NEGATIVITY AND WISDOM AS PART OF PHILOSOPHY EDUCATION

Philipp Thomas
University of Tuebingen
philipp.thomas@philosophie.uni-tuebingen.de

Abstract
Negativity is understood here as the theoretical insight into the limits of knowledge as well as the practical, even existential consequences of this insight. The tradition of philosophical wisdom reflects negativity in this sense since antiquity. The concepts of negativity in Nietzsche, Hegel, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger are also reconstructed in the article as part of this tradition. The text tries to make these philosophies accessible to philosophy education. The starting point here is the question about a way of life that has dissociated itself from ideological certainties.

Keywords: Negativity, lost confidence in certainty, ancient philosophical wisdom, Hegel, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger

1. What is negativity and why should it be part of philosophy education?
1.1. On the meaning of negativity between theory and practice
Negation and negativity have had a rich tradition in Western philosophy since antiquity. While in Christian metaphysics up to Spinoza negativity is understood as the infinite in the horizon of God's creation of the finite, Spinoza sees the being of objects in what they are not (Ritter 1984: 671). Montaigne and Kant determine the finiteness of our knowledge in very different ways. In the 19th century, German idealists, especially Hegel, describe negativity as a dialectical force that Kierkegaard explicitly relates to human existence. In the 20th century, phenomenology describes phenomena above all in their inexhaustibility. Existentialism discovers the radical indeterminacy of man and the "thrownness in existence" and "fateful freedom". Albert Camus illustrates the human situation determined by futility through the myth of Sisyphus. Less tragic than ironic, Richard Rorty sees humans' post-metaphysical situation, in which the belief in being able to attain an absolute truth through philosophy is lost. Rather, it is important never to completely trust one's own certainties of truth and to revise them again and again (Rorty 1989). Scientists like Werner Heisenberg or Ilja Prigogine destroy the myth of absolutely certain scientific knowledge. The thought that the highest being, or God, is unrecognizable and unspeakable has occupied negative theology since antiquity. Plato, Plotin, the church fathers as well as the negative Christian theology (e.g. Nikolaus von Kues) and mysticism (e.g. Meister Eckhart) articulate the experience of thinking that reaches insurmountable limits in different ways and thus describe that which it actually aims at as the other to the conceivable in different ways.

The term negativity has different meanings. In addition to ignorance, phenomena such as antinomy, antagonism, opposition or contradiction are also referred to. The latter are addressed in this text only in the section on Hegel, otherwise it is primarily addressed as ignorance. Here I use the term negativity in the sense of the practical consequences of ignorance. More precisely, it is about the theoretical insight into the impossibility of knowledge and the existential consequences thereof, which also mean a potential for one's own further development. This connection can be illustrated indirectly by the phenomenon of disillusionment: What happens when something is suddenly seen through as merely imaginary? An everyday case is when we are mistaken in the explanation of a phenomenon and have to realize that not explanation *a*, but explanation *b* applies. For a physical symptom, e.g. certain pains, we have prepared an explanation. After a medical examination we realize that we have a certain disease that we had not expected. In a certain sense, for example in the interest of the right therapy, disillusionment seems to us to be an asset. We may judge in a similar way if we fell in love unilaterally, but for a long time believed that the love could be mutual. We will not welcome the painful disillusionment, and yet it may give rise to further development. On a large scale, we can think of the loss of certainties suffered by people who grew up in a state system with strong ideology, such as a dictatorship, and whose state collapsed, as it was the case in Germany in 1945. Soon people look at what happened with completely different eyes and judge earlier certainties as imaginary.

The meaning of negativity as a philosophical term can now be distinguished from these examples. This is no longer about the insight that everything is completely different (explanation *b*) than initially assumed (explanation *a*). But it is about the insight that explanation *a* does not apply because in principle an explanation is not possible since our knowledge reaches a limit here. This limit is in principle: knowledge of the type 'explanation a' or 'explanation b' is generally seen through as an illusion, for example when it comes to ideological certainties. This theoretical insight can also have practical, even existential consequences, which, similar to the non-philosophical examples, can prove to be the potential of a transforming development. In the following I will try to briefly show this for different philosophies in which negativity plays an important role.

