STUDIA UBB. PHILOSOPHIA, Vol. 70 (2025), 1, pp. 143-156
(RECOMMENDED CITATION)
DOI:10.24193/subbphil.2025.1.08

The Socratic Imperative and Philosophical Autonomy

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ABSTRACT. The Socratic imperative to examine one's own life is linked to the fundamental moral idea of personal autonomy. Therefore, it is quite difficult to reject it, but it is equally challenging to apply it for various reasons. If it is philosophically assumed, a distilled version of the Socratic imperative has significant implications for one's meta-philosophical options and the way we conceive of philosophical education. I argue that a commitment to the Socratic imperative implies a commitment to what I call "philosophical autonomy", namely an intellectual obligation to map the space of (meta-)philosophical options and position oneself in the dialectical theoretical space as close as possible to those philosophical subjects that are relevant for the task of examination of one's life.

Keywords: the Socratic imperative, philosophical autonomy, meta-philosophy, philosophy as a way of life

I.The Socratic imperative

It is hard to find an introductory book or course about philosophy without some reference to the Socratic dictum that "the unexamined life is not worth living" (Socrates, as quoted in Plato, Apology, 37B, trans. Benjamin Jowett). It has become part of the job description of a philosopher, and a mission statement for philosophy. It is an easy-to-sell dictum in universities: students think that they are in the right place, a 101-philosophy course, and are on the right track examining, for a semester

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or so, their lives. By taking the philosophy course, they will rise above the crowd and embrace a life of deeper meaning and purpose, a life worth living. However, the dictum is problematic, given that it is not clear what examining one's life amounts to and why only the examined life is one that is worth living. These are important questions and a good starting point for a professor teaching her/his 101-philosophy course, as well as for this paper.

According to Socrates, to examine is to discuss virtues and investigate the big problems of life. "And if I say again", he remarks, "that daily to discourse about virtue, and of those other things about which you hear me examining myself and others, is the greatest good of man, and that the unexamined life is not worth living, you are still less likely to believe me". For Socrates virtue is knowledge, knowledge of the human good, and vice is ignorance. If one does not know the human good, she/he is likely to do, randomly, good or bad things. Only if she/he knows what good, truth and beauty are, will she/he do good deeds, will be truthful and will have a beautiful character and a fulfilling life. This is because, in his view, humans always and necessarily want to do what is good. All our actions are explicitly or implicitly driven by some conception of the human good and if I know what the good life truly is, then I will also do good deeds. Our main duty is to live the good life and thus, to know the good. This means that we must examine our life in order not to live the least worthy of lives, one of ignorance, and thus, even unknown to us, a possible immoral life.

I do not want to defend here the Socratic project, as unpacked above, with all its assumptions. However, it is useful to distinguish the building blocks of the Socratic imperative. One is the idea that examining one's life is a precondition for living the good life. Another one that an evil life in not worth living, but only a good one is. Any of these two elements can be rejected, resulting in different versions of the Socratic imperative. Rejecting the first idea leaves open the possibility that one could live an unexamined but good life that it is worth living. One could be the recipient of a great amount of moral luck for example, and thus live, by chance, a good life. Even if she/he lived without considering the consequences of her/his actions, her/his life's trajectory or the features of her/his character, the life we are envisioning might still be a good one.

Regarding the first idea, that examining one's life is a precondition for living the good life, we can identify two interpretations. The first one is that the act of examining one's life has only instrumental value: reflecting on one's existential condition, with its particular features, is necessary in order to obtain whatever constitutes the good life. In order to assert that the unexamined life, *good or bad*, is not worth living, one must attribute intrinsic value to the epistemic act of self-examination.

