

THE ART OF PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

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Chapter I

The Problem of Philosophy

1. Nature of Philosophy

The emergence of new pedagogical practices in the philosophical domain, the desire to philosophize manifested within the wider public in recent years, successful works in bookstores with a wide array of philosophical claims, lead us to ponder over the nature of philosophizing, and perhaps even to answer those who question the legitimacy of this recent trend in vulgarizing the philosophical aspiration. Does philosophizing necessarily draw upon erudition, on a general reflection on the world and life, on a type of behavior, on 'empty chatter', or on critical analysis? Is it performed freely or under some constraints? These appear as many particular meanings and possibilities encountered here and there that will lead us to decide in a particular – be it from a biased or partial standpoint – and subjective way on the problems raised by the principle of such a practice. Many a theorist will embark himself without scruple on this hazardous journey which consists in determining its essence, meaning and value univocally and rigidly, to condemn and vilify such and such notion in which he will perceive the breeding ground of some poison or ideological virus, prophesizing the absence if not the eminent or distant death of philosophy. Certainly, if it is not forbidden to take sides within the philosophical enterprise – the radicalism of a priori theorizing is hardly foreign to it – let's ask ourselves if the famous problematization that philosophy teachers are asking from their students could not equally be required of the authorized teachers and theorists.

On what ground can a discourse, since it consists mainly in discourse, be said to be of a philosophical nature? Is it when thinking becomes its own object? Is it through the use of abstraction, which allows one to move from the narrative to the explanatory, from myth to rationality? An opposition which presupposes moreover that rationality does not itself belong to a mythical order, and that a myth is not rational. Is it because of its analysis or conceptualization? Is it because of the passage from the lived to the reflexive? Is it a discourse which is already reflected, the content of which is already explicit, or is it a discourse which encourages reflection, carrying an implicit thought? Although, we admit that, as in all these oppositions, one of the terms does not necessarily exclude the other. Is it to be aware of one's own existence, a

consciousness which would imply being articulated through words. Is it the emergence of a foundational metaphysic, of an ontology, or of a critical thinking? Is it the recurrence of a thought or the elaboration of a system? Is it the object of reflection or the way of thinking which is determining? Is it the appearance of an ethical discourse or should one extract an epistemology out of it? If it is all about arguing and convincing, does rhetoric summarize the philosophical art? Is not, by definition, any religious doctrine a philosophical vector? Does any specific culture articulate a philosophical doctrine? Is philosophy the eternal exegesis of consecrated authority? Is philosophy a historically dated and geographically determined activity, or does it belong to mankind, in essence, despite its polymorphism? Should we talk of a Greek philosophizing miracle, as the model par excellence, or of the Greek philosophizing exception, as a mere historical and cultural particularity? Thus, is philosophy inherent to human nature? Is the concept its outcome or its adulteration? Should one distinguish between a vulgar and a noble philosophy, an empirical and a scientific philosophy, a natural and an artificial philosophy? As many questions which, in themselves, border the philosophical activity, to the risk of overflowing it.

If philosophy does not already contain within itself such an attempt, maybe should we contribute to the emergence of a meta-philosophy, the matrix of philosophizing, the synthesis of the conditions enabling the philosophical exercise. Taking into consideration, on one side, the classical supporters of the historical dignity of the philosopher, the wise and knowledgeable, the scholar for whom philosophy represents the institutionalization of humanities, the teaching of the history of ideas, the production of a speculative literature abounding in abstruse concepts. On the other hand, the 'liquidators' of philosophy, who swear only on scientific certainty, precision in language, logic and facts, or again the followers of a practice devoid of theory, even though they boast about philosophizing. This 'beyond' would consist in thinking of philosophy as a comprehensive toolbox, a broad-minded panorama of ideas, of issues, of procedures, of philosophy as a mean to another end, whatever it may be. A vision which is, of course, somewhat technical, but which would allow us to avoid falling into the trap of doctrinal or dogmatic thinking. After all, this is what the great systematic philosophers have been trying to accomplish, while pretending to ignore authorities or dogmas and to rely solely upon reason. On this ground, no doubt, also lies the spirit of a philosophical practice.

The gamble of the present work is to try, once again, among countless and eternal attempts, to clarify the meaning of philosophizing. And like any other author, we shall not be spared from our own bias, to the risk of choking ourselves. We shall confess as much as possible: our main focus is philosophy as a practice. What does it mean and imply as a human activity? And if it appears to us impossible to claim, from the viewpoint of Sirius, in a kind of absolute perspective, to determine the unique or primal meaning of a term which carries a whole history, we can nevertheless try to clarify the issues nested within it.

2. Ambiguity of Philosophy

Since its ancient Greek origins, the consecrated term of philosophy rests on an ambiguity, or on what appears to us today as an ambiguity and paradox. Let's start with ambiguity. The term 'sophia', towards which, theoretically, – as suggested by the root 'philo' – the philosopher feels love, desire or sympathy signifies both wisdom and knowledge. The coherence of this coupling of words is easily understandable. Indeed, once could expect from one who seeks to know that he behaves in a certain way: he will be thoughtful and composed; he will listen and analyze; he will not get carried away by a mere trifle. This implies a certain distance in front of people and events. It is the behavior expected of a good student: the one who learns and knows how to learn. Thus, this wisdom implies a specific subjectivity, a way of being, and by connecting it to the other meaning of 'sophia', this wisdom is inseparable from the fact of knowing, of understanding, and therefore from a certain objectivity. Although this conciliatory outlook remains quite understandable, it can also be considered as a utopian goal, a kind of ideal and unsurpassable horizon which our modern age, bearer of doubt and suspicion, cannot accept as a matter of fact. Several overflows of the personality tax the act of knowing without however invalidating *de facto* the veracity of this knowledge, thus prohibiting the possibility of keeping in the same term a specific way of being and a thinking ability, understood within a mutual relationship of necessity. Rightly or wrongly, it is thus considered possible that one can be both the 'worst' individual and a 'brilliant' scientist at the same time. Appetite for power, megalomania, selfishness, pride, betray as many 'character defects' which, however unpleasant, won't prevent the learned man to be learned. And, to contradict the ancients outright, we could even state that the possession of knowledge, just like money or power, encourages irrationality rather than any wisdom. Here again, rationality and wisdom contain a problematization potential more obvious than it appears at first. If the ancients, like the Stoics, espoused a vision where the reality of the world and of the city was primarily based on coherence and harmony, other schools, such as the Cynics or Heraclitus, thought that conflict prevails and constitutes the first reality. Even the Christian view, which advocates universal love, carries a good dose of agonistic principles in its vision of knowledge. It condemns those who transgress the prohibition of 'vain' knowledge as well as any desire for it, considered the prime source of the original sin. Without 'charity', knowledge is less than nothing. In this, modernity, bearer of doubt, could only engulf itself into a breach which, to varying degrees, has ever been present within the exercise of thought.

3. The paradox of philosophy

Let us come to our paradox. According to tradition, the philosopher differs from the sophist. For, if the former wishes to know, the latter is already in possession of this knowledge. Those who, like Pythagoras or Plato, have emphasized the term philosopher, who fabricated it and gave it its glory, wanted to tell us that, in order to know, one must desire to know, and for that purpose it is better to know that one knows nothing, or almost. This act of faith expresses a kind of humility establishing and generating knowledge, in opposition to a pretense of knowledge which does not seek to know anymore, which does not question itself any longer, since it knows already. The harsh criticism of Plato against the sophists depicts us a people enjoying knowledge as power, a state of mind which naturally leads them to try to convince their auditors of the strength and validity of their knowledge, rather than seeking what they are still unaware of. We rediscover here the link between wisdom and knowledge, since a particular subjectivity, taken as a psychological ideal, is the founder of this knowledge. However, the paradox contained in this particular option resides in the fact that the philosopher will finally boast about this humility: through it he will gain a privileged access to truth. Thus, the limiting thought of the sophist will be opposed to the openness and power of thought of the philosopher. Henceforth, the dice are loaded: who will boast about being a sophist and who will not claim instead to be such a philosopher? By this reversal or transvaluation, the philosopher becomes the one who knows, the sophist the one who ignores, while in fact they both grant themselves good faith, fully justified in their eyes. Therefore, go figure who is the sophist and who is the philosopher. Unless one probes loins and hearts, an arduous task as everyone knows. Is the modern philosopher the ancient sophist? Moreover, is it enough to declare oneself ignorant in order to be learned? Is a proud and stubborn scientist less learned than a good man, ignorant and without pretense? Plato tries to solve the riddle by suggesting that the hypothesis of wisdom is the knowledge of what we know and of what we do not. The attempt is interesting: it tries to capture in one blow our knowledge and our ignorance. But this unique perspective is problematic: knowledge is manifested primarily by an ability to grasp and to transform the world, as indicated by science, whereas being aware of our ignorance, or of our doubt, is not a product of efficiency. It is even its opposite.

Within the philosophical perspective, the purpose is first to work on the relation to knowledge, but a scientist can very well consider that knowledge has value in itself, while relation to knowledge is strictly psychological or philosophical, an activity belonging to another domain altogether. Some physicists criticize their colleagues who became epistemologists, no longer being physicists, possibly due to some fatigue or out of laziness, if not because they fell to fashion. If our era became aware – perhaps because of its history and of its many experiences – of the human dimension of its activity, it is by the introduction of ethics as a

regulatory function that the problem has resurfaced, and not through the psychological dimension, as was the case with our predecessors. We do not ask ourselves if our doctor leads a healthy life before we consult with him: we mainly check his technical skills, but also the honesty of his actions. Unknowingly, we make a radical break between knowledge and epistemology, as well as between epistemology and psychology. Rightly or wrongly. Although there again, the modern craze for psychology, and more recently for philosophy and for ethics, probably indicates a reappearance of the mind of the thinking subject as a constitutive entity of knowledge.

Let's now try to problematize the term 'philosophy' through four different interpretations which we will attempt to analyze. We will play them once against the other, since they intersect in various ways, as we have somewhat already discussed earlier. The four meanings which we will in turn give to philosophy are the following: philosophy as culture, philosophy as a field, philosophy as an attitude, and philosophy as a competence. By times these different meanings will share a common direction and will feed each other, at other times they will ignore one another or come into conflict.

Within the context of the choices which we have made, we will rather quickly address the first two meanings of philosophizing, that of culture and field, to subsequently delve ourselves deeper into the two last ones: that of attitude and of competence.

4. Philosophical culture

For many people, the primary meaning of the term philosophy, in memory of the courses we followed on school benches, of conferences we attended, of books we read, is that of a culture, with its authors, its doctrines, its schools, its eras, its consecrated ideas, its various conceptual tools. Philosophical discourse is generally learned and referenced, which can make it obscure to one who is not initiated. However, if each individual mind can hardly claim to reinvent the whole of mathematical science, how could it similarly reinvent the history of ideas, recreate the substantial contributions produced over the centuries by the slow work of generations and by the labor of illustrious geniuses? Are we not dwarves resting on the shoulders of giants? Great is the temptation to believe in one's own genius and to ignore our debts.

On the other hand, if all of this is about gaining independence of thought, must we not realize that the established concepts allow for many short-circuits of thought? Like mathematical or physical formulas, these referenced concepts allow one to avoid long explanations and, in this way, they are useful. But they also serve to freeze the mind, preventing it from thinking itself: they introduce new evidences. For, the tool never being neutral, it becomes easy, if not natural, to erect it into a dogma. Thus, Aristotelian or Kantian distinctions, though particularly useful and significant, readily induce the avoidance of problematization. As history

shows, it becomes difficult to give up or even to criticize the thought of these authors, which became as reliable and unavoidable as a reference dictionary. Fashion has its reasons which reason ignores. The artifice, a human specificity, a tool to distinguish nature and culture, is both a blessing and a damnation.

Thus, as we have said, just as it is impossible to recreate the entire history of mathematics alone – when it comes to the conception of forms and numbers, for example, the contributions of the ancients are extremely useful, and even necessary – we could not pretend to ignore this philosophical cultural heritage without depriving ourselves of crucial elements, essential to any thought worthy of that name, but also without ignoring the historical genesis of our own thinking, this long collective intellectual process of which we are the heirs. Access to philosophical culture allows us to become aware of ourselves and to structure our thought, provided that we do not glorify its composing elements, attributed to geniuses, without trying to see the close connection which these exceptional men entertained with common or conventional thought, even if philosophy could thus hurt itself against the banality of opinion.

Opinion is undoubtedly one of the most important handicaps for philosophical practice, as Parmenides had identified in his time. In the classical sense, because it proposes a semblance of thought, a hodgepodge of ready-made ideas, gleaned here and there without any distance or analysis, where everyone tends to repeat what others say without even noticing it. Opinion is common because it is banal and devoid of anything singular, because it involves no work or particular enterprise. Parmenides categorically opposes the 'pure orb of truth' to the 'opinions of mortals, in which there is nothing true or worthy of credit'.