1.2. On the utility of negativity for educational processes

I would like to plead for negativity in its philosophical meaning to be regarded as an important part of philosophy education. We are used to thinking only culturally and philosophically about the loss of certainty, we are also concerned about plurality and the social coexistence of ideological certainties on the one hand and the lack of ideological certainties on the other. But we do not ask enough about a way of life of one's own for those people who have dissociated themselves in principle from certainties. A small but presumably not unimportant part of such a way of life of missing certainties could be offered by the potential of philosophical thinking of negativity. I would like to argue in favor of looking at the loss of certainty not so much from the outside, for example from a perspective of cultural philosophy, but from the inside. What practical consequences can insight into ignorance in principle have? By this I mean much more than a compensatory art of living. Such a way runs the risk of closing the gap caused by the

missing certainties by new concepts, perhaps even by a new big picture (Thomas 2006: 189ff.). For me it is about something else, namely, first of all, the transformation of the apparent knowledge into the deep consciousness of ignorance. And second about the possibility that on the ground of this consciousness of ignorance we open ourselves to other forms of knowledge which are no longer of the type 'explanation a' or 'explanation b'. This whole intellectual movement is by no means neutral for the thinker as would be for example a mathematical proof. Rather, it concerns the thinker in his existence and life practice. The transforming movement of turning knowledge belongs to the rich tradition of philosophical wisdom. Why should negativity be part of philosophy education? Because the question of a way of life having abandoned ideological certainties is relevant for our society and for young people. And because we can only address this question philosophically if we take up the tradition of philosophical wisdom and its negative thinking in philosophy lessons.

2. Ancient wisdom: sophists, sceptics, Ecclesiastes
2.1. Sophists and sceptics: two ways of dealing with ignorance

While for Parmenides being is a unity and non-existence cannot be thought of, the sophist Gorgias of Leontinoi argues for the non-existence, non-recognizability and non-communicability of being (Flashar 1998: 50). The sophists spoke of negativity, but of a very weak one: If there are no absolute truths and everything is basically relative (Protagoras according to Plato, *Theaitetos* 152 a), then one can draw quite pragmatic conclusions from this. Values apply to a community (according to Plato, *Theaitetos* 167c), people give themselves law and order for practical reasons and not because they love to be just (Trasymachos according to Plato, *Politeia* 358a ff.). The laws benefit the weak more than the strong (Kallikles according to Plato, *Gorgias* 483b). Here the sober diagnosis that there is no higher truth leads to equally sober considerations about which lifestyle is successful. Yet the insight into something negative (that there is no absolute truth) has no transforming power here, but it finds a practical answer.

This changes with the skeptics: pyrrhonian skepticism, as handed down by Sextus Empiricus, sees through our explanatory models of the world *as images*. All systems of true propositions about the world are rejected. The path to happiness itself cannot be derived from a system of reasons and pursued with power. And already knowing this can greatly relieve us human beings who are strenuously searching for happiness Sextus Empiricus writes:

> The Sceptic, in fact, had the same experience which is said to have befallen the painter Apelles. Once, they say, when he was painting a horse and wished to represent in the painting the horse's foam, he was so unsuccessful that he gave up the attempt and flung at the picture the sponge on which he used to wipe the paints off his brush, and the mark of the sponge produced the effect of a horse's foam. So, too, the Sceptics were in hopes of gaining quietude by means of a decision regarding the disparity of the objects of sense and of thought, and being unable to effect this they suspended judgement; and they found that quietude, as if by chance, followed upon their suspense, even as a shadow follows its substance (Sextus Empiricus 1967: 19-20).

If we consistently bracket certainties, then we are freed to an existence that no longer focuses on conceptually mastering the world. But happiness can also find us if we realize that we cannot

understand ourselves, our life and the world. Wisdom here means the search for other forms of knowledge and life practices. This is also related to the skeptical concept of isosthenia. The insight into not knowing arises from the observation that in every philosophical question equally good arguments can be found even for contradictory positions. The conflict is undecidable. To make this isosthenia visible and to abstain from judgment is the goal of Pyrrhonian skepticism (Riedweg et al 2018: 219). In his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (§§ 79-82) Hegel similarly determines the equilibrium of the reasons as the negative-reasonable moment of philosophy. This is due to a dialectical negativity, but goes beyond mere negation and naïve skepticism.

