

# Philosophical Education and Transcendental Tolerance

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In this article I would like to address a challenge that is intensively discussed in Europe, namely the so-called dilemma of teaching values. How to win children, pupils, students or even citizens for values like tolerance, human rights or democracy without dogmatism – without ignoring the free use of reason?

Very principal positions are involved in this discussion. You need to be a universalist to insist that there are global values for all reasonable creatures. Communitarists deny this possibility. From their point of view, even the “*Sapare Aude*” is a cultural construction, and normative universalism has a tendency to become neocolonialism. One might perceive this attitude to be informed by tolerance, but we should also be aware that it belongs to the main line of the argument in Samuel P. Huntington’s *Clash of Civilisations*. Huntington is a ‘cultural relativist’. According to this conviction, people cluster around the values and the symbols of their incidentally accrued cultures. One of the ‘key’ formulations of Huntington’s claims is that values like human rights are perhaps ‘unique’ but not ‘universal’ (comp. Huntington, 1996, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, p. 513).

In 1995, two years after the publication of Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilisations’, the UNESCO proclaimed its explanation of tolerance. It reads as follows:

## Article 1: Meaning of tolerance

1.1 *Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty, it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace.* (comp. UNESCO, 1995, *Declaration of Principles on Tolerance*).

In this context, the UNESCO puts high hopes in school education in general, and philosophical teaching in particular. This is why the program ‘Philosophy, a School of Freedom’ (comp. UNESCO, 2007, *Teaching Philosophy and Learning to Philosophize*) was started. In some parts of the world, philosophical education and the support of tolerance via this subject are already common. Barbara Bruening proved in 1998 that the subject and its pedagogic goals are established all over Europe (Bruening, 1998, *Ethikunterricht in Europa. Ideengeschichtliche Traditionen, curriculare Konzepte und didaktische Perspektiven in der Sekundarstufe I*). In many of the Romanic nations, ‘Philosophy’ is an obligatory school subject. Other nations offer comparable efforts under the umbrella of ‘Critical

Thinking'. In the Federal Republic of Germany, Paragraph 7, 2 of the constitution confirms that religion is to be a regular subject at school. Consequently, 'philosophy' and 'ethics' have mostly been offered as mere alternatives to the religion courses. In recent years, however, the availability of philosophical education has massively increased. The German Federal State of Berlin has, for example, introduced obligatory ethics in the schools' curriculums for all, by public referendum.

The integration of refugees as well as citizens from Muslim cultures has pushed this development as well. In 2015, Klaus Goergen has convincingly pointed out the potential of bringing together young people of various cultures and origins in a normative discourse (Goergen, 2015, *Ethik für alle? Plädoyer für ein Pflichtfach Philosophie/Ethik*, in: ZDPE 2/2015, pgs. 91-98). Moreover, there is empirical evidence that philosophical education has a beneficial impact on critical thinking skills and increases the appreciation of controversial arguments. The proof began with Lawrence Kohlberg and was confirmed by the research of Georg Lind in Europe and Latin America (comp. Kohlberg, 1984, *Essays on Moral Development: Vol. 2. The Psychology of Moral Development*; Lind, 2016, *How to Teach Morality: Promoting Deliberation and Discussion, Reducing Violence and Deceit*).

But, what exactly can philosophical education contribute to the cultivation of tolerance? Essentially, two models of tolerance education can be differentiated:

The first model represents **contentual tolerance education**. What is communicated here is a 'canon' of behaviour and ways of life to be tolerated and accepted.

The second model can be designated as **transcendental tolerance education**. It provides no obligatory content, but attempts to promote the condition of possibility for discernment and tolerance. At its core, this approach revolves around a 'reorientation' in attitudes and ways of thinking, understood as the clarification and explanation of terminology and categories, as well as dealing with open-ended questions and cultural conflicts.

A presentation of explicit norms may be indispensable still. This applies to instructions in legal affairs as well as to the integration into already existing social and cultural circumstances. If you wish to play soccer with us, you have to accept the offside rule. Whether this rule is good in itself, is not up to debate.

Philosophical reflection is, however, *a priori* untied to specific results. This is what the dilemma of teaching values is all about (comp. Martens, 1996; Tiedemann, 2015, *Ethische Orientierung in der Moderne – was kann philosophische Bildung leisten*, in: *Handbuch Philosophie und Ethik. Bd. 1: Didaktik und Methodik*). Matthew Lipman's community of inquiry as well as Gareth Matthews' discourse communities are committed to the principle of rationality. Content beliefs are not the goal of the process. (Lipman, 1980, *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*; Matthews, 1984, *Dialogues with Children*).

