

Morally transformative experiences at the university

An epistemic approach to moral education

Doortje Lenders

Student number: 1062992

Supervisor: dr. Fleur Jongepier

Date: 12/08/2022

Thesis for obtaining a “Master of Arts” degree in philosophy
Radboud University Nijmegen

I hereby declare and assure that I, Doortje Lenders, have drafted this thesis independently, that no other sources and/or means other than those mentioned have been used and that the passages of which the text content or meaning originates in other works - including electronic media - have been identified and the sources clearly stated.

Place: Rotterdam, date: 12/08/2022

If facts alone could lead us to the promised land – facts about climate change, gun violence, terrorism, war, racial prejudice, economic inequality – then we already live in a paradise of facts. The problem is not that we do not know what is happening but that we cannot bear to be changed by that knowledge.

- Deborah Nelson, *Tough Enough*

The things we want are transformative, and we don't know or only think we know what is on the other side of that transformation. Love, wisdom, grace, inspiration – how do you go about finding these things that are in some ways about extending the boundaries of the self into unknown territory, about becoming someone else?

- Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*

Unless you take the leap, you can't prove it. And once you actually make the leap, there's no need to prove it anymore.

- Haruki Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*

Abstract

Philosophers and educational scientists have long recognized that moral development is a matter of experience in addition to reason, but the university has a persistent tendency to teach morality in a strictly theoretical way. This article addresses concerns that ‘morally transformative experiences’ (MTEs) in education are not compatible with the university as a distinctly epistemic institute, and argues that these concerns are not justified. First, I argue that the university’s epistemic function entails that it should cultivate epistemic virtues in students. Then, I provide an account of MTEs and build upon Iris Murdoch’s work on moral perception to argue that some MTEs make an indispensable contribution to the cultivation of epistemic virtue.

Morally transformative experiences at the university: An epistemic approach to moral education

Word count: 8.263

1 Introduction

The university needs to prepare students, as aspiring experts in their field of study, for the moral dilemmas they will face in their academic work. This is most obvious in normative sciences such as ethics and political theory, but applies to many other fields of research: when does a deviation in thought or behavior become a psychiatric disorder? Which characteristics of a population should a research sample reflect in order to be called representative? Should a virologist publicly speak out on the policy responses to a pandemic?

At the same time, moral education is regarded with suspicion. Debates around moral education mirror those concerning the social function of the university. Some scholars and students believe the university should be at the forefront of social change. For example, they support academic activism (Nussbaum 2018; Oxley 2020) and the ‘no-platforming’ of speakers who hold socially or morally objectionable claims (Simpson and Srinivasan 2018; Simpson 2020). Others endorse a more conservative ideal of the university as a morally neutral institution, that is dedicated to the pursuit of objective truth (Williams 2016). Naturally, the former view is more encouraging of moral education than the latter.

In these muddy waters, it is unclear which educational tools the university teacher can use to help students navigate the moral questions they face as (aspiring) academics. One controversial tool, that has been discussed extensively by philosophers of education over the last century, is personal experience (as opposed to factual knowledge). John Dewey argues that education should not just be about transferring information, but also about relating it to prior experiences (Dewey 2008); in a similar vein, Paulo Freire conceptualizes learning as a cycle of practical experiences and reflection (Freire 2014). Bell hooks rejects a dispassionate, intellectual approach to education and argues that love and passion

should be central to learning, as well as an appreciation of the physical body in addition to the mind (hooks 1994).

Recently, several scholars have revived the idea that education should be experiential (Kristjánsson 2020; Pugh 2020). Most notably, Douglas Yacek has provided a systematic account of what he calls ‘transformative experiences’ in education (Yacek 2020; 2021). These are experiences that bring about personal transformation in students “to achieve positive structural change in society or to bring about other kinds of ethical and cognitive growth” (Yacek 2020, 259). Yacek discusses several ethical problems that might arise when instantiating a transformative experience in education.

Before he moves on to the ethical objections, Yacek briefly addresses a more fundamental question: should we want transformative experiences in higher education in the first place, and if so, on what grounds? He argues that transformative experiences are justified because they serve to initiate students into an academic tradition or discipline (Yacek 2020, 265–67). This justification is problematic, because a tradition does not have fixed answers to controversial moral issues. Yacek’s justification for transformative experiences does not justify experiences with respect to the moral dilemmas that are most pressing and that are therefore most important to address in moral education. The justification for transformative experiences thus remains unsatisfactory.

In this article, I will investigate whether universities and university educators should facilitate transformative experiences with respect to complex moral issues. In section 2, I will argue that the university has a democratic responsibility for moral education, but that moral-educational methods should contribute to the cultivation of epistemic virtue. Section 3 discusses the notion of morally transformative experiences. In section 4, I will argue that some morally transformative experiences – namely, those that are aimed at a process of moral development that Iris Murdoch calls ‘unselfing’ – contribute to the cultivation of epistemic virtue and are therefore a valuable contribution to academic education. Finally, in section 5, I will discuss how educators should respond to students with

immutable and radical moral convictions who refuse to be transformed by educational experiences.

2 The justification for moral education at the university

The first question that arises when assessing the desirability of morally transformative experiences in education is the following: does the university have any responsibility for moral education to begin with? I argue that it does and I will discuss how we should understand the duty to facilitate moral education in relation to another core responsibility of the university: the responsibility to produce reliable knowledge. To meet both responsibilities, moral education at the university should contribute to the cultivation of students' epistemic virtues.

There is widespread agreement over the idea that the university fulfils an important role in democracy. The conviction that the university should provide some form of moral education usually stems from this idea. However, there is less agreement over what the democratic function of the university entails and what kind of moral education this presupposes. I distinguish between two competing interpretations of the university's democratic function, each with their own normative expectations regarding moral education. The first is a moral interpretation, which states that the university has a moral responsibility for the reproduction of substantial democratic values; the second is an epistemic interpretation, which holds that the university should cultivate students' ability to think critically and independently.

The moral approach has been articulated by Martha Nussbaum. She argues that educational institutions, from primary school to the university, have a moral responsibility to promote democratic values and to train students to embody those values:

What is it about human life that makes it so hard to sustain democratic institutions based on equal respect and the equal protection of the laws, and so easy to lapse into hierarchies of various types—or, even worse, projects of violent group animosity? What forces make powerful groups seek control and

domination? What makes majorities try, so ubiquitously, to denigrate or stigmatize minorities? Whatever these forces are, it is ultimately against them that true education for responsible national and global citizenship must fight. And it must fight using whatever resources the human personality contains that help democracy prevail against hierarchy. (Nussbaum 2010, 28)

This approach to the democratic responsibility of the university implies that the university should promote values like gender equality, global citizenship, and sustainability. This can be done through research, for example through producing knowledge on relevant issues like democracy and climate change, and through education, that is, through teaching about those issues and the moral implications of different theories.¹ In addition, the democratic responsibility of the university is often understood to extend beyond research and education: it also plays out in the way the university itself is organized. Creating gender-neutral bathrooms, expressing solidarity with Ukraine after the Russian invasion, and promoting a vegetarian diet in university restaurants are all ways in which the university endorses a set of moral values with the goal of furthering larger societal and democratic aims.

However, the idea that the university should promote specific moral values is highly contested. According to some conservative thinkers, like Joanna Williams, expecting educators to teach those values is contradictory to democracy because it prioritizes a certain political agenda over others (Williams 2016, 176–85). The university should not reproduce existing moral and political values, but should criticize those values and the ways in which they are interpreted and implemented in society. This critical assessment takes place on the basis of something that is supposedly more robust than values: knowledge. Historically, this ideal of the university is grounded in the idea that unrestricted pursuit of truth

¹ Another question is whether the university actually lives up to this ideal. Even though the university produces a lot of knowledge on morally charged topics and on moral decision-making, it can be argued that other social actors, like democratic institutions, non-governmental organizations and civic organizations, play a more significant role in transferring and promoting democratic values in society than the university.

ultimately, albeit indirectly, promotes the common good (Scott 2019, 100). On this view, the democratic responsibility of the university is epistemic: the university contributes to democratic society through producing reliable knowledge and cultivating the skills needed to produce and assess knowledge.

Moral education in the form of transferring specific moral values is not justified on the epistemic approach, because it supposedly discourages the cultivation of a critical and independent academic spirit. In Williams' words: "Values are a matter of personal conscience. Expecting people to demonstrate they hold values that have been determined for them, irrespective of whether they individually agree with those values or not, creates a climate of 'intellectual conformity' that is the exact opposite of what a university should be about" (Williams 2016, 71–72).

Most university educators hold a more moderate version of Williams' epistemic view, that is less hostile towards moral education. They would not agree that moral values are strictly "a matter of personal conscience": the strict separation between knowledge and personal values that Williams' view presupposes is hard to maintain in practice. As (aspiring) experts in different fields of study, scholars and students are confronted with moral dilemmas with respect to their area of expertise. Moral dilemmas are not restricted to normative sciences like ethics, critical theory and law, but also arise in descriptive fields such as psychology, environmental science, and even physics.