2.2. Ecclesiastes: wisdom at the bottom of ignorance

The author of the book *Ecclesiastes* from the Old Testament probably lived in the third century BC and was influenced by skeptical, epicurean and stoic teachings (Lohfink 1980: 7, 9). The thinking of negativity here is even deeper than in skepticism. It begins with the melancholic thought of the total futility of our actions. No matter how great our efforts and success may be, we will soon be completely forgotten: "No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them" (Ecclesiastes 1, 11, New International Version). Secondly, it follows from this that all wisdom in the sense of a wise mastery of life is also null and void (6, 11f.). Trust in justice has been broken: "the righteous perishing in their righteousness, and the wicked living long in their wickedness" (7, 15). At this low point, the reflection reverses. The pain of incomprehension and futility is transformed into a silent practice that actively pursues neither happiness nor meaning, but is more receptive to the world. "For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun" (9, 9). "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom" (9, 10). Only when we have experienced cynicism and desperation and realize that we cannot see any context behind the things, our life and the world emerge strangely foreign, precarious and at the same time valuable, and we can try to correspond to them, figuratively speaking: not with our thinking, but with our existence. Negativity can unfold a great transforming force here.

2.3. Ancient wisdom as an element of philosophy education today?

As teachers we have doubts or are even desperate in face of the injustice and senselessness of the world. This also goes for our students: Promises of happiness fail, the adults are powerless, the right of the strongest seems to apply everywhere. But instead of courageously making this the starting point of our discussion, we teachers often cling to pragmatic solutions and clever rules like the sophists. My thesis is here: Only if we open ourselves completely to negativity, as Pyrrhonic sceptics and Ecclesiastes have done, we can incorporate the transforming power of negativity into our thinking. No big picture can solve the world like a math problem. Our existence has no meaning in the sense in which a sentence has a meaning. If the practice of conceptual coping with the world repeatedly runs into the void and we bracket it and adopt it selectively, there will be room for new practices. Our place, our time and the people around us, all this is accidental. And yet this coincidence can become the most important point in the world

for us. In his book on wisdom the philosopher Andreas Luckner mentions in this sense the fairy tale of *Frau Holle* (Mother Holle). Goldmarie (Golden Mary) is convinced by the apple tree that the ripe apples want to be picked and by the bread in the oven that it wants to be pulled out, otherwise it becomes black. In the fairy tale, the Goldmarie is later richly endowed by Mother Holle. "It is her attitude towards the people and things that 'gild' Marie's life and her happiness is not a reward for the good she does and has done, but a surplus" (Luckner 2005: 61). With our students we can work with texts such as this one, or with Sextus Empiricus' anecdote of the painter Apelles. In class we can disappoint the usual expectation that philosophy can lead to secure knowledge of the whole and to understanding the world. The practical insights of skepticism and Ecclesiastes show: When thinking opens itself to its own impotence, i.e. to the impossibility of ultimate justification and to the limits of meaning, then thinking loses this impotence in another way at the same time - in that it points into the other of itself. This movement is meant by the transforming power of negativity.