'We love young people who say straight out what they mean, as long as they think on lines like us'. This remark by Mark Twain shows that it requires courage to establish real philosophical education. Philosophy is not the administrator of a carefully selected set of ideas, it is the call to thinking for ourselves and the cultivation of that very habit. The radicalism of the philosophical 'Sapere Aude'

manifests itself in its principle of incompatibility with normative requirements.

Whoever postulates that philosophical reflection necessarily leads to a primacy of democracy, human rights and humanism, is wrong. Philosophical argumentation struggles for consistency. Sympathy or Political Correctness are no criteria for quality. Of course, antidemocratic drafts can be supported by substantial arguments. Just look at the history of philosophy! Not many of the great figures have been convinced democrats.

Is Plato's idea of the **Philosopher King** unacceptable for school education because it is antidemocratic? Should a pupil who, after intelligent reconstruction and critical reflection, aligns him- or herself with Plato, receive a 'bad' grade? Certainly not. A dogmatic canon of values and the essence of philosophical education are incompatible. A philosophical accomplishment can be measured by the quality of its argumentation and not by its adherence to 'political correctness'.

But what effect does transcendental tolerance education produce? I do see five benefits. The first benefit is the explanation of categories, terminology, and differentiations.

Kant's differentiation between *knowledge, opinion, and faith* might be a good example (Kant, 1781, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, pg. 532 ff.). Whoever understands the nature of these levels of episteme develops a robust immunity to dogmatism. I can entertain a position without being convinced of it myself, and any statements of faith are only justified for the believer. Only knowledge is based on arguments that everyone must accept. To understand how little knowledge we have and how limited our reason is, is one of the most important foundations of tolerance.

In any truth that gets not possession of our minds by the irresistible light of self-evidence, or by the force of demonstration, the arguments that gain it assent are the vouchers and gage of its probability to us; and we can receive it for no other, than such as they deliver it to our understandings. (Locke, 1689, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*)

A second benefit is to counteract the inflationary and thus worthless application of the term 'tolerance'. Even the Latin root '*tolerare*' shows the necessity of having to bear or suffer an unlovely issue. According to Rainer Forst, tolerance always requires rejection as well as higher-order arguments that demand acceptance (Forst, 2012, *Toleranz im Konflikt: Geschichte, Gehalt und Gegenwart eines umstrittenen Begriffs*).

Forst identifies and establishes three components which are indispensable for the very definition of tolerance. The first, he designates as the '*rejection component*'. In order to be able to tolerate anything at all, the practices involved have first to be seen as false or disruptive. Anything else would be approval or indifference, and would therefore render any debate superfluous. Intuitive rejection does not get in the way of tolerance but is rather the base requirement for the possibility of its existence. The second component, according to Forst, is the '*acceptance component*'. This includes the reasons why certain practices are personally considered improper or bad, but still have their justification. Rejection remains, but there is an understanding of opposing arguments and the limitation of one's own evidence. The third component is the '*refusal component*', which always

intervenes when higher-order arguments justify or demand a refusal.

This applies to reciprocal and intersubjective justification. It is the same for both: those who claim tolerance, and those who reject tolerance. Both are obligated to explain their reasons in discussions. Only those arguments will be acknowledged which can be communicated reciprocally or intersubjectively. ‘*We always did it like that*’ or ‘*I do not want that*’ are, in fact, no arguments at all. Any school pupil mastering the basics of syllogisms will understand that normative conclusions can normally not be drawn from one premise alone.

Provided the arguments are sufficiently convincing, the dispute is settled. In the case of ‘tolerance’, a tendency to a rejection of the disputed issue remains. The argument by itself is accepted, but that which was argued to be accepted remains rejected.

A third benefit lies within the discussion of concrete cases and cultural conflicts. May a hijacked aircraft be shot down? Is the circumcision of boys unacceptable without medical necessity? Are burkas a sign of cultural diversity or an attack on liberal society? Should ‘continuing embryonic research’ be permitted? Should a liberal-democratic nation be allowed to impose obligatory healthcare insurance upon its citizens? How voluntary may marriages be? Are honour and respect benefits that need to be earned, or is everyone entitled to them? When and where can public religious ceremonies be tolerated? How much tolerance should the organisation of public schools exercise when it comes to foreign traditions. May an individual be a citizen of a democratic and an undemocratic nation at the same time?

