer concentration and the superficiality of the contacts, which are determined by the number of likes in social networks rather than by the meaning of shared interests and viewpoints is also criticized. From a didactic point of view, however, a mere collection of cultural and media-critical considerations remains unproductive

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[2] According to Habermas, the "deliberative paradigm" is an ideal model for democracy, particularly in view of the "electronic communications revolution", in order both to retain the basic idea of legitimation through rational opinion-forming and to take account of the empirically ascertainable changes in complex societies (cf. Habermas 2008: 143). In the shorter English Version, this remark is missing (cf. Habermas 2006).

until it is clear which basic problems are hidden behind these criticisms, which exemplary insights are to be gained in the debate, and which options for action are open.

"Filter bubbles" and "echo chambers" must be placed in a broader context and understood as a specific manifestation of a general problem. First of all, the phenomenon of isolation in a separate information universe has increased due to the spread of social networks, but is by no means new. Oswald Spengler, for example, wrote that the "people" only read the "one, 'their' newspaper" and so truth coincides with "what one constantly reads and hears" (Spengler 1920/22: 1139). Theodor W. Adorno, in reference to this observation, criticized the "expropriation of people's consciousness through the centralized means of public communication" (Adorno 1950: 56), i.e. through newspapers and radio. While the analogy between classical and digital media has its limits, especially with regard to the role of the so-called gatekeepers – journalists who weight information according to its relevance and decide on its publication,[3] the reference to historical parallels can protect against exaggerated conclusions concerning the effects of the distribution of digital media. Pörksen, for example, argues that this is an "epochal break," since so far "every medium [...] has itself limited its reach" (Pörksen 2018: 16). Reckwitz, moreover, speaks of a "structural break," since digital technology by no means merely "increases [...] the old, industrial paradigms" with their tendency towards mechanization and standardization, but (despite its uniformity in the form of a "cultural machine") enables, stimulates and even forces a "singularization of objects and subjects" (Reckwitz 2017: 228-229). A closer look behind the alleged rupture, however, reveals continuities that must not be ignored if the change triggered by the digital media is to be adequately assessed. This applies both to the optimistic interpretation that the digital media have opened up new freedoms and political participation opportunities for people as well as the pessimistic assessment that digitisation, and the Internet in particular, is leading to a flattening, a loss of understanding and depth in experiencing and dealing with important issues. For example, Reckwitz judges the social effects of the spread of digital media predominantly positively, because the subject is socially perceived and valued in the digitized world in its "uniqueness" (Reckwitz 2017: 59). But the uniformity with which many people look spellbound at the display of their smartphones and forget about their environment is reminiscent of the standardization of behaviors that Adorno and Horkheimer had criticized under the banner of the culture industry. What Reckwitz describes as a "background structure

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[3] Habermas speaks in this context in a positive way of "filters", namely as "filters of a discursive opinion formation" (Habermas 2008: 144).

for the production of singularities" (Reckwitz 2017: 229), namely the economic and technical instruments of a digitized society, ultimately prevails in standardized behaviors of people and goes beyond the "uniqueness" of their digital profiles (cf. Simanowski 2016: 39). The tendencies already criticized by critics of society and culture, namely the pressure of conformity and the disappearance of the individual in the masses, have only changed form and continue to be effective.

The talk of an "epochal" or "structural break" apparently (also) serves as an argument for the thesis that the spread of digital media represents a new "educational challenge" (Pörksen 2018: 21). However, the connection between social-technical changes and the goal and form of education is by no means as close as is assumed in this argument. The example of the now almost forgotten didactic concept of "*epochaltypischen Schlüsselprobleme*" ("key epochal-typical problems") shows that the transition from the identification of a socio-technical change to the determination of corresponding educational content requires additional reasons. Among other things, it must be clarified what position the new educational content should take in a comprehensive and general educational concept that starts, for example, with the basic idea of education as a mutual self- and world-disclosure, and therefore initially distinguishes elementary forms in which this disclosure can take place. Therefore, the reference to the distribution of digital media alone is not sufficient to justify the demand to declare digital media and corresponding forms of communication as an independent and indispensable element in an educational concept. Conversely, some of the media science topics could prove to be examples of fundamental questions that are already taken into account in the comprehensive educational concept. Then the alleged "educational challenge" could be reduced to concretizing these general questions in relation to the changed reality.