3. Dialectical negativity and the formation of the self: Nietzsche and Hegel
3.1. Nietzsche: liberation to oneself

Nietzsche on the one hand is the philosopher of the 'big yes'. In *Zarathustra*, affirmation is the goal, and it is not possible for either the camel or the lion, but only for the highest form of existence, the child. On the other hand Nietzsche is also the philosopher of denial: the cultural assets of his epoch are destroyed, whether Christianity, morality of compassion or the historical conception of history. The truth in its classical concept of a metaphysical transcendence is lost, Nietzsche's philosophy is regarded as nihilistic. But here nihilism is the condition for a transformation. What remains is that other form of transcendence that is achieved in the transformations of life. In the end, Nietzsche can speak of *amor fati* and of a path to the superhuman. Nietzsche is concerned with the liberation of man from the burden of culture, which always comes to man from the outside, e.g. in the educational process. As long as our values are determined by others, we cannot become ourselves, life appears to us as dead, as a desert. "Especially the strong load-bearing man in whom reverence resideth. Too many EXTRANEOUS heavy words and worths loadeth he upon himself – then seemeth life to him a desert!" (Nietzsche 2009, section "The Spirit of Gravity"). Only when man has completely freed himself he can set out in search of himself. If this search were guided by classical Western reason again, it would perhaps lead to the same results again. Instead, man should entrust himself in his search to his very own, individual reason, he should accept himself lovingly. Nietzsche calls this physical reason.

> "But he who would become light, and be a bird, must love himself" (ibid.). "Dare only to believe in yourselves-in yourselves and in your inward parts! He who doth not believe in himself always lieth" (ibid., section "Immaculate Perception"). "The body is a big sagacity" (ibid., section "The Dispisers of the Body").

Nietzsche strives for a different form of reason, a different form of knowledge, namely a physical and individual one. Where are negativity and transformation here? Certainly, in the dizzying insight into the permission to allow one's own self to be allowed to the world.

3.2. Can Nietzsche's message of self-liberation be part of philosophy education?

Do we dare to discuss what this can mean with our students in the context of the school: to say goodbye to the foreign values, to love oneself, and to become light as a bird? What does it mean to trust your own needs and 'inward parts'? Do we perhaps even know it from our own experience, this space of freedom that suddenly opens up when in a clear moment we feel what it means to be allowed to lead an individual existence? It's not about being special, it's not about heroism. It is about being able to exist as a self that does not have to be able to immediately say who it is and which may above all be curious about itself. Nietzsche does not offer us a program with regard to content. "'This-is now MY way, where is yours?' Thus did I answer those who asked me 'the way'. For THE way-it doth not exist!" (ibid., section "The Spirit of Gravity"). Can we adopt the explanatory models and develop a sense for ourselves with the help of bodily reason? And can and do we want to give our students an idea of this process?

3.3. Hegel: negativity as the engine of development

Hegel describes the transforming power of negativity as the inner motor of thought, human development and the development of the world. In contrast to negativity as non-knowledge, here we encounter a different meaning of negativity. But Hegel's philosophy encompasses and unites both meanings. In the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (§§ 79-82) Hegel defines naive skepticism as mere negation. In the dialectical moment of reason, the unilateral of mere negation is cancelled out. There is no outside in Hegel's thinking, and this is what makes it so radical. Not only do the 'right' thoughts and the finished results belong into this thinking, but especially also do the errors on the stages in the thinking process. Therefore, Hegel's thinking is a good way of describing processes of personal development and education.

> The course of *Geist's* development towards self-knowledge lies through the initial confusions, misconceptions and truncated visions of men. These cannot therefore lie outside the system. Rather this initial darkness reflects something essential about the absolute, viz., that it must grow through struggle to self-knowledge (Taylor 1975: 127).

This double negation is described by Hegel as a process of transformation. About the first negation:

> The Thing is posited as being *for itself*, or as the absolute negation of all otherness, therefore as purely *self*-related negation; but the negation that is self-related is the suspension of *itself*; in other words, the Thing has its essential being in another Thing (Hegel 1977: 76).

Something gains its identity from the fact that it is not everything else, that it negates everything else through its existence. This is a contradiction and it will be this contradiction

that drives forward a development process. The contradiction is that the thing gains itself entirely from the other, namely from its negation. It doesn't seem to have a self of its own.

About the second negation. The second negation refers directly to the contradiction and impossibility that something has its "essential being in another Thing". If this is the sentence: "It is not possible that 'the Thing has its essential being in another Thing'", then this sentence is negated in the second negation. We realize that – when understood in a different or more developed way – it is nevertheless possible that something has its essence from something else. Namely, when this thing evolves into something that embraces a kind of inner otherness without breaking it. The engine for further development is the contradiction and the lack which lies in the formula "being for itself, the absolute negation of all otherness". At the same time, this lack is a potential in which something perishes and then arises anew, becomes different and yet remains the same.

