Philosophical Problems in the Classroom[*]

The Clash Strategy for Planning and Facilitating Dialogic Inquiry

Luca Zanetti
INDIRE[**]
l.zanetti@indire.it

ABSTRACT. The aim of this paper is clarify under what conditions a philosophical problem arises. I will describe two ways in which we might perceive a question as a problem. First, when we find ourselves inclined to believe in propositions that appear incompatible with each other. Second, when we find ourselves inclined to believe in propositions that seem incompatible with our desires. I will discuss both of these cases and articulate a didactic strategy – the Clash Strategy – which can be used in order to plan and facilitate dialogic inquiry in the classroom. This strategy suggests introducing stimuli that will help students appreciate the clash that drives the philosophical question to be explored during the dialogue. In summary, this paper aims to offer insights to all teachers interested in promoting dialogic inquiry, whether philosophical or otherwise, in education.

KEYWORDS. Dialogic pedagogy; Philosophical problems; Didactics of philosophy; Inquiry.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to clarify under what conditions a philosophical problem arises and to provide some practical guidelines for teachers who intend to plan dialogic inquiries about philosophical problems in the classroom. Although in this paper I shall focus on *philosophical* problems and dialogic inquiry about *philosophical* contents, the observations made here can be extended *mutatis mutandis* to all kinds of problems and dialogic inquiries.

I will describe two ways in which we might perceive a question as a problem. First, when we find ourselves inclined to believe in propositions that appear incompatible with each other. Second, when we find ourselves inclined to believe in propositions that seem incompatible with our desires. I will discuss both of these cases and articulate a didactic strategy termed the Clash Strategy[1]. This strategy suggests introducing stimuli in the classroom that will help students appreciate the inherent conflict that drives the philosophical question to be explored during the dialogue. In summary, this paper aims to offer insights to all teachers interested in promoting dialogic inquiry, whether philosophical or otherwise, in education[2].

The paper is organized as follows: In Section 2, I will briefly explain why the use of dialogic inquiry is well suited for the teaching of philosophy. Then, in Section 3, I will address the didactic problem of motivating students to participate in dialogic inquiries. In Section 4, I will distinguish between instrumentally and non-instrumentally asked questions, emphasizing the importance of students raising questions for the sake of seeking truth, both in philosophy classrooms and in education more broadly. Section 5 will explore two scenarios in which we may encounter a philosophical problem: when we experience a conflict between seemingly incompatible beliefs and when we face a conflict between our beliefs and desires. Section 6 will identify factors

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1   For the first sketch of this method, see ZANETTI 2020.

2   Nowadays there is a plethora of pedagogical approaches that insist upon the importance of dialogue in education. For a recent overview of the literature on dialogic pedagogy see (LAIRD-GENTLE ET AL. 2023) and KILBY (2021).

that determine the intensity of the problems experienced. In Section 7, I will introduce the Clash Strategy for stimulating dialogic inquiry about philosophical problems in the classroom. This method involves presenting stimulus-question pairs that help students grasp the underlying conflict of the problem. I will also provide guidance on how to plan and conduct sessions of dialogic inquiry using this approach. Finally, in Section 8, I will conclude by outlining various approaches for planning dialogic inquiry using the Clash Strategy.

2. Philosophy Didactics and Dialogic Pedagogy

In recent years, studies seem to converge on the importance of promoting the active participation of students in the classroom. One of the main reason – although by no means the only one, nor perhaps the most important one – for the interest in student-centered pedagogies is that active learning seems to increase learning performances[3].

Philosophy didactics is no exception to this trend. In the context of this discipline, one natural way to put students at the center of the learning process is to promote the practice of *dialogue* in the classroom.

The emphasis on dialogue is no accident in the context of philosophy didactics. There are at least three noteworthy features of philosophical inquiry that explain why the use of dialogue is natural in the context of the teaching of philosophy: philosophical questions give rise to *persistent disagreement*; philosophical inquiry is mostly conducted *a priori*; most philosophical questions spring from *everyday life*.

Philosophical inquiry, like any other inquiry, is animated by some questions and tries to find the true answers to these questions. What is specific about philosophy is that although each philosopher thinks to possess some true answers to some philosophical questions, there is no substantial agreement among philosophers about the true answers

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3   Cfr e.g., FREEMAN ET AL. 2014. See KILBY 2021 for the literature on the empirical evidence for the value of dialogic forms of active learning.

to core philosophical questions. For this reason, in philosophy there is no such a thing as a substantial body of truths that can be simply transmitted to students. There might be agreed upon truths about the *history* of philosophy – this is one of the reasons why it is natural, as it is often the case in the Italian context, to teach philosophy in the form of a history of philosophy – but there is no substantial consensus over the truth about, say, the nature of knowledge, death, free will, the self, truth, meaning, or, indeed, philosophy itself.

Although there is a huge difference between professional philosophers and students – both in terms of knowledge and in skills specifically related to philosophical inquiry – at some important level of description there is no substantial difference between professional philosophical inquiry and student's philosophical inquiry[4]. Not only they both can ask philosophical questions and come to believe in answers on the basis of arguments. But they both conduct their inquiry *a priori*, or, as it said nowadays, *from the armchair*.