We could further dissect the imperative, and remark that even if a good life necessarily incorporates the act of examination, the examination might be done by someone else. It is an open question if one can externalize the effort of examining one's life. Socrates probably would reject this option, although not in an easy manner. He thinks that his conversations are a kind of alethic midwifery procedure, equivalent to the process of examination. The passivity of his partners in the Platonic dialogues is proof that an examined life is not necessary one of solitary self-examination and might be in big part undertaken by someone else. One could argue, also, that any life, whatever its epistemic and moral features, is worth living, even an unexamined life of vice and corruption. This thesis might be put on a Kantian orbit: if we are referring to the life of a person, we are talking about a being with intrinsic value, given that she/he has will (good or bad) and reason.

We have thus two dimensions in the Socratic imperative: the moral one (good or bad life), and the epistemic one (unexamined or examined life) and we have four possible lives: good and examined, good and unexamined, bad and examined, and bad and unexamined. Every dimension can be unpacked in different ways. The good life can be understood, considering virtue ethics, as a life of excellence and character, where a person cultivates virtues (like courage, wisdom, temperance, justice) and seeks eudaimonia (flourishing). From a Kantian perspective, the good life is one lived in accordance with universal moral principles (derived from the categorical imperative). In an utilitarian framework, a good life is one where one seeks to increase general happiness and reduce suffering for the greatest number of beings. From an existentialist perspective, a good life is one of authenticity and responsibility. In a religious interpretation, the good life is one of devotion, love, compassion, and transcendence. And so on. To examine one's life can also mean, in practice, many things: one can reflect philosophically on one's life, can explore in an artistic manner her/his biography, or one can meditate in order to understand his condition. The examination, whatever the method, has as final goal understanding. Understanding can, in its turn, be understood in many ways. Scientific or philosophical understanding is explicit, conceptual and theoretical, while artistic or religious understanding is non-theoretical, sometimes conceptual and sometimes implicit (as a form of know-how). From a philosophical perspective, I will argue in what follows, understanding one's life involves a certain path, one that is mandatory for philosophers.

Before exploring what I call "the imperative of philosophical autonomy", we should give credit to the Socratic imperative in its most convincing interpretation: it is very plausible to believe that a good, noble and examined life is worth living; that a good and examined life is better than a good but unexamined life; and that, finally,

a good life described as good *because* it is examined, is better that all lives. Why so? Because if someone examines her/his life and acts in accordance with a conception of the human good, then this makes the good life *her/his life*. The goodness, if any, of hers/his intentions and actions is not, in this case accidental, but intrinsic to hers/his existential project. She/he is not just the actor of hers/his actions, but also the screenwriter and director of her/his good life. By examining the life one is living, it truly becomes one's own.

But what if the concept of *the good life* is meaningless? The examined life is part of the good life because, one could argue, the human life is a value-centered life. And the examination is necessary to discover the proper values that ought to be at the center of one's life. The good life is one that, in addition to being examined, we could add, is a happy and flourishing one. It is open to debate if there is a coherent knowable set of values connected to happiness and human flourishing. Maybe there is no such set, or it is not accessible to humans through reason or philosophy. In that case, we need a form of philosophical therapy, in hope that we will learn how to live given this skepticism or nihilism regarding the problem of the good life. Regardless of such problematic options, I think that it is plausible to consider that the examined life is still better that the unexamined life because examining one's life relates to understanding the human condition, the personal existential predicament, and the moral dilemmas one faces. To live is to be conscious and understand the experiences and existential options. The examined life, regardless of the question of the good life seems, thus, necessary for having a richer experience of life. And a life lived more fully *because* it is understood is better than a life lived with less philosophical awareness (and thus less understood).

The Socratic imperative is an epistemic and ethical imperative. Stripped of certain substantial problematic claims that are part of the Socratic project, in its soft formulation, the imperative says that we must examine our life in order to live a better life. The ethical dimension of the imperative needs to be stressed. To examine one's life, in a minimal sense, one necessarily needs to formulate, in some situations, considerations that justify his/her actions considering some set of coherent values.