In a different sense, more problematic, opinion hinders philosophy because it is the scarecrow, the Damocles sword that one feels weighing over oneself and which one can wield over others. Anyone daring to think for oneself, without going through the pitchforks of established authors and of referenced discourse, would be threatened with excommunication: he would belong to opinion. By extension, the same phenomenon happens with those who dare claim to originally interpret the thought of an author. Opinion is what would be considered false. But we also meet the opposite view: in order to philosophize, one would have to say what no one ever said, or to assert the opposite of what everyone says. One should not be surprised by the fact that professional philosophers easily proclaim anathema against one another.

Also, Plato warns us against easy ideas, against established words, he proposes a path that allows one to work on these ideas, to implement thought. Besides, while he criticizes the 'vulgar' opinion, he also criticizes the 'learned' opinion, the orthodoxy, which remains a mere opinion. Even if the philosopher escapes from the cave, from its darkness and illusions, to contemplate the truth which lies outside, he still feels obliged to return 'inside', so that his fellow citizens can benefit from his new gained lights and in order to confront his people. There is no question of taking refuge in some ivory tower, even if he will die out of this return to the 'real'. As

for the arguments of authority, they are constantly criticized or ridiculed by Socrates, more interested in the kind of singular confrontation that allows for the emergence of autonomous thinking than in mere knowing and in the rehashing of brilliant ideas, although he does not refrain, from time to time, to provide some elements of his own philosophical culture, or to impose some of his own intuitions. Since it is frozen, scholarly opinion is but an opinion. It no longer arises out of a genesis. It is no longer a work in progress. Hence, it does not question itself anymore.

Let's mention, to that effect, the intuition of Pascal in regard to opinion, when he claims that truth is truly to be found in opinions, but not where their bearers believe it to be. That is to say that opinion is not opposed to truth, which is nested at the heart of opinion in a rather confused manner, and to a lesser extent than believed by the one who is their vehicle. The consequence of that perspective is that access to truth can be gained by returning to opinion itself, by the work that it can do on its own material, by becoming aware of itself. It is no more by looking outside for some good and intelligent discourse, fake or possible, that philosophical work will proceed, but by a reflection, by a redoubling, by reflecting thought unto itself. Thus, philosophy entertains a dialectical relation to opinion. This is also what Kant tries to explain in his analysis of common sense, both the foundation of and an obstacle to philosophizing.

As we have already mentioned, our thought does not arise out of some spontaneous generation. It comes from both a personal history and a cultural and social genesis. Hence, if thought should consider the former, so should it also the latter. If the Chinese do not think like the Americans, and if the latter do not think like the French, it is because these cultural factors affect these singular beings, as is evidenced by the noteworthy differences between these various countries. It matters not if renown authors from a certain culture have shaped this culture, or if they are a 'typical product' of it, its defining representative: in any case, they inform and nourish the individual thought, who would be foolish to deprive itself of this input, even when, through this instantiation, it meets its own banality. It goes in the same way for authors who are foreign to us, which by their otherness will invite us to perceive our own singularity, to conceive of our specificity.

Thus, by abiding to our perspective, which is that of philosophical practice, or of a practical philosophy, the philosophical culture, the history of ideas, the comprehension of the major issues of debates of authors and schools, will ease our task to locate and decode our personal anchors as well as those of our interlocutors, to capture the dilemmas which inhabit them. Established conceptual operators will be useful, as technical tools which we should take interest in learning not for the sake of vain erudition, but because they simplify our work and help us become more precise and effective. This does not exclude the independence of free knowledge, quite the contrary. It sets us free from the weight of expectations, since it no longer matters to obey the injunctions of institutional opinion, to protect ourselves from specialists ever so ready to hit the cut and thrust over details, since we will henceforth use the

contributions of history as suits us, adapting them unreservedly to our will.

This leads us to quickly distinguish two types of relation to philosophical culture: the historicist and the pragmatic visions. The first one is more characteristic of the 'continental' vision, more metaphysical and focused on content, whereas the second is more inherent to Anglo-Saxon philosophy, more analytical and preoccupied with form. The latter, like science, or else technical knowledge, which it wishes to emulate and to model itself upon, boasts about its scientific nature, its efficiency and modernity. It is interested in the nature of discourse and in the modes of assessment of its validity, or else in the practical aspects of discourse. Continental philosophy rather tries to set up great universal and foundational patterns, conveying values and axiologies established a priori. Ethics is a visible battlefield of these two worldviews, where will be confronted pragmatic logics interested in the consequences of actions, and eudemonist logics, likely to promote virtues that state as postulates the nature of good and evil in themselves, in a more autonomous manner, detached from consequences. Very naturally, without thereby authorizing any automatism, the founding act rather looks towards the past, while efficiency is looking towards the future of thought, each of these two outlooks carries in itself the root of its own blindness.

In conclusion, on the cultural dimension of philosophizing, to put it into perspective, it is useful to recall the German concept of 'Bildung'. This term, developed in the XIXth century by philosophers such as Humboldt and Hegel, literally refers to the idea of education, to the formation of the self. This maturation of the subject refers to a kind of harmonizing process of the heart and mind, both of the individual and of society. This transformation of identity, its fulfillment, is brought about by testing the knowledge and beliefs of the subject, through a necessary confrontation with 'natural consciousness'. It is a perspective which goes against a certain ambient psychologism, where the 'nature' and 'character' of the individual are presented as intangible and unavoidable data of the subject. However, this concept does not exclude the plurality of talents and of personalities, this multiplicity – and the dialectical relationships which it entertains – being constitutive of the development of society. In fact, it includes a critical dimension in the relationship between the individual and society, in an ideal perspective. Thus, the idea is to humanize man, to develop his emotions as well as his intellectual capacities. It is not any kind of formal or erudite 'general culture', a display of knowledge and references, but a spiritual growth, existential and social. In this way, the 'Bildung' stands out just as much from a metaphysics of being than from some post-modern rejection of all universality.

5. Philosophical Field

The second meaning of philosophizing that we will propose is what we call the philosophical field or the philosophical domain. For, if philosophy

claims to be interested in everything, if nothing is theoretically foreign to it, it nonetheless has its favorite grounds. If some philosophers may seem more concerned with the methodology they develop than with the contents it fosters, as Socrates and his maieutic, ever ready to use all available means to question and engage a mind; Hegel and his dialectic, with the negation work it implies; or else Kant and his transcendental analytic; it remains true that content considerations are largely overwhelming methodological questions in the history of thought. One can argue that most philosophers entertain a thetical view of their work. This means that they are primarily defending a certain worldview, idealist, materialist, empiricist or utilitarian, and that they are thus putting forward certain concepts on which they will ground their 'system'. In regards to the problematic which they identify, they generally chose some specific options to approach them, positioning themselves against other philosophers of opposing perspectives, thus defining themselves through opposition or criticism. There are nevertheless some eclectic philosophers, like Leibniz, who claim to agree with all philosophers, except when he refuses the proposals of other philosophers, something which is moreover refuted by some of his positions.

What are these concepts, these problematics which define the philosophical field? Let us try to draw some markers, although the history of thought is marked by important modifications in this domain. Since narcissism obliges, without doubt, or because he is the key for everything else, since he is the thinking subject, man first ponders on man, in what can be called anthropology, or an existential concern. Who is he? What does he do? Where does he go? Is he simple or compounded? Is he mortal or immortal? Is he free or determined? What is he finality? Two other thematics are then compulsory, subsidiary to the first one but equally crucial. On the one hand, cosmology. Where does man live? What is this world? Are there multiple worlds? Is the universe finite or infinite? Has it been created or does it exist by itself? Then epistemology, which deals with means of knowing and truth. How can we answer our questions? Is our knowledge reliable? What are our guarantees of truth? Then metaphysics, which responds to our desire to go beyond evidence, beyond what is immediately perceptible by the senses, postulating that it is necessarily another prime reality, foundational or paradigmatic, which can account for the one familiar to us. Let us specify, however, that the order in which we are presenting these fields has no causal or chronological pretensions, since no order can be imposed as a universal model. What was there before the world and man? What causes observable phenomena? Is there a root cause? What is there beyond perceptible matter? What could escape time or constitute it? Do we have a soul? Next comes ethics, which from the opposition between good and evil questions the legitimacy of human acts and guides daily decisions, especially in relation to others. What should I do? What should we do? How to know what to do? Am I free to do as I want? What do I owe others? Then psychology, which tries to understand the functioning of the human mind, the tensions which animate it. Is the mind one or multiple? Can the mind

claim autonomy? What do we desire? How does the mind work? Is the mind subjected to diseases? How can we educate our minds? And finally, aesthetics, which cares about harmony, beauty, creativity and imagination, about the pleasure of the mind and of the senses. Why do some objects appeal to us? Do we all love the same things? Can taste be educated? What is beautiful, is it so in itself or because it pleases?

For the sake of simplification, we could use the traditional division between three disciplines: epistemology – formerly logic – which has truth as its object; moral, which has the good as its object; and aesthetic, whose object is the beautiful. These three transcendental concepts, true, good and beautiful, seem to structure the philosophical reflection throughout the era and places, and like most simple schemes, at the risk of reductionism, such a division is quite effective, even though these concepts are no longer in vogue or a formal level. In the same way, we could complexify the picture by adding fields to the scope of the philosophizing, which would emanate mainly out of modernity, such as political philosophy for example, or social philosophy, or again philosophy of the mind, linked to cognitive sciences.

But our concern, rather than seeking some exhaustivity, is above all to circumscribe the philosophizing, to apprehend its limits and exteriority, to be able to grasp it within a single mental operation. Like any categorization, ours, as the beacon of a process, allows for a better understanding of an object, or for a new awareness, by replacing and rethinking the singular idea within the framework to which it is supposed to belong. Without forbidding the emergence of disruptive singularities, this type of formalization makes it possible to find oneself and to envisage the implicitly contained relations, and hence the self-nature, of a given question. This includes the fact of having a precise glance at the particularity of a singular question, which would otherwise be drowned in an undifferentiated mass. Thus, by delimiting in a relatively arbitrary manner the philosophical field, we allow ourselves to keep in mind, as a provisional truth, a unifying principle serving as a work and thought hypothesis.

Chapter II

Philosophical Attitudes

Let us now enter this third meaning of philosophizing, more developed, where we will more specifically address what we call the 'practical' dimension of philosophizing.

1. Thinking in Hollow

The philosophical attitude is the way of being that one can consider as the condition of the philosophizing, the state of mind which enables its exercise. There are some attitudes that are more or less generally accepted, but we won't go so far as to pretend that they are universal. The history of philosophy is populated by individuals who take satisfaction in questioning the slightest point of agreement that might have hitherto been conceded, in order to mark for ever this harmony or consensus of the seal of their distinctive individuality. These general qualities would be, for example, the desire to know, which presupposes the consciousness of a certain ignorance, hence the desire to see this knowledge progress. Doubt is also such an attitude, though it is sometimes strangely articulated within a sustained dogmatism, when it forbids itself any risk-taking in regards to the slightest statement, however provisional. Zen philosophy calls it 'poison', due to its paralyzing effect on action and decision making. Another example is the suspension of judgement, which allows a problem to be examined with a relatively opened mind, which too often confines itself to considering adverse assumptions in order to understand them, while in the background being convinced of one's own. In this way, problematization, that is, the capacity to envisage the problems given by particular and divergent ideas, would be a more appropriate term, which by no means excludes bias. But we will see that further while discussing competencies, even if it is also an attitude. Astonishment appears to be another attitude almost universally accepted, which allows one to see with a renewed or amazed outlook what appears to others as routine banality, and has thus become invisible. For, if observation and analysis seem to be essential for philosophizing, they are skills to be acquired out of an attitude, which we could identify as availability, or attention, a source of astonishment. Indeed, the fact of distinguishing presupposes an increased attention where ordinary facts become astonishing because they are no longer taken for granted. The same applies for questioning which, before being a conceptual or analytical competence presupposes a 'mise en abyme' of the world of

knowledge and of the thinking subject, where nothing is taken for granted any longer. A kind of reoccurring childhood where nothing is given anymore, where the requirement of a why and how almost systematically applies to everything: the mind now operates in hollow, and not in full. As Socrates recommends, it must unlearn in order to think.

