

Chapter 5

The Moral Situation: Self and Other



Abstract Questions of power and ethics were implicitly present in the previous chapters. In this chapter, I deal with them in more detail, examining the power struggles in the classroom in terms of the relationship between the student and the lecturer as well as that between students. I also discuss ways out of the struggle, including a reflective attitude, classroom practices and considerations of spatial arrangements. Further, recognition, generosity and care are suggested as possible ways to overcome the difficult ethical situations in learning and teaching philosophy. In this context, I discuss the Oslo Summer School, where care ethics was used as the theoretical point of departure.

5.1 Power Struggles in the Classroom and How to Move Beyond Them

To gain an insight on your own power as a lecturer, you only need to temporarily to become a student again. At that very moment, you become aware of how many feelings rush through you during the class. Sometimes those feelings are pride, joy and inspiration, but quite often they include frustration, disappointment, humiliation and anger. When the well-meaning lecturer first encourages you, who are only a beginner in whatever you are learning, to engage in a group discussion and not to care if you make some mistakes, and only a while later uses your mistake in order to make a general point to the whole class, doesn't that feel like a smack on the face? Wouldn't you like to protest? Or, when you have prepared a short presentation about an issue that is important to you, and the lecturer, who is concerned about keeping to time, practically ignores your input, don't you feel betrayed? Furthermore, you may feel you are quite knowledgeable about a topic discussed in the class, but at the same time you feel that the discussion is lingering on basic issues, and you do not participate in the conversation, so the lecturer can move to more interesting matters. End result: the lecturer takes you for a timid beginner, who needs encouragement, and you feel extremely frustrated.

Of course, as a lecturer who temporarily is in the student's role, you are still in a different position than a person who is a full-time student and has no pedagogical training or experience: you are not as trapped in the power dynamics between the teaching staff and the students, because you are able to evaluate the learning situation from different perspectives. However, the lecturer's position of power can hardly escape your attention. Even if the lecturer's intentions are good and their teaching methods progressive, they still hold the power to judge, the power of telling you that you are wrong or right, the right to evaluate, power over you who are a student. Other lecturers wish to assert their authority and use the classroom as a showcase of their own brilliance. This relation, in which students occupy the position of a reverent audience whereas the lecturer obtains that of a demigod, can develop regardless of the methods the lecturer uses. It is not unheard of that charismatic individuals use unconventional methods in order to gain further control over others, rather than to emancipate them.

Nevertheless, the lecturer is not the only one who possesses power in the classroom. A student can challenge the lecturer's authority, including their expertise on the topic and their ability to take into account different viewpoints—for instance, feminist, LGBTIQ+, racial, political or religious, or pertaining to a different manner of doing philosophy. Sometimes a student's question or comment may catch the lecturer off guard, and she may feel that her authority is threatened. The lecturer may be tempted to use her superior knowledge and skills in argumentation to solidify her position of power. This strategy is problematic, for the lecturer and the student are hardly equal rivals. Even in philosophy, arguments are not just arguments, but there are living, breathing, vulnerable individuals behind them, and it may serve the learning situation better if the lecturer does not continue arguing the point until the bitter end but leaves things open-ended. After all, one is not teaching just theory but is always also an example of how a philosopher relates to others, and of how a staff member relates to students. Through one's example, one can teach the students how to gain and maintain authority by undermining the viewpoints of others, or one can teach them a mode of dialogue and interaction that is tolerant of uncertainties and differences and progresses as a shared quest for increasingly nuanced understanding.

The question of hierarchy is not present only in the relationship between the lecturer and the students. Students may be involved in building hierarchies between themselves. Occupying speaking space, showing off their knowledgeability, emphasising their commitment to the practice of philosophy, forming circles of the like-minded and belittling or ignoring the input of others are some of the ways in which students may seek to establish a high-ranking position among their fellow students. Some of them may invest more in such pursuits, while others may feel frustrated with the implicit competition, or come to identify themselves as misfits or as inferior to the more knowledgeable. Yet finding one's place in the hierarchy is not necessarily reflected upon or planned but lived as a part of everyday interaction.

