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The question that this article poses is: what role does inquiry-based learning play in philosophy? Remarkably, a short answer was already given 250 years before this question was ever asked. As Immanuel Kant wrote in his “Announcement of the Program of his Lectures for the Winter Semester 1765–1766”:

The method of instruction, peculiar to philosophy, is zetetic, as some of the philosophers of antiquity expressed it (from ζητεω). In other words, the method of philosophy is the method of enquiry. It is only when reason has already grown more practised and only in certain areas, that this method becomes dogmatic, that is to say, decisive. (Kant 1765/1992, p. 293)

According to Kant, what is idiosyncratic about teaching philosophy is its “enquiring” nature. For Kant, this is in the nature of things, i.e. in the nature of philosophy (cf. *ibid.*, p. 292). In contrast to many other sciences, there is no “common standard” of knowledge in philosophy (*ibid.*, p. 294). It cannot be based on “experience or foreign evidence,” in which, for example, history finds a common measure, nor can it “demonstrate” its theorems, such as in mathematics (*ibid.*, p. 292 et seq.). The consequence is that there is no fixed stock of learnable knowledge in philosophy (*ibid.*) in which the “pieces” of assured knowledge to be imparted have already been “decided.” For this reason, a student of philosophy cannot be *taught* through appropriate instruction. There is no universally binding philosophical knowledge that the student would only have to absorb and learn as such. Rather, they must seek this knowledge themselves: “In short, it is not *thoughts* but *thinking*,” which he ought to learn (*ibid.* 292).

Because philosophy lacks knowledge, i.e. it lacks generally accepted answers to their questions, according to Kant, philosophical instruction must necessarily be exploratory.

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But what does that mean, exactly? What is the connection between the lack of knowledge and a scholarly, exploratory attitude? Where does inquiry-based learning take place in philosophy, and how can it be promoted?

29.1 On the Use of the Term “Inquiry-Based Learning” in Philosophy

The 1970 issue of the Federal University Assistants’ Conference (BAK), “Forschendes Lernen – Wissenschaftliches Prüfen” (BAK 1970) (“Inquiry-based learning – Scientific testing”), also contains an initial statement on inquiry-based learning in philosophy. I am not aware of any philosophical institute, however, in which philosophy is taught with an explicit reference to these methodological considerations. Overall, there are scarcely any German publications on higher education didactics in philosophy. On the dust jacket of his 2007 anthology “Hochschuldidaktik Philosophie” (“Philosophy of higher education didactics”), Johannes Rohbeck still claims to have opened a new field of research with this volume (cf. Rohbeck and Philippsen 2007). Yet, to my knowledge, there are no empirical studies as to how philosophy is taught at German institutions of higher learning.

Even if no explicit link is evident between higher education instruction and the higher education didactic debate regarding inquiry-based learning, there is an explicit connection to inquiry-based learning at least in the field of teacher education. The Teacher Training Act of May 12, 2009 provides for what is termed a “practical semester” as part of teacher training in North Rhine-Westphalia. The “framework for the structural and content design of the practical semester in a master’s degree program relating to teaching certification” (“Rahmenkonzeption zur strukturellen und inhaltlichen Ausgestaltung des Praxissemesters im lehramtsbezogenen Masterstudiengang”) stipulates that “occupation-relevant scholarly theory and reflection [... should be linked with] a scientifically sound education in a *scholarly attitude*” (Landesrektorenkonferenz 2010, p. 4, emphasis added). At the University of Bielefeld, for example, this assignment has led to the explicit explanation of the role of inquiry-based learning in the practical semester in (“Guidelines for the Subject-Specific Implementation of the Bielefeld Practical Semester” / “Handreichung zur fächerspezifischen Umsetzung des Bielefelder Praxissemesters,” cf. section B.2 of Fachgruppe Philosophie 2014, pp. 4–10). The research, which is linked here to the study of teaching students, is essentially not philosophical, but instead, and entirely in line with the country’s conceptual framework, “school research” (cf. Landesrektorenkonferenz 2010, p. 6).

However, the lack of integration of German higher education philosophy into the higher education didactic debate regarding inquiry-based learning does not mean that inquiry-based learning is, by definition, not quite part of the study of philosophy at German universities. It is more difficult to track down such references that are merely “implicit,” however.