2. Contrary attitudes

In a second time, after the generally recognized philosophical attitudes, let's mention some particular attitudes, more subject to controversy, but sufficiently common or striking to be noticed. If only because they present an interesting and promising problem. The first one is the agonistic dimension of philosophizing, which feeds upon contradiction and incites confrontation. If it is present early on in Greece, in Heraclitus or Socrates, it is somewhat bracketed among the Stoics as well as in a tradition that could be called scientific, which is found, for example, in American pragmatism. For, it is not so much the confrontation between men and principles which is factoring the progression of thoughts anymore. Among the Stoics, it is rather the capacity to accept the world. In a way, it becomes a capacity to act on oneself by the very fact of this apprehension or understanding of reality. It is about 'taking unto oneself' rather than 'fighting' against. Within American pragmatism, as in the scientific method, it is collaboration and collective work that are put forward, something which we could call a 'complementarist' vision of diversity based on a certain sympathy. A thinker like Marx, inspired by Hegel, will nevertheless combine the ability to understand the world, consciousness, with a confrontation of this world against itself, the agonistic dimension finding its articulation and its meaning in the dialectical accomplishment of this world, through the mediation of man, himself historically kneaded by these conflicts. Acceptance of the world and conflict will be two crucial and often opposite primary philosophical attitudes, as Descartes will specify.

The same goes for 'distanciation', established by certain philosophers as a crucial condition of philosophizing. Phenomenological reduction is an example, which demands to go beyond the factual to grasp the general and conceptual issues of which the fact is only the symptom, a principle which refers to an ancient tradition for which the act of philosophizing, in its attempt to grasp the essential and the categorical removes it from the particular and the accidental. But again, such currents as nominalism, cynicism, positivism or existentialism, reject such an attitude, which grants concepts or universals a too great or factitious reality to anchor the subject more specifically in a concrete reality, or hardware. A last opposition of attitudes which needs to be mentioned, in our eyes, is that around humanism. Again, if concern for man and empathy for the thinking being – the only one to have access to reason or to philosophizing – seem to be self-evident, to the point of glorifying the human being by clearly distinguishing it from everything else which exists, especially from the animal world, this attitude is not totally generalizable.

Philosophies of suspicion, among others, have wished to show to what extent this particular power of man is the cause and principle of his defeat, to the point of making him a being most hateworthy among all, as we shall find in Schopenhauer. Although Pascal or Augustine also summon this human weakness, but to testify to its glorious specificity. On this point, the relation to the divine will often misrepresent the result, for man will be at once the only being capable of God, subject to grace, and for this same reason, he becomes fallible and pervert in his repeated rejection of the good. On another note, Arendt will show us the evil potential that humans contain in their everyday banality.

3. Radicality

From this, let us conclude as a common attitude, to a certain radical posture of the act of philosophizing. For, even when he claims to be very attached to the singular, the philosopher tends to anchor himself in a certain worldview, from which he will read and decode facts, events, things and beings, seeking a certain coherence, if not a justification of its general choices a priori. In this sense, he will always be ready to pursue and denounce the incoherence of others, even though he, like Montaigne, has attempted to develop a certain eclecticism conceived as an alternative to dogmatism and the systematizing spirit. Or, again, like Nietzsche, who developed a theory of gay Knowledge while criticizing the heaviness of philosophy, and yet was unable to refrain from advocating a heavily backed thesis, a very demanding one, full of consequences. This radical posture, however, sometimes claims a middle ground position, conceived as an ideal of wisdom. Thus, in Aristotle, virtue is theoretically stranded between two excesses: the prudent, for example, stands at an equal distance between the rash and the fearful. In Kant, the critical position, echoing Cartesian doubt, also attempts to place the right attitude in a 'neither, nor' between dogmatism and skepticism: neither a naive, blissful and rigid acceptance, nor a systematic, suspicious and fearful refusal. Such a critical perspective emanates from a universal mistrust of a priori judgments, but it invites us to probe the basis and conditions of their possibility. We may however ask ourselves, whether in Descartes or in Kant, if the refusal of the argument of authority has not given way to a kind of unbridled power of singular reason, to new evidences, perhaps more complex, or even more legitimate, which even though they emanate from the mind of this very individual and proudly proclaim the autonomy of singular reason and of the individual, do they not fall into other more subtle or modern forms of traditional dogmatism. Until postmodernism, which tries to reduce to a sinful act any adherence to rationality and universality.

4. Acquired Ignorance

Among these specific attitudes, dear to different thinkers or currents of thought, there are some on which we would like to dwell because they seem particularly conducive. We could name the first acquired ignorance, humility, or sobriety. As we have already mentioned, the term philosophy stems from an acknowledgement of lack and from the desire to fill this gap. However, throughout the history of thought, a phenomenon has gradually been established, attributable to the success of science: the certainty and dogmatism connected with the systematizing spirit and their cortege of established truths. Since time immemorial, more than one patented philosopher had no qualms to assert a certain number of non-negotiable truths, non-problematizable in his view. Especially in the last two centuries of 'philosophy of the professors'. For, it is no longer a question of wisdom whose quest is open or infinite, but of the efficacy of a thought or of an axiology, both on the level of knowledge and on the level of morality. To be sure, every thought, however interrogative and little assertive it may be, necessarily holds some affirmations which serve as its postulate. But it is nonetheless true that at the level of the attitude, that of the relation to ideas, certain specific patterns more naturally induce a feeling of indubitable certainty, particularly when it comes to the elaboration of a system, while others rather advocate a state of systematic uncertainty whose implications shall be consequent.

Let us take as an example the principle of the *Learned Ignorance* of Nicolas of Cusa, which consists largely in asserting that ignorance is a necessary virtue, which is acquired and allows one to think, for every thought worthy of the name is but a conjecture, an approximation, which always demands to be examined with a scrutinizing and critical eye. This, moreover, coincides with Popper's more recent idea, with its principle of 'falsification', for which science is precisely characterized by the fact that every proposition can be called into question, contrary to dogma, the act of faith, a certainty which is rather of a religious nature. For Leibniz, it will rather be a matter of worrying, of promoting this uneasiness which forbids peace, because the latter signs the death of thought.

5. Harshness

Another common attitude: rigor, or harshness. The rigorous logic of a Kant, in which each term is defined within an implacable mechanism, does not encourage such a distancing or 'mise en abyme' of thought. The attitude of the question and of problematization is not that of the answer and of the definition. However, the latter, despite a quest for certainty, knows its own legitimacy, through its demand for rigor, if only because philosophizing also means protecting a discourse from itself, so as to constitute it. This involves both commitment and questioning. The elaboration of a system implies to establish an architecture in which the concepts and the propositions fit into each other throughout the

development of this thought. And as Leibniz explains, the harder the path in space and time, the more difficult it is for thought to remain coherent with itself. The quality of this architecture will define the consistency of thought, beyond the very content of this thought. It goes in the same way with the disciples of an author, who will verify their interpretation by the yardstick of the amplitude of thought that serves as a referent. And if the risk is great to fall into the trap of dogmatism engendered by the argument of authority, the typical example of which is medieval scholasticism in the quasi-pathological relation that it maintained with the thought of Aristotle, a philosopher whose propositions were for centuries considered incontestable, let us not forget that the inverse problem of an unbridled thought, which can unswervingly affirm anything and make say anything, is just as calamitous. And when Nietzsche writes that the philosopher has to proceed like a banker, 'To be dry, clear, without illusion', he tries to tell us that words and thoughts have a precise value, which one should not take lightly. Thus, the harshness that can be blamed on the philosopher is also a quality which is not self-evident, even if here again Nietzsche does not shy away from contradiction by criticizing the philosophical asceticism and the laborious dimension of the Socratic approach which requires to be held accountable for the least term or the slightest expression. This same rigor demands that we hear what we say when we say it, hear the 'truth of our opinions', as Pascal says. Thus, rigor demands an attachment to reality that must go beyond that of sincerity, of the desire for appearance, of the desire to be right or of the sense of ownership. If it does not fall into dogmatism, rigor may incarnate a real challenge for being and thought, although on the pretext of scientificity it risks obscuring and crushing any thought, intuition and creativity.

6. Authenticity

This leads us to another philosophical virtue: authenticity, which we would like to distinguish from sincerity. It relates to courage, tenacity, and will, in opposition to the inclination and complaisance of opinion, and not to some gentle and momentary feeling. It belongs to the affirmation of the singular, in its conflict with otherness, with the whole, with the opacity of being, in its conflict with obstacles and adversity. It is undoubtedly one of the primary forms of truth, which we shall call singular truth, or truth of the subject. It is the whole being, but in its singular form, which is its vector and substrate, and not some mere discourse. It is the one whom one hears murmurs behind the Kantian injunction of the *Sapere aude*, 'Dare to know!', that is, 'Dare to think!' Dare to know what you think, or else you will not be able to know and learn. And for this, your thought must express itself through words, it must be objectified, become an object for itself. It is this demand which emerges behind Descartes' recommendation enjoining us to continue our journey in the event of uncertainty of the mind: the 'provisional morality'. And more squarely

expressed by Kierkegaard, when he asserts to us that there is no truth but subjective truth. Authenticity is what makes us say that a person is 'true', beyond or below discourse, or through discourse. Without consideration for a kind of truth or for some a priori universality, we simply ask ourselves if this person assumes his own discourse, till the end, insofar as this 'end' has a meaning. Even through its contradictions and unconsciousness, and perhaps in spite of them, the being cuts itself a passage and forges itself. He will measure his bankruptcy or his lie in proportion to his concessions, his small internal calculations. As absurd as his being might be in the eyes of the world and in his own eyes, he pursues his destiny, he perseveres in his being, as Spinoza would say. This 'instinct of truth' allows us to assert, despite the risks of errors and conflicting judgments. It is this *parrhesia*, this frankness, this freedom of speech, the truth-telling whose practice always threatens to defeat the social bond, which Foucault calls 'the courage of truth.'

7. Availability

Faced with this authenticity, difficult to live, because often unbearable for others, let us see a third philosophical quality, the opposite, which we shall call availability, openness, or receptivity. It is about being there, being present in the world, adhering to what is other. For, if authenticity tends to be deaf to otherness, availability is completely acquired to it. It is so in two different ways: to be available like the tiger on the lookout, or like leaves in the wind. In this distinction, only the outcome of the case varies, carried by the nature of being. No more than the leaf, is the tiger 'autonomous': it does not decide in the last instance to leap on its prey, its 'tigerness' takes care of everything. Like the tiger, the leaves carried by the wind marry the slightest roughness of being, it is carried by reality, but more fortuitously. Although it can be said that the tiger, unlike the leaf, is animated by an intention, which makes it less available. Even though his intention generates his availability.

This availability can be conceived in different ways. Like the relationship between self and other: the presence of the world, the presence of others, or the presence of all that can become a tool, of all that can be instrumentalised, as Heidegger hears and criticizes it. Moreover, it is about the self-availability of self: the opening up of oneself to the world, a self that can be reduced to the status of mere opening, an interstice through which the flow of beings and things passes, as tentatively described by the Taoist vision which, to the Western and voluntarist mind, will sometimes appear as a passive and impotent attitude. Or else it is about the availability of oneself to oneself, that is, a concern for oneself, as in Socrates, Montaigne, Foucault or even in Buddhist thought.

However, for those to whom this attitude would seem fatalistic or passive, let us ask whether reading a text or listening to a speech, or the vision of a show, does not require such availability. How many times do

we say that we do not understand this or that speech, when it is not a problem of understanding, but only a refusal of acceptance? A refusal to change place or position, even if only for a moment. To think, to engage in dialogue with oneself, as Plato prescribes it, does it not presuppose a form of alienation? If I am not willing to be myself momentarily, how can I think? If I am not ready to take on the deviation of alterity, if I cling to myself like a drowned man to a buoy, how can I pretend to deliberate? If my self and the thoughts which belong to it are so obvious, how could this conversion, which is at the heart of the philosophical dynamics, take place? To be available is to be split: to be listening to the world is to accompany others in their journey, it is even to precede them in their own way to show them or to avoid them the pitfalls and other obstacles it entails, as Socrates practices it with his interlocutors. For, there is no royal way. The path that one chooses is necessarily muddy and strewn with ruts. To accept to follow another direction is to know that ours is not better off, to risk learning something and to consider new horizons.

Close to this more radical receptivity, we find contemplation, 'the other' way of being, distinct from action. For, the one who acts does not have time to contemplate, his mind is too busy to produce, to survive, to work. He is too engaged in the affairs of this world. He is perhaps even too busy thinking. Thus, in Aristotle or Plato, the contemplation of the good, the beautiful, or the true is a disposition per excellence of the intellect worthy of the name: he who has time, or who takes time. From this comes the concept of liberal arts, such as music, rhetoric or mathematics, those activities of the free man, who has time to think because he is not forced to work. He who contemplates is in the temple, a space which, etymologically, lies between heaven and earth: he looks attentively, he is absorbed in the view of the object into an almost mystical attitude; he expects nothing from the world except to be able to be seen.