Moreover, although students and professional philosophers have different knowledge of the world, they both reflect on philosophical topics from the armchair and their reflection begins, to put it loosely, from their own life. They both raise questions about justice and death, because these concepts capture aspects that they feel problematic in their everyday life.

Different metaphilosophical theories will add other features to the list and will give flesh to these features in different ways. I have tried to characterize these features in a way which is as neutral as possible among different metaphilosophical views. Any more specific description of the activity of philosophical inquiry – e.g., it starts with *intuitions*; it is an activity of *conceptual clarification*; it is grounded on *phenomenological observations*; etc.[5] – will itself be a core philosophical

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4   I take this claim to apply even to philosophical inquiry from a very young age. For defenders of this claim see the work of Gareth Matthews, MATTHEWS 1978, 1980, 1984, 1994, McCALL 1990. For critics see KITCHENER 1990 e WHITE 1992, 2012. For a reply to these criticisms see MURRIS 2000.

5   See OVERGAARD, GILBERT, BURWOOD 2013 for an introduction to a variety of historically influential views about the methods and nature of philosophical inquiry.

topic, and as such it will elicit substantial disagreement.

These three features – there is no agreed upon body of truths in philosophy, philosophy is largely *a priori* and it is grounded in our everyday life – make it well suited for philosophers to propose dialogic inquiry to students. Since philosophy is largely done from the armchair, philosophical dialogue can usually unfold without the need to gather empirical data; since philosophy springs from everyday concerns, students understand the value of the questions asked and they can feel that they have a say about them; moreover, since students appreciate that there is no agreement over the true answers to their philosophical question, they feel entitled to explore them[6].

3. The Motivation Problem

To say that the use of dialogue suits well with philosophy is not to say that it is easy for students and for teachers to engage in dialogue. Any teacher interested in guiding dialogic inquiry with students will have to meet a very general challenge that virtually applies to *all* didactic proposals, and which can be roughly summarized as follows. On the one hand, dialogue is a difficult activity – both cognitively and emotionally – and thus students need *motivation* to participate in it. On the other hand, we want to select the motivation carefully. Punishment and reward are not the right sort of motivation, although they might to some degree play an important role in the process (e.g., social pressure is unavoidable, and grading in some contexts is non-negotiable as well). Ideally, we would like students to be motivated to participate in dialogue because they *care* about the *topic* under investigation and because they are keen to endorse the *values* codified by the practice of dialogue. So, the general problem is how to create the conditions for helping students to be motivated to participate in

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6   This is not to say that dialogic inquiry does not have a place in other disciplines. The point here is only to highlight why it works especially well in the case of the teaching of philosophy.

dialogue and to be motivated for the right reasons. We can call this *the motivation problem* (which can be extended *mutatis mutandis* to any other didactic proposal).

This problem can be tackled in various ways. The pedagogy and didactic strategies adopted by the original *Philosophy for Children* (P4C) curriculum[7] might be seen as providing a particular solution to this problem. Focusing on the didactic strategies, the traditional way of inviting students to dialogue in the context of the P4C consists in allowing students to *choose the question* to be investigated. Some stimulus is presented – originally a text from the curriculum – and then students are invited to formulate some questions that are elicited by the stimulus. Students will then select one of these questions and the dialogue will be devoted to exploring the initial question and all the new ones that will eventually emerge as the inquiry unfolds. This didactic choice addresses the motivation problem because the questions that students spontaneously raise are likely to be questions that students care to explore[8].

In this paper I wish to explore dialogic inquiry in which the *question* to be investigated by the group is not selected by students but rather by the teacher or facilitator. Both didactic choices are valuable, but in this context I prefer to focus on dialogues which are centered around a question selected by a teacher because this choice is arguably the one that better suits the needs of philosophy teachers at high school and university level (which are the contexts which mostly interest me here). In high school and university the teacher might need to *transmit* some specific knowledge to students, and letting students decide which question to explore might have the unwelcome consequence of bringing to the fore a topic which is too remote from the topic that the

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7   See PRITCHARD 2022 for an overview and for reference to the sources, and MCCALL 2009 for a comparative analysis between a variety of ways of structuring P4C-inspired philosophy sessions.

8   This is not the only way in which P4C takes care of the motivation to participate in a philosophical dialogue. To mention just one another important aspect of the P4C didactic choices, the texts in the curriculum are meant to attract student's interest in philosophical questions by presenting questions that arise in life scenarios which are familiar to students.

teacher wants or needs to explore. In the context of dialogic inquiry in high school and university philosophy teaching, for a teacher to choose the question to be explored in the dialogue seems to be a good way to balance two desiderata: promoting student's participation, and transmitting knowledge about a topic that is chosen by the teacher[9].

However, if the question is selected by the teacher, there is no guarantee that the question will produce in students the right motivation for participating in a dialogue. That is, it is possible that the students simply do not care about the question proposed. So, when dialogue begins with questions selected by the teacher, how do we ensure that the question will elicit the right motivation for dialogic inquiry? This is the motivation problem as it applies to the method under consideration.