Academic education needs to facilitate the debate on those dilemmas. On behalf of the educator, this requires several normative decisions. For example, which perspectives should be represented? When and on which basis does the teacher intervene in the discussion? Which arguments are valid and which not? Any form of moral education is informed by the moral beliefs of the teacher, even if the teacher does not impose those beliefs upon their students (Scott 2019, 65–68). On this moderate epistemic approach, academic education cannot fulfil its epistemic duties without addressing moral values.

The moderate epistemic approach is less controversial than the moral approach. There is widespread agreement over the idea that the university has an

epistemic responsibility, whereas it is highly debated whether the university should promote moral values, let alone which values.² Still, the moderate epistemic view needs to answer a difficult question: how can academic education discuss moral questions in an epistemically responsible way?

The field of virtue epistemology explores the idea that educational methods are epistemically responsible if they aim for the cultivation of epistemic (or: intellectual) virtues (Baehr 2015; Peels et al. 2020). Epistemic virtues are virtues that contribute to a person's ability to acquire, process, and produce knowledge. These virtues include so-called reliabilist virtues, which are natural abilities like perception, memory, and reasoning, and responsibilist virtues, which are more like character traits such as open-mindedness, discernment, and attention to detail (Turri, Alfano, and Greco 2021). On this view, educational methods are justified when they contribute to the cultivation of epistemic virtues. I will pursue the idea that moral education can contribute to the cultivation of epistemic virtues in students and I will discuss what kind of moral education is best equipped towards this end.

It is a common idea that moral education only succeeds in the cultivation of epistemic virtues when it is done in a theoretical and dispassionate manner. This idea, that I refer to as the 'narrow view' of moral education, holds that moral education should take place through acquiring the relevant facts (which contributes to the virtue of knowledge), becoming familiar with the arguments for and against different positions (the virtues of knowledge, insight, and understanding), and discussing the validity of the arguments (the virtue of reasoning). For example, learning about the moral implications of euthanasia means learning about the medical and legal context and about what different ethical theories would tell us about voluntarily ending one's life. As I will show in more detail in the next section, the narrow view rejects morally transformative

² This does not imply that the cultivation of specific moral values is always undesirable. However, it does mean that moral value education is inevitably controversial. My preference for epistemic arguments is, in part, pragmatic: it attempts to bypass the objections of those who reject the *moral* arguments in favor of morally transformative experiences.

experiences for they supposedly undermine rather than contribute to epistemic virtue.

I will contrast the narrow view to my own account of moral education. This ‘broad view’ agrees with the narrow view that the cultivation of epistemic virtues provides a solid criterion by which to judge the desirability of different kinds of moral education. However, whereas the narrow view supposes that the ‘textbook education’ described above is the only kind of moral education that contributes to epistemic virtue, my view goes beyond this. I argue that morally transformative experiences, in addition to theoretical methods, are essential towards the cultivation of epistemic virtues in students. Before I make this argument, I will give a more detailed characterization of morally transformative experiences.

3 Morally transformative experiences

In an idealized version of moral education, new information and convincing arguments move students to critically revise their moral convictions. This is why the narrow view has theoretical education and rational debate as its preferred methods for moral education. However, it is questionable whether these methods are effective: changing one’s moral outlook is notoriously hard. It is unlikely that a person changes their minds based on reasons alone. Instead, a shift in one’s moral outlook requires a person to be emotionally or cognitively affected by a moral issue.

The idea that transformation is not the result of rational deliberation has been addressed in philosophy. Most notably, L.A. Paul’s *Transformative Experience* discusses how disruptive life experiences change our preferences and values (Paul 2014). On Paul’s account, an experience can be transformative in two senses. First, it can be epistemically transformative: the person who has the experience learns something new that “she could not have learned without having that kind of experience” (Paul 2014, 10). Second, it can be personally transformative: an experience fundamentally changes one’s personal values. Paul speaks of a ‘transformative experience’ when an experience is transformative in

both senses. A classic example is the experience of having children. Becoming a parent is epistemically transformative, because parents have exclusive access to knowledge of what it is like to have children. It is also personally transformative, in that becoming a parent changes one's personal values. For example, person who used to place a high value on having an extensive social network could come to prefer a small, but tight social circle.

We can also imagine transformative experiences to play a role in our moral dilemmas and judgments. For example, consider a person who grew up in a wealthy family and who opposes the progressive tax system. They consider it unjust that people with a high income pay a higher tax rate than those on a low income, even though they know that overcoming poverty is hard. Now, imagine this person ends up in poverty themselves due to some bad luck or bad life choices. Only when they experience what it is like to be poor do they realize that their disapproval of progressive taxation was informed by personal benefit rather than by a concern with justice. As a result, their moral outlook changes: they come to value shared responsibility over self-sufficiency. I call experiences that are transformative with respect to our moral outlook 'morally transformative experiences' or MTEs.

Potential MTEs in education are real-world experiences like internships, community projects, and spending time abroad to experience another culture, but also include simulations of real-world experiences, such as theatre workshops or even virtual reality experiences. Douglas Yacek is the first philosopher to provide a systematic and detailed account of transformative experiences in the context of education (Yacek 2020; 2021). His account concerns transformative experiences that serve "various moral and epistemic ends" (Yacek 2020, 258). That is, Yacek addresses both morally and epistemically transformative experiences. As this article discusses moral education, I am looking specifically at morally transformative experiences. However, as I will argue throughout this article, MTEs also serve epistemic ends. Building on L.A. Paul, among others, Yacek identifies four qualities of transformative experiences in education (Yacek 2020, 259–62):

1. Momentousness, because the experience involves an intense moment of insight;
2. Irreversibility, because it is impossible to go back to the person one was before the experience;
3. Discontinuity, because the experience changes the structures and categories that one uses to interpret and to give meaning;
4. And rapidity, because the experience is instantiated by an educator in a class setting, which is usually a temporary and brief constellation.

I interpret these four qualities less as necessary conditions and more as useful pointers towards (morally) transformative experiences. Regarding *momentousness*, I think an MTE is often the cumulative result of several moments. When a single moment is experienced as transformative, it is likely that earlier moral developments already planted a seed for the transformation. *Irreversibility* is an important characteristic, because it contrasts transformative education to knowledge-based education: whereas knowledge is easily forgotten, a transformative experience has a lasting effect. However, even though the effect is lasting, I would not exclude the possibility that moving to another environment or having another transformative experience can undo some transformative changes. The quality of *discontinuity* is, on my view, the most vital. Any transformative experience constitutes a radical discontinuity in a person's outlook, and in the case of MTEs, this discontinuity specifically concerns the moral principles and concepts a person uses to arrive at their moral judgments. Finally, there is the quality of *rapidity*. In line with my comments on momentousness, I think a transformative experience can unfold over the course of a study program or even of a person's education path. It is not restricted to a specific classroom constellation.

So, what I mean by morally transformative experiences are experiences that cause a discontinuity in our moral frameworks and that are, to varying degrees, momentous and lasting, and that are part of a student's educational process. Both Yacek and Paul contrast transformative experiences to testimonies. That is, a student cannot be transformed by a peer's testimony of their experiences

with a morally charged issue, but has to experience it for themselves. I do not agree: I think that exchanging and discussing experiences with peers, as well as reading a novel that describes a certain experience or inviting a guest speaker to share their experience, can be transformative. Contrary to Yacek and Paul, I argue that testimony has the potential to function as an MTE.

Paul provides two arguments against the transformative power of testimony. However, these arguments do not specifically target *moral* transformation; rather, she discusses *personal* and *epistemic* transformation with respect to life choices like having children. I argue that Paul's objections against testimony are not applicable to morally transformative experiences.

According to Paul, testimonies are no substitute for lived experiences because they are, first, unreliable. It is impossible for people to know whether they would have valued their life more if they would not have undergone the experience: a parent cannot confidently state whether they would have been more or less happy if they had remained childless. Second, testimonies are personal. Due to this, it is hard to assess whether I would ascribe the same meaning to the experience as the speaker does. The fact that having children makes my friend happy does not mean that having children would make me happy (Paul 2014, 88–92).

It is easy to see that these two objections do not extend to moral questions. Say we are discussing whether the tax system is just, or whether the job market is racist. Dismissing the testimonies of poor people and people of color, respectively, as “unreliable”, would constitute a grave case of testimonial injustice (Fricker 2007). The question of how I would personally value the speaker's experience is much less relevant in the case of moral decision-making than it is in the case of a big life decision: hearing a testimony of an experience of poverty or racism is not meant for me to figure out how I would value that experience, but about allowing me to take into account the other person's valuation of their own experience.

Yacek offers a third argument against testimony: when students hear a testimony of an experience, they judge this experience based on their existing

values. This is problematic, because the point of a transformative experience is that it changes the values and concepts by which the experience takes on meaning (Yacek 2020, 263–64). I think that hearing a testimony can itself constitute a transformative experience. For example, imagine a student who provides debt counseling to poor families as a form of community service. Hearing those people's experiences of life in poverty, and how this life has transformed their outlook on life, can be just as morally transformative as having first-hand experience with poverty.