The Greek term 'epoche', taken up among other things by phenomenology, somewhat captures this availability. It describes this mental action, this moment of thought or contemplation, in which are suspended all our judgments, our knowledge, our convictions, our a priori, whatever form they may be. This theoretical 'mise en abyme' may involve in the same way a suspension of action, mental or physical. A distancing from the very existence of the world and its nature. Our own consciousness is thus subjected to criticism, to a questioning, to the scrutiny of doubt. Not to condemn it to the limbo of an eternal absence of judgment, but to recast its paradigms, its foundations, its modalities. The idea of judgment is not abandoned as an inherent source of error, but momentarily suspended in order to examine its legitimacy. We are far from the radicality of some Pyrrhonism, determining that we cannot trust either the senses or the reason enjoining us to remain impassive and without opinion, thus condemning us to *aphasia*, this mutism of thought. Although such wisdom is undoubtedly one of the paths leading to *ataraxia*, this absence of trouble and suffering. It is this momentary suspension summoned by Descartes as the epistemic principle of 'methodical doubt'.

In Husserl, this will be articulated through the 'phenomenological reduction', a principle which avoids the pitfalls of our various beliefs – naive or constructed – concerning the existence of the world, in order to examine phenomena as they originally and purely appear to consciousness.

8. Prudence

The last, relatively collective, philosophical virtue that we would like to address is prudence. It is this prudence which is supposed to make us perceive the dangers which are waiting us, and which might, therefore, induce us to inaction, out of fear, from the principle of precaution. Prudence does not like unnecessary risks, and from there one can easily slip into the rut and conclude that any risk is superfluous. This is true of our 'good students', big or little, who will hardly assert anything that is not perfect: that would not be complete, that would not be irreproachable, which would not be the faithful reflection of the extent of their thought. In trying to foresee the unfortunate consequences of our actions, we will want to avoid them, and in order to simplify our lives, for more security, we will abstain. As every word involves some risk taking, better to remain silent, especially if others listen to us.

But, besides that prudence which resembles a chilly and bourgeois morality, that unworthy lukewarmness which St. Paul condemns with impetuosity, what more vigorous meaning can we give to this term? It is, however, one of the cardinal virtues: it merely invites us to think before we speak and act, to decide conscientiously, to do what is right, rather than to react impulsively or inconsiderately. Kant is interested in this practical and ancient wisdom: for him, it is a skill, one that makes us choose the means leading to the greatest welfare. Prudence presupposes clarity of judgment and of mind, it forms the citizen, it sometimes belongs to politics even more than to morality. But if philosophy is a practice, as we understand it, then philosophical art must also confine itself to this prudence, which waits patiently and seizes the opportune moment, which seizes the best means, for the sake of efficiency, this other form of truth. Like nature, which proceeds with a principle of minimal action.

Indeed, Plato distinguishes the politics from the philosopher by the 'kairos', the seizure of the opportune moment, a crucial modality of efficiency, unlike the philosopher who 'aristocratically' ignores temporality. But after all, if he invites the king to become a philosopher, he also invites the philosopher to become king, to be political: that is, to grasp the limits of his being in space and time. All truth is not good to say, at anytime and to anyone, says Jankelevitch; but to know what to say, what can be said, how to say it, to whom to say it, when to say it, is it not also part of the truth? Truth is collective, it is neither singular nor transcendental, say the pragmatists, and no doubt in this they better assume the practical dimension of philosophizing, which is not a simple knowledge but a know-

how, a knowing how to be, how to act, of which prudence is a constitutive virtue.

Attitudes are skills. The origin is the same, the meaning almost identical. With the exception that the first refers to being, to knowing how to be, while the second refers to action, to knowing how to do. It remains to be seen whether the action must determine the being, or whether the being must determine the action. Again, as a matter of attitude or as an act of faith, this positioning will determine both the content of the philosophy taught and the way of teaching it, the need to teach it, the relationship to the other, the relationship to oneself and to the world. To fully assume this problem, we must not deny that philosophizing has a subject: ourselves, or the other. This is an observation which prevents us from speaking for philosophy and authorizes us to talk only in the reduced perspective of a singular being, a singular word. But here again, this amounts to advocating a specific attitude which cannot escape the criticism of those who wish to escape from it.

9. Synthesis of philosophical attitudes

In guise of a synthesis, let us add this little summary that we had written for our pedagogical work. It captures all the attitudes essential to philosophical practice in a teaching setting. The attitudes in question are cognitive and existential ones, which must be distinguished from moral attitudes, although they can reach them. The idea is to make oneself suitable so that reflexive activity can be exercised.

Resting

To calm the body and the mind, to calm down, to silence the hubbub of the spirit, to emerge from the precipitation of thought and the urgency of speech. To do this, the teacher must monitor and moderate the pace he gives to the task, whether it be a lesson, a written work or a discussion, so that students become aware of their own functioning and act more deliberately.

The acquired ignorance

Introduce a part of uncertainty into class work, moving from a pattern of knowledge transmission, the actual knowledge, to the implementation of hypotheses, the process of thought. It is a question of being able to abandon our own opinions, to suspend our judgment, even if only for a rigorous and critical examination. To do this, the teacher must no longer confine himself to the scheme of the 'right answer', unique, absolute and omnipotent, to work on the process of reflection, on common reflection and problematization.

Authenticity

Daring to think and say what one thinks, to venture on hypotheses without worrying about anxieties or seeking the approval of the class or of

the teacher; without being undermined by doubt. It is also about being responsible for what we say, what we think, what we do, in a rigorous and coherent way. To value this singular thought, the teacher should encourage more timid students, either orally or in writing, invite everyone to complete their idea in spite of the consequences, clearly, to ensure that they are understood, and prevent any collective manifestation of disapproval or mockery that would interfere with the process.

Empathy / Sympathy

To develop the capacity to put oneself in the place of others in order to understand them (empathy), to feel attraction towards others (sympathy), to decenter oneself; a state of mind which makes pupils available to others, comrades or teacher, willing to hear a foreign speech without prejudice or animosity, but with interest. It is a question of introducing cognitive rather than emotional relationships, based on reason, which does not imply to identify with the other, to feel what he feels or to necessarily be in agreement with him, nor to reject his person, but to understand his emotions and ideas. For this, the teacher will have to invite the class to become aware of the problematic relations between students and to work on that which generates parasitic frictions.

Confrontation

To develop the capacity to confront the thoughts of others and one's own, to engage in criticism and debate, without trying to seek agreement or consensus at all costs, without minimizing or glorifying one's own thoughts or that of others. It is not a matter of respecting ideas or opinions in themselves, but of respecting reflexive activity, which implies replacing soft tolerance with a certain vigor. To do this, the teacher should invite students not to fear each other, to reconcile students with the concept of criticism, so that they take this activity as a game or exercise and not as a threat.

Astonishment

Learning to accept and acknowledge surprise, one's own surprise and that of others, in the face of the unexpected, in the face of difference or opposition, in order to perceive what is problematic and to grasp its stakes. Without this astonishment, everything becomes routine, thought is blunted, everyone is turned unto himself and his own platitude, everything is only opinion and subjectivity or certainty and objectivity. To do this, the teacher must put forward the diversity of perspectives and tighten the relationships between ideas in order to generate a dynamic tension, producing new hypotheses.

Trust

Having confidence in others and in oneself, without thinking that it is a matter of defending anything: one's image, ideas, person. Without this trust, everyone will distrust others, will try not to answer them, will refuse to admit obvious errors or aberrations, because they will suspect a hidden

agenda, because they will be afraid of being caught in wrongdoing or humiliated. This trust is a factor of autonomy both for oneself and for others. For this, the teacher must create a climate of trust where error is dedramatized, where one can laugh about absurdities, where a beautiful idea can collectively be appreciated, whoever the author might be.

Chapter III

Deepening

After knowledge and attitudes, the third meaning of philosophizing, or the third modality of its definition, would be its operativity. To approach it from this angle, we will use a term derived from pedagogy: skills, which imply a know-how, because they formulate both the requirements and the criteria of this know-how. That is to say, philosophy is here conceived as an art, as a technique constituted through a procedure or a set of procedures, or as a treatment which we applied unto ideas, and we are interested here in this treatment in itself more than in particular ideas. Therefore, it is philosophical formalism, not as a content, that is, as established concepts, but as a path.

The first aspect of this journey is to deepen thought, to deepen ideas. Of course, we start from the principle that in the mind of every person there are always ideas, there is always a minimum of knowledge which we will name opinions. Though this opinion may, as Plato distinguishes it, belong to the 'right' opinion, also called the 'true' opinion, or to the common opinion. The first is distinguished from the second by the work already done, and in this sense it is more reliable, although it does not fundamentally change anything in the process that remains to be accomplished. For this thinker, truth is first of all a demand, a tension, a call, a power which transcends every particular idea, and which in this sense can never be an idea, nor another, nor even a system of thought, no more than an approach or an attitude, although these latter two conceptions are already qualitatively closer to the concept of truth. Hence, truth cannot but be a dynamic, no matter the point from which one leaves, thus the important remains the requirement that one imposes unto oneself.

To deepen thus becomes the permanent expectation of a desire to go further into a content in order to work on it. This expectation results from acquired ignorance, from this knowledge which one knows one ignores, from this consciousness which makes us say that we do not know what we say. From then on, every word that we hear, from our mouth or from that of others, any proposition that we make to ourselves, will require to be deepened, that is, dug, amplified, emphasized, dramatized, clarified, etc. But in a more precise and concrete way, let us see what this deepening means, let us examine its different ways of operating, which are not infinite in number and which it seems useful to circumscribe and delimit. For the indeterminate, and its infinite appearance, tend to dazzle the mind which then believes that its operations are, or ought to be, a mysterious 'genius', the only human potential capable of reaching such a level of operativity, a power almost divine, alone capable of penetrating a

highly reserved domain. To delimit, on the contrary, is to establish technical bases, known procedures, repeatable and relatively assured, and thus reassuring and useful. When everything is possible, oddly everything becomes impossible, by a kind of mirror effect in which the mind drowns in the abyss which it has generated itself: the creation of a space devoid of landmarks, where all constraint is absent, which certainly gives the mind a sense of freedom, but also disturbs it to the point of paralyzing it.

1. To Explain

To deepen, on one hand, is to explain. To explain is to go out of the fold, to make visible what was folded up – folded unto itself – for this withdrawal makes the reality or the entity in question inaudible and invisible to external gaze, even to the very look that carries it. The encounter with another remains a privileged opportunity to make visible the invisible, or to make the visible the visible. At the same time because the other, the similar one that acts as a mirror, if he assumes and plays his role adequately, will decree this opacity, will emphasize this opacity, will draw our attention to it, so that we overcome this feeling of habit and personal of comfort that tends to blind us. “I do not understand what you are saying!” he says, if he does not fear our inertia and reserve, if he is not afraid of looking like a nerd. From then on, we can either reiterate with stubbornness the clarity and the evidence of our remarks, or take charge in varying degrees of the feeling of impossibility that is confessed to us, by advancing some new proposition whose function will be to illuminate what has until then remained in the shadow. That is to say, to treat the blind spots or the apparent contradictions. A legitimate refusal to explain may oppose this request, for pedagogical or existential reasons, in full awareness of the cause, or by some psychic or intellectual deficit: by inability to go further or by the coil of some defensive and unconscious mechanism.

To explain is to transpose in other words, in other places, to develop what is simple, to bring together what is distant, to place in a context, to offer examples and to analyze them. It is to transform the place, the words and the circumstances. It is to study the reverberation of a light ray when it is reflected on what it is not. And this is why it is a question of deepening, since it is a matter of moving, expanding, multiplying, amplifying and expanding. To explain is to develop, to envisage the consequences of a proposition, to establish analogies which enable us to see how the form of our remarks can under other unexpected heavens regain its reality. To explain is to clarify: it can be to complexify, but also to simplify. It is to carry out various and contradictory operations in order to better see and understand, to construct thought at the risk of deviating. Thus, to deepen is also to transgress the limits that an initial intention had been assigned, regardless of whether these limits are intended or not, whether temporary or not. There are moments for everything. As Descartes invites us, let us know how to cut out and to

take an idea only for what it is, for what it offers, without worrying about the multiplicity of its possible and actual ties. But we can also extend infinitely the virtuality of an initial meaning.