2. The old and the new look through "green glasses"

An important difference between traditional and digital media is that the choice of a particular newspaper or radio station is based on a decision of one's own, which can be said to be rational on the condition that one knows how the information and opinions offered were produced. This condition of "filter sovereignty" (Pörksen 2018: 215) is probably met to a greater extent by the classical media than by social platforms and search engines whose algorithms work in secret. Pörksen describes the choice of a certain newspaper or a certain television station "as if one were consciously putting on tinted glasses," an "analogy" he borrowed from Eli Pariser's book *Filter Bubble* (Pörksen 2018: 215 and 255, note 249).

However, Pariser speaks of filter bubbles precisely in those cases in which those affected are not aware that the information offered is personalized, i.e. selected and arranged with regard to presumed interests and opinions of those affected (Pariser 2011: 9f.). Furthermore, it is doubtful whether newspaper buyers and television viewers will *remain* permanently aware of the extent to which the reality conveyed by the media is also a product of their own decision. More important, however, is that these are epistemological questions, not questions of media studies, as can be seen from the fact that the comparison with "tinted glasses" comes from this context. Heinrich von Kleist described a corresponding thought experiment, namely that "all men had green glasses instead of the eyes" and therefore "must judge that the objects [...] *are* green [...]" (Kleist 1801: 1280).[4] Kleist wanted to explain the basic idea of Kant's critique of knowledge (which he understood as a skeptical position), namely that the objects of knowledge are merely phenomena, and that therefore truth "*Bildung*" ("education") remain unattainable to humans forever. Against the background of this epistemological question, the problem of filter bubbles now appears as a special manifestation of a general problem, from which the solution (or resolution) should offer something to be learned for the media studies problem.

In a media-critical context, a filter bubble does not distort or restrict the perception of all people (or all perceptive and rational beings), but only individuals or members of a group of like-minded people. This limitation makes it necessary to describe the situation of the wearer of tinted glasses from (at least) two different perspectives, namely from that of this wearer, for whom "all objects are green," and from that of the observers, who do not wear tinted glasses and who therefore make the distinction between a world that appears green and the world as they themselves perceive it. This distinction, which media science assumes to be empirical, can appear in the context of epistemology only in hypothetical form, because the conditions of the possibility of human knowledge and its objects cannot be changed in reality, but only in abstract hypothetical terms, such as by a mental comparison between the finite knowledge of human beings and the infinite knowledge of an omniscient, godlike being.

Despite this difference, the reference to epistemology is meaningful and useful because it brings out a precondition of media criticism more clearly. Media criticism presupposes an external point of view from which it is possible to observe media consumers and the world as it appears to them in its difference to the "real" world. Only from such a point of view can media critics describe the behaviour of other people in a way that is typical for their

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[4] Letter of March 22nd 1801 to Wilhelmine Zenge, emphasis in the original.

investigations, namely in its facilitation, but also in its limitation by the media. This raises the question of the very possibility of such a position or second-order observation. That this condition of media criticism is problematic[5] arises from Luhmann's thesis that every observation of the media and media users also shows its "blind spot," from which a fundamental limit results for every media criticism. It cannot claim to have "media-free" access to reality beyond all media. Luhmann, for example, speaks of the "reality of the mass media" in the double sense that (1) newspapers are actually printed in large editions and television programmes are broadcast, and (2) in this way reality is created, as it is known to media consumers (Luhmann 1996: 12-14). But observers can only observe how reality is constructed, which is why the question: "How do the mass media distort reality [...]" loses its meaning (Luhmann 1996: 20).

Accordingly, criticism of the bias in filter bubbles and echo chambers seems to lack basis if it is to provide not only a description of different reality constructions, but also an assessment of their appropriateness. It is impossible, as Luhmann claims, for an external observer to have a criterion that allows him to judge the appropriateness of a construction of reality. This consideration should be applied to the media-critical description of filter bubbles and echo chambers: an external observer can detect different modes of perception, but cannot claim to distort perception in the sense that it amounts to a deviation from a reality not conveyed by the media.