3.4. Negativity as an engine of development: what does it mean for philosophy education?
The example of adolescence is relevant to our work with pupils (Erikson 1953, 1956). During adolescence we discover ourselves. But the main reason for this is that we are beginning to reject the world. As children, we saw the same world through our parents' eyes. Now we see everything super-critically and consider it an imposition to continue to be the well-functioning people that society wants. Society offers us professional or family roles. But we may feel that we lose ourselves when we get involved in these offers. Here one could say that we derive our identity from the negation of society and the roles it offers us. The inner contradiction of this situation would be that although we have a particularly strong feeling of being ourselves in rejection, we can only refer to what is negated and rejected in the question: "And who are you?". This could be the perplexity of adolescence. It does not seem possible that "the Thing has its essential being in another Thing".

During this phase we may at some point have the idea that we can also change society. We do this through the development and the letting become effective of our own talents and predispositions. However, this work and change presupposes taking on a task or an offered role. In the first negation it seemed impossible for us to be ourselves if we diminish the negation of society. In the second negation, selfhood seems possible to us in the moment when we shape the material that society offers us (e.g. the profession we take on) in a way that only we can do it. Then we have gained our identity in this other one, which has been newly designed by us individually. The shift from impossibility to the possibility that "he Thing has its essential being in another Thing" describes the painful and at first not considered possible further development of our identity in view of the other.

Philosophy never lets go of critical questioning: It finds shortcomings in every definition. This means progress in philosophy. At the same time, however, this force of criticism can mean progress in our lives and in our world. Something 'does not fit', is contradictory, or has the character of a false solution. The critical, destructive force of thought means the transformation of our view of the world. Even in adolescence in this sense we criticize not only the world but also ourselves. Thinking thinks against itself, destroys familiar knowledge, and destroys itself. It leads into a powerlessness in which the potency of the conceptual seems broken – and it leads

out of this powerlessness again by changing our self-image, our existence, our practice. Such a philosophy can open up new spaces. It is this movement, whose engine is negativity, which should be part of philosophy education. In philosophy lessons, students can practice thinking against themselves and thus set development processes in motion. The horizon here is the tradition of wisdom, in which the movement from fictitious knowledge over ignorance to other forms of knowledge is thought.

4. Constitutive negativity and life practice: Wittgenstein and Heidegger

Typical of the concept of negativity in 20th-century thought is the strong awareness of ignorance, of lack of ultimate justification, of fundamental limits of knowledge, and of a lost security of the subject. Negativity is no longer dialectical, as with Hegel or Kierkegaard, it no longer drives developments. Rather, the contemporary negativity resembles that of pyrrhonian skepticism in which a dominant form of knowledge is bracketed and abandoned. It is the differentiated and self-founded images we make of the world, our models and constructs, which we ultimately consider to be the reality itself that destroys contemporary philosophical negativity. But unlike ancient skepticism, ignorance is not raised to an insight. The situation is not described from the outside by saying something like: Our big pictures are not possible. It is described from within: how we always move in worlds of meaning and constitutive paradigms and how no final justification is possible for them. The limits of knowledge, which play such an important role, cannot be viewed from above or even from the outside, as relativism claims to be able to, but only as the certainty of always moving in meaning constituting paradigms. This also eliminates the construct of a reality in itself, which distinguishes between the world as it actually is and the world as we see it, and in doing so again takes up an external point of view. The consciousness of the finiteness of our speaking, understanding and knowledge is an awareness of irreversible immanence: "there is no thought that encompasses all of our thought", writes Merleau-Ponty (2014: xxviii).

4.1. Wittgenstein: life forms cannot be explained from the outside

In his linguistic analyses Wittgenstein comes to the conclusion that the meaning of linguistic terms radically depends on human practice. It is not the connection to the essence of a thing that ensures their meaning; rather, it depends solely on the rules that certain practices impose on terms. One can therefore give reasons for the meaning of terms, but the reasons refer to language games and are thus ultimately part of forms of life. The forms of life themselves cannot be further explained. And thus we cannot say of the most fundamental structure of our world of meaning in which we move that it is reasonable nor unreasonable.