Criticism of the explanation

Nevertheless, let us point out here that the implicit must not be considered only as a defect or a lack: it also has its own reasons for being. If, from a conceptual point of view or from a communication perspective, criticism of the implicit – especially because of the lack of clarity that accompanies it – can be considered legitimate, let us see how an explanation is sometimes neither legitimate nor desired. Let us first invoke the limits and the abuses of the ideology of ‘transparency’, a scientist vision that pretends to make every phenomenon visible to everybody, be it a singular or an universal totality. This seems to us to be neither desirable nor possible: the shadow part of a discourse or of a being remains necessary and inevitable, although the attempt at transparency is also salutary. As always, regarding knowledge, paradox is to be expected: if knowledge is a power whose desire, constitutive of being, is no longer legitimate, the temptation of omnipotence that accompanies it inevitably transforms the smallest part of this power into an abuse of power, for this power turns back unto itself and against the spirit that engenders it to annihilate the dynamics that engendered it. In guise of a conclusion: surely one should explain, and try to explain, but by keeping in mind the factitious side of the explanation, which often looks more like a repetition or a rationalization a posteriori than like a real clarification. In this way, by working on problematization, one will try to show the importance of the critical perspective and of the ‘mise en abyme’ in order to really see the truth of any talk.

For now, let’s evoke the pedagogical objection that we would make towards the explanation attempt, in particular that of the master to the student, which also involves that of the speaker to the listener. Our Western tradition generally favors the full rather than the void. Absence and ignorance have rather negative connotations, while presence and fullness reassure us: they induce a feeling of fullness while absence causes lack and pain. Thus, the teacher feels compelled to tell everything, both because he feels obliged to ‘do everything’ and because he is supposed to ‘know everything’. Unlike the more oriental perspective, in which the void is also a reality, indeed the source, the founding reality, or the matrix. There, the teacher can limit himself to sending a simple sentence to the pupil which the latter should be meditating upon, analyzing it, for it is he who will be responsible to find its meaning. This reversal of responsibility forbids the principle of ‘giving the beak’ which our pedagogical tradition can often embody, in which the author of an idea feels obliged to provide the ‘notice’, to explain himself, to give accounts.

To pursue our critique of the explanation till the end, let us also consider another possibility: the contemplation of the idea, taken here as the articulation of a proposition or of a series of propositions. Let us

momentarily distinguish the initial idea of the explanation that could be given. It may be interesting to emphasize the hiatus between these two moments for two different reasons. The first is to consider that an idea has a form in itself, a life of its own, a morphological, syntactic and semantic specificity. And if this specificity goes without saying in poetry, it seems to us that the same can happen in philosophy. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why it may be interesting to know or to remember, in its original version, in the text, or even in its original language, a given formulation. This philosophical aestheticism, in spite of the abuses that could be made of it, nevertheless finds its meaning in the singularity of individual language. Ironically, it is also for the same reason that one can justify the fact that each listener or reader of a text reformulates in his own way a proposition read or heard, in order to ensure that he has appropriated the ideas in question. Be that as it may, this moment of contemplation of an idea, the same as for a painting or for a musical piece, where one observes and allows oneself to be penetrated before analyzing, judging or reacting, is a pure moment of receptivity, of availability, which ensures one to receive as much as possible from the expressed speech.

Contemplation

The second reason we give to this hiatus is that every interpretation, every explanation is, like every translation, a betrayal, since it necessarily transforms: it transposes, it supports, it delays. It is a betrayal that we must accept, for we must always be able to go over our mourning for the originary, whether it is that of the word of another or that of one's own. A living word is a betrayed word: its implementation and its operativity are necessarily reductive and limited acts, even if their deployment in alterity, an act of alienation and denaturation, could not be more natural and necessary. Nevertheless, we must be aware of the role played by this transposition, especially when we move from the concrete to the abstract, or from the idea to the example. Admittedly, to refuse an interpretation on the pretext that it is an interpretation would incite an excessive formalism and rigidity. But, in the same way, to assume a moment of hesitation before engaging an original discourse, in a particular context that does not properly belong to it, is a measure of intellectual hygiene which shows respect for a word which is unique and singular. This invites us to problematize the meaning, not to limit ourselves to a single reading, even if it were the author himself who would invite us to this particular understanding of his own words, to an exegesis of his own text.

Let us take, as an example, the interest of contemplation as an alternative mode of identification to mere explanation. Often, in discussions, a person engages in an abrupt or broad explanatory response to the statement of a question or proposal. But it quickly becomes clear, for its listeners and sometimes also for that person, that the original intent was abandoned. Carried away by his own ideas or emotions, the orator forgets where he comes from, he does not know how to keep his mind fixed on a topic, a pole established in his mind as a fixed star, a

specific problem to be treated. Keeping an idea in mind is a form of constraint, linked to memory and concentration, independent of any other idea that would come to one's minds afterwards. Somewhat borrowed from the principle of choral singing, or from the improvisation of jazz, the challenge is, on the one hand, to be able to think oneself, and, on the other hand, to hear what is going on outside. To be able to simultaneously think the originary and the subsequent, the inside and the outside, a given and a progression, a center and a periphery, an idea and its explanation. This, it seems to us, is the double perspective which the mind must learn to assume, from which it must operate, as the condition of a genuine thought: that which takes alterity into account, that which knows reality as a principle of exteriority, which protects us from ourselves, an internal safeguard which we shall try never to forget.

2. To argue

Arguing is another important form assumed by the work of thought deepening. To argue is already to take a stand, to have taken a position, since it is a matter of justifying, of proving, and of acknowledging the motives of an idea or of a thesis. Even if this position would be momentary and artificial, it amounts to acceptance or endorsement: it must account for the existence or the veracity of a given idea. To justify is to make a proposition just, to do justice to a proposition which otherwise would not be entitled to this status, which otherwise would be considered unjustified, even unjust.

The question now is whether arguing necessarily allows us to go deeper. In a certain way, we will confirm that yes, it does, since in attempting to consolidate a thesis in the eyes of an audience, real or imaginary, a number of other ideas will be reported which, through the effort of showing or convincing, will support the initial idea. However, the nature of the argument may vary enormously. An argumentation consists in producing one or more propositions, facts or ideas, in order to justify an initial statement. But is it to prove that one is right, in a rhetorical way? Or, is it otherwise to better understand the reasons, the origin, and the legitimacy of an initial statement, in a philosophical way? Arguments can appeal to the pathos of the listeners, to their feelings; it can refer to authorities, artificial or abusive; it can use formulas, twists and other rhetorical tricks intended only to obtain the assent of the interlocutor, to weaken his resistance rather than to make him reflect, by referring to conventions or commonplaces, by pleading rather than digging deeper. These are the many procedures that flatten the discourse more than they deepen it, that put the mind of the listener to sleep rather than engaging it in thinking.

The more the attempt to argue is addressed to a large audience, the more it universalizes its intent, thus distancing itself from an warned and predictable public, the less likely it will fall into the trap of the quest for assent that proximity encourages. If the argument is intended for human reason in its generality, as far as it is possible, a regulative ideal which it

is useful to keep in mind, it will be more attentive to, and critical of, its own content. Nevertheless, as advertising communication, political propaganda and religious proselytism demonstrate, one can also address everyone by arguing abusively, by trying to instrumentalize the other, by turning him into a client, a supporter or an adept, reducing him to a mere object of some desire or a will. And let us not forget, as we have said, that an argument emanates from a subjective position, which tries to justify itself, or to criticize an adverse position, which amounts to the same thing.

Contrary to the analytical or logical approach, which purports to objectively examine the content or the consequences of a discourse, the argument is already engaged in a vectorial matrix, which orients and directs it. Moreover, argumentation is supposed to operate in the domain of the contingent, of the probable, precisely where logic or analysis have ceased to operate: argumentation is not a matter of necessity, of logic, said Aristotle, but of dialectic, which for the author remains less reliable. In the end, it is a kind of worst-case scenario. Yet, it is a last resort which is unavoidable, since reality does not present itself to us in the form of a logical system, since our knowledge of the world constitutes a disparate and often contradictory whole.

Thus, the argument, in a philosophical sense, allows us to go deeper, since it gives the reasons for an idea, it considers its consequences, establishes parallels and analogies, summons examples, analyzes content, establishes links and so on. But its power is limited, insofar as it does not problematize, it does not distance itself from itself, or it does not enter into a critical relation with itself. Nevertheless, if the argumentation remains a part of a wider process of thought, then it will play its limited but constitutive and essential role in the elaboration of thought. Thought will engender itself, not in a thought in which the games are already played, where the dice are piped, but in a thought that remains capable of contemplating its own negativity, its own nothingness, an argument worthy of that name. Failing this, it will remain in flat evidence, in front of itself. It will confine itself to a sort of tautology. The whole difficulty lies in the paradox of the mind which, by engaging itself, can at the same time nourish its own limit, fortifying an ego which may end up believing itself invincible, or examine these very limits instead, enabling their outreach, the possibility of being released of them. Digging is both building foundations, but also sinking at the risk of getting bogged down. For, if the argument consolidates, we can also say that it conditions: it determines the meaning, anchors it, freezes it, and in addition it pretends to demonstrate the veracity of the statement by proceeding that way.

To Prove

To argue is also to prove, by a demonstration which attests the necessity of a proposition, by establishing a bundle of proofs which supports its probability; by proposing a reasoning by the absurd which forces us to conclude the impossibility of the contrary; by exposing inevitable

presuppositions or consequences, which sharpen and facilitate our judgment, which legitimize our intimate conviction a little more. And if argumentation does not prove the veracity of a saying, it at least makes it possible to consolidate its content. The hypothetico-deductive process, which invites us to think of 'if this, then that' feeds on these sequences which alone constitute a good part of the frame of our thought, which structures the matrix of our ideas. Surely, the act of arguing does not always prove, for want of necessity, but the mere attempt to make manifest the coherence of the ideas hiding behind ideas, gives an increased legitimacy to the production of our thought, an additional degree of truth or verisimilitude, by bringing to light the genesis of the idea. The whole thing is not to believe everything we are advancing, not to lose sight of the fragility of our being and its concoctions.

Moreover, the argument often takes on the form of a condition, for example according to the following form: "I carry an umbrella when it rains." The wearing of the umbrella is justified by the rain, but the rain is only occasional, which results in not always justifying the wearing of the umbrella. The whole idea then is to know whether it is raining or not, to predict whether it will rain or not. Involvement is, moreover, an important modality of the argument: "I do this or that because otherwise..." One argues by invoking the consequences considered undesirable or the absence of consequences considered desirable. The point is then to know if there is a relation of necessity, of probability only or even of simple possibility. Is the link strong or is it tenuous? A common mistake is to overestimate the quasi-consubstantiality of the cause and effect relation, of the act and its consequence, by underestimating the fragility of the argument, being carried away by conviction or by the desire to convince. One can here evoke Hume's criticism of the idea of causality, which brings this 'founding principle' back to a mere subjective opinion. An argument certainly supports, but it necessarily highlights the fragility of a presupposition, and, in this postulate, is undoubtedly articulated the fundamental difference between the rhetorical argument and the philosophical one: the first one wins adhesion, the second establishes an area and shows its limits.

3. Analyzing

The analysis is the division of a physical or idealistic totality into its constituent parts, in order to examine and determine their values and relationships.

To analyze, in its most immediate sense, whether in chemistry or philosophy, is to dissolve, to pass from the complex to the simple, to decompose the whole into its parts. To do this, we have to be able to think of these parts as parts, which raises the problem of the name, of the concept, of the etymology. On the other hand, we can think of the assembly of these parts together, of the rules that order this assembly, which very naturally leads us both to the problems of language and to those of logic. Analyzing consists mainly in examining the content of what

we already have, in interpreting its constitutive meaning, without claiming to add anything else. It is in this that Kant opposes the analytical judgment to the synthetic judgment, the second bringing in new concepts, external to the initial proposition. In this sense, we come closer to the explanation, except that the analysis is no doubt more restrictive, since it cannot seek anything outside of itself. This prohibition may be perceived as painful because of its relatively ascetic character. To examine words without pretending to 'go elsewhere'; to let go of the mourning for this 'moving forward', so dear to the hearts of men; to ignore one's own intuitions, however brilliant it may be; is not always easy. Especially when it comes to examining and expounding our own words, to grasp their limitation, to see the magnitude of what they deny by omission; without pretending to resort to the deceiving 'what I meant' or 'what I would like to add'; might be lived as a painful moment wherein the somewhat crude and limited truth of our own words hits us.

The analysis runs directly counter to the feeling of omnipotence inexorably linked to speech. The latter always preserves its pretensions to the status of truth, always claims to be on the right side ethically, whatever the nature of this ethic might be. For this reason, analysis will often appear as a reductive operation, which obliges us to take hold of a definite meaning, even if very short, maybe a simple sentence, to examine its content, however limited it may be, which often betrays our vague intention. In order to really grasp the meaning of a speech, Socrates invites us not to hold great discourses, and those who did hold him such great speeches got angry at him because they could not recognize themselves in the butchery inflicted by him upon their speech. Since it is sometimes necessary to examine a single sentence, a single proposition, or even a single word, so that a very specific meaning may emerge. "You make me say what I did not say!" They cried, angry. "You must be angry with me for doing so!" This was the inevitable conclusion that followed. At the extreme, indeed, it is possible to arrive at a single word, to reduce a discourse to a single concept which it is then necessary to define, of which the operativity must be verified. In this sense, conceptualization is one of the limiting forms of the analysis process.