MTEs, either in the form of (simulated) first-hand experiences or in the form of testimonies, are a potentially useful tool in moral education. They have the power to disrupt our moral consciousness in a way that theory and logical argument cannot. However, they are not widely applied in higher education. This is not surprising: introducing experience in education is controversial, because there are many morally transformative experiences that contradict the university's mission to produce knowledge. Such an experience happened to seventeenth-century scholar Blaise Pascal. Originally a mathematician, Pascal put his faith in reasoning as the source of all, including moral, knowledge. However, a profound religious experience led him to devote his life to the moral obligations that are dictated by God and cannot be rationally known (Clarke 2015). This moral transformation made him abandon his intellectual projects (Carel and Kidd 2020, 207).

A more contemporary example is that quite some people who oppose of newborn health interventions, like vaccination, report that the experience of giving birth sparked their moral objections to those interventions. People who have given birth often describe it as a very natural experience. They appreciate not only the strength of their own body, but also the perfection of their 'unaffected' newborn. For some new parents, this encounter with the (supposedly) natural state of their own and their child's bodies transforms their moral outlook (Reich 2016, 97–100). The (perhaps utilitarian) viewpoint that people have a collective responsibility to avoid the spread of disease is replaced by a felt moral duty for protecting the natural state of their newborn's body.

MTEs that result in the abandonment of mathematical knowledge or the rejection of vaccines are obviously epistemically problematic. However, not all MTEs are contradictory to the university's knowledge-producing mission. I argue that some MTEs, namely those aimed at the type of moral development that Iris Murdoch calls 'unselfing', are epistemically valuable.

4 The epistemic function of morally transformative experiences

In order to show that morally transformative experiences can contribute to the cultivation of epistemic virtues in students, I turn to Iris Murdoch's moral philosophy. Murdoch argues that we can find our way out of complex moral dilemmas by paying closer attention to reality (Murdoch 2014b, 89). Moral development, for Murdoch, is essentially about training ourselves to perceive the world better. I will first elaborate on the process of moral development, called 'unselfing', and argue that unselfing contributes to the cultivation of epistemic virtues. Second, I will argue that unselfing can be realized in education through morally transformative experiences. Taken together, this shows how morally transformative experiences that are aimed at unselfing can make students more epistemically virtuous and are therefore a desirable addition to academic moral education.

4.1 The epistemic benefits of unselfing

According to Iris Murdoch, our ability to behave in a morally virtuous way depends on our ability to perceive clearly. When we are confronted with a moral dilemma, we can (literally) see what the right choice is by paying close attention to reality:³

Should a retarded [*sic*] child be kept at home or sent to an institution? Should an elderly relation who is a trouble-maker be cared for or asked to go away? Should an unhappy marriage be

³ Murdoch endorses a Platonic realism. We can perceive the good in material reality, for example in people and things, and these reflect the transcendent idea of the Good (Murdoch 2014b, 90–91). Even though we may never fully grasp or define the Good, we know “the direction in which Good lies” (Murdoch 2014b, 95). So, through perceiving material reality we can approach the transcendent moral reality.

continued for the sake of the children? Should I leave my family in order to do political work? Should I neglect them in order to practise my art? The love which brings the right answer is an exercise of justice and realism and really *looking*. (Murdoch 2014b, 89)

So, knowing the right answer to moral dilemmas is a question of perceiving reality. For this reason, moral development simply means that we improve our perceptive abilities. When we come to see a morally charged situation more clearly, we know with more certainty what the morally right way to act is. The love that Murdoch mentions in the quote is a love of the person, thing or situation we are perceiving, or, more generally, a love of reality.

However, such a clear vision of reality is difficult to achieve. Our perception is usually impaired because we are preoccupied with our selfish worries. That is, we tend to perceive things in relation to how they affect us personally, rather than for what they really are. An example should make this more clear: imagine a woman, *M*, who disapproves of her daughter-in-law, *D*. The woman believes *D* to be a nice girl, but unfit for her son. *M* finds *D* “unpolished and lacking in dignity and refinement” (Murdoch 2014a, 16) and would prefer her son to be with a more sophisticated girl. This, of course, is a selfish thought: her son’s relationship should be about what makes her son and his girlfriend happy, not about the mother’s preferences. The reason that *M* perceives *D* as ‘unpolished’ and so forth is not that *D* actually is unpolished, but that she is not the kind of girl that *M* would want to have as a daughter-in-law. *M*’s perception of reality is clouded by her selfish will.

A well-developed moral attitude, on the contrary, is one that enables clear perception because it is disposed to see beyond the self. Someone with the right attitude therefore sees things for what they really are. For example, when *M* manages to see beyond her personal preference for a polished and refined daughter-in-law, she perceives *D* for what she really is: “not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful” (Murdoch 2014a, 17). Seeing

beyond the selfish will by devoting our attention to reality is what Murdoch calls ‘unselfing’ (Murdoch 2014b, 82).

In order to perceive in a selfless manner, we should train ourselves to be attuned to reality rather than to the self. Contrary to most moral theorists, Murdoch does not believe morality is concentrated in moments of choice. Instead, the attunement to reality that underlies our decision-making requires continuous work:

Of course virtue is good habit and dutiful action. But the background condition of such habit and such action, in human beings, is a just mode of vision and a good quality of consciousness. It is a *task* to come to see the world as it is. [...] We act rightly ‘when the time comes’ not out of strength of will but out of the quality of our usual attachments and with the kind of energy and discernment which we have available. (Murdoch 2014b, 89)

It is quite easy to see why someone with a selfish moral attitude is less epistemically virtuous than a person who is disposed to see reality with more clarity. A person who is preoccupied with their selfish will is susceptible to epistemic vices like dogmatism, prejudice, and wishful thinking. Someone who works on becoming less selfish instead cultivates their perceptive abilities. Additionally, they can improve other epistemic virtues, like discernment (because they learn to see relevant differences and similarities), attention to detail (because they develop an increased perceptive sensibility), open-mindedness (because they cling less to their own convictions and instead are willing to see reality for what it is), and so forth. Therefore, unselfing is not strictly a way to cultivate a moral character but also has epistemic benefits. The following examples illustrate that selfishness can obscure students’ perception of reality and shows how unselfing can contribute to students’ cultivation of epistemic virtues.

First, I know a woman who is studying to become an end-of-life counselor and who highly values patient autonomy. When she started her studies, she

considered it her mission to support patients in deciding when and how they wanted to pass and to make sure that the patient's relatives would not impose their own will. However, as she assisted patients during her internships, she realized that the preferences of the patient's relatives matter, because they have to live with the way their loved one passed. She came to see the relatives for what they are: the aspiring counselor no longer saw them as obstacles to the patient's exercise of autonomy, but as individuals who are each trying to grapple with the approaching loss of a loved one. Through her experience of unselfing, the student cultivated epistemic virtues. She overcame her dogmatic insistence on patient autonomy, learned to pay attention to detail through identifying the patient's and the relatives' wishes, and exercised high-level analytical abilities in finding a solution that satisfied all those involved.

A second example that shows how unselfing in education contributes to epistemic virtue is outdoor adventure education. This method is usually applied to develop leadership skills, but has recently been recognized as a useful approach to making students aware of their own social privileges (Meerts-Brandsma, Lackey, and Warner 2020). Spending several days in the wilderness with a group, and tackling all kinds of problems together, can certainly lead to unselfing with respect to social power relations: in the miniature society that arises, the development of different social arrangements is easier to track than in the chaos of real life. This allows students to see their own part in those arrangements. Additionally, outdoor education takes place away from actual society, which often legitimizes oppressive behavior. Therefore, it enables students to look at the group dynamics with a fresh pair of eyes. This contributes to the cultivation of several epistemic virtues. Students learn to attend to the signs of their own privileges, to discern between legitimate and oppressive power differences, and to overcome prejudice towards others.

These examples illustrate that unselfing – directing attention away from the self and toward “the world as it really is” (Murdoch 2014b, 91) – contributes to the cultivation of epistemic virtue. What is more, the aspiring counselor's and outdoor student's transformations were not sparked by theoretical education, but

by practical experience with the subject of their moral judgments. I will now turn to the relation between unselfing and experiential education. I argue that unselfing cannot be achieved through the kinds of methods that the narrow view prefers, but requires educators to facilitate morally transformative experiences. This finalizes the demonstration of my broad view on moral education, which entails that morally transformative experiences that are aimed at unselfing contribute to the cultivation of epistemic virtues in a way that theoretical methods do not.

4.2 *Unselfing and morally transformative experiences*

To see why unselfing requires experiential education, let us first turn to theoretical education and consider why it is not the appropriate method to cultivate a selfless attitude. As we have seen, the problem with theoretical moral education is that people are often not prepared to change their convictions on the basis of moral arguments. Students tend to accept the arguments and theories that support their existing beliefs. To see why students stick to their selfish convictions rather than engage in unselfing, it is useful to understand selfishness as what Quassim Cassam calls a “stealthy vice”. Stealthy vices are epistemic vices that are hard to detect to the person who holds the vice, due to the nature of that specific vice. For example, someone who is closed-minded does not know they are closed-minded, precisely because their lack of open-mindedness keeps them from considering the possibility that they might be closed-minded (Cassam 2019). In a similar vein, someone who has a selfish moral attitude is not disposed towards perceiving reality, and their obscured view of reality renders them less sensible to empirical evidence against their selfish convictions.