29.2 What Does Inquiry-Based Learning Mean?

Huber conceives of inquiry-based learning as one of three types of “research-related learning” (and teaching). In addition to inquiry-based learning, this also includes research-based and research-oriented learning (cf. Huber 2014, p. 22). All three types refer to the process of research, which corresponds to the attitude described by Kant as enquiring (“zetetic”), in contrast to the “dogmatic” style of teaching. The three types of research-related learning differ, *inter alia*, in the degree of student independence, how open the subject of research is, and the relevance thereof to the scientific community, and are described in this volume by Miege and Pasternack, for example.

According to Huber, in order to be able to speak of inquiry-based learning, it is of crucial importance that the students work independently: They should define problems, ask questions, conduct studies and evaluate and present their results *themselves*; in short, they should do their own research. This process is characterized by its being *zetetic*: The knowledge being pursued is not yet fixed, but rather sought. That which is sought in the research process is thus new, and not only for the researcher, as Huber emphasizes. According to him, “research processes are always also learning processes [...], which are only distinguished therefrom by the fact that they are based on objective knowledge that is new or relevant not only to the subject, but for others as well” (Huber 2014, p. 23). The insights sought are not only subjectively new, which is to say new for the learner, but also objectively new. Inquiry-based learning is therefore independent and practical, *zetetic* and original.

29.3 John Rudisill’s “Junior Research Seminar” at the College of Wooster

In his article “The Transition from Studying Philosophy to Doing Philosophy” (Rudisill 2011), John Rudisill contrasts the learning of philosophical content in the form of historically available positions and arguments (= “studying philosophy”) with learning how philosophy is practiced, philosophizing or “doing philosophy” (*ibid.*, p. 241). Rudisill describes philosophy with the aid of a series of learning objectives (“philosopher’s skills”):

- the ability to interpret and analyze philosophical texts,
- the formulation and critical examination of the arguments of others and oneself,
- the application of terms and methods handed down through the history of philosophy to solve philosophical problems and
- the development and defense of one’s own answers to philosophical questions (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 243–244).

To promote these skills, the College of Wooster envisages a “junior-year seminar in philosophical research” (*ibid.*, p. 241). It is an integral component of the curriculum for

students majoring in philosophy (ibid.). The entire curriculum is designed to enable students to independently write a major thesis in the last (i.e., fourth) year of their studies (known as the “capstone project,” ibid.). In this thesis, the students’ task is to integrate the philosophical skills learned during the course of study into a broader research project, in which they draw conclusions about their own philosophical question(s) (ibid., p. 247 et seq.).

The junior research seminar is a one-semester course in the penultimate (i.e. third) year, which is intended to prepare the students specifically for this task. The seminar leads the students through a series of smaller tasks towards the goal of writing a term paper – with the length of a research article – at the end of the semester (ibid., p. 254). The tasks of the participants include, inter alia, (cf. ibid., p. 249):

- the preparation of an exposé for the final term paper including a bibliography containing at least ten titles,
- the presentation of an article relevant to their term paper in the seminar,
- the presentation of their own term paper project in the seminar,
- commentary on the term paper project of another student in the seminar.

A design principle of the course which clearly emerges from these tasks is the *principle of communication*, as I refer to it here. The last three tasks “force” students to initiate communication with their fellow students during various phases of the homework project. Students seem to underestimate the fact that research work usually arises through an intensive exchange with others.

Moreover, in these forms of communication, an additional principle emerges that I would like to call the *principle of imitation*. The presentation of one’s own project corresponds to the professional research and colloquium lecture; commentary on such a lecture is a common procedure at scientific conferences. Just because performing these tasks imitates actual research communication, the previously described principle of communication is more than a merely formal or purely didactic principle; instead, it is a principle, the application of which, enables an activity to be learned, which itself is a part of actual research.

Rudisill’s seminar can easily be described as a case of inquiry-based learning in Huber’s sense: The condition of independent practice is largely fulfilled (I discuss the way in which to assess the restriction of independence by guidance below). Whether this practice is zetetic depends more on the content of the tasks. Based on general considerations regarding the handling of philosophical content, which I will explain in more detail below, however, I assume that Rudisill’s seminar also fulfills this condition. The third condition, the desired originality of the results, is certainly only limited, at least according to claim. For this reason, students do not learn in an actual research context because one cannot expect them to produce results that are of interest to the research community before they finish their studies.