4. Instrumental and non-instrumental reasons for questioning

One way to tackle this problem is to look at the nature of inquiry more generally, to understand what its basic moves are and, in particular, what motivates it. According to a minimal and fairly uncontroversial characterization of inquiry, the following "moves" are constitutive of inquiry:

> to *raise questions*
> to *answer* them (and to do so on the basis of *epistemic reasons* or *grounds*)

In inquiry, we have some questions, and we try to find answers to them. In the process of finding answers – which is itself an inquiry, and will involve new questions and new answers – we are not looking for any kind of answers, we are looking for answers that are *true*. In

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9 For more on this didactic choice, in contrast with the one favored by the original P4C-style of philosophy session, see the discussion in WORLEY 2021.

order to be convinced that some answers are true, we need so-called *epistemic* reasons or grounds, that is, propositions or experiences that indicate – more or less conclusively – that some possible answer is likely to be *true*.

Dialogic inquiry shares the same fundamental moves of individual inquiry. The dialogic dimension of dialogic inquiry adds layers of complexity to the phenomenon. But insofar as dialogic inquiry is a form of inquiry, it does involve the same basic moves. In the community of inquirers participants raise questions and try together to answer them on the basis of considerations that they regard as pertinent for discovering the truth.

If a teacher wants to motivate students to participate in dialogic inquiry, one natural approach to understand how to do so might be to explore the conditions for the emergence of inquiry. So, the question is: what motivates us to inquire?

Inquiry starts with questioning. Peirce famously spoke of «the irritation of doubt»[10] as the starting point and driving force of inquiry. If inquiry consists in the activity of finding answers, there are no answers to be found where there is no question asked. So, to reflect on the origin of the motivation to inquiry, we can explore the way in which questions more generally arise.

A useful entry point into the territory of questions (and their relationship to their origin and their motivation) consists in noting an important difference between questions and beliefs. As many philosophers have recently pointed out[11], we are not free to believe at will. With the possible exception of some peripheral cases (see Peels 2015), in general we cannot believe that *p* if we have no epistemic reason whatsoever for believing that *p*. On the contrary, it seems that we can raise questions at will, with the possible exceptions of cases in which we take ourselves to know (or at least to know with absolute certainty) the answer to the question that we wish to raise[12].

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10 PIERCE 1877.

11 Contemporary discussion of these issues traces back to WILLIAMS 1973. For recent discussions, see, among others, HIERONYMI 2006, SETIYA 2008, YAMADA 2012.

12 See ZANETTI 2021.

So, if we can to some considerable extent raise questions at will, why can't we simply ask the questions that teachers invite us to ask at the beginning of some dialogic inquiry? The simple answer is that we can raise questions at will only if we *want*. This is precisely what "at will" means. So, again, we are pushed back to the question of motivation. First of all, we might want to ask questions *for different reasons* and not all reasons are of *the right kind* – that is, not all reasons represent the motivation that we want students to have in inquiry. Second, our desires to ask questions might have different degrees of intensity and, as noted, since dialogic inquiry is a difficult activity, we need not only the right desire or motivation, but we also need that the desire or motivation be strong enough.

So, the question now is: under what conditions we *want* to raise questions and we want to do so for the right kind of motivation and with strong enough intensity? In answering this question, it is important – both theoretically, and didactically – to appreciate the distinction between questions asked for instrumental reasons and questions asked non-instrumentally.

Although *all* questions aim at *truth* – that is, aim at receiving a *true* answer[13] – we might raise questions for various reasons, and most of the time when we raise a question we do so in order to reach a goal which has nothing to do with the aim of getting the truth. To illustrate, I want to go to the beach; to get there, I need to orient myself, so I ask all sorts of questions to get a sense of how to get to the beach. In this case, I do not ask a question about the location of the beach for the sole sake of knowing the truth about the location of the beach. I raise the question only insofar as I regard this as instrumental to reach some goal that I have.

Let's now see illustrations of this point in scholastic contexts. I want to make a positive impression on the teacher, and for this reason I raise the question she is proposing, so that I can show that I know the answer. Or consider this case: I want to get a good grade, so I raise all sorts of questions about mathematics because I need the answers to

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13 See ZANETTI 2021, 2023a, 2023b.

the questions in order to get a good grade.

As these examples illustrate, instrumental questions are often questions that we are motivated to answer for the sort of reason that we, teachers, usually describe as a reason of the wrong kind. I am not suggesting that it is somehow bad to desire to make a good impression on the teacher or to desire to pass the exam. I am just saying that beside these motivations we ideally want students, at least on some occasion, to care about the truth for its own sake.

Sometimes we do in fact raise a question as to whether p for no other reason than knowing whether p is the case or not. These are cases in which, as we might say, in raising a question we are aiming at truth *for its own sake*. And this is paradigmatically the sort of pure passion for the truth that we hope to elicit in our students[14]. To illustrate, I might wonder about the nature of the universe for the sole sake of understanding the universe, or I might wonder about the nature of power for the sole sake of understanding some fundamental aspect of our humanity that fascinates me.

Note that not all kinds of instrumental reasons for questioning are unrelated to the truth. We often have reasons to ask some questions because to ask that question is instrumental to answer another question which is asked for the sole sake of knowing the truth. E.g., I want to know whether I am free or not, and in order to know the truth about free will I raise all sorts of questions about, say, the nature of mental causality. To mark this distinction, we might speak of instrumental *non-epistemic* reasons in the case in which we ask a question because it is instrumental to reach some goal that has nothing to do with the goal of knowing the truth about some topic, and of

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14 Noting the different motivations behind our questions, one might wonder whether the reason why one asks a question also determines the very nature of the question asked. In other words, the questions raised for instrumental reasons are questions of the same kind as those raised for non-instrumental reasons? I think that phenomenology settles the issue here. Questioning is a single phenomenon, yet we might raise questions for different reasons. When I play a game and wonder which kingdom won during the Hundred Years' War, I am aiming at the truth for the sake of winning the game, but I am aiming at the truth nonetheless, and my question is not different from the one of the historian who is genuinely passionate about history. What differs is only the motivation.

instrumental *epistemic* reasons in the case in which we ask a question because it is instrumental to answer another question that we raised non-instrumentally, that is, for the sole sake of knowing the truth.