In philosophical classes queries like these can be discussed without being tied to cultural or religious traditions. An example: if a teacher were to display a burka-attired woman on the blackboard of a classroom in Berlin, Germany, and asks the pupils to give an opinion, a rapid division would very soon occur. One half of the class would probably say that they see a religiously devout woman living her pursuit of happiness. The other half of the class might argue that this woman is the victim of oppression and needs help. It is not the job of philosophical education to settle this question, but to train exact description and the use of categories. For example, none of the class sees a woman. Regarding someone in a burka, at most you can see a human figure. Moreover, categories like ‘personal freedom’, ‘citizen obligations’, ‘structural violence’, or ‘shame’ can help to find and justify one’s opinion, or at least to understand the reasons for disagreement. Identifying reasons opens a door for reciprocal respect despite controversial positions. Ideally, discussions like these help to increase the acceptance of difference, and to question prejudices.

The next benefit is to understand that tolerance needs to be limited. Otherwise it turns into nihilism. There is a lot of struggle surrounding terms like ‘multiculturalism’, a ‘multicultural society’ or ‘cultural pluralism’ and so on. From my point of view, these debates are quite boring. At the end of the day, the interesting question is whether cultural diversity should be limited or not.

To equate such limitation with intolerance is a gross simplification. It is also a question of priority between individual and collective rights. Is cultural tradition a value in and of itself? Who is going to protect the individual from its own community? Pascal Bruckner calls the representatives of

an unlimited multiculturalism “anti-racist racists”. Bruckner speaks of a ‘Paradox of Multiculturalism’. All the various communities are granted the same treatment, but not their members, because they lose the right to break away from their own traditions (comp. Bruckner, 2007, *Enlightenment fundamentalism or racism of the anti-racists?*, pg. 58).

It is a sad example of negative dialectic. The heart of racism is to reduce the individual to its affiliation with an ethnic or cultural group. Moreover, there is also a differentiation between ‘persecution racism’ and ‘neglect racism’, or between active and passive racism. Recent German history produced the crudest persecution racism – the ‘Holocaust’. The human rights of millions were violated, regardless of individuality, only because they belonged to a certain demographic. The rule of persecution racism says: ‘*We violate your human rights, because you belong to a certain group of people.*’ In order to prevent such barbarism from ever rising up again, tremendous efforts were made, especially in Europe, not to discriminate on racial or cultural grounds. This is of course a desirable development. The problem is that unlimited tolerance for cultural groups can undermine the individual rights of their members. Again, individuals are reduced to their group affiliation. The rule of the neglect racism says: ‘*We will not protect your human rights, because you belong to a certain group of people.*’

The struggle for higher-order arguments as the basis of tolerance leads to the fifth benefit of philosophical education: the debate around ethical cosmopolitanism and rules like human rights.

Even the UNESCO argues for limited cultural tolerance on the basis of human rights:

*1.2 Tolerance is not concession, condescension or indulgence. Tolerance is, above all, an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others. In no circumstance can it be used to justify infringements of these fundamental values. Tolerance is to be exercised by individuals, groups and States (comp. UNESCO, 1995, Declaration of Principles on Tolerance).*

Nevertheless, such a proclamation is far from being a legitimisation. The fact that the majority of nations signed the declaration of human rights is a proper contractual argument. Nevertheless, it loses its binding quality with every generation that did not actively ratify the contract.

The idea of cultural relativism radically challenges universal ethical values. Since it is impossible to imagine values to be independent of social contexts, Alasdair MacIntyre (MacIntyre, 1981, *After Virtue*) argues that they have no universal claim. Huntington expresses this point of view much more radically. Values such as democracy, human rights, and freedom of speech are unique, but represent no ‘universal’ culture (comp. Huntington, 1996, pg. 513). Any such consensus could at best be achievable within an already disappearing small group of academic elites, which Huntington calls the ‘Davos Culture’ in reference to the World Economic Forum held annually in Davos, Switzerland (comp. Huntington, 1996, pg. 78). The hope, however, that sooner or later identical universal cultural values will be generated in all cultural spheres, is decidedly denied. Huntington sends a clear denial to the cosmopolitans of the ‘enlightenment’. Progression in the cultural spheres is primarily of a demographic, technical, and military, but not of an ethical nature.

A philosophical community of inquiry must not ignore these positions. Moreover, it is to be accepted that they might be right and need to be heard and analyzed. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the defense of universal values like human rights has failed.