Even this stripped-down version of the imperative might be considered ambiguous and thus problematic. Are we supposed to examine every action we undertake or every situation we find ourselves in? Examining every action is impossible, and examining some actions is sometimes undesirable. Impossible for lack of time, and undesirable because it undermines some quality of experience and of the action, like being in the flow. This quality, one might argue, is essential for the good outcome of some actions, for example, in the case of performing an artistic act or responding to an emergency. Thinking of an action can be done during, after

or before an action. If it is done during the action, it changes its structure. Thus, the standard of reflective rational action is not necessary for every action. In some cases, we are in the process of prospective deliberation, deliberation done to choose a course of action. In other cases, we are just acting, having no time for deliberation, or we are in the flow, and it is just not appropriate to reflect. But we can and must, one might argue, engage in a prospective and retrospective examination of our actions even in such cases, when it is possible. Yes, some actions are done out of habit, or in the flow, or in a kind of "fluent agency" (cf. Kornblith 2010; Railton 2009; Arpaly and Schroeder 2012). In such cases my dispositions or moral reflexes could be the appropriate object of prospective or retrospective examination.[1] However, even if we restrict the domain of reflection, theoretical philosophical reflection might be epistemically paralyzing.[2]

Second, as mentioned, the requirement to formulate for oneself a coherent set of values is highly demanding and might be impossible. It can be thought of as an ideal that guides us, and in practice a continuous project. It is an open question if such a coherent set of values even exists. If there is, then we are also faced with problems regarding justification. Such values are either self-evident, or they have to be derived from other values (and not facts, if we accept the standard is-ought divide). In the end, some values or their alethic correspondent, necessary moral truths, must be postulated, due to the problem of being stuck in an infinite argumentative regress. However, some basic moral principles, e.g. "Do not hurt an innocent person!" or complex general ones like the utilitarian principle or the categorical imperative, are not self-evident or necessary moral truths.

Finally, we can ask ourselves what beauty is, truth or the good, friendship or solidarity, understanding or self-development. But we can ask also why to pursue them in the first place. The examined life presupposes deliberation (prospective deliberation) and retrospective examination, but also meta-deliberation. It is one thing to ask myself what I should do, given my set of values, or if my past actions are in line with these values, and another to ask myself if my values are the right ones, if they deserve pursuing, to ask what the act of pursuing values amounts to and what it actually means to reflect and understand (i.e. examine). At this point, it becomes evident that the imperative of examining one's life necessary leads to different important conceptual problems that must be examined. Thus, even if there are different types of examination (or understanding), religious, artistic, scientific etc.

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[1] Do my moral dispositions lead to justified actions in line with my set of values? This is a rather complicated subject, and I leave this and other related problems for a future discussion.

[2] Daniel Kahneman (2011) suggests that over-analysis can lead to cognitive fatigue and suboptimal decisions.

they cannot be comprehensive if they do not take into consideration all the conceptual problems we discussed in this section. Philosophical examination is, it seems, necessary in the process of self-examination, however this process might be conceived.

II.The imperative of philosophical autonomy

Examining our life and our high-order values implies a critical stance that can be scientific, artistic, or religious, not just philosophical. One might argue that not all perspectives are valid or, in contrast, that they are all valid and should all be pursued. Maybe only the philosophical stance is legitimate, and it makes no sense to examine one's life scientifically or artistically. This is a legitimate problem but one that I will not analyze in this paper. What I want to discuss in this section is relevant only to the philosophical stance, understood as a rational activity, one where some toolbox of argumentative methods is used, and specific problems and puzzles are central.

What I want to argue is that, if one accepts a soft version of the Socratic imperative and adopts a philosophical stance towards it, then one should strive to be *philosophically autonomous*. This means that one should choose to study, and devote her/his time, to problems that are logically connected, and closer conceptually, to the duty of self-examination. Meta-philosophy must be seen as the fundamental philosophical branch, and the problem of what philosophical questions have priority in light of the Socratic imperative, the starting point of philosophical reflection.