Thus, a stealthy vice cannot be disclosed through reasons and arguments. Instead, Cassam argues, a person can be confronted with their stealthy vices through traumatic experiences that result from those vices. For example, an intellectually arrogant doctor might come to realize their own arrogance when it causes them to dismiss some important piece of information and make a fatal mistake (Cassam 2019, 158–60). A person might be confronted with their own self-directed attitude through a similarly disruptive experience. However, this does not need to be a negative experience: Murdoch describes how unselfing takes

place through all kinds of “self-forgetful” moments (Murdoch 2014b, 83). In the example of the mother-in-law, the woman forgets her selfish objections to her daughter-in-law by paying attention to what the girl is really like. Murdoch also describes a moment in which she is caught up in her selfish worries, but then sees a kestrel hovering in the air outside her window. This encounter with nature pulls her out of her selfish mindset. She regains a clear image of reality and of the (un)importance of her personal troubles in that reality (Murdoch 2014b, 82).

What is distinctive about a self-forgetful moment is that it disrupts a person’s perception such that they come to realize that their previous mode of perception was informed by the selfish will rather than by the actual state of reality. In a self-forgetful moment, reality presents itself in such an intense or powerful way that it “pierce[s] the veil of selfish consciousness” (Murdoch 2014b, 91). But how can we create these moments in moral education? The experiences Murdoch mentions, like watching the hovering kestrel, do not translate easily to an educational context: they have no direct relevance to the moral dilemmas that aspiring researchers face, their unselfing effect is hard to predict, and they are difficult to create in a classroom setting. However, certain morally transformative experiences can function as self-forgetful experiences.

I have characterized MTEs as experiences that cause a discontinuity in our moral outlook and that are usually momentous, lasting, and rapid. In order to lead to unselfing, MTEs need an additional quality: they should confront students with reality. MTEs aimed at unselfing may include many different kinds of experiences, like class discussions, guest lectures, internships, and community service activities, as long as they urge students to see beyond the self. Murdoch also emphasizes encounters with art and nature, such as the hovering kestrel, as sources of unselfing (Murdoch 2014b, 83). In the same spirit, reading a novel or visiting an exhibition may be (part of) an MTE that leads to unselfing, as well as the wilderness education described earlier.

To illustrate how MTEs can contribute to unselfing, let us return to our previous examples. The end-of-life counselor took some theoretical classes on ethics before starting her internship, in which she learned about well-known

theories like virtue ethics and deontological ethics. However, she did not see beyond her selfish preoccupation with autonomy until she experienced assisting patients and their relatives. Interestingly, the student reported that the encounters with patients and their relatives reminded her of something she had learned in her ethics classes: Aristotle's concept of the golden mean. Similarly, the students in the outdoor education example probably knew about oppression, but only became aware of their own social privilege through experience. This shows that theoretical education is vital, but that it does not lead to unselfing without the help of MTEs.

Not all morally transformative experiences are self-forgetful. Remember the new parent who rejects vaccination because they consider it a violation of the natural state of their child's body. Through the lens of unselfing, it becomes clear why this MTE is not epistemically valid. The moral value of vaccinating newborns is rooted in a rather harsh reality, in which people die from preventable diseases and in which we need 'unnatural' interventions to protect public health. The new parent, who is preoccupied with the perfection and innocence of their newborn, does not see this reality. In this case, the MTE of giving birth did not lead to unselfing, but, on the contrary, created a private moral bubble that obscured the parent's view of reality.

The morally transformative experiences that are justified on the broad view are those that are aimed at unselfing. They bring students into contact with the reality of the moral dilemmas they face in their fields of research in order to make them aware of the ways in which their personal will influences their perceptions of reality. These experiences inspire and enable students to devote attention to reality rather than to personal preferences. In doing so, they practice several epistemic virtues that theoretical moral education fails to cultivate. Contrary to the narrow view, the broad view holds that some MTEs – namely, those aimed at unselfing – make an indispensable contribution to the cultivation of epistemic virtue.

5 Cultivating a desire for moral transformation

So far, I have shown that ‘self-forgetful’ MTEs are essential towards the cultivation of a morally and epistemically responsible character in students. However, this does not mean that every MTE that is aimed at unselfing also succeeds in doing so. Some students are unwilling to be transformed by certain MTEs, because they are extremely rigid in their – often radical – moral outlook. Especially when it comes to social justice issues, it is not uncommon to encounter students who simply do not want their views to be challenged. The use of MTEs that evoke resistance in students is problematic, because it can estrange those students from their teachers and from the university. I argue that there are several things educators can do to cultivate a desire for moral transformation in students.

This problem is not addressed by Yacek, who does address three other ethical problems that may arise in a transformative classroom (Yacek 2020). First, there is the problem of transformative consent: how can a student consent to undergoing a certain experience when the point of the experience is that it might change the student’s preferences and values (upon which the student is supposed to base their consent)? Second is the problem of controversial direction. Transformative experiences with respect to controversial issues can be directive and thereby undermine autonomy on behalf of the student. In extreme cases, those experiences may even constitute indoctrination. Third is the problem of transformative trauma. Transformation often disturbs a student’s world view or self-conception. When it is not replaced by a new, substantive perspective, this can lead to trauma or an identity crisis.

Each of these ethical objections supposes that a transformative experience generally succeeds in bringing about transformation in students. However, I want to consider what might happen to a student whose educators attempt to create all kinds of MTEs, but who is unaffected by those experiences morally and epistemically. Yacek briefly touches upon the possibility that an MTE fails and the student remains unchanged, and concludes that this is not ethically problematic (Yacek 2020, 267–68). However, I think it becomes problematic when a student *refuses* to be transformed. This situation is most likely to arise in

the context of MTEs with respect to highly controversial topics, such as social justice issues. MTEs that aim to challenge students' views on race and gender discrimination, for example, often evoke resistance in students who are convinced that a teacher is just trying to impose their progressive political agenda in class.

My own university recently organized a series of theatre workshops about unconscious bias (Radboud University 2022). In the workshop, actors play out real-life instances of prejudice at the university and engage in dialogue with participants. Anyone can imagine that a student who is convinced that they have no such bias, and that those who claim to suffer from other people's implicit biases are overreacting, will not exactly be in the front row during this workshop. It is also quite likely that the student will not show up for the next class. This illustrates the harm of resistance against MTEs: it is not only problematic with respect to the student's moral and epistemic development, but can lead to alienation from teachers and from the university as a whole.

Importantly, the polarizing effect of MTEs is not a reason to quit them altogether. Aversion and struggle are part and parcel of moral transformation: an MTE changes one's perspective and it is impossible to evaluate it properly before undergoing it. I will not discuss the student's right to refuse a certain experience here (which links to the problem of transformative consent that Yacek discusses). As I have argued, MTEs have overwhelming moral and epistemic benefits, and I think educators have a responsibility to get reluctant students on board. There are (at least) three things an educator can do to cultivate a desire for transformation in students, which I summarize as *disruption*, *reflection*, and *imitation*.

First, educators should be aware that a student who is unwilling to undergo an MTE is often stuck in a persistent selfish outlook. When dealing with a recalcitrant student, an educator should first and foremost aim for a *disruption* of that outlook. But how can a teacher transform a student's outlook with respect to a controversial topic when the student refuses to be transformed?

Remember my characterization of selfishness as a stealthy vice (Cassam 2019). A person can only become aware of their own selfishness through experiences that confront them with the consequences of their own selfishness.

Note that this kind of disruption is not tied to a specific topic: an experience that confronts a student with their selfishness in any area makes them aware of the fact that their perceptive and evaluative abilities are not perfect. Thereby, it opens them up to the possibility that those abilities fail in other instances, too. So, when a student refuses MTEs with respect to a difficult topic, educators should provide experiences that simply serve to disrupt their selfish attitude and to foster an initial willingness to see beyond the self.

This is consistent with Murdoch's conception of selfishness as an attitude: a selfish outlook on a specific person or situation does not stand on its own, but is part of a more general tendency to perceive the world in a selfish manner. A disruption in one place therefore affects the whole of our moral attitude. For example, an exchange with students from another country can confront students with the limits of their own viewpoint. Such an experience can lay a foundation of selflessness required for more difficult MTEs, like exchanging and discussing experiences of sexism. In this sense, MTEs can function as an antidote to the resistance that they evoke.

Second, it can be beneficial to a student who refuses to be transformed by an experience to learn how the experience changed the moral outlook of their peers. Murdoch describes how paying attention to another person's moral-conceptual scheme can inspire moral change. Remember M, the mother-in-law. It is difficult for M to arrive at a renewed vision of her daughter-in-law D spontaneously, but "M could be helped by someone who both knew D and whose conceptual scheme M could understand or in that context begin to understand" (Murdoch 2014a, 31). This requires collective *reflection* on an experience.

Coming to understand another's conceptual scheme takes place through discussion of a "common object" (Murdoch 2014a, 31). Ilya Zrudlo provides a practical example of this, in which he uses Aesop's fable *The Fox and the Crow* for a class discussion about different interpretations of moral concepts like flattery and pride (Zrudlo 2022). Similarly, an educator who wants students to think about racism and classism could use a novel like Kiley Reid's *Such a Fun Age* as a common object. This novel is written from the perspective of a twenty-something

black woman who navigates the antiracist efforts, that sometimes turn out to carry racist undertones, of two people in her life: her white boyfriend and the white, suburban mother of the girl she babysits (Reid 2019). This novel can definitely be eye-opening, but it is unlikely that it has this effect on a student who denies racism altogether. In that case, listening to peers talk about which events or phrases changed their conceptions of (anti)racism or elitism may, at the very least, provide a glimpse into a transformed moral outlook.