Given the lecturer's position as the one who frames the learning experience and is expected to provide something meaningful for the students to consider, it is hardly surprising that students sometimes compete for the lecturer's attention. Attaining that attention can have significant consequences for the student's future in academia,

if the relationship between the enthusiastic student and the lecturer turns into one of academic patronage (see e.g. Nichols et al. 1985; Martin 2009).

Not all agree that such a competition should be an inbuilt feature of any system of education. hooks has suggested that the competition for the lecturer's attention reflects the competitiveness built in the capitalist economic system (1994, 199). While this may be partially true, it should not be forgotten that very early on, Plato's *Symposium* describes students competing for Socrates's attention. This may indicate that such a rivalry will not go away with the demise of capitalism.

With admirable candour, hooks analyses her own relationships with students. She points out that sometimes she is accused of becoming attached to some students of the class (1994, 198–199). Such attachments may not be altogether rare, not least because some students may be more enthusiastic about the lecturer's topic and approach them more eagerly than others. Also, personal background and temperament can explain why lecturers may become more interested in some students than others.¹ hooks's response is to ask her students to analyse why her affection for some would take anything away from the others (1994, 198–199). Nevertheless, the solution to dismiss the students' concerns about favouritism as inherent in a competitive society is not satisfactory and hardly alleviates the students' worries about not being treated equally. I suggest that a more ethical approach to the interaction between the student and the lecturer can be attained if, rather than asking the students to disregard the lecturer's more affectionate relationship with some students, as hooks suggests, the lecturer engages in self-reflective practices in their teaching, and displays sensitivity towards the diversity of the students and their needs. Another important question the teaching staff should always be aware enough to ask themselves, is: what kind of role does my sexuality play in the way I relate to students? Being flattered by the attention of some, perceiving others as rivals at least partly because of their gender—these tendencies are difficult to overcome if one denies them. Acknowledging that one can be biased in this manner, despite one's commitment to equality on the level of principles, is the first step out of practices of implicit favouritism.

Most importantly, if the lecturer consistently practises the ethics of generosity and care, that is, if the lecturer is genuinely open towards the needs of all students and shows that the input of each student is equally welcome, the students will eventually acknowledge and respond to this. The lecturer does not have to give into impulses to prefer this student to that: it is their job to become interested in the potentials and flourishing of all their students. In the long run, this attitude will be rewarded by the students' trust. Hierarchy-reducing methods can likewise prove useful in the attempt to secure equal treatment of all students: pair and group work that allow the less vocal students to become more confident to express their views, or setting a fixed time for everybody's interventions—in seminars, by actually timing those interventions or by giving each student a few chips with which they can acquire limited time to speak.

As was demonstrated by the first example in this chapter, both the lecturer and the students contribute to the emotional atmosphere of the class without being aware of

¹ Bridget Cooper argues that a teacher with a working-class background may find teaching pupils with a similar background particularly rewarding (2011, 73).

it. Often the given feedback is merely gestural: smiling, looking serious, frowning, looking at the other (student or staff member), ignoring them and so on. Given the phenomenon of implicit bias, the lecturer should, perhaps, pay particular attention to how they relate to women students and students belonging to other minorities.

An exaggerated reflectivity is not the ideal to be sought after in the teaching staff—it is well known that such an attitude makes all spontaneous action difficult. However, if one takes upon oneself the task of teaching, one should be genuinely interested in the student and to check one's own attitude, when something appears to be going wrong in the communication between the student and the lecturer or in the general classroom situation.

As Beauvoir argues in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947), it is when one no longer feels *uncertain* about the justification of one's actions that one should become concerned about it. According to her, the difference between “the tyrant” and “the man of good will” can be found in the certainty with which they relate to their own aims and actions. The tyrant “rests in the certainty of his aims”, whereas the man of good will keeps asking himself: “Am I really working for the liberation of men? Isn't this end contested by the sacrifices through which I aim at it?” (Beauvoir 2003, 166; 1976, 133–134.)