However, to know what do to, I must know what I am, one could argue, what freedom is, what is the structure of the universe, if there are other persons or minds like mine and so on. Thus, metaphysics might also be considered paramount. From a Kantian perspective, epistemology is *prima philosophia* and, in accordance, I have to map the structure and limits of knowledge, whatever its target, meta-philosophical or metaphysical. We could go on and remark that, given that every theoretical investigation involves a linguistic medium, with its own structure and limits, the philosophy of language should be in fact our starting point.

As with every philosophical topic, the problem of *prima philosophia* is complex. Of course, life does not stand still while we are debating the problems that are logically connected with the task of examining one's life. We have limited time for philosophy, whatever the subject, and we are forced to make, eventually, some educated doxastic choices regarding the structure of the universe, knowledge and language while, at the same time acting, interacting, reacting in our existential situation. Neurath's boat analogy is useful in this context:

> "We are like sailors," he writes, "who on the open sea must reconstruct their ship but are never able to start afresh from the bottom. Where a beam is taken away a new one must at once be put there, and for this the rest of the ship is used as support. In this way, by using the old beams and driftwood the ship can be shaped entirely anew, but only by gradual reconstruction. (1973[1921], 199)

If we accept the Socratic imperative, we realize that, to have an examined life, we must solve lots of philosophical puzzles. At the same time, we cannot suspend judgment until a final resolution of those puzzles is reached, given that we just cannot suspend living. Thus, we must commit ourselves to some principles and theoretical options that we deem to be reasonable.

Let us recap. The Socratic imperative is partially problematic, but still relevant in a softer version, in order to live a good life. Any substantial personal ethical reflections have logical connections with different metaphysical, epistemological, logical, or linguistic problems. To be able to solve (if ever possible) such problems, we require resources (time and energy) that might never actually be at our disposal. What the exact connections between practical problems and other philosophical fields are, is itself a meta-philosophical puzzle. While agnosticism is a theoretical option in many cases that has no practical consequences, "apragmatism", as we might call it, the suspension of action, is highly difficult and problematic. We have strong moral beliefs. We hope that they are rational, internally coherent and justifiable. They do presuppose some specific solutions to old philosophical theoretical problems. For example, the moral act of assigning blame presupposes that someone is responsible for her/his actions. Responsibility requires personal freedom. But personal freedom is a long debated philosophical topic.

III. Philosophical maps and dialectical distances

What are the consequences of these remarks for how we do philosophy? If we accept the soft Socratic imperative, something that I think we have to, I argue, each philosopher must have an inter-disciplinary map consisting of logical connections between different philosophical disciplines and a sub-map, an intra-disciplinary one, consisting of connections between different puzzles to other puzzles. Given such conceptual maps, the domains that are closer to ethics should demand more philosophical attention; likewise, some intra-domain puzzles should demand more attention than others. We sometimes have intuitions that support this view, intuitions according to which some philosophical domains are more relevant than others, from an existential point of view, and some puzzles, in a specific discipline, are

more relevant than others. Thus, it is plausible to consider that different philosophical topics have a certain "conceptual distance" from the Socratic imperative and practical issues.

How might we measure this distance? My proposal is to use what I call a "theoretic dialectical system". Each philosophical problem could be formulated as an argument. Each argument is liable to some objections, some stronger than others. Each objection faces other objections. And so on. The farthest an objection from some central problem, the more technical we perceive that objection to be. When we read papers titled along the line of "A response to John's objection to Dave's critique of Moore's theory of concept formation", we know that there is a big dialectical distance between some central issue in a philosophical field and what we are reading. The paper might be well written, but the dialectical distance from a central issue makes it probably less worthy of our attention given that we do not have all the time in the world to go, however far, in every dialectical direction.

So, what I claim is that

We must examine our life, given that the examined life is better than the unexamined life. (The soft Socratic imperative)

In order to successfully examine one's life, we must reflect on moral issues but also solve logically related philosophical problems.