Murdoch emphasizes that a person who struggles with changing their moral outlook can only be helped by someone whose conceptual scheme they can “begin to understand” (Murdoch 2014a, 31). Thus, peers need to be familiar with each other. The typical university course setting, in which students spend maybe two hours a week together over the course of a few weeks or months and have little interaction, is not ideal. Small-scale education that takes place over a longer period of time is more appropriate. Educators should also ensure that students get to know each other personally. Only then can they begin to understand each other’s moral outlook.

Third and finally, students can become more open to MTEs when they can *imitate* their educators. That is: teachers should not only provide transformative experiences for their students, but should also be willing to be transformed themselves by classroom discussions or practical moral dilemmas that arise in class. For example, Michele Moody-Adams argues that students should be able to point out a teacher’s implicit biases (Moody-Adams 2018). The willingness to be transformed, according to Moody-Adams, is a mutual responsibility. I think this is not only a matter of fairness, but has additional benefits: a teacher can show to students that changing one’s moral convictions is a good thing and can show them what moral transformation looks like. Additionally, it communicates to students that the educator is not trying to impose their own beliefs upon students, but that all those present in the classroom strive to achieve a common goal: unselfing.

6 Conclusion

In this article, I have provided an account of a novel type of transformative experience: morally transformative experience. The category denotes experiences that do not only provide new pieces of knowledge, or change a person's moral convictions, but that transform the way someone arrives at those convictions. A morally transformative experience causes a profound shift in a person's moral outlook.

Such a transformation cannot take place through reading and discussing ethical theory. Therefore, morally transformative experiences are an essential element of an education that prepares students for the moral dilemmas they will inevitably encounter as researchers. However, the argument I have provided is not moral, but epistemic in nature. I have argued that morally transformative experiences can lead to what Iris Murdoch calls unselfing, and that when they do, they contribute to the cultivation of epistemic virtues in students. This urges an expansion of the narrow view, which assumes that only theoretical methods have epistemic validity.

At first glance, this epistemic approach aims to convince skeptical educators and policymakers of the desirability of moral character building by mediating the tension between the university's moral and epistemic responsibilities. At a deeper level, however, my account is a rejection of this tension. Inspired by Murdoch, I have argued that the virtues we exercise to find our way out of moral dilemmas – attention to detail, discernment, even creativity – are the same virtues we use when acquiring, processing and producing knowledge. Teaching students how to approach reality is just as much a moral as an epistemic endeavor.

Even if I have convinced (some) skeptics of the epistemic value of MTEs in education, there are still obstacles on the roads towards a higher education that embraces morally transformative experiences. I have addressed one of these, namely resistance against MTEs from students. A second obstacle would be the increasingly impersonal approach that educators take, and are often forced to take, in today's academic education. Globally, universities are struggling with funding

cuts for education, leading to large classes and standardized testing. During the pandemic, educational institutions resorted to online education. Many of them still offer online or hybrid classes for efficiency reasons. Large-scale and online education are far from an ideal setting for MTEs: successful transformation requires personal interaction in a safe environment that inspires students to become someone new.

A final obstacle concerns the demands MTE-based education makes on academic educators. Some educators could experience the duty to provide transformative education as a violation of academic freedom. At the same time, morally transformative experiences are an educational method that is more invasive and less predictable than textbook education, which puts teachers in a more vulnerable position. In this sense, MTE-based education is dependent on the protection of academic freedom. Experiential education also raises questions of educational competence: assisting students in their transformative experiences requires teachers to create an environment in which students feel comfortable, to respond to personal and moral crises, and to encourage students to reflect on their experiences – skills that are usually not taught in educational degree programs.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the academic world has much to gain from morally transformative experiences. Institutions that accommodate transformative education will attract passionate and engaged teachers, who will inspire students to see beyond “the mess of the selfish empirical psyche” (Murdoch 2014b, 81). These experiences contribute to the moral and epistemic sophistication of students, who, as future researchers, will shape our future practices of knowledge production.

7 Bibliography

- Baehr, Jason, ed. 2015. *Intellectual Virtues and Education: Essays in Applied Virtue Epistemology*. New York: Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315714127>.
- Carel, Havi, and Ian James Kidd. 2020. "Expanding Transformative Experience." *European Journal of Philosophy* 28 (1): 199–213.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12480>.
- Cassam, Quassim. 2019. "Stealthy Vices." In *Vices of the Mind*, 144–66. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Clarke, Desmond. 2015. "Blaise Pascal." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2015. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University.
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/pascal/>.
- Dewey, John. 2008. "The Child and the Curriculum." In *The Child and the Curriculum Including, the School and Society*, 3–31. New York: Cosimo Books.
- Freire, Paolo. 2014. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA.
- Fricker, Miranda. 2007. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- hooks, bell. 1994. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Kristjánsson, Kristján. 2020. *Flourishing as the Aim of Education: A Neo-Aristotelian View*. London and New York: Routledge.
<https://www.routledge.com/Flourishing-as-the-Aim-of-Education-A-Neo-Aristotelian-View/Kristjansson/p/book/9780367727970>.
- McGowan, Mary Kate. 2018. "On Political Correctness, Microaggressions, and Silencing in the Academy." In *Academic Freedom*, edited by Jennifer Lackey. 8. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198791508.003.0008>.

- Meerts-Brandsma, Lisa, N. Qwynne Lackey, and Robert P. Warner. 2020. "Unpacking Systems of Privilege: The Opportunity of Critical Reflection in Outdoor Adventure Education." *Education Sciences* 10 (11): 318. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10110318>.
- Moody-Adams, Michele. 2018. "Is There a 'Safe Space' For Academic Freedom?" In *Academic Freedom*, edited by Jennifer Lackey, 36–60. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Murdoch, Iris. 2014a. "The Idea of Perfection." In *The Sovereignty of Good*, 1–44. London and New York: Routledge.
- . 2014b. "The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts." In *The Sovereignty of Good*, 75–101. London and New York: Routledge.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. 2010. *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- . 2018. "Civil Disobedience and Free Speech in the Academy." In *Academic Freedom*, edited by Jennifer Lackey. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Oxley, Julinna C. 2020. "How to Be a (Good) Philosopher-Activist." *Essays in Philosophy* 21 (1/2): 6–28. <https://doi.org/10.5840/eip2020211/22>.
- Paul, L.A. 2014. *Transformative Experience*. 1st ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Peels, Rik, René van Woudenberg, Jeroen de Ridder, and Lex Bouter. 2020. "Academia's Big Five: A Normative Taxonomy for the Epistemic Responsibilities of Universities." *F1000Research* 8 (July): 862. <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.19459.2>.
- Pugh, Kevin. 2020. *Transformative Science Education: Change How Your Students Experience the World*. New York: Teachers College Press. <https://www.tcpress.com/transformative-science-education-9780807764503>.
- Radboud University. 2022. "DEI Unconscious Bias Theatre Workshop." Radboud University. 2022. <https://www.ru.nl/english/about-us/our->

- university/diversity-equity-inclusion/dei-events/dei-unconscious-bias-theatre-workshop/.
- Reich, Jennifer A. 2016. *Calling the Shots: Why Parents Reject Vaccines*. New York: New York University Press.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1803zjf>.
- Reid, Kiley. 2019. *Such a Fun Age*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- Scott, Joan Wallach. 2019. *Knowledge, Power, and Academic Freedom*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Simpson, Robert Mark. 2020. "The Relation Between Academic Freedom and Free Speech." *Ethics* 130 (3): 287–319. <https://doi.org/10.1086/707211>.
- Simpson, Robert Mark, and Amia Srinivasan. 2018. "No Platforming." In *Academic Freedom*, edited by Jennifer Lackey, 186–209.
- Turri, John, Mark Alfano, and John Greco. 2021. "Virtue Epistemology." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2021. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University.
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/epistemology-virtue/>.
- Williams, Joanne. 2016. *Academic Freedom in an Age of Conformity: Confronting the Fear of Knowledge*. 1st ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Yacek, Douglas. 2020. "Should Education Be Transformative?" *Journal of Moral Education* 49 (2): 257–74.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2019.1589434>.
- . 2021. *The Transformative Classroom: Philosophical Foundations and Practical Applications*. London and New York: Routledge.
<https://www.routledge.com/The-Transformative-Classroom-Philosophical-Foundations-and-Practical-Applications/Yacek/p/book/9781032005959>.
- Zrudlo, Ilya. 2022. "Iris Murdoch and Moral Education: An Initial Conceptual Framework and a Practical Example." *Journal of Moral Education*, March, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2022.2037534>.

Research proposal

Administrative details

1a. Title

Morally transformative experiences at the university: an epistemic approach to moral education

1b. Summary of the theme and aim of the project (199 words)

Educational science and educational philosophy have long acknowledged the value of lived experience in moral education. However, the idea that the kind of moral experiences we encounter in everyday life have no scientific value has led to a highly restricted approach to moral education at the university, consisting of ethical theory and rational argument.