It is always possible for both the lecturer and the student to become “tyrants” in the broad sense adopted by Beauvoir: a person who disregards aspects of the freedom and futurity in the other and nihilates the other's will. Talking over the other, interrupting the other, and ignoring and belittling the other's comments are strategies that hinder two-way interaction and are, in some cases, an outright attack against the other. This said, it is true that many of us engage behaviours such as talking over others and enjoy a rapid pace of discussion. However, for the communication to be dialogical, attentive listening has to be practised. Questions that reflect genuine curiosity and care have to be asked in order to allow the interaction to develop into more than a monologue.

Power struggles tend to spring up without effort, whereas undoing the effects of those struggles takes work. Space and attention have to be conscientiously allocated to those who are overwhelmed by the outpour of ideas from the mouths of others, or who, because of their different take on matters, are temporarily excluded from the discussion. It is a safe assumption that even if some people have not said anything for a half an hour, they do have things to say.

Teaching philosophy is not only about teaching how to make good arguments. It is about opening space for an intellectual curiosity, and sometimes, if a person in a position of authority puts all their efforts into showing how the student's argument fails, more is lost than gained: the space of intellectual freedom and inquiry is blocked.

I am aware that this view can be rejected out of hand by those who think that learning how to make good arguments and how to act when in a tight spot presupposes that professional philosophers be hard enough on students (see Antony 2012, 240). In my view, one is required to make a choice: either we teach students to be warriors who need to harden to do well in future combat, or we see them as participants in a shared project in which listening and encouragement are significant skills. As I see it, the latter approach, which I prefer, is not gendered nor in conflict with learning to

create good arguments or even with receiving enough critical feedback.² This said, I realise that there are different cultures of interaction within philosophy; some of them can already be quite close to the collaborative approach I am suggesting whereas in others it will be harder to implement less combative practices.

The questions of hierarchy and communication also arise in how the physical space is used and arranged. It has been suggested that circular arrangements would diminish the power distance whereas the traditional arrangement of the lecturer on the podium and students in neat rows before them emphasises the authority of the lecturer over the students. From the point of view of learning results, however, there appears to be no one superior classroom arrangement: what works best depends on whether the learning calls for silent concentration on the topic or communication with others. Circular arrangements and groups of tables appear to facilitate communication, whereas rows facilitate concentration on individual assignments or listening to one speaker (Wannarka and Ruhl 2008).

Needless to say, architectural design affects the possibilities of interaction in the learning space (e.g. Lei 2010). In auditoriums, it is very difficult for the lecturer to move in the space freely and approach the individual students who ask questions. In this way, the spatial arrangement can incapacitate lecturers themselves. In the typical situation of a philosophy lecture, however, the lecturer is hardly ever totally immobile: especially when lecturers answer questions, their gestures reflect the process of thinking and can as such encourage the student to understand the practice of philosophy as a process of questioning that involves the whole body.

To summarise, the power dynamics of the classroom—brought about by the strivings of the lecturer, the students or even the physical space—do not have to be taken for granted or agreed to. Lecturers can use their position of power to create an atmosphere of trust, in which energy is liberated from implicit competition to collaboration and developing ideas together. It is important to remember, however, that there is a specific interplay between pedagogical methods and ethics: while certain hierarchising and competitive tendencies of the classroom are hard to undo without pedagogical methods that allow for alternative interactions to develop, pedagogical methods on their own cannot build trust among the students and between them and the lecturer. What is required from the lecturer is sensitivity, concern, genuine generosity towards the students, and an appreciation of the opportunity to philosophise together.