Some problems are morally more important than others because they are dialectically closer to the Socratic imperative. (Some sets or clusters of problems - philosophical domains – are morally more important than others.)

We must have a conceptual map that represents the logically related philosophical problems between different puzzles and domains.

We should be more concerned about (and reflect more on) philosophical domains and problems that are philosophically closer on our map to issues relevant to the Socratic imperative, which should be represented as the center of the map. (This is what we might call "the imperative of philosophical autonomy").

IV. Possible objections and solutions

My central claim is that, if we have a reflective Socratic duty to ourselves, it demands a systematic approach to philosophy, not a "cat-approach" to philosophy, where one attends to philosophical problems contingently, according to inclination,

due to curiosity, angst, intellectual reflexes, professional obligation or other some contingent facts (for example that I have met some talented and charismatic professor that happens to be an expert on some philosophical topic). In the same way that we must act according to some principles that we choose for ourselves, principles that can be adopted and respected by every moral agent, we must reflect not on whatever philosophical issues, but especially on the ones that are connected to the duty of reflecting on one's life, issues that are dialectically closer to the Socratic imperative. To do otherwise is to succumb to philosophical heteronomy. Thus, I also think the imperative of philosophical autonomy must be universally assumed (especially by philosophers).

One might object,[3] first, that even if some philosophical problems are, indeed, more important than others, this does not mean that everybody should focus on them, in the same way that the fact that there are some noble and worth pursuing jobs (like being a doctor or a social worker), does not mean that other jobs should not be chosen. Second, the fact that there is a long process of objections and responses related to a philosophical debate is not intrinsically problematic, given that this is an intrinsic part of the rational process of asking and giving reasons. And philosophy is exactly such a rational enterprise. What matters is that the debate is meaningful and significant, not that it is long.

I do not think that the analogy is warranted. Different jobs require different abilities. Thus, even if there are more noble ways of earning a living than others, not everybody can have what it takes for such jobs to get close to, or achieve, excellence in the areas associated with those jobs. So, there's no imperative to have a career in some domain that might be deemed morally superior to others. However, being a moral philosopher, a political one, a philosopher of mathematics or one specialized in the philosophy of religion does not require extremely diverse abilities, as do different professions like being a ballerina, a doctor, a professor or an economist. All philosophers are part of the same profession for which two abilities are central, namely critical thinking and conceptual creative thinking. Maybe a more adequate analogy would be one that centers not on multiple professions, but on a single one: there is no imperative in the medical field that all doctors should be cardiologists just because some medical conditions result in more deaths per capita; analogous, there should be no imperative to focus on some philosophical problems just because these are (by some standard) more important than others. But if increasing the number of cardiologists would result in fewer deaths, then it is reasonable to demand that more medical students orient themselves towards cardiology. In the

[3] I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for formulating these two objections.

same manner, if indeed some philosophical problems are more important than others, then it is also reasonable to adopt the imperative of philosophical autonomy and concentrate more on these important philosophical problems.

The second objection targets the idea of dialectical distance. My claim was that as the dialectical distance increases, the relevance of the objections decreases. But the chain of objections and responses, of critiques and rebuttals, is essential — it is claimed — for the progress of a rational activity like philosophy and does not entail distancing from the fundamental philosophical problem. If it is meaningful or relevant, the longer the dialectical chain, the better, given that we get a deeper understanding of the problem.