I have said that sometimes we want students to care about the truth for its own sake. Sometimes this might happen even if students' initial motivation towards inquiry is instrumental to the satisfaction of some non-epistemic desire. To appreciate this point, consider the comparison between the following two scenarios.

First scenario. A group of friends want to go on holiday in Greece. This might prompt some questions: e.g., how do we reach Greece? Do we need to change values? Etc. In asking these questions, participants want to know the *true* answers to these questions. But they do not care about these truths for the sole sake of knowing the truth. Knowing the answers to these questions is instrumental to satisfying some independent desire that does not have anything to do with the truth: that is, planning a happy trip to Greece.

Second scenario. Consider now a case from a scholastic context. Some disagreement and dissatisfaction emerges in the classroom in connection with the evaluation system. Students want to find out some evaluation system that is regarded as fair by everyone in the classroom. So, the aim is to choose a system that will be met with universal consensus in the classroom. One way to reach this aim is through dialogic inquiry, and the teacher might guide students in this inquiry. Along the way, all sorts of philosophical questions will emerge: questions about fairness, the aims of education, objectivity, etc. But the initial force that drives the motivation to inquire is not the desire to know the truth for its own sake: it is the desire for agreement on a topic that is felt as important by the classroom. This is an illustration of a case in which the teacher exploits students' non-epistemic desires in order to motivate philosophical inquiry. However, even if this inquiry starts with some non-epistemic desire, as the inquiry unfolds students might find some of their questions as fascinating in their own rights. As I wonder about fairness, merit, objectivity, etc., I might find that these topics are interesting and thus I

might experience some volitional change: my focus is no longer
narrowly restricted to the aim of coming to an agreement, now I am
also puzzled and fascinated by the complexity of life, the role of
chance, the difficulty of finding a balance between fairness and
objectivity, etc. And this fascination, condensed in the many questions
and answers that it elicits, is a form of desire for the truth for its own
sake.

5. On Having a Philosophical Problem

We can now offer a new formulation to the question about motivation:
what are the conditions in which one raises a question for the sole sake
of knowing the truth? In other words: in which conditions do we ask
questions non-instrumentally? More specifically: in which conditions
do we ask a *philosophical* question non-instrumentally?

   The origin of philosophical questioning is itself an important and
debated philosophical issue[15]. For the purposes of providing practical
guidelines to philosophy teachers, I shall here describe only two
paradigmatic ways in which we happen to have philosophical
problems. The first case is one in which we can happen to raise a
question non-instrumentally. The second is one of those cases in
which even if some question is asked instrumentally it might quickly
transform into a question asked non-instrumentally.

   One way to have a philosophical problem is to be inclined to believe
propositions that seem incompatible with one another. Or, to put the
point in other equivalent terms which are quite common in
contemporary analytic philosophy, one way to have a philosophical
problem is to have conflicting intuitions[16]. This is a fairly common
understanding of what it takes in general to have a problem, and it is a
view of philosophical problems that is often taken for granted[17].

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15 See, for instance, Arendt's historically informed discussion of this topic in ARENDT 1978,
    Ch. 3.
16 For an overview of the many questions concerning intuitions see PUST 2019.
17 This view is endorsed in a recent paper in the *Journal of Didactics of Philosophy*: «we

Consider how frequent it is to present philosophical problems as clash of intuitions or as a set of inconsistent triads (tetrads, etc.). To make just one example, consider Bill Brewer's presentation of the problem of perception in his book *The Objects of Perception*: (I) Physical objects are mind-independent; (II) Physical objects are the direct objects of perception; (III) The direct objects of perception are mind-dependent. Each proposition is prima facie plausible, and yet it also seems that they can't all be true.

As noted, however, there is nothing genuinely *philosophical* in aporetic clusters, for most everyday problems have the same structure. I believe that my keys lie on the table because my memory tells me so. But my partner says that I forgot them in the jacket. Both are plausible. So I have a problem that is condensed into a question like: where are my keyes? Here to solve the problem I need to reject one of these incompatible beliefs or to reject the belief that these beliefs are incompatible. So, in order to explain what is genuinely *philosophical* about philosophical problems something more must be said[18]. Here I am not especially interested in *that* question, so I shall simply take it that this form of philosophical problems consist in aporetic clusters of inconsistent *philosophical* propositions – or anyway of propositions that bear upon traditional philosophical questions.

Another way to have a philosophical problem is to be inclined to believe in propositions that seem to depict a reality which is incompatible with the satisfaction of some desire that we take ourselves to possess. Although problems are often presented as sets of inconsistent yet initially plausible propositions, it is relatively rare to see presentation of philosophical problems as sets of propositions that seem to be inconsistent with desires. The reason for this is, I think, quite simple. The search of truth need not be parasitic upon our desires: if the way things are seems incompatible with our desires, then too bad for our desires. However, although desires shall not

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should regard a philosophical problem as a particular sort of *aporetic cluster*, i.e., as "a set of individually plausible propositions which is collectively inconsistent" (RESCHER 2001, 5)». (BARZ 2019, 6).