> "What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – forms of life" (Wittgenstein 1953: 226e). "You must bear in mind that the language-game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there – like our life" (Wittgenstein 1969: 73e, No. 559). "The difficulty is to realize the groundlessness of our believing" (ibid., 24e, No. 166).

The groundlessness meant here is the insight: What we experience as world is always our world of meaning, and we know this only from within.

4.2. Heidegger: the meaning of being depends on human practice

In *Being and Time* Heidegger asks about the meaning of the concept of being. Heidegger discovers that this meaning varies and that it cannot be separated from the most fundamental human practices. For example, if we speak of our being, then we cannot ignore the fact that this is always our own and that we *must* exist, so to speak: Because we are not just there like things, but we have to somehow manage our existence, we care about it and have to shape it. Heidegger calls this meaning of being existence (*Existenz*) (Heidegger 1996: 10). However, when we talk about everyday objects, e.g. tools, we realize that in everyday life we hardly notice them as such any more, but simply use them. Heidegger calls these things useful things (*Zeug*) (ibid.: 64), and being now means something else again, namely handiness (*Zuhandenheit*) (ibid.: 65). But if we just look at such a thing without it being part of our everyday action, then it would lose its handiness and become something objectively present (*Vorhandenes*) (ibid.: 69). Being would now mean objective presence (*Vorhandenheit*). And what does being mean when we speak of living beings? "Life is neither pure objective presence, nor is it Da-sein." "Life has its own kind of being" (ibid.: 46). The meanings of being described so far cannot grasp what life is. As in Wittgenstein, the connections that determine the ever-new meanings of the concept of being cannot be further explained. They are related to basic human practices that entail human existence. So there is no last meaning of being. Negativity can be understood as such in Heidegger's early philosophy: Our thinking cannot exceed our human being, it always remains bound to our temporal-spatial and physical existence and its practices. The world is always our world of meaning. And we only know it from the inside.

4.3. How can the insight 'we only know the world from within' deepen philosophy education?

Awareness of an immanence that cannot be lifted means to be at a critical distance from our own secure views of the world, but also from the secure views of all other people. This applies in particular to practical knowledge, e.g. worldviews and concepts of identity and meaning of life. Theoretical, e.g. mathematical knowledge or empirical data are not concerned to the same extend. Now, we no longer see worldviews and world models as true in the most comprehensive sense, and we no longer believe in the bird's eye view. Shouldn't the defenders of certainties consistently bracket their world models and always understand them only *as models*? This departure from the big pictures also has consequences for the question of one's own identity and meaning of life. In the field of political, religious, historical, economic or scientific ideologies, we tend to represent the world through a big picture (to create a big picture of the world) and to draw ourselves into this picture in a second step: in an important place, in a certain role. The function of one's own existence in the whole of the picture (and thus the world) is then something like one's own meaning of life. This figurehead can be described with Ricoeur as 'narcissistic reconciliation' (Thomas 2006: 103ff.). But if we begin to suspect that the big picture is not absolute, but above all an image, then our own sense of life can also lose its

stability, because this 'technique' of securing our own identity and meaning no longer works. In the context of philosophy education, this destruction of apparent certainties and of the meaning of life supported by them means asking the question for a much more modest identity and way of life. We only know the world from within: Our practical knowledge, our view of things, our values, our models of understanding, they still provide certainty. Our ethics and values seem still without alternative. But this is a questioned certainty, for it cannot be absolutely justified or justified 'from outside'. This applies at the level of culture, the milieu and the individual. This movement of shifting from apparent certainty to the consciousness of ignorance can continue into an openness to other forms of knowledge. I would like to give three examples of such other forms of knowledge.