29.4 Inquiry-Based Learning in German Higher Education Philosophy

I have identified the autonomy with which the students perform their respective activities as part of a research project as a special feature of inquiry-based learning above. Insofar as possible, they should define problems *themselves*, ask questions, conduct studies and evaluate and present their results. In my experience, this is exactly what happens in theses – although theses are usually supervised by instructors, which may include agreeing on the topic or even interim discussions about the state of affairs, for example. In this respect, it is questionable whether one can speak of complete autonomy here. When one takes into account that research, as highlighted above, is a communicative process, however, it is clear that autonomy cannot mean the exclusion of any other person's participation. In my experience, the act of supporting thesis work is so general that it does not affect students' autonomy. Although the students are indeed in dialogue about their work, in the end, they must define the problems, ask questions, conduct studies and evaluate and present their results themselves. In terms of autonomy, therefore, the philosophical thesis definitely seems to be a case of inquiry-based learning.

A critical condition is the condition of originality brought into play by Huber, however. If the standard applied to this condition is that the results obtained also be of interest to third parties, and therefore worthy of publication, then I would say that at philosophical institutes in Germany, this claim is usually not made for theses, whether master's or bachelor's theses. Of course, ambitious work in this sense is certainly desirable, but neither the rule nor required. Rather, a claim to originality is usually associated with the dissertation. In the master's or bachelor's thesis, students tend not to research in the sense that they produce or strive for publication-worthy results. The traditional thesis is not research, but merely an imitation of research, asking a philosophical question and trying to answer it. This applies not only to the final thesis, but even more so to the entire course of study.

Furthermore, there is another obvious objection. Since this is an exam, what is achieved with the test should not be *learned here*, but must be proven to have *already* been *learned*. This does not preclude students from learning anything by means of their thesis and, insofar as they do research in the sense of the above criteria, the exam is certainly an example of inquiry-based learning in the literal sense. The concept of inquiry-based learning seems to be linked to the intention of using research for learning *during* a course of study, however. From this perspective, it would be misleading to call the thesis a case of inquiry-based learning.

Now, however, it is justifiable that the traditional term paper in philosophy be regarded as a "stripped-down" thesis to be written *during* a course of study. Thus it is not subject to the objection that has just been made of being "too late" to serve as a higher education didactic tool. It is questionable here whether one can speak to a sufficient extent of an independent performance by the students, however. Depending on the support concept, it is conceivable that the topic, the literature to be used, a concrete question or the structure of the term paper be prescribed or at least agreed upon, for example. Thus one may not

have the same level of autonomy when writing a term paper as one would when writing a thesis.

This lack of autonomy can be explained by means of a didactic principle, which I would like to call the *training-wheel principle*, as based on Rudisill's formulation (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 247–249). This principle is probably more familiar under the heading of “scaffolding,” to which Rudisill also refers (cf. *ibid.*, p. 248 et seq.). The training-wheel principle requires a gradual shift of responsibility for complex learning tasks from the instructor to the student. At the beginning of a course of study, instructors assume students' responsibility for certain aspects of the activity they are learning, like training wheels, allowing students to focus on other aspects. As a result of the continuing reduction of support on the part of the instructors as the course of studies progresses (see *ibid.*, p. 249), students gradually assume responsibility for more and more tasks. Students must assume responsibility themselves for everything that the instructors do not (anymore). The fact that instructors sometimes provide topics, questions, literature or structure for philosophical homework can be understood very well in terms of such support wheels, which are removed over the course of study. Largely autonomous work tends to be the goal more at the end of the course of study. The way to get to this point is ideally to go through a series of tasks of reduced but steadily increasing student accountability.

When considering the thesis, the characteristic of independence emerges as a rather vague criterion. Is the autonomy of a natural science-related research project impaired if the experimental series are not carried out by the responsible researcher, but instead by assistants? Or how independent is a text that has been edited and corrected several times as a result of discussions with colleagues? It is unclear how much autonomy is required in order to deem it “inquiry-based learning.” In any case, the control of certain conditions such as the specification of literature does not seem to exclude the possibility of students independently engaging in the literature, or in earnestly seeking an answer to a philosophical question. In this case, I think one could certainly speak of an exploratory (inquiry-based) term paper. The same applies to the other limitations on independence that have been mentioned. The extent to which a term paper is explorative therefore seems to require an assessment on a case-by-case basis.

In Rudisill's research seminar, I emphasized that students are asked several times to share their writing project, and interpreted this exchange as an imitation of the research process. In Bielefeld, there are two types of seminars, which likewise allow term papers to be dovetailed with seminars to some degree: “Philosophical Writing 2” in the bachelor's degree, and the “workshop seminar” in the master's. In the former, students write a short term paper of 2,000 words in intensively supervised sub-steps during the semester, while in the workshop seminar, students are asked to discuss the current state of a term paper, which they write in connection with a “regular” seminar. In the workshop, the students embark on a research-like exchange about their writing project, while “Philosophical Writing 2” focuses more on an explicit sequencing and reflection of the writing process while producing a term paper. These differences notwithstanding, the focus in both courses is centered on the (research) activity of the students. Even if these courses did not originate

within the perspective of this keyword, they can be understood as examples of inquiry-based learning. The workshop seminar essentially corresponds to the popular idea of the colloquium; introductory events for writing term papers are currently being created at many German institutes of philosophy. Everywhere such courses are integrated into the course of study, even beyond Bielefeld, one therefore also finds inquiry-based learning in philosophy.