18 See BARZ 2019 for more discussion on this issue.

shape our doxastic deliberation, they do often provide the starting point for inquiry. We saw that in the case of questions asked instrumentally. In ordinary cases, inquiry begins when we have a desire and we don't know how to satisfy it yet. Here the need is *practical*. In philosophy, inquiry often begins – and persists – because we have some deep seated desire which we are unable to square with our worldview. So, we have a problem of meaning, because we deeply need meaning in life, but our view – e.g., a materialistic and deterministic one – seems incompatible with the existence of meaning. We have a problem of evil because we want God to exist and to be good, but we can't square God's existence and goodness with the presence of evil and suffering. We have a problem of free will, because we want free will to exist, and yet we don't understand how it could exist given the acceptance of some philosophical views. Etc.

To sum up, there are at least two paradigmatic ways for philosophical problems to emerge: when we think that we have beliefs that are jointly incompatible; when we think that we have beliefs that are incompatible with some desire that we think we have. In both cases there is some experienced *clash*. In the first case there is a clash between *beliefs* only, and so we can speak in this case of a *purely cognitive clash* or *cognitive clash* for short. In the second case there is a clash between *beliefs and desires*, and so we can speak of a *cognitive-conative clash*. In most cases, in a philosophical problem we experience both clashes at the same time. To illustrate the distinction and the interplay between beliefs, desires, and philosophical questions, let us consider with some more detail two paradigmatic philosophical problems.

The Problem of Evil. The problem emerges because the existence of God – under some conception of God – seems to be incompatible with the existence of evil – under some conception of evil.

There are various ways of solving the problem. One is to reject the existence of evil – or to suitably revise our conception of it. The other is to hold that, appearances notwithstanding, the existence of God and evil are compatible. Finally, another option is to reject the existence of

God – or to modify our conception of it.

Now, this problem is a problem *for someone* only if someone is prima facie inclined to believe in the existence of God (and of evil). If one does not feel so inclined, then what is described as a "problem" of evil can in fact be described as an *argument* from evil *against* the existence of God. This point is well known and it applies to all problems that consist in cognitive clashes. There is a clash of intuitions only if we are inclined to believe the seemingly jointly incompatible propositions. But if we are not strongly inclined to believe some of these propositions, then the fact that the other propositions seem true can be taken as a reason to think that the other propositions are false.

The Problem of Free Will. The problem emerges – at least on one very simplified version of one among many problems of free will – because it seems that we are free, it seems that the world is deterministic, and it seems that free will is incompatible with determinism.

Again, the problem can be solved by rejecting one of these intuitions: we are not free, free will is not incompatible with determinism, determinism is false.

In this case, there is a problem for someone only if the inconsistent propositions that constitute the problem really seem true *to someone*. Whereas in the case of the problem of evil we might suppose that in the context of contemporary classrooms few people will be inclined to believe in the existence of God, in the case of the problem of free will we might suppose that many people nowadays will be inclined to believe in the existence of free will.

The problem of free will is of special interest to us because it shows the difference and the potential overlap between cognitive and cognitive-conative clashes. The clash we have just seen is a clash between beliefs only. But now consider the following reaction to the prospects of living in a deterministic world devoid of free will.

> I have called physical determinism a nightmare. It is a nightmare because it asserts that the whole world with everything in it is a huge automaton, and that we are nothing

but little cogwheels, or at best sub-automata, within it.

It thus destroys, in particular, the idea of creativity. It reduces to a complete illusion the idea that in preparing this lecture I have used my brain to create something new. There was no more in it, according to physical determinism, than that certain parts of my body put down black marks on white paper: any physicist with sufficient detailed information could have written my lecture by the simple method of predicting the precise places on which the physical system consisting of my body (including my brain, of course, and my fingers) and my pen would put down those black marks[19].

Here, the lack of free will seems to be experienced as a problem not only (or not so much) because we are inclined to believe in it, but also because, to put it simply, we *want* it to be true. We are *scared* at the prospects of discovering that we are not free. We *need* to think of ourselves and others as free in order to ground institutions and practices that we deeply value.

One can feel that there is a problem about free will because one simply wants free will to exist and yet all the evidence she possesses seems to indicate that free will is impossible. In this case, one does not even need to be inclined – on grounds that are taken as evidential – to believe in free will. She feels the problem simply because it seems to her that something that she regards as desirable – the existence of free will or perhaps something that requires the existence of free will – is threatened by what she regards as the available evidence. Most of the time, however, I suppose that people experience some problem with free will *both* because they want it to exist and because it seems to them that it exists.

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19 POPPER 1977, 222.

6. Clash and Intensity

We were wondering how philosophical inquiry begins. The suggestion is that when we experience some cognitive and cognitive-conative clashes we often feel the need to inquire. So, the practical suggestion for teachers is to create the conditions so that students can experience some clash.

Problems might be experienced with different degrees of intensity. The greater the intensity, the greater the motivation for inquiry. So it is important to think about what explains intensity in order to plan and facilitate dialogic inquiry with students.