Above all, one should never be too sure about one's ability to take all the students into account in an adequate manner. Especially when student numbers are large, the classroom situation involves such a great diversity of experiences and individual situations that one most certainly remains ignorant of some of these. Despite the fact that some learning sessions are a far cry from glowing examples of shared flow, and may even occasionally fail, a vigilante attitude towards the classroom interaction

² By “not gendered” I mean that, according to my experience, the success of or need for this strategy does not arise from the gender of the student but rather, most students tend to have some feelings of uncertainty that need to be taken into account in teaching and supervision.

and one's own practices helps a great deal. In addition to this vigilance, the ethical demands of the classroom situation include recognition of others and a generosity towards them. These aspects of learning and teaching are discussed in the following section.

5.2 Recognition, Generosity and Care

In the philosophy class, there is always potential for a shared intellectual quest, during which the students and the lecturer are directed towards a common object of wonder, and strive together for a greater clarity, encouraging each other with their questions and interpretations.³ This kind of shared search differs significantly from the distractedness that often characterises our discussions with others. What is more, it may help everyone involved to understand their own lives more profoundly. In the ideal case, the students do not come out of the classroom exhausted but energised, still intensely discussing the topic of the class with each other. For the lecturer, the class is then equally energising. Especially if the course deals with her particular area of expertise and interest, it provides a great opportunity for her to think together with others, who, even if temporarily, engage with her key topic for the length of the course. Passionately lived and given, learning and teaching are no longer duties but freely exchanged, a gift.

In such a case, lecturers share their passion for philosophy, inviting the others to engage in thought processes that are directed towards understanding rather than developing an expert front. The students, likewise, shake out their concerns about how they appear to others, and engage in a lively exchange of ideas. All in all, the inner movement of the participants in the learning session could, perhaps, be described as a shared orientation in the same direction, which allows individual movement between one's prior understanding and fumbling for a new grasp of the topic, drawing from the thoughts expressed by others, experiencing them as impulses to one's own associative processes.

True enough, Beauvoir describes the liberated and equal erotic relationship in a similar manner, that is, in terms of exchange, gift and passion (Beauvoir 2010, 763; 2008, 648). What we are dealing with is, of course, a kind of love, the love of wisdom, *philosophía*, and the relationship of this love to erotic love is discussed as early as Plato's *Symposium*. Yet such experiences are not restricted to learning philosophy, as hooks's descriptions reveal (1994). Rather than try to argue for the specificity of philosophy in this instance, it is perhaps more important to understand the general ethical attitude behind such learning experiences. I already mentioned the importance of the subjects' mutual recognition of each other's freedom, which is discussed, for instance, in Beauvoir's works and Axel Honneth's philosophy of recognition. Debra Bergoffen points towards yet another ethical resource in Beauvoir, namely an ethics

³ For a discussion of philosophy as love and wonder see Heinämaa (2000), as well as Irigaray (1989).

of generosity (1997, 7). In fact, generosity and the recognition of the other's freedom are tightly interwoven in Beauvoir's philosophy.

Generosity should be distinguished here from self-sacrifice and self-denial, as well as from Aristotle's description of generosity as the middle way between meanness and wastefulness (see *NE IV:1/2001*). From the Beauvoirian point of view, being generous towards others does not imply nihilation of the self, nor does it reflect a "moderate" attitude towards consumption and wealth. Instead, generous giving does not imply losing anything or asking for something in return. This conception of generosity resembles the one Friedrich Nietzsche puts forward in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883–1885/2009). Both Nietzsche and Beauvoir argue that genuine generosity does not operate within the sphere of bargaining or commerce.⁴ When things such as appreciation, adoration and loyalty are asked for in return, an act does not demonstrate generosity.⁵ Beauvoir's idea is that generosity can only operate when the other's freedom is recognised, and if I wish to control the other's actions, thinking that he owes me, I did not really give him a gift but a loan, or what is even worse, I was initially motivated by my own vanity and will to gain power over the other, to be his tyrant—which is the exact opposite of true generosity (see Beauvoir 2003, 277–278; 2004b, 123–124).⁶ The only thing the benefactor can ask of the other is the recognition of freedom in the act of giving (Beauvoir 2003, 277; 2004b, 123;).