The project aims to explore whether an experiential approach to moral education is compatible with the university's function as an epistemic institute that is responsible for the advancement of scientific knowledge. Specifically, it will discuss the hypothesis that 'morally transformative experiences' are not only permissible in higher education, but offer unique epistemic benefits that theoretical moral education does not. This approach unites two competing ideals of the university: the conservative idea that the university should prioritize knowledge over morals, and the progressive claim that the university has a moral responsibility for *Bildung* and social action.

The project is firmly grounded in both philosophical theory and moral practice. In addition to an analysis of the ethical objections against experiential education, the project will take a distinctly empirical approach to address the practical difficulties that institutions, educators and students encounter in the face of morally transformative experiences.

1c. Keywords

Moral education, transformative experience, epistemology of education, academic freedom

Proposal

2a. Description of the proposed research (2427 words)

*2a1. Background and *status questionis**

So united as academics are in their conviction that the university fulfils a vital role in democracy, so divided are they over what that role entails. On the one hand, progressive scholars endorse the idea that the university should address cases of immorality and injustice: academics have access to the knowledge that helps them to signal and understand moral wrongs and, especially when they have tenure, are in a relatively privileged position to address those issues. Some even argue that [scholars have a responsibility to engage in activism](#)ⁱ and that [activism and scientific reflection are mutually beneficial](#).ⁱⁱ

On the other hand, there is a reactionary movement arguing that ['moral attitudes and political commitments' stifle academic debate](#).ⁱⁱⁱ Several scholars have argued that a concern with morality and justice is incompatible with the university's responsibility for the advancement of knowledge (Fish 2014) and constitutes a serious violation of academic freedom (Williams 2016). This resistance against what is often called political correctness or "woke culture" is most prominent in the United States, but [is finding its way into Dutch](#)^{iv} and other European lecture halls.

It is not only research practices that are in disarray. The same confusion plays out in that other task of the university: education. Academic education should teach students to grapple with the dilemmas they will inevitably face as (aspiring) researchers, but the polarized academic landscape discourages educators from engaging with moral and normative questions in the classroom (Scott 2019). When they do, the pedagogical tools they utilize are often limited to

ⁱ <http://justice-everywhere.org/general/should-academics-also-be-activists/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.ru.nl/nieuws-agenda/meer-info/2021/mei/activisme-wetenschappelijke-reflectie-versterken/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://harpers.org/a-letter-on-justice-and-open-debate/>

^{iv} <https://www.volkskrant.nl/cs-b39c43e3>

reading about different ethical theories and exchanging arguments in rational debate.

The inclination towards dispassionate methods in moral education is unfortunate, because philosophers have long recognized the value of experiential learning. Paolo Freire conceives of learning as a cycle of practical experience and reflection (Freire 2014); bell hooks provides an account of learning as a process that is not strictly intellectual, but that involves physical, emotional, and even erotic experiences within the classroom (hooks 1994); and according to John Dewey, education should enrich everyday experiences and instill a sense of wonder that extends beyond the classroom (Dewey 2008; Pugh 2011).

More recently, several philosophers have explored the role of particularly intense and disruptive experiences in moral change and moral education. Research has focused on the moral function of epiphany, both inside and outside an educational context (S. G. Chappell 2022; Jonas 2015; Yacek and Gary 2020), on so-called ‘peak experiences’ of truth, beauty, and goodness (Kristjánsson 2020), and on the pedagogical value of experiences of moral failure (Cashman and Cushman 2020). Finally, a lot of scholarly work has been dedicated to the influential notion of transformative experience. This concept originally denotes experiences that result in irreversible personal and epistemic change with respect to the subject of the experience (Paul 2014; Paul and Quiggin 2020), but has also been applied to the evolution of moral values and convictions (Yacek 2020; 2021; Harman 2015).

Educational scientists have confirmed the pedagogical and moral value of lived experience. Some recent examples include the effects of service learning and community engagement on moral development (Desmet and Roberts 2022; Hudson and Brandenberger 2022), building character and becoming aware of one’s privileges through outdoor adventure education (Meerts-Brandsma, Lackey, and Warner 2020; Stonehouse 2021), and the cultivation of an intercultural mindset through interaction with different neighborhoods (Layne and Teng 2022).

However, scholarship has neglected to address the concern that most university educators struggle with: how does experiential moral education relate

to the university's function as a distinctly epistemic institute? Is experiential moral education really an obstacle to the pursuit of truth, or can they also be compatible? Can moral experiences even benefit the production of scientific knowledge? The project aims to address these questions in order to open up a fruitful conversation on the opportunities and pitfalls of experiential moral learning in an academic context.

The relation between distinctly moral experiences and scientific knowledge is a novel one, but it is inspired by a rich body of literature that discusses the epistemic value of different kinds of subjective experience. Most notably are the fields of feminist standpoint theory and intersectionality. Scholars in these fields have described how first-hand, everyday experience of social injustice uniquely situates oppressed people to acquire knowledge of social reality (Lorde 1984; Davis 1983; Crenshaw 1991; Collins 2009; Srinivasan 2016) and have argued that this fact should reshape our scientific and epistemic practices (Harding 2015; Fricker 2007; Anderson 1995; MacKinnon 2013).

Another link between experience and knowledge can be found in the field of virtue epistemology, which discusses the traits or attitudes that make people competent at producing knowledge. Virtue epistemologists have argued that a traumatic experience can confront a person with their epistemic vices (Cassam 2019) and that emotional experiences serve to direct our attention and invite a reassessment of our evaluative capacities (Brady 2013). In both cases, an intense, personal experience contributes to our epistemic abilities.

It is remarkable that the relation between experiential moral education and scientific knowledge has not been researched, given the overwhelming scholarly engagement with moral experiences on the one hand, and the epistemic value of different kinds of subjective experience on the other. The proposed project aims to connect these two debates in order to assess the desirability of moral experiences in academic education.

2a2. Aim and research questions

The aim of this project is to develop an account of morally transformative experiences (MTEs) and explore under which conditions and circumstances, if at all, they should be part of academic education. This is a normative question that will be answered through the following research questions, each of which corresponds to one stage in the project:

1. *Epistemic question:* How, if at all, can morally transformative experiences in academic education contribute to the university's function as an epistemic institute?
2. *Ethical question:* Under what conditions, if at all, is the demand to provide morally transformative experiences (on behalf of educators) and to undergo them (on behalf of students) ethically permissible?
3. *Practical question:* What obstacles do institutions and educators encounter when implementing morally transformative experiences and what can be done to overcome these?

Stage 1: Conceptualizing the epistemic value of MTEs.

It is widely accepted that the university, unlike other educational institutions, has a responsibility towards society to produce reliable knowledge. Therefore, it is problematic when a specific form of moral education contradicts that responsibility. The first stage of the project investigates how MTEs relate to the university's epistemic aims.

- The first sub-part consists of providing a detailed account of the university's epistemic responsibilities, specifically with respect to education. In particular, the project will explore the idea that academic education is not primarily about the transfer of knowledge (Siegel 2016), but about the cultivation of so-called epistemic virtues, like reasoning, attention to detail, and open-mindedness (Baehr 2015; Pritchard 2013; Battaly 2008).

- The second sub-part aims to provide an account of morally transformative experiences and to explore how these may contribute and/or contradict the university's epistemic aims. This sub-part will build upon the work of Iris Murdoch. She argues that our perception of morally charged situations is often obscured by selfish concerns, but that certain 'self-forgetful' experiences can help to see beyond those concerns and gain a clearer view of reality (Murdoch 2014). This idea is relevant to the aims of the project, because it bridges the gap between the moral and epistemic value of experience: self-forgetfulness does not only contribute to moral character formation (Zrudlo 2022; Jamieson 2020), but also benefits a person's ability for perception and discernment. The latter suggests an (unexplored) connection to virtue epistemology.

Stage 2: Addressing ethical objections against MTEs.

Even if MTEs are *epistemically* valuable, this does not automatically imply that they are a desirable part of academic education. There are several ethical objections against experiential education that arise specifically in the context of academia, on behalf of educators as well as students. The project aims to address both sets of objections and derive from this the preconditions under which MTEs at the university are ethically permissible.

- The first sub-part aims to determine what kind of responsibility academic educators have to provide MTEs and (how) this responsibility is compatible with academic freedom. A concern with moral issues can be seen as an obstacle to the unhindered pursuit of truth (Williams 2016), but others have defended the idea that academic freedom is compatible with reforming our knowledge-producing practices in light of evolving values (Scott 2019; Moody-Adams 2018). The project aims to provide a nuanced account of academic freedom and map under which conditions MTE-based education fosters it.

- The second sub-part aims to address the ways in which MTEs potentially cause harm to students. MTEs are usually intense experiences and will often lead to mental struggle and possibly even trauma (Yacek 2020). Additionally, moral transformation might alienate students from their off-campus (moral) communities. One question these concerns raise is whether MTEs require consent. The project will consider the idea that asking for consent is often not desirable precisely because MTEs contribute towards ‘moral maturity’ (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 2014) and will explore alternative ways in which the potential harms of MTEs can be mediated.

Stage 3: Providing practical guidelines for the implementation of MTEs.