The difference in intensity seems to be shaped by a variety of factors. Here are some of them.

First, clashes might be experienced as more or less problematic depending on the *degree of confidence* that we attribute to each of the propositions that seem jointly incompatible. The greater the degree of confidence, the greater the problem. The reason why this is so is that the greater the degree of confidence in some proposition p, the harder it is to reject p. And if one has a great degree of confidence in each problematic proposition, then it is particularly difficult to reject any of these propositions.

Consider, to illustrate, the so-called problem of external world skepticism. The problem arises because it seems that we have knowledge of the external world, but given the acceptance of premises that seem highly plausible, it seems to follow that this empirical knowledge is impossible. There are various arguments to the effect that it is impossible to have knowledge about empirical propositions (or epistemic justification for believing in them). One argument runs as follows[20]:

> I am unable to know that I am not a brain in a vat.
> If I do not know that I am not a brain in a vat, then I do not
> know very much.

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20 PRITCHARD 2004.

Hence,
I do not know very much

Yet, we also believe that we know very much (about the external world). Hence the problem. And here it seems that the problem is particularly acute precisely because we have a strong degree of confidence – perhaps even some sort of psychological certainty that is in principle unshakable on any intellectual grounds – in the proposition that we know very much (about the external world). If it didn't seem at all to us that we know very much about the external world, then perhaps we wouldn't feel any problem at all; instead, we would have an argument – and perhaps a quite convincing one – for concluding that we do not possess knowledge about the external world (compare this point with the previous observations about the problem of evil).

   Consider, by contrast, the sorites paradox. The problem can be formulated in various ways, but here is a simple formulation that will do for our purposes[21]

1 grain of wheat does not make a heap.
If 1 grain doesn't make a heap, then 2 grains don't.
If 2 grains don't make a heap, then 3 grains don't.
…
If 999,999 grains don't make a heap, then 1 million grains don't.
Therefore,
1 million grains don't make a heap.

And yet it seems that 1 million grains do make a heap. And so we have a problem.

   In this case it seems that our degree of conviction in these propositions is weaker than in the case of the proposition that we have everyday empirical knowledge (e.g. "I have two hands"). If this is the

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21   Hyde & Raffmann 2018.

case, then this is one reason why the sorites paradox might be felt as less problematic than the paradox of external world skepticism.

The second feature that might explain why problems are felt with different degrees of intensity is their *role in our worldview*. Following Quine's metaphor[22], we can understand our worldview as an intricate web of beliefs. At the periphery there are beliefs that can be easily changed, in the light of new evidence from experience, without altering the core of the web. The more we move nearer the center, the more we find beliefs whose change will have profound impacts throughout the entire web. Arguably, at the core of our worldview there lie *philosophical* beliefs. And this might in part explain why certain philosophical problems – namely those that threaten our most fundamental philosophical beliefs – are experienced as intensely problematic. Relatedly, we might suppose that core philosophical beliefs will be endorsed with a strong – or even a seemingly unshakable – degree of convention. Even if we can have a strong degree of assent with respect to peripheral beliefs (e.g., everyday empirical beliefs), still, in the case of philosophical problems, the existence of a strong degree of confidence might be often taken as a prima facie indication that we are in the presence of some fundamental philosophical beliefs.

Consider the problem of external world skepticism again. *All our empirical beliefs* (e.g., beliefs in propositions like "I have two hands") hinge upon the conviction that there exists an external world[23]. To reject this belief will jeopardize our entire worldview, thereby leading to some sort of «cognitive paralysis», as Crispin Wright puts it[24]. So, any set of prima facie plausible propositions that seem to be incompatible with this fundamental belief will threaten to shatter a large and fundamental part of our world view.

By contrast, the problematic propositions of the sorites paradox do

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22 QUINE & ULLIAN 1970.

23 For more on this point, see current debates on hinges inspired by Wittgenstein's remarks in *On certainty*: WITTGENSTEIN 1969, MOYAL-SHARROCK 2004, WRIGHT 2004, COLIVA 2015, PRITCHARD 2016.

24 WRIGHT 2004, 191.

not seem to be as near to the core of our web of beliefs as the belief in the existence of the external world. So, this might in part explain both why they seem to be held with some lower degree of conviction, and why the sorites paradox might be felt as less problematic than the problem of the external world skepticism.

There are, I think, many other factors that might have an impact on the intensity with which problems are experienced. A skilful philosophy teacher becomes sensitive to the presence of these features. Some of these are: whether the problematic beliefs are fundamental in defining the identity of the students (think of problems related to values); whether the problematic beliefs threaten desires of the students, the strength of these desires, and whether these desires are fundamental in shaping the identity of the students; how the problematic beliefs interact with the group, whether there are specific social pressures that make it difficult to change one's views; etc. In planning and facilitating one's philosophical dialogue, the teacher might use awareness of these factors in order to help students to enter fruitfully in the dialogic interaction.

§7 The Clash Strategy for Planning and Facilitating

The Clash Strategy asserts the following: if you want to create the conditions for dialogic inquiry on some question, you should create the conditions for students to experience that question as problematic. We have seen two ways in which some questions might be felt as problematic. So, the strategy consists in creating the conditions for experiencing some cognitive clash, some cognitive-conative clash, or both. How do we do so? In answering this question we need to know which are the fundamental building blocks of a dialogue.