While Beauvoir's ethics of generosity is at best implicit, numerous authors have developed such ethics during the past few decades, relying not only on the work of Beauvoir or Nietzsche but also of Marcel Mauss, Georges Bataille and Emmanuel Levinas (see e.g. Bergoffen 1997; Schrif 1997, ed.; Diprose 2002). In the context of this volume it is not possible to investigate these developments in more detail, so I content myself with commenting on the possibilities of an attitude of generosity in the context of learning and teaching philosophy. A generous attitude towards the other is caring but not patronising, and as it involves the recognition of the other as free, it tends to inspire a similar attitude in others. My stinginess, in contrast, can inflict a need on others to guard their boundaries and possessions. As I pointed out earlier, both students and the faculty are in many ways vulnerable in the classroom, and it is all too easy to withdraw to the attitude of indifference and detachment when one feels threatened.

I do not propose the mere identification of generosity as a basis for ethical action would suffice to deal with all possible moral problems. There will certainly be situations in which generosity is not enough, and in which self-protection and self-care become an issue. In the context of care ethics, which, like ethics of generosity, focuses

⁴ For an analysis of Nietzsche's conception of gift-giving and generosity, see White (2016).

⁵ Beauvoir writes: "The sick man requires care; I give it to him; he recovers. But the health he recovers through me is not a good if I stop him at that. It becomes a good thing only if he makes something of it." (Beauvoir 2004, 121; 2003, 272–273;).

⁶ Beauvoir's way of conceiving gift and generosity resembles Marcel Mauss's and Georges Bataille's discussion of gift and excess in that it challenges utilitarian ethics and the idea of an economy driven by self-interest. The difference lies in Beauvoir's idea that genuine generosity does not require reciprocation. In contrast to this, Mauss and Bataille argue that the *exchange* of gifts is the glue that holds the archaic society together.

on relationality, Pettersen has elaborated on Carol Gilligan's concept of mature care (Pettersen 2008, 133–150; 2011). For Pettersen, mature care involves equal care for oneself and the other (2011, 56).

Care ethics is a relatively new ethical theory, the starting points of which are usually located in Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982) and Nel Noddings's *Caring* (1986/2013). Both authors suggested that women enter into ethics from a different point than men. Challenging deontological and utilitarian ethics, they argued that it was more typical for women to think of ethical choices in terms of relationality and care than through rights, rules or justice. Care itself has been defined in a number of different ways. Among the best-known is Joan Tronto's categorisation of care into: (1) attentiveness (as an inclination to become aware of need), (2) responsibility (responding to need), (3) competence (ability to provide good care) and (4) responsiveness (feeling with the other and recognition of the possibility of abuse in care) (Tronto 1993, 126–136). Care ethicists emphasise the virtual universality of the experience of care: practically all people know what it is to receive and give care, and can thereby extend their narrow self-centred horizons towards the experience of others and a concern for their well-being (e.g. Pettersen 2011, 58; Clark 2010, 150). As we can see, Tronto's definition of care does not presuppose that care should be understood as an exclusively female approach to ethics. In this sense, even though the first expressions of care ethics incorporated assumptions that can be criticised of essentialising gender, the whole of the care ethical project needs not be confined to an essentialist framework.

As Pettersen has suggested (2011, 59), the care ethical concerns and concepts are in many ways compatible with Beauvoir's ethical concerns, which were briefly discussed above. Both care ethics and existentialist ethics recognise the ambiguity of lived experience and the difficulty of making ethical decisions merely on the basis of abstract rules, while at the same time advocating systematic reasoning in the service of ethics. Yet another similarity is suspicion about the ethical value of absolute self-denial in favour of others (see Pettersen 2011, 59–60). As Pettersen puts it, sometimes “the devoted carer is exploited and injured, and sometimes she inflicts harm on others in the name of care” (ibid., 60). Beauvoir in turn points out that the acts of a benefactor towards the protégé can be tyrannical, when they imply an attempt to control the other. Similar relationships of oppression can take place between lovers, spouses, and parents and children—in all of these cases one can in bad faith inflict pain on others and oneself while pretending to act for the good of others (Beauvoir 2010, e.g. 201, 208; 2008, 302, 312). In the classroom, too, devotion to the other can be, at its basis, a form of control, a desire to possess the affection and appreciation of the other.