Once the theoretical conditions for epistemically and ethically responsible use of MTEs in higher education have been established, the project will take a closer look at practical obstacles that institutions and educators face in realizing MTE-based education. This stage will take an empirical approach.

- The first sub-part consists of empirical work and includes, first, dialogues and interviews with educational policymakers, educators and students to map the difficulties they (expect to) encounter when providing or undergoing experiential education. These may concern, among others, the interaction with and reactions from students, the required educational training, the educational environment at a specific institution, and the academic climate more generally. Second, this sub-part will put theory into practice with an experimental approach, which includes the design, execution and evaluation of several MTEs in close collaboration with educators and students.
- The second sub-part aims to translate the empirical findings to concrete guidelines 1) for educational policymakers, both at the institutional and the governmental level, and 2) for academic educators. An important component of this sub-part will be to bring MTEs and their practical

implementation to the attention of policymakers and educators, for example through a symposium or a series of workshops.

2a3. Methods

This is a normative-ethical project that will bring together literature from several philosophical fields. The first two stages are theoretical in nature. Stage 1, which explores the epistemic relevance of moral experiences, finds itself at the intersection of epistemology and moral philosophy. To characterize the epistemic aims of academic education, the project will use literature on the epistemology of education (Siegel 2016; Robertson 2009) as well as work in virtue epistemology (Baehr 2015; Pritchard 2013; Battaly 2008). To account for the epistemic value of moral experiences, the project will develop a concept of “morally transformative experience” and discuss literature on moral perception (Murdoch 2014; Audi 2013; T. Chappell 2008). The second stage, which aims to formulate answers to ethical objections against morally transformative experiences, includes an analysis of relevant concepts such as academic freedom (Lackey 2018; Scott 2019), moral and epistemic agency (Sosa 2015), and consent (Alexander 2014; Brison 2021).

Stage 3 is empirical in nature. This approach is inspired by a novel methodology called descriptive ethics (Hämäläinen 2016), which assumes that moral philosophy is often too preoccupied with theory and overlooks many aspects of our moral practices. To become more sensible to the norms and ideas that underlie educational practices, this stage will engage in close interaction with policymakers, educators and students to discuss questions such as: which moral values define the academic climate? How do educators exercise academic freedom? What MTEs do students deem (in)appropriate?

2a4. Scientific and social relevance

The philosophical field benefits from this project in several ways. First, it extends L.A. Paul’s influential account of transformative experiences by introducing its moral counterpart. The concept of morally transformative experience may prove useful in other contexts besides education, such as political preference formation or ‘technology-induced value change’ (van de Poel and

Kudina 2022). Second, the project links two extensive bodies of literature: one on the relation between scientific knowledge and values (e.g. on the possibility of value-free science, see Lacey 1999; Longino 1990; Harding 2015), the other on the relation between values and subjective experience (e.g. on the apprehension of value through perception, see Audi 2013; T. Chappell 2008; and through emotion, see Vendrell Ferran 2022; Döring 2003; Johnston 2001). Taking moral development as an intermediate, the project will result in a novel connection between scientific knowledge and subjective experience. Third, the project deepens our apprehension of Iris Murdoch's ideas. Many scholars are currently engaging with Murdoch's work (e.g. Widdows 2016; Compaijen 2020; Mason 2021) and the project contributes to those efforts.

Additionally, the project will be of interest to educational scientists. Experiential learning has been widely discussed in educational science, but research on the relation between experience and moral development is limited (Hudson and Brandenberger 2022). Educational scientists will benefit from philosophical work on the relation between experience and morality, for example in order to design new directions for experiential moral education; philosophers will also benefit, because they can apply empirical findings on experiential learning in their theorizing.

The project's most notable contribution to the academic environment is that it provides scaffolding for educational reforms at the university. This is, first, helpful to educators who already recognize the value of morally transformative experiences: the project appeals to the academic community and its [institutions for creating an environment in which experiential education can thrive](#).^v Second, this project aims to address the concerns of educators who have not yet embraced experiential education by providing an epistemic, rather than moral, argument in favor of MTEs. This bridges the gap between a progressive camp that promotes moral education on moral grounds and a conservative camp that opposes it on

^v <https://news.mit.edu/2020/infusing-ethics-experiential-learning-0508>

epistemic grounds. Ultimately, this project aims to contribute to reforms that make academic education both epistemically and morally better.

Finally, the project does not only benefit academic communities but also enriches popular debates. It touches upon fundamental discussions about the role of the university that are at the root of public upheaval concerning [professors with extreme political views](#)^{vi}, [the value of intellectual diversity](#)^{vii}, and [the pitfalls of the ‘managerial’ university](#)^{viii}. The project helps to clarify these discussions by reflecting on the democratic, moral, and epistemic responsibilities of the university.

2b. Workplan and timetable

For stage 1 (epistemic) as well as stage 2 (ethical), each of the two sub-parts will result in an academic publication. For stage 3 (practical), the first sub-part consists of empirical work. The second sub-part will result in guidelines for policymakers and educators. Stage 3 will be wrapped up with activities to bring MTEs to the attention of academics and educational policymakers, possibly in collaboration with a science policy-oriented research institute such as the Rathenau Institute.

Year	1				2				3				4			
Quarter	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Stage 1: The epistemic value of MTEs																
Article on the epistemic responsibilities of academic education (e.g. <i>Social Epistemology</i>)		•														
Article on a Murdoch-inspired account of the epistemic value of MTEs (e.g. <i>Journal of Value Inquiry</i>)					•											
Stage 2: Ethical objections																
Article on MTEs and academic freedom (e.g. <i>Journal of Academic Freedom</i>)							•									
Article on MTEs and student consent (e.g. <i>Journal of Moral Education</i>)									•							

^{vi} <https://www.bnnvara.nl/joop/artikelen/universiteit-leiden-neemt-afstand-van-antisemitisme-baudet-mentor-paul-cliteur>

^{vii} <https://bijnaderinzien.com/2017/05/08/een-meer-conservatieve-universiteit-is-een-betere-universiteit/>

^{viii} <https://www.filosofie.nl/het-is-tijd-voor-een-nieuwe-universiteit/>

- Compaijen, Rob. 2020. "Detachment and Attention." In *The Philosophy of Reenchantment*, 19. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367823443-14>.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43: 1241–99.
- Davis, Angela. 1983. *Women, Race & Class*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Desmet, Ophélie Allyssa, and Anne Marie Roberts. 2022. "Teaching for Positive and Transformational Creativity through Service Learning." *Education Sciences* 12 (4): 234. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12040234>.
- Dewey, John. 2008. "The Child and the Curriculum." In *The Child and the Curriculum Including, the School and Society*, 3–31. New York: Cosimo Books.
- Döring, Sabine A. 2003. "Explaining Action by Emotion." *The Philosophical Quarterly* (1950-) 53 (211): 214–30.
- Dreyfus, Hubert L., and Stuart E. Dreyfus. 2014. "What Is Moral Maturity? Towards a Phenomenology of Ethical Expertise (1992)." In *Skillful Coping: Essays on the Phenomenology of Everyday Perception and Action*, by Hubert L. Dreyfus, edited by Mark E. Wrathall. <https://academic.oup.com/book/10163/chapter/157728923>.
- Fish, Stanley. 2014. *Versions of Academic Freedom: From Professionalism to Revolution*. The Rice University Campbell Lectures. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/V/bo16462633.html>.
- Freire, Paolo. 2014. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA.
- Fricker, Miranda. 2007. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hämäläinen, Nora. 2016. *Descriptive Ethics: What Does Moral Philosophy Know about Morality?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Harding, Sandra. 2015. *Objectivity and Diversity: Another Logic of Scientific Research*. The university of chicago press. <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/O/bo19804521.html>.
- Harman, Elizabeth. 2015. "Transformative Experiences and Reliance on Moral Testimony." *Res Philosophica* 92 (April): 323–39. <https://doi.org/10.11612/resphil.2015.92.2.8>.
- hooks, bell. 1994. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Hudson, Tara D., and Jay Brandenberger. 2022. "College Students' Moral and Prosocial Responsibility: Associations with Community Engagement Experiences." *Journal of Experiential Education*, May, 10538259221090600. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10538259221090599>.
- Jamieson, Lesley. 2020. "The Case of M and D in Context: Iris Murdoch, Stanley Cavell and Moral Teaching and Learning." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 54 (2): 425–48. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12416>.