Recall that a dialogue is a form of collective *inquiry*. So it shares with inquiry the same fundamental structure. The building block of inquiry are the following.

> to *raise questions*
> to *answer* them (on the basis of *epistemic reasons* or *grounds*)

Now, to *answer* a question is to form a *belief*. And a belief is based either on *doxastic* grounds or on *non-doxastic* grounds. Either way, unless the grounds for an answer are readily available to the inquirer, in order to answer some question one will need to ask other questions, which in turn need to be answered, and the answers, unless they are readily available, will in turn need one to ask new questions, etc. Let me illustrate this point with an example.

I wonder whether the existence of death is incompatible with the idea that life is meaningful. In order to answer this question, I wonder what meaningfulness means. Eventually, I answer that it requires that life has a point. Then I wonder what having a point means. And I wonder whether the existence of death is incompatible with the idea that life has a point. Then I wonder what death actually is. Etc.

Inquiry is just the endless formations of questions and answers. Sometimes the subject has a reflective stance upon one's answers that allow her to explicate or to revise her grounds for her answers. This very reflective stance consists in asking questions – why do I believe that this is true? – which in turn is just the beginning of another inquiry. Etc.

Dialogic inquiry unfolds in the same manner. So, its fundamental stages are the raising of a question and the search for an answer. But a question does not arise out of nothing. With the possible exceptions of some cases – which we shall put on a side for the present purposes – in most cases we ask a question because of some *stimulus*. So we can represent the building blocks of inquiry (and of dialogic inquiry) as follows:

> to *experience a stimulus*
> to *raise a question*
> to *answer the question*

These three steps are inquiry, and the third step – to answer the question – is itself an inquiry.

Now, any inquiry is individuated by its leading question. In principle we can have as many inquiries as the questions that we raise and which are followed by the effort to answer them. However, in everyday life, we do not individuate inquiries in this manner. We distinguish between what we might call the leading or overarching question – which is the one that identifies the inquiry – and the many sub-questions and corresponding sub-inquiries that we do in order to answer our leading question. In the previous example, inquiry is guided by the aim of answering the leading question "is death compatible with the existence of meaning in life?". The same applies to dialogic inquiries. There is some leading or overarching question and then there is what we simply call the process of inquiry, which is the concatenations of a great number of micro-inquiries constituted by each of the many questions that we happen to ask. So, in a particular dialogic inquiry, the classroom might explore the question "does money make us happy?" but in answering this leading question students will ask all sorts of other questions.

Before coming to the leading question of a dialogue, the teacher will normally present some stimulus to the classroom. In fact, the teacher might even ask other questions – and a question can itself be a stimulus – before she comes to the moment in which she asks the leading question. So, the motivation problem can be restated as follows: which stimuli and questions should I present to the students before they are ready to appreciate the leading question that I want them to explore? And here comes the answer of the Clash Strategy: use stimuli and questions in order to let the students experience the clash which explains why the leading question is problematic.

In order to know which stimuli and questions to use in order to have the conditions for experiencing some clash, the teacher first needs to have a clear view of the clash she wants to present. I have said that clashes can be of two kinds, cognitive, and cognitive-conative. In order to facilitate teachers' search for clashes, it might be easier to reason in

terms of beliefs only, rather than in terms of beliefs *and* desires. In order to do so, one can simply translate desires in terms of evaluative judgments, more or less according to the following scheme.

> Desire to reach goal a = The belief that a is good, or the belief that a is desirable.

I am not suggesting that desires might be reduced to evaluative beliefs[25]. Nor am I suggesting that someone can desire to reach goal *a* only if she believes that *a* is desirable (or similar contents). I am just suggesting to plan *as if* desires can be reduced to some evaluative beliefs. In this way one might keep track of the clash in terms of beliefs only. That being said, I think it is important for teachers and facilitators to appreciate that problems (philosophical or otherwise) do not reduce to cognitive clashes. Desires are key to motivation[26], and, as we noted in §3, it is important to create the conditions for having the right sort of motivation to participate in a dialogic inquiry.

To sum up, I have suggested that a teacher might plan a philosophical session in the classroom by finding a clash and then thinking about stimuli and questions that will allow students to experience it. However, I have not provided any detailed practical suggestions about how to choose stimuli and questions once the clash has been found. This has to wait for another occasion. I shall conclude the paper by offering to teachers some roadmaps for planning philosophy sessions using the Clash Strategy.

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25 For the view that desires are identical with evaluative beliefs or with some sort of representation of the state of affairs   desired as good, see STAMPE 1987; ODDIE 2005; TENENBAUM 2007; FRIEDRICH 2012.

26 On a fairly traditional view of desires – which traces back at least to Hume and is often contrasted with the view that desires are evaluative beliefs or evaluative representations – to desire something is to be motivated to act in such a way as to satisfy one's desire. For adherents of this thesis, see ARMSTRONG 1968, STAMPE 1986, STALNAKER 1984, SMITH 1994, DRETSKE 1988, DANCY 2000.