The analysis is a static method, as we have said, since it does not allow 'to move on', but obliges us to remain in place in order to dig a given meaning deeper. Worse, it can be a regressive method when it tries to trace the facts to their causes, going from the consequences to the principles. This process will be carried out either to try to prove the merits of a proposal, and, in this sense, the analysis will be likened to a demonstration, or to identify the presuppositions of the proposal, which makes it possible to better understand it, or even to problematize it, since we will have identified what conditions this proposition, and therefore what could have modified its nature. Of course, here we somehow intersect the work of argumentation. But analysis, especially logic, is content to work on what is affirmed, on what is contained in what is affirmed, on its composition, on the intrinsic given, without seeking to summon other propositions. The only exception concerns the rules of

logic, or rules of composition, where the analysis makes it possible to verify the legitimacy of the assembly in question. The knowledge of these rules and that of their transgressions conditions the work of analysis here, whose logic provides the tools. These formal rules make it possible to detect the extent to which one proposal leads to another, is compatible with another, or contains another. These relations are above all relations of necessity, which cannot tolerate exception, and not relations of probability or contingency, authorized by the wider and less rigorous principle of argument. And if the advantage of analysis is rigor and objectivity, its inconvenience is, on the one hand, its illusion of objectivity, for one can easily forget that the value of any logical proposition is conditioned by the value of its premises, and, on the other hand, its rigidity, for every logical system is enclosed unto itself, since it does not allow any contribution from foreign elements. Logical analysis is an assessment of the coherence of an object. It invites criticism insofar as it verifies the possible universalisation of the sequences used. The principle of causality is constantly put to the test, and it is precisely the general interest of this mode of deepening. But it tends to define, that is, to enclose, to tighten, rather than to open the subject. However, it is very interesting and useful to work intensively on a given topic rather than in an extensive and open manner. The demand is not the same. It is bitter but very meaningful and formative for the mind.

Concerning analysis, let us return to a principle that we have approached while discussing attitudes: criticism, a term formulated by Kant to articulate an intermediate position between skepticism and dogmatism. Let us recall that the Kantian 'revolution' rests on the impossibility of knowledge to accede to reality in itself, in order to affirm that we have access only to the phenomena or to the appearances of this reality, although these phenomena are not devoid of reality altogether. Critical methodology consists in analyzing the foundations of thought and action, measuring its extent, and evaluating its limits. It is, above all, reflection and self-criticism, since it reflects on itself. However, as we have already mentioned, the temptation is strong, under the guise of 'scientificity', to claim, despite all these precautions, a sort of ultimate knowledge, to establish new certainties. And if it is conducive to engage in such a practice, in such an adventure of systematization, it is also important, as Gödel invites us, to remember that any system can only know its own truth from its own exteriority, by emerging from itself, in order to perceive its own limits. Any totality which claims to contain itself will necessarily suffer from the hypertrophy of its own being and forge its own illusions.

In this connection, there is a final conceptual distinction, coming from Hegel, which is useful to mention, between internal criticism, which belongs more to objective analysis, and external criticism, which is rather an exteriority, another bias. If it is possible and desirable to criticize a thought from within, confronting it with itself, the necessary counterpart of this internal criticism invites us all the same to analyze a thought through the postulates that are foreign to it: external criticism. One is no

less legitimate than the other. Why, indeed, accept without assuming the presuppositions imposed upon us? This dialectical position, which encourages us to be both inside and outside, offers us an additional guarantee of distancing and critical analysis. A dialectical position of which Nietzsche, faithful to himself, will hasten to denounce the vanity, insofar as this redoubling of thought unto itself, this laborious work of negativity, being an extreme sophistication, encourages the excessive development and illusions of our tiny reason, the omnipotence of our intellect, rather than letting emerge and accepting the great reason of life, the only reliable and genuine organic structure.

Analyzing is an attempt at grasping, in a sort of 'in-itself', the composition of being, however illusory this seizure may be, since thought then claims to operate from a detached and disembodied perspective: it becomes the incisive gaze of God. And if we are to warn against the abuses and the sterility of analysis, we must nevertheless invite everyone to this moment of alienation of thought, to this asceticism which invites us to grasp beyond ourselves the reality of reality. To do this, one must learn to disregard oneself, which independently of any efficacy or result is a highly recommendable practice, initiating one to the sobriety of thought, to the humility of being. To know how to analyze is to be able to make the word say only what it says, it is to know what one says, to be conscious of what is said. It amounts to accepting the limits, to abandon the accidental and the desirable. It is to accept the finitude and the limits of a given. Certainly, the analysis knows its own pitfalls. For example, the "It has nothing to do with..." of the learned one who, distinguishes in an outrageous way, and thus distinguishes himself. Or the 'It joins!' or 'It is the same thing' of the neophyte who merges altogether and believes in himself. An infernal couple that represents a sort of Charybdis and Scylla of thought. To summarize, to analyze is to learn to read, to learn to read again, to learn to read oneself over.

4. Synthetizing

The primary meaning of synthesis closely parallels that of analysis. If the analysis decomposes and studies the composition of the compounded, in fact it also allows to consider the opposite, the art of synthesis. Logic belongs to this practice: the art of composing in a legitimate way. Synthesis may appear as part of analysis, as its second moment: one decomposes only to recompose. But if synthesis is conditioned by analysis, and vice versa, since logic, or the study of coherence or concatenation, does not belong more to analysis than to synthesis, it also holds a particularity in relation to its mirror image. The analysis starts from a given that it is to be deconstructed and reconstructed, while synthesis, instead of reconstructing, constructs, which often implies that it must first destroy. Indeed, it must abandon many elements considered secondary, through a work of negation. It's given is not a compound, but a mass of scattered elements which it must sort out and assemble. For

the analysis, the puzzle is already mounted, not for synthesis, and this difference, which can only be a formal one, contains important stakes.

The first consequence is that synthesis is open: to itself, it raises the problem of what it is possible to combine with an initial proposition, which it must formulate and consider how to combine it. The reported elements may be of all kinds, or even what is – apparently at least – radically contradictory to a given proposition: the working hypothesis. This is what makes synthesis the key moment of dialectic, after the thesis and the antithesis, a process that can be completely opposed to analysis. As Hegel extensively identifies it, who posits dialectic as the foundation of thought and reality, synthesis, juggling with opposites, allows for a work of negativity leading to higher levels of rationality. Indeed, if analysis limits its object to what it is, synthesis makes it possible to articulate an object in a relation to what it is not, a 'what it is not' that is nevertheless constitutive of its being. The famous example of the relationship between the acorn and the oak tree, an opposition that is articulated in a concept of 'becoming', quoted in the preface of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* is a classic example. We shall treat this further in our later chapter on dialectics.

The two basic processes of synthesis, the foundation of logic, are deduction and induction. The analytic deduction is content to draw from a given proposition what it contains, the synthetic deduction brings together several elements to constitute a general proposition. The first type of inference produces multiplicity from unity, the second produces unity from multiplicity. The syllogism is one of the oldest, most common and most famous cases of synthetic inference. It consists chiefly of taking a general proposition, called the major, to add to it a singular proposition, called the minor, and to draw a conclusion from it. As for induction, it is opposed to deduction insofar as rather than dealing with general propositions, it passes from the singular, or a set of facts, to the general, by attempting to elaborate propositions likely to take charge of the evoked facts that often come under observation.

If logic is sometimes regarded by some philosophers as an important part of philosophy, by the Stoics for example, it will be regarded by others as a mere accessory instrument because of its reductive or purely formal side. Indeed, its rules ensure the coherence of the statements rather than their veracity, it checks their proposals rather than engendering them. However, the breakdown of classical logic into a diversity of 'logic' in the twentieth century has largely contributed to restoring it as a science of 'truth', particularly in Anglo-Saxon philosophy, for which analytical modality represents the royal and 'scientific' path of thought.

Beyond the purely logical and formal aspect, which consists in assembling propositions among themselves and elaborating the principles that govern these assemblages, synthesis is a practice of theorization, of conceptualization, since it is concerned with regrouping under a single and brief idea what initially belongs to multiplicity. Thus, when we read a text, or listen to an author, we try to condense in a short statement or a simple

sentence the words spoken, in the form of a summary of the content, or of the intention that guides it, an avowed or unavowed intention, or even by establishing a central implication or consequence of the words spoken. The principle of synthesis here is to bring forth the essence of a discourse, or what constitutes its unity, its substance, its principal attraction. This unity can already be contained explicitly in the discourse, and the synthesizer will then satisfy himself with choosing a consciously expressed proposition that he will draw from the text. Or he will forge a proposal that will seem to transcend the text and articulate the first reality with a greater or lesser degree of interpretation which may even be challenged by the author of the text. Again, analysis joins synthesis, since analyzing a text can also consist of such a condensed proposition, even if one can expect from an analysis that it is more circumstantial and developed than a synthesis. In the same way, the work of conceptualization joins that of synthesis, since it is a question of producing a term or a reduced expression that sums up a larger thought, which purports to capture the essential.

The fact of reducing, reduction, is an important aspect of synthesis. Traditionally, the reduction used in logic consisted of reducing a complex set of propositions, of unusual form, to a recognizable, identifiable, and therefore qualifiable form. Reduction makes it possible to unify the field of knowledge, to integrate data under common and reduced laws. Thus, Husserl and phenomenology proposed to reduce facts to essences, thereby ridding them of the abundance of their concrete individualities, which had the chief advantage of combining knowledge.

The anagogical approach seems to us another interesting case of synthesis, a particularly radical form of the process which we find in Plato. It consists, on the basis of a given proposition, or of a set of propositions, of attempting to go back as far as possible, to the first and founding transcendentals: unity, truth, beauty, good, and so on. It has its origin in Plato, and even if it has been able to inspire phenomenological reduction, it does not have the same presuppositions, since they are metaphysical in Plato and empirical in Husserl: me and the world, they are in other words experiential. In any case, it is a question of determining the fundamental stakes underlying any particular proposition, no matter how trivial, by showing beyond evidence the presuppositions contained in a given proposal. In all cases, this implies abandoning an important part of the given, particularly empirical, the narrative and the circumstantial, which remains an important psychological obstacle to the synthesis: very often the human mind does not want to let go of all the narrative elements, since they compose this sequence that is called existence. Plato also defines the essence of a discourse, its unity, through a simplicity purified of its intention.

In contrast to, or in addition to, induction and deduction, we would like to propose, as a modality of synthesis, a third, lesser known and more recent, concept emanating from Peirce, the inspirer of the American pragmatist current: abduction. This concept is interesting insofar as it

makes it possible to account for scientific discovery: by observing and reflecting, the mind encounters various empirical or ideological data which are imposed upon it, which surprise it, which oblige it to advance new hypotheses, sometimes in complete contradiction with established principles. This concept differs somewhat from the Hegelian scheme, as another description of the hypothetical-deductive scheme, in the sense that new hypotheses are not relatively predictable constructs of the mind, produced by an effort of reason reflecting on its own content, but arise of themselves, in an uncontrolled way, to an open, observant and attentive mind, which implies a certain mental availability. A certain non-linearity resides in this process, and a possibility for questioning or divergence, which, as always with pragmatism, tries to defeat the dogmatism linked to overdetermined anchorages of thought. The omnipotence of the postulate, of the will and of the system is here put in check, since it queries a priori thought in favor of a first and transcendent reality of the world whose manifestations are not always predictable. For, if Hegelian thought tries to take charge of opposites, it is always by integrating them into a system whose integration power is never called into question, since it tends towards an implementation of the absolute. A synthesis understood as a reduction of discourse, as a summary, or a synthesis as an assemblage of disparate elements, or again a synthesis as the gushing of an intuition, all give to see. They give rise to thought. All of them are factors of awareness. In every case, synthesis produces the direct from the indirect, it fills the holes, it establishes the links: it is a true thought, and not an annex and secondary tool. But the paradox of synthesis is that it allows us to deepen while saying less, while speaking less: it speaks thanks to an economy of words. In this it is an expensive intellectual act, because it invites a certain harshness, an asceticism, a letting go. It asks to remove, to trim, to abandon our futile and vain hopes of totality and exhaustiveness. Synthesis deepens because it clarifies, it clarifies because it removes and makes visible that which otherwise disappears in the flow, in the mass, in the flux. In this sense, as when pruning a tree, it makes the structure visible, it structures the moving mass of words and ideas that would otherwise be much more confused. It reorganizes and restructures because it makes short circuits, sometimes unexpected, without which we would see nothing. Synthesis is not a neutral act: it makes reconciliations that change the face of things, by eliminating various opacities it gives fluidity to the discourse. Synthesis, therefore, produces meaning. Not because one is ignorant of the elements that compose it or even the principles it brings to light, but because of the unusual density of its speech, which shows what was previously disparate, without anyone necessarily perceiving it. Synthesis shows what we already saw, what we could see without seeing, what we saw without being able to see, what we saw without wanting to see.