- Johnston, Mark. 2001. "The Authority of Affect." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 63 (1): 181–214.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2001.tb00097.x>.
- Jonas, Mark E. 2015. "Education for Epiphany: The Case of Plato's Lysis." *Educational Theory* 65 (1): 39–51. <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12094>.
- Kristjánsson, Kristján. 2020. *Flourishing as the Aim of Education: A Neo-Aristotelian View*. London and New York: Routledge.
<https://www.routledge.com/Flourishing-as-the-Aim-of-Education-A-Neo-Aristotelian-View/Kristjansson/p/book/9780367727970>.
- Lacey, Hugh. 1999. *Is Science Value Free?: Values and Scientific Understanding*. London and New York: Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/Is-Science-Value-Free-Values-and-Scientific-Understanding/Lacey/p/book/9780415349031>.
- Lackey, Jennifer, ed. 2018. *Academic Freedom*. Engaging Philosophy. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198791508.001.0001>.
- Layne, Heidi, and Siao See Teng. 2022. "Developing Intercultural Mindedness through an Experiential Learning Activity—A Case Study from Singapore." *Education Sciences* 12 (3): 212.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12030212>.
- Longino, Helen E. 1990. *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvx5wbfbz>.
- Lorde, Audre. 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press.
- MacKinnon, Catharine A. 2013. "Intersectionality as Method: A Note." *Signs* 38 (4): 1019–30. <https://doi.org/10.1086/669570>.
- Mason, Cathy. 2021. "Iris Murdoch and the Epistemic Significance of Love." In *New Philosophical Essays on Love and Loving*, 39–62. Springer.
- Meerts-Brandsma, Lisa, N. Qwynne Lackey, and Robert P. Warner. 2020. "Unpacking Systems of Privilege: The Opportunity of Critical Reflection in Outdoor Adventure Education." *Education Sciences* 10 (11): 318.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10110318>.
- Moody-Adams, Michele. 2018. "Is There a 'Safe Space' For Academic Freedom?" In *Academic Freedom*, edited by Jennifer Lackey, 36–60. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Murdoch, Iris. 2014. *The Sovereignty of Good*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Paul, L. A., and John Quiggin. 2020. "Transformative Education." *Educational Theory* 70 (5): 561–79. <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12444>.
- Paul, L.A. 2014. *Transformative Experience*. 1st ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Poel, Ibo van de, and Olya Kudina. 2022. "Understanding Technology-Induced Value Change: A Pragmatist Proposal." *Philosophy & Technology* 35 (2): 40. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-022-00520-8>.

- Pritchard, Duncan. 2013. "Epistemic Virtue and the Epistemology of Education." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 47 (2): 236–47. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12022>.
- Pugh, Kevin J. 2011. "Transformative Experience: An Integrative Construct in the Spirit of Deweyan Pragmatism." *Educational Psychologist* 46 (2): 107–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2011.558817>.
- Robertson, Emily. 2009. "The Epistemic Aims of Education." The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education. October 30, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195312881.003.0002>.
- Scott, Joan Wallach. 2019. *Knowledge, Power, and Academic Freedom*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Siegel, Harvey. 2016. "Epistemology of Education." In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/0123456789-P074-1>.
- Sosa, Ernest. 2015. *Judgment and Agency*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198719694.001.0001>.
- Srinivasan, Amia. 2016. "Philosophy and Ideology." *Theoria: An International Journal for Theory, History and Foundations of Science* 31 (3): 371–80.
- Stonehouse, Paul. 2021. "Character Through Outdoor Adventure Education? The (Delimiting) Hope of Modern Virtue Ethics." *Journal of Experiential Education* 44 (3): 243–56. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053825920967034>.
- Vendrell Ferran, Ingrid. 2022. "Feeling as Consciousness of Value." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 25 (1): 71–88. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-021-10244-x>.
- Widdows, Heather. 2016. *The Moral Vision of Iris Murdoch*. New York: Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/The-Moral-Vision-of-Iris-Murdoch/Widdows/p/book/9781138258686>.
- Williams, Joanne. 2016. *Academic Freedom in an Age of Conformity: Confronting the Fear of Knowledge*. 1st ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Yacek, Douglas. 2020. "Should Education Be Transformative?" *Journal of Moral Education* 49 (2): 257–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2019.1589434>.
- . 2021. *The Transformative Classroom: Philosophical Foundations and Practical Applications*. London and New York: Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/The-Transformative-Classroom-Philosophical-Foundations-and-Practical-Applications/Yacek/p/book/9781032005959>.
- Yacek, Douglas, and Kevin Gary. 2020. "Transformative Experience and Epiphany in Education." *Theory and Research in Education* 18 (2): 217–37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477878520957276>.
- Zrudlo, Ilya. 2022. "Iris Murdoch and Moral Education: An Initial Conceptual Framework and a Practical Example." *Journal of Moral Education*, March, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2022.2037534>.

2d. Summary for non-specialists (475 words)

The university finds itself at a crossroads. On one side, students and academics demand that the university takes responsibility for and action against issues like social injustice and climate change. On the other, some scholars fear that moral, social and political concerns are an obstacle to the unhindered pursuit of truth. [At the same time, both parties worry that open debate and toleration at the university are crumbling.](#)^{ix}

These discussions naturally translate to academic education. Should the university educate students to become part of an academic tradition and learn the tricks of the trade of knowledge production? Or should students also be encouraged to reflect upon scientific practices in light of social justice and moral responsibility?

This project aims to shed light on the distinction between moral education and scientific knowledge. It aims to explore the hypothesis that the development of a moral character is not contradictory to the university's responsibility to pursue truth, but instead makes students more competent at producing reliable knowledge. The advantage of this approach is that it respects the 'conservative' idea that the university is primarily about knowledge, while it also accommodates the 'progressive' demand for moral education.

Specifically, the project will investigate the value of 'morally transformative experiences' (MTEs). These are intense, disruptive experiences that cause a moral change in a person that would not have happened through theoretical deliberation. We know from real life that moral transformation often involves such experiences: for example, living in poverty can change a person's views on what a just tax system looks like. Artists also employ the transformative potential of experience: artist Ólafur Eliásson put [huge ice blocks from Greenland in the streets of Copenhagen and London](#)^x to make people experience the urgency of climate change.

^{ix} <https://harpers.org/a-letter-on-justice-and-open-debate/>

^x <https://olafureliasson.net/archive/artwork/WEK109190/ice-watch>

In the first stage, the project aims to give a more fine-grained account of the university's educational responsibilities: what does a successful academic training look like? Then, the project will define 'morally transformative experiences' and investigate how, if at all, they contradict and/or complement the university's educational aims.

In the second stage, the project will investigate under which conditions morally transformative experiences are ethically permissible. For example, some teachers might feel that the demand to provide educational experiences, rather than just theoretical education, is a violation of their academic freedom; another worry is that transformative experiences, which often leads to struggle and even crisis, causes severe psychological harm to students. This stage will address those objections.

In the third stage, the project takes an approach that is quite unusual for philosophers: it engages in empirical research. This stage includes discussion of and experimentation with morally transformative experiences, in close interaction with policymakers, educators, and students. The aim of this final stage is to formulate practical guidelines for institutions and educators and help them to reform higher education such that it accommodates and encourages morally transformative experiences.

Curriculum vitae

Personal details

Name: Doortje Lenders

E-mail: doortje.lenders@ru.nl

Telephone: +31615606975

Education

2020 – present

Research master Philosophy

Radboud University, Nijmegen (NL)

- Specialization: Philosophical Ethics
- Current GPA 8.6/10

2015 – 2019

Bachelor Artificial Intelligence

Utrecht University, Utrecht (NL)

- Specialization: Reasoning
- Humanities Honours Programme
- GPA 8.85/10 (*cum laude*)

2018 – 2019

Erasmus+ exchange

Jagiellonian University, Kraków (PL)

- Courses on philosophy and European and global politics

Teaching and assistance

Nov 2020 – Jan
2021

Research assistant

Radboud University, Nijmegen (NL)

Department of Language and Communication

Research project into the automatic detection of metaphors in the news coverage of the covid-19 crisis

Jan 2020 – March
2020

Teaching assistant for ‘Philosophy & AI’

University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam (NL)

Feb 2019 – April
2019

Teaching assistant for ‘Linguistics for AI’

Utrecht University, Utrecht (NL)

April 2018 – June
2018

Teaching assistant for ‘Data Structures & Algorithms for AI’

Utrecht University, Utrecht (NL)

Jan 2018 – April 2018 **Teaching assistant for ‘Intelligent Systems’**
Utrecht University, Utrecht (NL)

Internships

Feb 2022 – May 2022 Research intern
Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR)
The Hague (NL)
Project ‘Media and Democracy’

Nov 2018 – Jan 2019 Research intern
Kosciuszko Institute
Kraków (PL)
Project concerning automatic detection of public procurement fraud

Publications

- ["Waarom bedreiging van wetenschappers en politici niet alleen een zaak voor de rechter is"](#), Bij Nader Inzien, 28/04/2022
- ["De coronapas is juist een teken van echte democratie"](#), Trouw, 21/09/2021
- ["Migranten hoeven zich niet te bewijzen om mee te tellen"](#), NRC, 16/09/2021
- ["Er is moreel gezien niks mis met het weigeren van een vaccinatie"](#), De Volkskrant, 12/04/2021

Symposia and workshops attended

2022 OZSW ReMa Winter school

2021 OZSW PhD Spring school ‘Moral Theory and Real Life’

Extracurricular activities and volunteer work

2022 – present **Reading volunteer at *De VoorleesExpress***
Weekly reading sessions with children who are at risk of a language delay

2021 **Reading group co-host**
Research master reading group on Foucault and De Beauvoir

2019 **Artist manager at *Brainwash Festival* (Amsterdam)**

2017 – 2018 **Board member at student sailing association *Histos* (Utrecht)**

2016 – 2017 **Class volunteer at *Stichting Move***
Setting up a neighborhood project with a primary school class

Language skills

Dutch (native), English (fluent), French (B1)