(1) The other side of the unfoundability of one's own and other worlds of meaning is a certain dignity of these worlds and the call to recognize and protect them. Realizing negativity can help us to create a feeling for the contingency, fragility, and finite nature of our values. Their validity is no longer seen as absolute, but conditional on someone who represents and articulates these values and someone who appreciates them. All human beings seem to share this very situation of a certainty which is embedded in uncertainty. This may give rise to a quite special solidarity. Based on Heidegger and Wittgenstein's analyses, Thomas Rentsch describes the ethical relevance of negativity in this sense.

> An essential ethical insight consists in the recognition of the unavailability and inexplicability of fellow human beings; personal unavailability is constitutive for relationships of non-instrumental, 'positive' interpersonality, for personal freedom and dignity. Respect for the unexplained being of the other is constitutive for moral conditions (Translated from Rentsch 2003: 465).

In philosophy lessons we can try to reconstruct what conditions and prerequisites must be given in order to feel recognized, accepted, and free in this sense. Conversely, a practical knowledge is addressed here that goes beyond rational argumentation but is nevertheless part of philosophy. Philosophy teaching should also be devoted to practices of recognition, non-instrumental relationships, and the mutual granting of freedom and dignity. These are also examples of other forms of knowledge mentioned here time and again.

(2) Although self-criticism and questioning oneself is typical for many philosophies, the tradition of negativity and wisdom displays a quite special approach. Where ideological certainties are abandoned and where one's own meaning in life and identity are no longer secured by signing oneself into a big picture, one's own identity becomes an open question again. Here, negativity becomes relevant in the sense of Nietzsche's philosophy. We may exist as a self that does not have to understand, justify, and construct itself. We can leave open who we are. At the same time, we may expect the world to understand our own peculiarities, and we may be curious about ourselves. For this we can shift our attention from discursive reason to what Nietzsche calls physical reason. This means our needs as well as the sense of our idiosyncrasies and the 'solutions' that do not apply to the whole world but only to our lives.

(3) Where the world no longer has a final reason, we can marvel at things again. In specific moments we can even experience them as miracles. Although any philosophy knows amazement, again, negativity opens a specific understanding and practice. Here other

approaches to ourselves, to our lives and to the world are addressed. These other approaches can find our interest more easily when we no longer rely on the discursive knowledge of the explanatory models over and over again. In this sense, the awareness of ignorance can mean that we open ourselves to the world, especially in so far as it is unexplained and mysterious. The fact that we also perceive them as unresolved, precarious and contingent no longer appears exclusively threatening, but rather as the price of their depth. We can develop a sense for what the explanatory models differentiate and for how they make more precise our experience of the world (the example of a botanist on an excursion), but also flatten it (the botanist on a walk who can no longer switch off explaining and seeing through and is lost for an aesthetic-contemplative perception of nature (cf. Seel 1991: 53, 66-67). Explaining the world sometimes impoverishes our experience. Here we can speak of an over-understanding of discursive knowledge (Thomas 2006: 212-214). Moments in which we feel the depth of the world and of our lives are often moments in which explanation recedes.

Earlier (see 1.2.) I said: Why should negativity be part of philosophy education? Because the questioning of a way of life in saying goodbye to ideological certainties is relevant for our society and for young people. And because we can only address this question philosophically if we take up the tradition of philosophical wisdom again in philosophy lessons. I have tried to show what a central role the concept of negativity plays for this tradition. In the 20th century authors such as Wittgenstein or Heidegger add to this tradition, i.e. we can receive them and think beyond them also from this perspective. I argue for a philosophy education that is challenged by the unresolved issues of our culture, including the question of certainties and of farewell to certainties. In order to open up new spaces of understanding for young people, philosophy lessons can also be devoted to the tradition of philosophical wisdom, for which the concept of negativity in the facets described here is central.

5. Didactic considerations

How can we awaken a sense of negativity and wisdom in our students? Here are some possibilities.

(1) *Thought experiments*: In philosophy classes one may go through transformative thinking experiences. In thought experiments the students can vividly experience the limits of their world and their own thinking, and they may emerge from this experience changed: Try to imagine what was before the Big Bang or what is outside the universe. Why did the universe come into being and what is its purpose? Biologically, each one of you is the product of chance of a random combination of your parents' germ cells. So your individual talents, your susceptibility to disease, etc. are also random. This randomness seems to be like a boundary beyond which no gaze is possible. Doesn't this apply to the whole life? Here one can read excerpts from the Ecclesiastes (2.2.). It is about the experience that we are thrown into an existence that does not follow a 'higher plan'.