What I would like to point out is that, in philosophy, most arguments rest on premises that are not themselves established through deductive reasoning, but rather through probabilistic forms of inference — such as induction, analogy, or abduction. We seldom establish the truth or falsity of philosophical claims. We can aspire, most of the time, to plausibility or reasonableness regarding the premises and the conclusions, and these features are probabilistic. The response to John's objection to Dave's critique of Moore's theory of concept formation has a high probability to be probabilistic, as is John's objection and Dave's critique. Every probabilistic argument, even if it is strong, leaves room for the conclusion to be false, even if the premises are true. Thus, there is always room for black swans. Probabilistic arguments can be, in principle, bypassed. Thus, as the chain of probabilistic arguments increases in a debate, the margin of error becomes larger because the density of arguments increases. Given that most philosophical debates are probabilistic and conceptual, there are few chances of empirical corrections in philosophy (in contrast with scientific debates). Besides the probabilistic dimension of arguments, every dialectic step (objection-response) has, in the end, a smaller probability to be epistemologically relevant to the starting point of the debate. This happens because of the zoom out effect of the analytic process. If the soundness of an argument A depends on premises p1 and p2, and on its validity, then there are at least three possible targets for objections. A critique of the critique (a response) can also target at least other 3 elements. And so on. If the critique is not logical, targeting the structure of the argument, but the truth or plausibility of premises, we can expect a semantic distancing from the central problem to the objections and responses. This semantic distance entails in many cases what we perceive as the irrelevance of a debate. What started as something important, for example, the examination of the value of nature, ends up in a debate about the ontological status of normativity. This semantic sliding and the entailed irrelevance is a neccesary feature of the philosophical process. The first critique in the dialectic chain has a certain probability (greater than zero) to be incorrect, bypassable and irrelevant

(shorthand: the "inbir-factor"). The response to the critique, and the response to the response have their own inbir factor. We see, thus, that in philosophy, the longer the debate/the dialectical chain, the greater the chances that it becomes irrelevant. Given that there are also philosophical debates that are meaningful and relevant irrespective of their dialectical dimension, it is important to ask how it is possible to reduce the inbir-factor (I will approach this problem in detail in another paper).

V. Types of philosophical autonomy, philosophy as a way of life, and philosophical education

Philosophical autonomy can be defined as the ability and obligation of the philosopher to structure her or his reflection in an independent, critical and systematic way, without merely following the inertia of dominant paradigms or the authority of other thinkers. It also means developing a philosophical trajectory that is free, as much as possible, from the contingencies of one's life and personality. We can distinguish several types of philosophical autonomy:

Meta-philosophical autonomy, discussed above, is the ability to construct a conceptual map of philosophy and decide which issues are priorities for philosophical reflection. I argued that such a philosophical map should have at its center a soft version of the Socratic imperative.

Epistemic philosophical autonomy, i.e. independence in the formation of beliefs, avoidance of dogmatism and uncritical acceptance of existing philosophical theories.

Methodological philosophical autonomy, i.e. the ability to choose the appropriate methods of investigation. If my argumentation is correct, we should choose the methods that are the most useful or appropriate in our effort to position ourselves adequately to the Socratic imperative.

Practical philosophical autonomy, i.e. the application of philosophical reflection to one's own life and the way philosophy is lived, not just theorized. In the framework of the Socratic project there was a connection between theory and actions, such that knowing that x is good for me and that y and z are the means to achieve x, automatically directed my will towards x using y and z. Without such a commitment, the link between knowing and doing is problematic. In this context, philosophy as a way of life is a methodological option that deserves our attention.

If the process of examination ends with a non-sceptic conclusion regarding the project of the good life, then one must take philosophy to be more than a theoretical endeavor. It must be seen as a practical one. Conceptually close to the Socratic imperative and the duty regarding philosophical autonomy is a meta-philosophical option known as "philosophy as a way of life". In this regard, I agree