As is likely also true of Rudisill's Junior Research Seminar, however, the "workshop seminar" and "Philosophical Writing 2" are rather exceptional features in the philosophical curriculum. Ordinary philosophy seminars usually offer no such integration of a student writing project into the seminar. Although term papers are certainly often linked to seminar questions, the ordinary seminar neither systematically prepares for the writing of a paper, nor does it usually provide space for discussing student writing projects. The ordinary seminar usually deals with a certain subject matter in the form of one or more texts, which will be discussed during the semester with regard to the difficulties of comprehension and objective implications associated with it. Certainly there are student contributions, but these are usually not part of a larger writing or research project, but instead isolated performances aimed at obtaining a certain number of credit points.

Although the ordinary seminar therefore does not play a systematic role in students' individual research projects, they do, nevertheless, generally philosophize in these courses. Texts and arguments are analyzed together, theses are developed and reasons and counter-arguments weighed. All these are aspects of philosophical research, and to this extent the seminar is a place of inquiry-based learning. Learning in the seminar is also inquiry-based insofar as answers to questions are sought that are unknown at least to the participants. The fact that these are not necessarily answers worthy of publication should not be given too much weight. Publication-quality work can only be the perspective and not the concrete goal of philosophizing in a course of study. The more important aspect of inquiry-based learning may be found in the fact that the students learn to ask factually legitimate questions and to develop the corresponding answers with the help of philosophical tools. Rather, if these questions or answers have already been asked and provided in existing research, this even confirms that the students have researched and achieved the learning objective.

29.5 Conclusion

The opposite of inquiry-based learning and teaching is the dogmatic lecture. As such, at issue is the imparting of predetermined "pieces of knowledge." Kant's diagnosis of the state of philosophy can essentially still be agreed upon: there are still no, or hardly any, universally accepted questions. As such, there is still a need to focus on dealing critically with existing answers to philosophical questions. Philosophizing is therefore dependent on a historical knowledge of philosophy. Those who wish to philosophize successfully

should show how far their own solution to a problem exceeds those of others; of course, in order to do so, one must be familiar with the solutions that have already been proposed.

Thus, the history of philosophy proves to be a kind of “quasi-dogmatic” area: This area is dogmatic insofar as there is, at least in broad terms, sufficient agreement as to which of the “pieces of knowledge” in the form of traditional positions and arguments ought to be learned. This area is not truly dogmatic, or even just “quasi-dogmatic,” however, insofar as the positions and arguments to be learned here are not regarded as definitive solutions to philosophical problems, but as food for thought. To quote Kant once again, a philosophical classic must be regarded “not as the paradigm of judgment” in a specific philosophical matter, but rather “as the occasion for forming one’s own judgment about him, and even, indeed, for passing judgement against him” (Kant 1765/1992, p. 293).

Inquiry-based learning therefore plays an essential role in philosophy, because the attitude that learners must have towards philosophical content in the form of given answers to philosophical questions need not be uncritical and receptive, but rather unbiased, scrutinizing, attentive, and therefore exploratory. Students must demonstrate this attitude in all sites where they exercise their philosophical activity: in seminars, in term papers and, of course, in their final thesis. These are all sites of inquiry-based learning in philosophy.

Of course, this attitude must first be learned. In philosophy, it makes sense to promote such research-oriented behavior by explicitly drawing attention to its own openness. New students in particular sometimes arrive with the expectation of seeking answers as to what is good, true and beautiful. It may be helpful to disappoint this expectation as expressly as possible and to make it clear that philosophy cannot be expected to provide simple answers to these questions. It is likewise helpful to illustrate the disunity of philosophy by presenting different views on one and the same problem. Feinberg and Shafer-Landau (2013) do so with their introductory text collection “Reason and Responsibility.” The integration of student research projects into ordinary philosophy seminars also seems a promising way to promote a scholarly attitude. And finally, seminars that, like Rudisill’s research seminar, explicitly focus on a students’ research project are naturally particularly suited not only to promote a scholarly attitude, but also to provide students with a space in which to learn to combine various philosophical activities into a more complex research project.

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