*"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."*

Unfortunately, it is not that easy. The binding effect of human rights may be quite natural for most of us, but it is not self-evident. Ludwig Wittgenstein argued that to doubt makes sense only if certain things are not to be doubted (Wittgenstein, 1969, *On Certainty*). But even if this remark is to be accepted, it does not nullify the lack of proof. Reasonable people must use the unconstrained constraint of the better argument (Habermas, 1987, *Theory of Communicative Action*). Philosophical education makes students understand that there is no ultimate justification, which does not mean, that 'anything goes' (Feyerabend, 1978, *Science in a Free Society*). We still have to be 'conscientiously endeavoured to think about our beliefs coolly, rationally, impartially, with conceptual clarity and with as much relevant information as we can reasonably acquire.' (Regan, 2004, *The Case of Animal Rights*, pg. 134).

And there are good reasons to regard the justification of human rights to be unmatched. Concepts like those of Martha Nussbaum, Susan Neiman, Ottfried Höffe, John Rawls or Jürgen Habermas are not final but very well founded. Martha Nussbaum talks of a vague but strong and resilient concept of 'good' (comp. Nussbaum, 1993, *The Therapy of Desire. Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*, pgs. 323-363). John Rawls uses the term of the 'Overlapping Consensus' (comp. Rawls, 1971, *A Theory of Justice*, pg. 340) This has nothing to do with the 'imperialism' of an 'American Way of Life', but with the condition of possibility of diversity and binding rules. Ottfried Höffe mentions a 'transcendental exchange', which, similar to Rawls' 'Veil of Ignorance', constructs an intelligible decision-making situation. He argues on the basis of a minimalistic anthropology. How independent and divergent our cultural 'imprint' may be, we can certainly agree that we are bodily, purely rational, social, and political beings. Any intervention into such necessities will restrict our 'freedom of action', and will thus prevent us from realising our understanding of a successfully led life. Any realization of cultural or individual difference presupposes the capacity to act. As 'human rights' seek to protect such a 'capacity to act' they do not endanger but guarantee diversity and disparity. "Transcendentality is that which one implicitly affirms, provided that one always seeks what one wills; transcendental means the circumstances, that one can have and pursue normal interests." (comp. Höffe, 1996, *Vernunft und Recht. Bausteine zu einem interkulturellen Rechtsdiskurs*, pg. 77; translation by Tiedemann).

The benefits of philosophical education are not to indoctrinate students with specific values. It's about the ability to argue, the insistence on reason, and the distinction of categories. These competencies are not only indispensable for any democracy; they are also the core foundation of the virtue of tolerance. Ekkehard Martens understands philosophical education as an elementary *cultural technique* of a human way of life (comp. Martens, 2003, *Methodik des Ethik- und Philosophieunterrichts. Philosophieren als elementare Kulturtechnik*). Julian Nida-Ruemelin talks of an 'renewed humanism' with rationalism, freedom and responsibility. The capability of educating reasonable, well justified

convictions (rationalism), and the capability of leading an autonomous and free way of life (freedom), and, as a result, the capability of becoming aware of and adopting responsibility (responsibility).

The teaching of philosophy and ethics is a training for giving and taking arguments. Their aims are not to indoctrinate values, but to negotiate them on the basis of reciprocal argumentation. In this regard, ethics are more important –so the Dalai Lama– than religion (comp. Dalai Lama, 2016, *An Appeal by the Dalai Lama to the World: Ethics Are More Important Than Religion*). Almost two decades ago, long before debates on integration and religious fanaticism arose, Hartmuth von Hentig formulated the following thoughts: “People are right who say: values are always at play in teaching; value concepts should be allowed to form anywhere; value judgments and decisions should always be made. But, there has to be **one** subject in the school curriculum in which the foundation of moral judgment/decision-making is clarified and its tenets brought to awareness. I call this subject ‘Philosophy’” (comp. von Hentig, 1999, *Ach die Werte! Ein öffentliches Bewusstsein von zwiespältigen Aufgaben. Über eine Erziehung für das 21. Jahrhundert*, pg. 164).

For the representatives of a conservative teaching of values, all of this may not suffice. From the position of didactical theory, transcendental tolerance education remains without an alternative. An imposition of ‘moral truths’ and philosophical education are not compatible with one another.

With a little good fortune, an attitude is formed which Jules Lemaître (1853 - 1914) called “the philanthropy of intelligence”.

Federico Mayor Zaragoza, Vice - Director of the UNESCO argues:

Philosophy and Democracy urge each of us to exercise our capacity for judgement, to choose for ourselves the best form of political and social organisation, to find our own values, in short, to become fully what each of us is, a free being. Among so many dangers, we have no other hope. (Zaragoza, 1995, *Memory of the Future*, pg.12).

I call this the goal of philosophical education of transcendental tolerance.

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