(2) *Ambiguity as lack of certainty*: Examples from the history of medicine can be used to illustrate how up to today fundamentally different ideas of the causes of illness and necessary therapies have been represented, in each case with the supposed certainty and authority of science. Thus, bloodletting was continuously prescribed as a panacea by the highly paid doctors

of the nobility. Today there are dietetic fashions: Which food is regarded as healthy, which as unhealthy? Which dietary supplement is recommended against the background of which theory? One gets the impression that even simple questions in the field of nutrition cannot really be answered by science, that different theories compete with each other. Students can easily discover this ambiguity as a lack of certainty in health forums on the Internet. There has obviously been some progress in modern science. But the closer you look, the more the clarity and certainty of supposedly scientific 'truths' seems to relativize. This connection touches on the skeptical concept of isosthenia, which can be included here.

(3) *Uncertainty about one's own identity*. Our interests, views about our life and the world and our last certainties change again and again in our lives. We evolve. If we read old diary entries, this becomes clear to us: We have become others. In addition, there is the question of what things belong to our own identity? Are our actions part of our identity, although their effect goes far beyond the 'here and now' and our body borders? Conversely, we must ask ourselves whether our identity did not develop entirely in contact with others. Everywhere the supposed security gives way to the impression of a fundamental uncertainty. It seems that we cannot say who we actually are any more than we can say what kind of water a river actually consists of. These thoughts lead to the insight into a certain aspect of negativity. The question of how to deal properly with this insight concerns the tradition of wisdom.

(4) *Modern literature, art and music:* Franz Kafka has created an impressive image in his short story *Vor dem Gesetz* ("Before the law"): A man patiently waits in front of the gate to the law (the most important goal of his life) and is prevented from entering by a gatekeeper. Everyone wants to get to this most important place, but there is a gate for everyone. The man's lifelong efforts are ultimately unsuccessful. Kafka's story can serve to illustrate that the promise of modernity that reasonable certainty is attainable and thus autonomy is possible often remains a promise. Likewise, the promise of romanticism that there is an inner truth in every human being and that it can be found in life often remains unfulfilled. Here negativity can be experienced as insight into existential ignorance.

In modern art Mark Rothko's paintings offer a good example of the limits of the representational. The sight of these paintings, which represent nothing, can also have something meditative for students. If you look at the pictures for a longer time, you think you are in front of an almost insurmountable border of understanding – which at the same time invites you to cross it. That this border stands in the tradition of negative theology becomes clear in the Rothko Chapel, completed in Houston, Texas, in 1971. On the one hand it is about spiritual experience, on the other hand the chapel is interdenominational, and it does not follow any concrete idea of God. Negativity in the sense of the perception of a border here enables other, possibly meditative forms of openness to the world.

Negativity can also be experienced in modern music as ignorance, uncertainty and a lack of meaning, which invites a change of experience of the world. Music pieces by the composer John Cage disappoint our expectations as listeners. The tones do not form a melody, but seem to stand by chance and only as individual tones side by side or on top of each other. In addition, in the piece *Five* (1988), the individual notes can be taken over either by voices or by instruments. In the piece *4'33"* (1952) even the silence and the random noises coming from the

listeners are part of the music. Cage thus frees us from intentionality, both the composer's intentionality and our intentionality as listeners. Things become audible and conscious in their seemingly meaningless lives of their own, and at the same time the world can be experienced more strongly as an event that remains incomprehensible but nevertheless constantly reveals itself in this incomprehensibility.

All these experiences can form a bridge to the view of the world as described by the skeptical philosophers. Negativity means the impossibility of understanding the being of things, the world and ourselves. Philosophy shows itself here as what it was traditionally, among other things, namely as an attitude of wisdom and changed life practices in the face of the principle unrecognizability of the world.

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