5. Exemplifying

Kant warns us against intuitions without concepts, which according to him are 'blind', but also against concepts without intuitions, which are 'empty'. The first part of the injunction obliges us to analyze, to produce propositions and thus to advance the concepts that articulate and compose them. We should be limited to example, to the narrative, to the empirical: reason must be put into practice and carry out its work of abstraction, in order to account for what is represented and what contains the empirical given or expounded. This forces us to think rationally and to develop an abstract thought by avoiding the traps of the anecdotal and the enumeration. Citing the idea of a chair makes it possible to avoid taking up and naming one by one the various elements of all the objects or entities falling into this category: to name each chair by a particular name. In this sense, it is a question of generalization. Conversely, producing an example, to exemplify, at the same time makes it possible to make visible or concretize the concept, but also allows to test the intellectual construction that produces the ideas and assembles them. The fact of exemplifying thus fulfills two crucial functions. The first function is pedagogical, because it allows to see, to understand, to explain by referring to the concrete. The second consists in testing, since it is a question of experiencing the concrete, of verifying, of embodying, of comparing the product of thought with the data of experience.

Philosophy, as a practice and like all practice, is confronted with a matter. Its matter is the knowledge which we have of the world, in the form of a narration and in the form of explanations: mythos and logos. The narrative is a set of facts and experiences lived or heard which constitute an empirical fact. The explanation is a set of ideas and theories that account for empirical data, which ensure their coherence and predictability. Philosophizing establishes itself in exteriority in the face of this matter: it doubts, it criticizes, it examines, it evaluates, it compares, although matter is also a tool, an instrument that it manipulates as it pleases. But if it puts the knowledge of the world to the test, if it questions our relation to the world, it puts itself to the test by this knowledge of the world, and indirectly, or through the mediation of knowledge, it is put to the test by the world itself. Thus, pedagogical work and experimental work come together, because the philosopher must confront otherness. This is why convening an example is crucial for him. Without it, he risks losing himself in the meanders of his own mind, imprisoning himself in a jail that he has made all by himself. To give examples is to know what one is talking about, to let people know what one is talking about, and to check the viability of one's speech. Of course, a speech has its own truth, it is up to reason to check the coherence of the discourse, its transparency towards itself. But since this discourse also tries to account for the world, it generally claims to take charge of a reality that transcends it, a fundamental and constitutive reality. It is also a matter of examining to what extent it can take charge of this reality under its various forms. The production of an example appears to be the

minimal gesture required by this verification. Where is the access to the real, the exterior, the otherness of matter, if no example is provided? How then can one claim a critical relation to the world and to knowledge? It is in this sense that one needs both the discourse on the empirical datum and the empirical given itself, that one needs both discourse and discourse on discourse, so that there could be a philosophizing worthy of the name. Otherwise, speech may become self-contained and believe in its own content solely because words are spoken and an unlimited credit is given to them simply because they have been pronounced.

Nevertheless, it is not for us to let the current presupposition endure, which puts the concrete into a single or primordial 'reality'. Thus, the current reaction: "These are mere ideas!", which gives materiality a reliable certainty, a guarantee without flaw, endowing it with a confidence that would not deserve the ideas or the concepts, considered too abstract. Already, because this materiality does not reach us directly but only through the imperfect and biased tools of our body, when the information provided is not terribly intellectualized. But where we will grant it its status as a bearer of truth, it is on the contrary when we grant it its status of strangeness and mediation, and no longer that of familiarity and immediacy. Matter is what is different, what is foreign, what resists and acts upon us, what escapes us, what alienates us. From this perspective alone, matter protects us from ourselves. As for the concrete, its interest is its contingency and its arbitrariness. It unites what, in the absolute of thought, would not have to be united. It is not by principle or a priori that the concrete is what it is. In a way, it is fortuitous, as a phenomenon. We can always rationalize its existence, but it would only be to reassure and give oneself a good conscience. No, the concrete has no reason to arrive, no fundamental reason in any case. We explain it only by assembling a few circumstances, through some efficient cause. Going further and attempting any teleology would be quite hazardous. But to venture to verify our hypotheses with the existence of the singular concrete, very different from a concrete theoretical universal secreted from the inside, this seems to us a reflex stemming out from a great wisdom. Not that this concrete is more real. Or if it is more real, it is only because we realize that it escapes us. The concrete, the material, the phenomenon, then has for its primary virtue to remind us of our own finitude, to oblige our thought to be modeled and not to launch itself in a freewheel or on a flying trip. It is at this moment that the concrete is concrete, and that it is no longer the fantasy of an anguished mind that seeks at all costs a place to reassure itself. It is the testing of thought.

6. Identifying the Presuppositions

The reality of a discourse is found in its unity, Plato tells us. Its unity is often its origin, objective or subjective. The subjective origin of a discourse is its intention, the reason it was pronounced, what it pretends to accomplish: to respond, to show, to demonstrate. But often the discourse is not conscious of its own nature, of its intention; it cannot

describe what it is. Most of the time, it is there only as a reaction: it only expresses a feeling that is working on us, mentioning a particular idea that crosses the mind without concern for appropriateness, or else it seeks to defend itself, to justify itself. And it would be very difficult to determine its motivation. It will use vague and cowardly expressions such as 'bouncing', 'expressing', 'wanting to say', and so on. It simply speaks. So it believes...

Objective origin is, first of all, the matrix of thought from which an idea is emitted, 'the philosophical school' to which it belongs. For example, the 'concern for pleasure' that appeared in a discourse, whether or not that term was mentioned. Or, it is the principle underlying this idea. The logical and demonstrative claim of argumentation would be such a principle. In a simpler and less philosophically engaging way for some, it would also be a specific, non-articulated idea, conceived by the listener as an undeclared preamble to the voluntarily stated idea. This implicit acquisition is then interpreted as a presupposition of the thought in question. For example, when I assert that 'I will certainly be at this rendez-vous', I pretend, without realizing it, to know in advance the status of the world, to predict the future and to ignore death; otherwise I would simply say that 'I will do everything to be there'. Or I would add 'Inch Allah!' As the Muslims do.

The problem that arises in the identification of the assumptions is to determine what conditions the judgment. Judgment is taken here as assigning predicates to a subject or subsuming a particular in a universal. Now, it is a question of identifying the contents of a proposition, explicit or implicit, without making it say what it does not say, what Kant calls the analytical judgment. According to him, such a judgment adds nothing new to the subject treated, no new concept is brought: it is only a matter of decomposing by analysis the data of the initial proposition or concept, in order to bring to light various predicates which until then were 'thought in it', but confusedly. Let us take the example of Kant: the triangle. I can say analytically that it has three angles, since this very idea is contained in the term 'triangle', without however being explicit. But, I can also, implicitly, by reasoning, draw the idea that it has three sides or that the sum of these three angles is one hundred and eighty degrees. Kant introduces here the concept of a priori synthetic judgment, insofar as I can express this judgment without resorting to 'external' empirical information, using only the operations of reason in order to obtain new knowledge. Without going into these fine distinctions, which are not always clearly defined, we must assume that identifying assumptions involves determining the intellectual matrix from which a statement is articulated, clarifying and explicating concepts that structure and generate a thought.

Insofar as philosophical practice does not come under strict formal logic, determined by relations of pure necessity, this explanation can certainly be a matter of necessity but also of probability, although it is nevertheless necessary to distinguish between the two cases of figure when we make this judgment. For example, if we use the principle that

every affirmation is a negation, we may assume that the person determined by the value A is not determined by the value B or C, and in a way that it rejects them. Obviously, it may be objected that B and C could in the absolute be also chosen, in a second time for example, since they are not explicitly rejected. Nevertheless, it is not B or C that were summoned in the affirmation in question, but A. We have to trust the 'said' and thus assume that what appears is what is. By principle of parsimony, it is advisable to avoid the pure possible, the 'what could have been said', the 'what could be'. Otherwise, we fall into the error of the free hypothesis. This common mistake is due to the fear of the error which Hegel denounced as the first error. For if one assumes that only the 'necessary' authorizes the judgment and that the 'not necessarily' is an admissible objection, many of the relevant judgments will be eliminated, which nevertheless come under common sense. Thus, if a person states the injunction that "one should not harm one's neighbor", I can conclude that this person has a moral view of things. But it may be objected that this speaker may have as a concern the mere fact of maintaining a good reputation, that he is rather animated by a concern for recognition. Of course, this is undeniable; this possibility cannot be categorically denied, but since there is no indication of such concern in the injunction, judgment must be based on the given, on what one 'sees', nothing more, nothing less. Up to further information, which may then change the deal.

Another clarification is worth mentioning. As we have stated, identifying assumptions involves identifying the conceptual matrix from which a discourse is uttered. But it is a rhetorical technique common in discourse that consists of enunciating concepts while denying them. For example, in the phrases "this is not a moral problem" or "I do not do it because it suits me." In the first case, the author announces a moral vision of things, in the second an 'instrumentalist', 'utilitarian' or even 'egocentric' vision. But it will be objected that in both cases the concept is denied, even implicitly criticized since it is rejected. We will answer that, nevertheless, the concept in question structures the sentence, founds it, gives it its meaning, which implies that it is its very substance. Regardless of the relation he has with this concept, the latter occupies his thought and articulates it, which makes it a founding concept, which makes the matrix of this concept a presupposition of the thought in question. We could say otherwise: this concept determines the register of discourse, its tone, and therefore its substance. The atheist who fights with God makes him exist. The justice-seeker who fights for the equality of all is anxious about power. We can hardly escape our actions and our words, no matter how jolting we are.

7. Interpreting

One of the obstacles in identifying presuppositions is that of subjectivity: since we claim to be objective in analytical judgment, we must add nothing of our own. Nevertheless, we cannot a priori refuse the contribution of this subjectivity, a conceptual contribution taken in charge

by synthetic judgment. The only problem is to determine to what extent this subjective contribution is arbitrary and unfounded, or to what extent it is common sense in spite of its peculiarity. Here lies the problem of interpretation. Since it is a question of explaining, of giving meaning, of translating, of making comprehensible, we must necessarily add concepts, at the risk of imposing a certain inflection of meaning on the content, since different terms are never equivalent. Just as the actor plays his role in a specific way that belongs to him, with a certain style, thus giving body to the author's text, the musician interprets a piece of music by translating his thoughts, feelings or even the intentions of the composer. In psychology, the verb to interpret takes a much more negative turn, since it means 'to attribute a distorted or erroneous meaning to a real fact or to an event', a negative connotation that has spread quite widely.

While we wish to give interpretation a status of intellectual legitimacy, we must nevertheless guard against the abuse which such a judgment may entail. Now, whether we like it or not, we will always try unconsciously – the pregnancy of subjectivity obliges – to approach the red line and to attribute to a discourse what does not belong to it. It will nevertheless be necessary to assume this risk, otherwise we will not dare to think. Some think that they are getting out of the matter by blaming the interpretation and pretending not to interpret or not to judge, however absurd this claim may be. On the one hand, if they really act thus they do not think any more, since judgment and interpretation are necessary for thought, insofar as these faculties invite us to evaluate the discourse heard; without which we only hear words and the purely factual dimension of their meaning. On the other hand, it is generally a lie, one tells oneself stories to give oneself good conscience, because it is practically impossible not to judge, especially if one pretends not to judge. Already because the prohibition of judgment is a contradiction of principle. To banish judgment is a radical judgment, with heavy implications of intellectual and moral presuppositions. At most, one can attempt momentarily to suspend one's judgment, or else try to separate the part of the judgment and that of the given. Two instructions which will require a great work on oneself, a great skill, and will not be carried out without difficulty.