This concern for the possible abuse of care that harms oneself and others, is related to the concept of mature care. According to Pettersen, the notion of mature care, first introduced by Gilligan, is of particular interest, because it helps us to understand care as “a relational process in which both the carer and the caree participate” and in which each participant engages in promoting the flourishing of all parties as well as preventing harm to all parties (Pettersen 2011, 55).

On rare occasions, the lecturer may enter conflict situations in which the general ethical rules of academic learning and teaching are questioned by a student, who suggests that the lecturer should adopt their own case-specific justifications for adequate performance as a guiding principle. In reality, of course, each case cannot be considered as if it were the only one, for evaluation and teaching in general are preconditioned by rules of fairness and quality of academic learning. Yet, as we saw in the earlier discussion of Beauvoir's ethics, an ethically vigilant person is always ready to question their own motives. Even when the motives of the other seem questionable, the other's vulnerability opens up this possibility to us, and, along with it, introduces often painful considerations about justifying our actions. Nevertheless, this possibility of pain and worrying is also a demonstration that we have not become unable to see and feel the source of ethics in the possible suffering of the other.

From a Levinasian point of view, justice and fairness, which come to limit our responsibilities to the other, are introduced by the presence of the third party (Levinas 1999). Considering Pettersen's discussion of mature care, we can see that it is not only the third party—in this case the other real and potential students and through them the ideals of academic education—that limits our responsibilities, but also our own vulnerability and needs. Nor should we ever overlook the potential of the institutional community to solve conflict situations through collectively instituted rules and procedures.

While Foucault's concept "care of the self" (1988) is not inherently linked with care ethics, it reveals yet another aspect of care. Foucault's concept of "care of the self" refers to the introspective self-government and practices that nurture individual growth, which, according to him, were embraced by ancient Greek and Roman thinkers. We have already discussed the meaning of self-reflection in pedagogy at length, but here the focus is different: we are searching not for only good teaching practices but for a life-long development and nurture of the self, which help us interact with others in an ethical way. Today, we are often lacking such a long-term understanding of our relationship with the world, and our feeble attempts to find a more profound basis for our lives are more often channelled through commercially geared self-help practices or religion than through philosophy. Beyond the pursuit of academic accomplishments, however, the practice of philosophy itself could contribute to a specific care of the self. This kind of care could help us to act more constructively in conflicts and other challenging situations.

5.3 The Oslo Summer School: Care Ethics and Conflicts

The last of the summer schools, titled Care Ethics and Conflicts, was organised at the University of Oslo by Pettersen. 75% of the twenty-four participants were women. Most of the students were from Nordic universities.

During the course, care and conflicts were discussed from a variety of perspectives, namely in relation to private and professional relationships, war and peace, global relations, and nature. Through these perspectives, the course demonstrated that care

ethics may be applied to far broader issues than is often the case: all of human interaction and even beyond.⁷

Fittingly with the theme of the summer school, the pedagogical principles were motivated by care ethical concerns. The goal was to address the diversity of students in a manner that considers their individual needs, inclinations and learning strategies. One of the leading principles was to create a non-judgemental environment in which it feels safe to both express one's ideas and to be quiet, and in which both students and lecturers are able to listen to each other attentively and respond to each other in a respectful, caring and benevolent manner. In addition, students were invited to reflect upon the role of experiences, emotions and reason in philosophy and ethics, and to self-reflection in the sense of both reflecting upon their own approaches and their reactions to the discussed topics. This way the emotional and relational aspects of learning were integrated into reasoning processes. What is more, attention was paid to the fact that the cases and dilemmas typical to care ethics can in many cases be difficult to deal with emotionally, depending on the personal history of the individual.