8. Roadmaps for Planning a Dialogue Using the Clash Strategy

When we plan a philosophical dialogue – or a dialogic inquiry of any kind – we might follow different paths. These paths are rationalizations of processes which are rarely sequential. Planning a session is a creative process, and as such it does not need to follow any fixed set of instructions. However, having some roadmaps in mind might be helpful in order to plan one's sessions and to learn how to plan. I use these roadmaps in training sessions. I ask future educators, teachers or facilitators to design session plans using these roadmaps, so that they can learn how to use the clash strategy in order to create the conditions for dialogue.

Planning from topic. Sometimes we know what the *topic* we want to explore is, but we don't know yet how to plan a dialogic inquiry on that topic.

The first point to appreciate is that there is a huge difference between a *topic* and a *question*. The same topic can elicit a myriad of different questions. Moreover, we don't start dialogues by saying things like: "Let's talk about justice". First of all, what about justice shall we talk about? Second, you need some stimuli that will help students to feel that there is something to talk about about justice (recall the motivation problem). We should rather start dialogues with specific questions, e.g.: "Does justice hinge on divine command?", and we should introduce them with some inquiry-conducive stimulus.

So, the first step in planning from a topic is to select some question related to the topic. My suggestion at this stage is to make a list of questions that strike you as good ones. Then, once you have some questions before you, try to understand whether they are really good and why. One way of doing so is to try to find some clash behind your question. In other words, I am suggesting that the questions that are likely to appear as good to you are questions that arise out of some clash. To my knowledge, this hypothesis is correct in most cases and

delivers fruitful practical insights for planning the session.[27]

Looking for clashes will not only allow you to select some good questions. It will also help you to move to the next stage, namely the creation of stimuli-question pairs in order to arrive at your question. Knowing what the beliefs and desires that create the clash are, you can think of stimuli that help students to appreciate the force of each intuition, so that they can eventually feel the problem that you wish to present to them.

	Roadmap from Topic	Illustration
1	Choose a topic	E.g.: wisdom
2	Find some prima facie good questions about the topic and write them down	E.g.: can a young person be wise?
3	Look for a clash behind your prima facie good questions	E.g.: it seems that wisdom comes only through time and experience; it seems that sometimes young people might be very wise
4	Design stimuli-questions pair to elicit the clash in the classroom	E.g.: short exercise in which students are invited to describe the wisest person they ever met in their life; short reading of some texts from Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha*

Planning from stimulus. Sometimes we fall in love with a stimulus – e.g., a picture-book – and we want to facilitate a dialogue that takes

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27 The fact that a question hinges on some clash is not the only feature that indicates that a question is a good one for dialogue. There are a plethora of other features that indicate that a question is good for dialogue. For more on this see WORLEY 2021.

the stimulus as its starting point. In this case, two possible roadmaps are as follows.

	Roadmap from Stimulus 1	Roadmap from Stimulus 2
1	Choose a stimulus	Choose the stimulus
2	Find some prima facie good questions that the stimulus is likely to elicit	Look for a clash that the stimulus creates
3	Look for a clash behind your prima facie good questions.	Formulate a question that is problematic because of the clash found in the stimulus
4	Design stimuli-questions pair to elicit the clash in the classroom	Design stimuli-questions pairs to elicit the clash in the classroom

In Roadmap from Stimulus 1, step (4) will have to be handled with some care. The sheer fact of presenting the stimulus to the classroom does not guarantee that the classroom will ask the question that you wanted them to ask. Nor the sheer fact of raising a question by itself guarantees that the clash you have in mind is animating the classroom. So, some planning is required at this stage in order to ensure that the clash plays a role in shaping the ensuing dialogue.

   Roadmap from Stimulus 2 is to my knowledge the best one if one wants to facilitate a dialogue through the clash method. The reason is that it exploits a clash that is already present in the text. This also makes it easier for the teacher to understand how to present stimuli-question pairs that will prepare the ground to feel the problem that the question is meant to capture.

   Here is an illustration with Roadmap from Stimulus 2 (you get an illustration of Roadmap from Stimulus 1 by changing the order of the

second and third steps).

	Roadmap from Stimulus 2	Illustration
1	Choose a stimulus	E.g.: a journal article on hikikomori
2	Look for a clash that the stimulus creates	E.g.: it seems that romantic love requires physical contact; there are romantic relationships between people who have never met in person.
3	Formulate a question that is problematic because of the clash found in the stimulus	E.g.: is love compatible with the lack of physical contact?
4	Design stimuli-questions pair to elicit the clash in the classroom	E.g.: short brainstorming in which students describe examples of what they regard as an ideal romantic relationship; short brainstorming on the ingredients for a romantic relationship; reading of the journal article; question about the compatibility of romantic love and lack of physical contact.

Planning from question. This case is a subclass of the Roadmap from Topic. If you have a single question in mind – e.g., is it ethically permissible to eat animals? – then you might check whether your impression that this is a good question is warranted by searching for some clash that explains why the question is problematic. If no clash is

easily found, then try to find some clashes in the vicinity, or try to find other prima facie good questions in the vicinity, and then try to find some clash that would explain why they look like good questions. Once you have found a good question, then look for stimuli-question pairs that will help the students to feel the problem and be ready to explore the question.

Planning from clash. This is, I think, the best way to plan if one wants to learn the dynamics behind philosophical problems and become skilful in handling philosophical questions and problems in the classroom. Once you have a clear clash in mind, find some question that captures the core of the clash, and then think of stimuli-question pairs that will let the students feel the clash.

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