If it should be easy, as Nguyen claims, "[to] pop an epistemic bubble simply by exposing its members to the information and arguments that they've missed," this process should not be understood as if confrontation with information and arguments would give those affected access to the reality not conveyed by the media. However, a situation that psychologists call cognitive conflict – namely the conflict between incompatible perceptions of the same part of reality – is conceivable. In the best case, a cognitive conflict can be resolved at a higher level of abstraction through the construction of new patterns of perception, which is tantamount to a learning process. The "bursting" of a filter bubble is then to be understood as reaching an equilibrium, so that cognitive conflicts of a certain type no longer occur.

A cognitive conflict is described from the perspective of an external observer. The affected persons themselves can report on the origin and resolution of a cognitive conflict only retrospectively, since they take up a suitable perspective only at the newly gained level of

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[5] With his constructivist account, Pörksen tries to do without this precondition, cf. Pörksen 2015. But results from media sciences are often understood and disseminated as if they presuppose a naive-realistic standpoint.

abstraction. During their involvement in the conflict, such a description is not possible because an essential cause of the conflict is that they are trapped in a filter bubble or echo chamber and are unable to absorb and evaluate external information. Filter bubbles or echo chambers cannot be seen by those trapped in it. There may be borderline cases, such as a Facebook user who also learns about world politics through classical media but who nevertheless remains uncritically connected to his community and to a degree that makes the talk of a filter bubble seem meaningful. Many users of social platforms also obtain information from other sources, as empirical studies have shown (Dubois/Blank 2018: 732-733). This only means, however, that there may be incongruencies and inconsistencies in the description of media use and that it is often not clear which of two meaningful descriptions is to be preferred. The filter bubble or echo chamber models do not lose their value simply because in some cases it is debatable whether they can be used adequately.

Even if empirical studies do not provide clear results regarding the distribution and degree of media isolation, filter bubbles and echo chambers remain a cause for concern. A special challenge is connected with the mere thought that one's own conception of reality could be determined and distorted by algorithms without being able to know about it and influence it.[6] The increasing power of Internet and search engine operators is not the only reason for concern. Another is the possibility that this power will no longer be experienced as such, that one thus lives as if in a prison without knowing it. Without such knowledge, a prisoner could not develop any idea of a reality outside of prison, and so there would be no motive to work on one's own liberation.

Thus described, the problem of the filter bubbles or echo chambers is of course not new. Socrates described it in his *allegory of the cave*. As is well known, the "strange prisoners" (Plato: Politeia 515a) live in their own world and are not even aware of their seclusion. Expressed in the media studies idiom, they are in a perfect echo chamber; the prisoners mutually confirm their convictions regarding the classification of the shadow images, and they fend off from the outset from the outsider's attempts to inform them about their situation, with reference to his "spoiled eyes" (Plato: Politeia 571a). Because their conception of reality

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[6] Recently, the concept of the algorithm has also aroused interest among social and cultural scientists, which is probably due to fears triggered by recent discussions about artificial intelligence and self-learning systems (cf. Stalder 2016: 164-202). The classical concept of the algorithm is much older than modern computer technology; it is the central concept of computer sciences and does not describe anything to be afraid of. From this point of view, computer science lessons could certainly contribute to the development of the ability to realistically assess current developments.

is completely closed, the prisoners cannot even consider that the information brought into the cave from outside could be accurate and useful. The basic problem, as Hans Blumenberg put it, lies in the fact that "one cannot depict in a cave what a cave is" (Blumenberg 1989: 89). As horizons that limit the sphere of perceivable objects, the filter bubble and the echo chamber likewise do not constitute any objects that can be perceived and described *inside* this framework.

This fundamental limitation results in behaviours that Socrates and his interlocutor, Glaucon, referred to in the course of their dialogue on "human nature in relation to education and illiteracy" (Plato: Politeia 514a). For example, the mere liberation of a cave dweller from his chains does not yet lead him to tackle the ascent from the cave in order to be able to see through his previous world as a world of shadows. He must be forced to work his way up to a point of view from which a superior knowledge of reality becomes possible.[7] The fact that it is impossible for the prisoners to adequately assess their situation becomes evident even after the freed man returns to the cave. The prisoners laugh at his inability to keep up with the competition for the correct prognosis of the passing shadows. He has the superior insight, but fails to make the cave dwellers understand the possibility of such insight (Plato: Politeia 517a). No communication is possible between the returnee and those left behind.