with Michael Chase, who argues that "philosophy as a way of life should be considered as a third way of doing philosophy that is distinct from both analytic and continental traditions" (2013, 280) — and, in fact, "more valuable and fruitful than the alternatives, as it guarantees a process of genuine self-transformation" (266). According to him, this is the most valuable account of philosophy there can be, the only one that can make sense and appeal to a person who is genuinely engaged with philosophy, and also the only one that preserves philosophy's original and authentic role and task. This is a strong claim, but one that is compelling and in accord with the above-mentioned ideal of philosophical practical autonomy. Philosophy as a way of life can be identified in many philosophical traditions, beginning in Antiquity, as Pierre Hadot (1995) has forcefully reminded us, and ending with important modern figures as, most notably, Montaigne, Spinoza, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Foucault. "What unites them with ancient philosophers is, according to Marta Faustino, "(i) the valorization of practice (actions, behavior) over theory (theses, books) and the consistency between the two, (ii) the performative character of their writings and their aim to promote self-transformation, and finally, (iii) a concern to provide some kind of guidance for one's life on the basis of an ideal of human flourishing or perfection." (2020, 208) It is an open and relevant question, for further research, what exactly is the connection between the Socratic imperative in its soft expression (the examined life is better than the unexamined life), the imperative of philosophical autonomy and the project of philosophy as a way of life. It is a central question that must be explored, I think, in order to understand the relation between philosophy and the good life.

The increased philosophical specialization has complex causes related to a certain dynamic in the history of ideas and some social developments.[4] The result is that many philosophers are focusing on some philosophical niche and grow old working on a few technical puzzles. However, if correct, the imperative of philosophical autonomy requiers, first and foremost, meta-philosophical examination and the development of a personal meta-philosophical roadmap. To be an expert on any philosophical topic is a great achievement. If that topic is dialectically close to the Socratic imperative, then the reflective activity associated to that topic is in accord with the imperative of philosophical autonomy. If the reflective activity was initiated, at some point, as a result of a meta-philosophical choice based on considerations that are at least implicitly related to the Socratic imperative, then it deserves special merit, given the Socratic duty to live an examined intellectual and practical life.

[4] Systematic philosophy is more or less a thing of the past. Maybe for good reasons. It is not obvious that philosophical topics can be integrated in a conceptual architecture where some issues are fundamental and have conceptual priority, and others are derivative and secondary.

I want to end by exploring the important connection between philosophical autonomy and philosophical education.[5] What are the consequences for the way we structure philosophical education in academic institutions like philosophy faculties, if we take seriously the Socratic imperative? First, I think that we should focus not just on critical philosophical thinking (that promotes epistemic autonomy), but also on meta-philosophical critical thinking in order to be able to navigate on the high-seas using a philosophical map. As I explained, this means promoting methodological autonomy, something that, in turn, requires us to reject the idea of premature philosophical hyper-specialization. Students should be exposed, as much as possible, to different philosophical traditions and methods (non-occidental and occidental) and encouraged to engage with the big philosophical questions in order not to get lost in niche technical philosophical exercises. Finally, philosophy students should be encouraged to develop their practical philosophical autonomy, i.e. the ability to apply philosophical reflection to one's own life and the way philosophy is lived, not just theorized. In this regard, institutions could implement personal philosophical counseling programs for students and create opportunities for them to engage creatively in practices or exercises that promote experiential philosophical exploration and transformation.[6]

[5] See Abbs 1994 and Nussbaum 1997 for exploration of the relevance of the Socratic imperative for education in general.

[6] Here are some examples of institutions that have implemented programs meant to promote philosophy as a way of life. Northeastern University (USA) implemented The Philosophy as a Way of Life Working Group, that provides faculty and students from various disciplines the opportunity to explore what it means to adopt philosophy as a way of life. Participants engage with readings and design "experiments in living" to apply philosophical concepts practically. University of Notre Dame (USA) developed the Philosophy as a Way of Life project, supported by an $806,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. This initiative included courses like "God and the Good Life," which integrates philosophical traditions into practical exercises. Students engage in activities such as creating "Desire Maps" to explore their goals and participate in immersive week-long practices inspired by Stoicism, Confucianism, and other traditions. The project also supported faculty training, curriculum development, and interdisciplinary research on flourishing. Graduate programs at Kyoto University and the California Institute of Integral Studies incorporate philosophy into addressing real-world problems like climate change. These programs encourage students to apply philosophical thinking to individual and societal challenges, blending theoretical inquiry with practical application.

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