It was pointed out to the students that the cases care ethics analyses are not hypothetical problems made for intellectual exercises only, but actual cases that often involve pain and suffering. Not least for this reason, students were encouraged to be reflective about their experiences during the class as well as about the different points departures of others.

As we can see, the approach adopted in this summer school differed from that of the mode that is common in the teaching of philosophy. Firstly, particular attention was paid to the role of emotions in the teaching and learning processes. Secondly, instead of resorting to thought experiments, the messiness of everyday life and its moral challenges were brought into the analysis. In this way, the course addressed two complaints that philosophy students have proposed: that there is no room for emotions in philosophy and that philosophy is often understood as a game-like, empty exercise of reason (see Chap. 4).

On the practical level, the diversity of students was addressed in a number of ways, perhaps the most important being the diversity of teaching methods. The idea was to create a space that would accommodate both sociability and withdrawal. The days of the summer school consisted of lectures, group work, student presentations, structured debates and more informal discussions. At the end of each day, the students engaged in quiet work, writing their reflections on the day in a journal.

An approach that makes space for silence is quite different from what hooks suggests, as she insists that all her students have to speak, even if they did it in sign language, as has sometimes been the case in her classes (1994). It is perhaps worth noting that lecturers are often surprised by the results when the course essays are returned: it is not rare that the most talkative of the students do not write the most thought-out essays. Some students may need peace and quiet to process their thoughts, whereas others may have difficulties forming their thoughts in writing and prefer to proceed through discussion. As we saw earlier, these skills are in some

⁷ For a discussion of the widening range of care ethics, see Pettersen 2011, 51–52.

cases related to social class, so from the viewpoint of social equality it is particularly important to make room for differences (see Sect. 4.2).

It is well known, of course, that the theories of learning styles have been hotly debated, and it is not my intention here to take a stand on these theories as such (see Pashler et al. 2008; Husmann and O’Loughlin 2019). Rather, the point of departure in the Oslo Summer School was not only to acknowledge the differences between the needs of different students but also to cater for the fact that each student needs a variety of learning methods. For instance, although people engage in social interaction with different levels of enthusiasm, after three hours of engaging in an “extrovert” or “conscientious” behaviour, all would feel tired to some extent (Leikas and Ilmarinen 2016). For this reason, all students may benefit from engaging in a variety of learning approaches during the day.

What else can one do to support withdrawing or reserved students, keeping in mind the possible sources of alienation for women students and students of other minorities? The answer need not be complicated, even if exclusions and alienations are manifold. Support can consist of encouragement and classroom strategies that create space for those who may not be so quick to verbalise their views or self-assured enough to air their views without questioning the need for this. The needed encouragement may be noticing the person individually also outside the classroom, commenting on their work in an encouraging manner, all in all demonstrating that they are worthy interlocutors and have valuable things to say.

Versatile classroom strategies can include exercises in which students move gradually from solitary work (for instance, writing down personal ideas and experiences related to a specific topic) to a group discussion, in which group members’ ideas and experiences are discussed on a more general level, and finally to sharing the results with the whole class. One can distribute speaking time more democratically by limiting the times each person can speak. This can help those students who tend to take a long time to get to their actual point, to think through what they want to say before they say it. It may also be helpful if the nature of the dialogue students and lecturers want to create is discussed explicitly at the beginning of the course. When students participate in setting the rules of the interaction, this makes it easier for them to create a reflective relationship to the rules.

Sometimes students can benefit from learning a theory, such as feminist theory, that thematises their particular position and allows them to become rooted within their field, instead of being left adrift. As was suggested in Sect. 3.4, providing a discussion of the history of women thinkers can help women students to become rooted in philosophy.

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