Plato's thought experiment can serve as a warning against overlooking or underestimating the difficulties associated with imprisonment in filter bubbles or echo chambers. These begin with the appropriate description. The perspective of the freed cave dweller must be distinguished from the perspective of those who appear to him as prisoners but are by no means so according to their own criteria. There can be no comprehensive perspective that allows the perception of the prisoners, the view of the process of their liberation, and finally the view from the position of insight into the unfortunate prisoners.

However, the form of the parable makes it possible to combine the perspectives of the observer and the (potentially) affected person. At first - on the pictorial level of the parable - Socrates represented the process of liberation from the perspective of the external observer, whereby he could not take the perspective of a captured cave dweller. Similarly, talking about filter bubbles is initially associated with the assumption that one is not caught in the bubbles discussed. The change from the pictorial to the content level of the parable, however, allowed Socrates and Glaucon to assume that they were somehow enclosed in a "cave," thus similar to

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[7] Platon: *Politeia*, 515c and 515e. Waldenfels uses the accurate formula: „*Politeía* is not an *Émile*." (Waldenfels 2017: 89).

the prisoners (Plato: Politeia 515a). However, this similarity can only be asserted in an abstract-hypothetical sense, not by describing one's own "cave" as a limited part of reality. Socrates' own interpretation of the parable, in which the cave is to be equated with the area of the perceptible and the world outside the cave with the area of the visible (Plato: Politeia 517b), does not change the fact that the cave in which Socrates himself could be trapped cannot be represented. On the other hand, it could be objected that the area of the perceptible becomes recognizable in its limitations under the condition of insight into the idea of the good (Plato: Politeia 517c). However, Socrates and Glaucon spoke of this insight only hypothetically and did not claim to have already arrived at this insight themselves. As far as the description of the cave is concerned, there are only two possibilities: Either "the others" are enclosed in a cave (or echo chamber), and in this case both the cave and the "reality constructions" of its inhabitants can be described from the position of an observer, or it can be hypothetically assumed that you yourself are enclosed in a cave in some sense, but without being able to describe this cave as part of your own world.

Despite these limitations, it is still possible to indicate what needs to be done to get out of a cave. The way out is not to wait for an experience of revival through which one reaches a higher insight.[8] Rather, one's own modes of perception and concepts must be subjected to a test of the kind that Socrates exemplified in his dialogues. His knowledge did not consist of a knowledge of a special kind, for example of ideas in another area of reality, but of the ability to examine claims and clarify terms.[9] Even if those concerned are not aware of exactly what the limitations of their perceptions and convictions are (and what causes them), they can nevertheless expect that an understanding beyond the boundaries of particular echo chambers becomes possible if they test their conceptual instruments for their reliability.

Philosophy's contribution to the media studies discussion of filter bubbles and echo chambers thus comprises four points, namely (1) that the perspective of a "prisoner" must be consistently distinguished from the perspective of an observer, but that (2) the observer can hypothetically assume of himself to be a prisoner, from which (3) the demand arises to subject his own perceptions, concepts, and principles to an examination, just as the prisoners in Plato's cave or users of certain media would also have to conduct in order to be prepared for a possible "cave exit." Finally, (4) this process can be understood as education in a sense that

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[8] Waldenfels draws attention to the parallel between the insight into the idea of the good and a proces of religious conversion (Waldenfels 2017: 90).

[9] Such is the interpretation of the talk of platonic "ideas" by Stemmer, following Wolfgang Wieland (Stemmer 1992, 220-221).

goes beyond mere knowledge of media use, but also beyond a culturally critical rejection of digital media.

3. Possible perspectives and didactical situations

It is didactically significant that caves and filter bubbles can only be spoken of from certain perspectives. In relation to one's own situation, they can only be spoken of hypothetically. There are several positions that learners and teachers can take up or can attribute to people whose handling of the media is the subject of discussion. Each of these positions provides certain ways of accessing the problem, requires specific assumptions to be fulfilled, and is subject to certain restrictions:

(1) Learners and teachers can take the position of media critics and think together on how to recognise when *other* people are trapped in a bubble, and what possible consequences that has.

(2) Learners and teachers could investigate a particular filter bubble, such as the one of the *followers* of a particular platform on the Internet, and try to determine what it is like for *other* people to live in it. Of particular importance would be the question of whether it makes sense to attribute a motive to these "others" to leave their cave. This does not seem possible (in the case of a completely closed cave world), because it presupposes the reference to reality outside the cave, which cannot be imagined inside.

(3) The teacher could (mis-)understand the didactic asymmetry in relation to the learners in the sense of seeing himself in the role of the philosopher who frees the enclosed learners from their prison.

(4) In view of the inescapability of media mediation and the resulting distortion, learners and teachers could agree on the sceptical position that education and truth remain fundamentally unattainable to them.

(5) Learners and teachers may attempt to combine the two perspectives of the included and the observers by hypothetically considering themselves as included.

ad (1): Many media critics suggest the description from the position of the external critic, who judges the limitations of the view of others. This undoubtedly has its justification. However, it has limitations in that the relationship with the "others" is designed from the outset in such a way that it is not possible to see how communication with the "others," which is regularly

called for, should still be possible. For cultural or media criticism, it may be indispensable to take an external standpoint from which the consumers of certain television programmes or the users of some Internet platforms appear like inhabitants of Plato's cave.[10] However, this demarcation carries the risk of not generally understanding the problem of filter bubbles as a problem of the media or the appropriate handling of information, but rather projecting it onto a limited group of people. In this case, this approach becomes counterproductive because it no longer contributes to the search for definitions and principles that can serve as a basis for understanding. The cave dwellers left behind cannot be given any understandable reason to grant the freed returnee special status and to give priority to his judgment over their own judgements. Similarly, it cannot be guaranteed that a group of media users will be given a reason to accept the opinion of external observers and assume the role of the blinded. Ultimately, the external approach leads to mutual accusations by members of different groups that they do not perceive the "thing" properly and apply useless concepts, or leads to lamenting the fate of the "uneducated" cave dwellers (Plato: Politeia 516c).

ad (2): Whether there is even an answer to the question of what it is to be another is controversial. Still, a change of perspective is possible in the sense of a reconstruction of views and experiences, for example as it is carried out in literature lessons investigating the representation of various figures and their views. It is also possible to subsequently report how one has made a mistake and how one has freed oneself from it. In retrospect, a cognitive conflict can be presented as an occasion to have gone through an educational process. A currently experienced conflict, however, will be experienced as a problem that should be solved as quickly as possible. It is not possible to know what it is like to be a prisoner in a filter bubble or cave if it is as comprehensive and total as Plato assumed in his representation.

As a consequence, it does not seem possible to have a motive for the ascent from the cave world or to imagine the mere possibility of an ascent in a meaningful way. This idea would have to take place within the framework of the forms of perception and categories that make up the cave world, but also present this world as an object. What is possible, however, is the abstract idea of a cave itself. In this way, however, the hypothetical description of one's own inclusion is detached from the perspective of certain "others." Their situation is not presented in order to put oneself in their place, but serves as a starting point for hypothetical considerations of one's own inclusion.

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[10] Cf. for example Fleischhauer 2016.

ad (3): A strict asymmetry between the "educated" returnee and the "uneducated" prisoners is not suitable for describing the process of gradual liberation from bias as a process of understanding. In Plato's portrayal, this is shown in the use of coercion and violence by the "liberator" and in the complete incomprehension of the cave dwellers left behind. The question of how a cave dweller freed from his chains can be motivated to tackle the arduous ascent from the cave remains open (cf. Blumenberg 1989: 88). As the situation of the cave dwellers is described, one cannot make out where a dialogue could begin through which contradictions would become clear and a learning process would thus be set in motion.

The reference to the (hypothetical) killing of the returnee is often interpreted as allusion to Socrates' condemnation by the Athenians (e.g. Blumenberg 1989: 147), and the depiction invites us to identify with the misunderstood philosopher, i.e. to assume the position of the knowing person but without really having completed the arduous ascent from the cave. It would therefore be an illusion to assume that understanding what is happening in Plato's description is sufficient to eliminate the aforementioned asymmetry between teachers and learners.

Of didactic interest is precisely what is excluded in the cave parable: a learning process as a process of communication between learners and teachers. Such a process of communication is possible between the cave inhabitants (about the moving shadow images) or between Socrates and Glaucon, when they discuss their situation with regard to education and illiteracy, precisely because there is a common horizon of understanding.

ad (4): The sceptical view fits well with a generalized critique of culture and media that no longer believes it is necessary to explain its own viewpoint. It is also the view often taken up by young people to whom knowledge and firm convictions seem to contradict what they understand by philosophy. From a didactic point of view, the sceptical view is unproductive if it is associated with the position that any (as always preliminary) result in the course of an investigation must be doubted even without a specific reason. Moreover, the sceptic avoids the interesting question of what to do in view of the possibility of being locked in a cave.

ad (5): Even if Blumenberg's assertion that "one cannot depict in a cave what a cave is" (Blumenberg 1989: 89) applies, it is nevertheless possible to start from one's own imprisonment in a cave and to examine the possibilities of one's own liberation in the form of

a thought experiment. Socrates asked Glaucon (Plato: Politeia 514a) to consider what those who suspect they might be in a cave or in a state of illiteracy could do. In contrast to the mutual incomprehension between returnees and cave dwellers mentioned in the parable, an understanding about the hypothetical case of one's own inclusion is possible in the conversation between Socrates and Glaucon. Neither Socrates nor Glaucon pretended to have already come to an understanding of the idea of the good, so that the hypothesis of one's own bias cannot be rejected from the outset. It therefore makes sense to investigate how liberation from imprisonment would be possible, namely liberation from unclear ideas and concepts.

The difference to the approach of media studies is obvious: media scientists investigate empirical facts, such as the closed perception structure of the members of a certain Facebook group. Such an examination cannot take place by asking people, who are already affected by a filter bubble, how it is like to be affected by this filter bubble. Of course, media scientists (and possibly sociologists and psychologists) will indirectly try to find out something about their specific perception structure by asking clever questions, for example about the special characteristics of the Facebook group to which the interviewees belong. But a direct communication *with* the "prisoners" about the situation of these "prisoners" would presuppose that those affected would be able to portray in the "cave" what this "cave" is all about.

The limitation of this position is that it is not possible to specify exactly where the path out of the cave begins and where it leads. The point of view of an external observer, which can compare the views of those still included with the reality not conveyed by the media, cannot be taken.

4. Consequences for philosophical education

Positions (1) and (5) are the main points of reference for dealing with the subject in class. Both are, as already mentioned, associated with restrictions and risks. The second approach (2) invites speculations that can at first stimulate teaching and offer some methodological possibilities, but ultimately does not lead far; the question of the perspective of the "other", who is enclosed, transforms into the question of enclosement in general, so that the second approach changes into the fifth. Approach (3) seems like a model from the didactic moth box because this position spells out the didactic difference between teacher and pupil in a one-sided way and gives the teacher a kind of higher insight, which even Socrates or Glaucon did not claim for themselves. The judgment that this model is useless should not be confused with

a denial of any didactic difference. (4) probably meets some sceptical convictions that are often encountered among young people, but proves to be sterile in the long run.

Media studies' treatment of the topic follows the lines given under (1) and (2). The approach to specific cases, such as a specific network, undoubtedly offers didactic advantages. There is also a demand to familiarise pupils with basic rules for the preparation and dissemination of information. However, when the demand is justified to make "fundamental questions of journalism [...] an element of general education" (Pörksen 2018: 21), questions of truth and trust as well as of the foundations of knowledge that fall within the realm of philosophy, are necessarily raised. It is therefore an important task of didactics of philosophy to redefine these classical questions with reference to the digitized society and to present their topicality.

Another area in which a contribution of philosophy would be meaningful and desirable is media ethics. Classical questions such as the responsible handling of truth gain new topicality through the dissemination of digital media. Compiled lesson plans in German can be found in didactic journals, for example in the special issue on media ethics of the journal *Ethik & Unterricht* (3/2016). In this context, too, the above distinction between different perspectives also proves useful if one does not want to fall into the trap that it is always "the others" who spread fake news.

In student-oriented teaching, of course, not only thoughts and arguments will be expressed which correspond to the preferred approaches (1) and (5). Moreover, the aim of this article was not to define what a philosophical treatment of the problem of filter bubbles and echo chambers should look like, but to draw attention to the limitation of a purely media studies approach (1) and to point out the path of a philosophical supplement (5). The purpose instead was to clarify which constellations are possible concerning the relationships between learners, teachers, and others, when dealing with premises for the perception of the description of reality. While specific guidelines should be derived from this article for how the problems the new media present are to be treated in the teaching of philosophy, criteria can be derived for a sufficient solution for dealing with them.[11]

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[11] I would like to thank Alexander Merrow for feedback to the translated text.

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How to cite this article