In order to interpret, in order to have the right to identify a content and to embark on this activity, there is an important presupposition: discourse belongs to nobody, that is, it belongs to everyone. No one can boast of being the true interpreter of someone, and especially not of oneself or of someone close to us. The argument of the specialist, the pretension of the one who 'really knows' the person or his thought, and especially that which consists in affirming peremptorily "I know what I say!", have no value here. Not that this status forbids these people to risk a judgment; On the contrary, they would be in the absolute best position to carry out such an analysis. But, in reality, this is not the case, precisely as we have already mentioned, because too often the discourse is used to defend itself and justify itself, since too many interests are at stake. As soon as there is something to lose, speech is truncated, falsified. It is therefore no longer the speech in question which is at the heart of

intellectual activity but a person, a status, a power, an image, a possession, and so on. Thus, a person will exclaim, 'You do not understand me. What I meant is...'. Now there is the problem. There was no question of hearing what it was meant to say, but only of seeing what had been said. Now, as the speaker often finds it difficult to reconcile himself with his own speech, he is the last one to be trusted as to what he has said. He is too much within himself, plunged in his intentions, his fears, his denials, and so on. The listener is probably in a better position to grasp the content of what is said. If only it is comparatively, if it is not itself too directly involved in what is expressed. He is therefore better able to see and identify the presuppositions. But if a speaker has sufficient distance to himself, he can certainly see himself thinking, which is called philosophizing.

Thus, Plato, for whom to think is to dialogue with oneself, invites us to the anagogical rise of a discourse as the regulating ideal of the interpretation. As far as we can, to identify the unity, or essence of discourse. This brings us closer to the work of identifying the presuppositions. To go to this place of the conceptual, the philosophical unconscious, the crucible where crucial choices were made, where the determinant choices of thought were made. In this return to the original journey, in this archaeological excavation of knowledge, we will find our true image. This is the *sine qua non* of any intellectual or spiritual deliberation worthy of the name. This passage to infinity, this testing of the simple, is not an easy asceticism. We often prefer to bury ourselves under the expression of our feelings and the display of our erudition. Seeing us is painful, and the same is true of others. Thus, the majority of discussions take pact not to venture into these dangerous regions, too close to the intimacy of being. Or, as we are too sensitive, it is war, the place of all enmities, abusive and hazardous interpretations, where it is desired above all to reach the other and to hurt him. The theater of cruelty, that which consists in really saying what one thinks, to go to the end of its own thought. Inadmissible violence among friends, behavior that contravenes the morals of good society. Yet it is this violence, this cruelty, which nests at the heart of the Socratic act of giving birth to souls. It is not only a question of confining oneself to producing beautiful babies: it is also necessary to bring to light small monsters, for they are there, they have just as much the right to live, if only to sacrifice them.

There is an interesting approach to interpretation which is reformulation, which can also be called the exercise of paraphrasing: to say something in words other than what has already been expressed. While it is difficult to rephrase an idea, it is even more difficult to gauge a reformulation. For, if our terms are usual, if our lexicon is familiar to us, this is not the case with that of the neighbor. Such an evaluation therefore remains a true exercise of thought, between rigor and flexibility. For this reason, many teachers prefer repetition to reformulation: the task is less risky, less tiring. The pitfall of repetition is that it is not known if the student has understood, to what extent the meaning has been internalized. Under the guise of caution, the formal approach is favored.

But it is true that putting in relation an initial text and the reformulation made of it by another person implies an intellectual gymnastics that is far from obvious. For, the proposed reformulation may have chosen an angle that surprises us, made with unexpected terms, where the choice of the essential, the rejection of the accidental is not quite the same as ours. In spite of everything, even if we did not produce such a reformulation ourselves, we must examine to what extent the latter is acceptable or not. To repeat the musical analogy, we must listen to the interpreter play his piece and determine to what extent its performance is faithful to the work, even though we do not hear it so, even though it does not please us, if only by the surprise it provokes in us. This does not mean falling into the trap of relativism, where 'everything is of equal worth', where a factitious 'freedom of intellectual conscience' prevails, for betrayal is also a reality. One can indeed misinterpret, under-interpret, overinterpret, and these terms have a real value. A thought may be given a meaning that is too detached from the original content, omit some essential aspects that make reformulation insubstantial, or exacerbate outrageously certain aspects that distort the given. Interpreting is an art, which is the only guarantee of understanding. It is necessary to translate in order to understand, but any translation is indeed a betrayal: 'Traduttore, traditore.' One will respond to such suspicion by invoking the consciousness of imperfection as a guarantor of understanding. And it is the same to understand oneself as to understand others.

Chapter IV

Conceptualizing

1. The concept

The concept – or conceptualization – remains a mysterious term, however it is a characteristic of philosophizing, essential to its activity. It is used as a tool, it is referred to as a criterion, without, however, ever sufficiently attempting to define its being or to define its function more precisely. In the teaching of philosophy, no particular effort is ever put into setting up a practice for its use: what one might call exercises or a learning of conceptualization. Or it is limited to the exercise of the definition. This happens for a primary reason, a habitual one limiting the act of philosophizing: on the very notion of concept, the philosophical theses collide. What distinguishes the concept from the idea, the notion, the opinion, the theme, the category, etc.? Already, let us ask what may be the interest or usefulness of this type of nuance or distinction. For some, the specificity of the concept resides in a certain claim to objectivity, to universality. To what extent is this term commensurate with this specific attribute or the general claims attributed to it?

Thus, in order to avoid the quarrels and trials in heterodoxy which are so common in philosophy, let us take the minimalist view that the concept is something that is used intuitively, a term that structures our mind: a kind of key-word, because he is the one who opens and closes the doors and chests of thought. Certainly, by doing so, avoiding too much theorizing on the question, we will also avoid venturing to articulate its 'true nature'. 'True', at least in the mind of the one who is supposed to initiate students to the philosophical approach, which conventionally requires to define the concepts used. But, to the definition, without excluding it, we will prefer consistency or clarity of usage. A process which, if it can spare itself from gauging the concept of the concept, can hardly do without concepts. Perhaps it is precisely in this gap between definition and usage that the particular nature of the concept articulates itself. Indeed, by following common parlance, if one 'finds' or 'has' an idea, if one 'has' notions, one 'invents' and one 'uses' a concept. Thus, the concept is very naturally a tool, an instrument of thought, an invention, like that of the engineer. If the idea is a representation, if the notion is a knowledge, the concept is an operator. And it is in the light of this operativity that we will identify and evaluate the concept.

What about the universality of the concept? Are the concepts specific or are they general? Do they belong to an author, such as the concept of noumenon, attributed specifically to Kant? Or do they fall under common sense, such as the 'concept of justice', which seems to emerge

from the dawn of time? We can oppose these two types of concept, but we can also say that they are indissociable. If the first is more particular and less frequent, it finds its meaning and the proof of its operativity in the echo offered by common sense. Indeed, in the case of the noumenon, it is easy to admit or imagine that any particular entity is endowed with a kind of interiority. The second, justice, despite its banality today, is the product of a genesis and a history which, from a common intuition, have produced two meanings: on the one hand, the institution of legality and, on the other, the principle of legitimacy.

However, in order to relate the two attributes of the concept, universality and function, let's propose the following hypothesis: the universality of a concept is determined by its effectiveness, by the possibility of its use and by its utility. In other words, if the concept has to be clear to be a concept, its utility must be manifest, otherwise it will only be formal. We must therefore avoid the infinite nuances of definitions whose interest we no longer grasp. Like a mathematical function, it must make it possible to solve a problem, it does not exist for no reason, it is not an end in itself. If it cannot save on the precision, it cannot either avoid the application. As singular as it might be, its operativity will confer a status of universality upon it. Thus, to emerge from an empirical practice where everything is done case by case, through a simple recipe, we will try to conceptualize the action or the particular thought. That is, to abstract what is essential and common to the various possible scenarios. It will be a question then of going out of the narration, the opinion and the concrete to enter into the analysis.

2. Function of the concept

There are different modalities or forms of conceptual activity. One can certainly create a concept anew, an act by which one recognizes the great philosophers, as proposed by Deleuze. But we can also recognize a concept, that is, identify an established concept, summon it. One can also define a concept, which is the preamble of any dissertation or theoretical work for many philosophers and teachers. But more intuitively, one can also use a concept, which remains a conceptual activity, although in a less analytical way.

Let us propose three types of activity related with the concept.

- To know the concepts engendered and approved by the philosophical tradition. It is a question here of knowing and using concepts recognized, referenced, which are presented as concepts, with all the credit that is granted to them from the outset. These concepts can be general or specific. To know, one must therefore learn, that is to say, to acquire, to commit to memory. It is also necessary to define, that is to say, to precise, to explain the nature of the concept. A knowledge which, of course, determines the capacity to use the concept. The major classical

pitfall here is to learn concepts without learning how to use them. By confining oneself to a simple statement or to a definition, all actions devoid of real appropriation.

- To recognize a general concept. It is here to recognize a concept used when it appears, without it appearing explicitly as such. To be able to identify a concept when one is encountered. Here arises very often the problem of abstraction: the fear of abstraction, accompanied by the impossibility of perceiving this abstraction when it appears. Some make it a posture: the refusal to see abstraction. The concept is no longer one: it is relegated to the simple articulation of a particular case. It is deprived of its general operativity, deprived of its universality, it remains a specific case, almost concrete.

- To create a specific concept. It is a matter of articulating a concept in order to solve a problem of thought. The term used may be a common term in its usual meaning, a term deviated from its meaning, or a neologism. The important thing is to recognize the specific use made of it, because the concept will often arise in a fairly intuitive way.

Within a traditional teaching of philosophy, the learning of classical concepts remains the only aspect of the concept to be relatively systematized. Through the courses of the professor and the texts studied, the student will have to assimilate a certain number of concepts that he will more or less appropriate for himself. Thus, within a key exercise, that of dissertation, he should preferably show that he has retained a certain amount of them, not simply by citing them, but by using them in an appropriate way which demonstrates understanding and mastery. Ultimately, however, he is primarily asked to elaborate on a given subject a thought constructed from his own ideas, in other words to provide a certain number of concepts belonging to him, to which he will have to integrate elements from class, thus articulating a coherent whole. But no practice, no exercise, no course, will have led him to such a mastery of his own thought. He will have his personal culture on the one hand, and on the other he will have seen and heard the teacher perform such gestures, but he will have never trained himself in the classroom. The only time he will implement this art will be on the occasion of the few dissertations that he will carry out alone, under examination or at home, benefiting only from subsequent advices, the few comments scribbled on his copy by the corrector. In other words, only the first part of our triptych is truly an object of classroom studies: the definition. And again, only on the theoretical level, not even in practice.

3. Recognizing the concept

Therefore, the most immediate crucial question to be treated seems to be the second part mentioned before: to recognize the concept that one uses

intuitively, in its status of operator of thought. Thinking one chair after the other makes it impossible for any scientific approach, for such a functioning is the negation of any universality, or at least of any generalization. The scientific approach always presupposes a certain form of unity: to grasp the globality in its regulatory principles. Now, this universality, or this generalization, which enables us to grasp the universe, is a product of the mind: a construction, an intuition, a reasoning, and so on. This particular chair, I can touch it, see it, sit on it, and so on. The senses serve as a starting point, as an initial information tool, and as a tool for verifying what is stated. Concretely, at the extreme, I do not need the word to express my thought: I can point fingers. The concept (or idea) of a chair, deprived of such demonstrative elements, rests on a tacit agreement: the other is supposed to know what I am talking about, with no immediate possibility of showing and checking empirically.

Nevertheless, the known concept encounters certain obstacles. First type of problem: the boundary case. Does any object or phenomenon apply to the denomination? Is the tree trunk on which I sit a chair or not? What about a wooden box? This situation obliges us to recognize that the chair is not a particular object; it is not an obvious fact: it is a product of the mind, which, like everything produced by the mind, knows its limits. We here oscillate between recognizing and creating: confronting boundary cases forces us to define the concept, to leave it as pure intuition, to conceptualize it further. Example: is the chair defined by its shape or function? Depending on the case, if a chair is defined by its utility: to sit, then the trunk is a chair. If it is defined by its shape: it requires some feet and a backrest, and the trunk is not a chair. Operativity is here either a function or a form, or both together: this precision is what could distinguish an idea from a concept. By emitting the principle that the idea is more general, or more subjective than the concept. Although the requirement of the definition, inherent and necessary to the idea, brings us very close to the concept. In order to distinguish the concept from the idea, let us propose the following hypothesis. The idea refers rather to a general entity, to an 'in itself', whereas the concept is rather a function, or a relation. If the idea is confined to intuition, the concept focuses rather on usage and definition, since defining a thing necessarily involves a relation to other things.

Let us admit that, in the end, this distinction can be very fragile. However, it allows us to reflect on the status of the object of thought. To avoid an outrageous theorization, of the concept or of something else, let's ask the question: What does this change? In this reflection, a first distinction seems important. Is it first a matter of defining and then, subsequently, of using, or is it possible, or even preferable, to use and then define? The first hypothesis is the most common in the advice given to students to help them to dissert. But the opposite is an equally valid practice. This crucial choice opposes Aristotle, a proponent of the initial definition, to Plato, a proponent of working on the given problem. The presupposition of definition as a primary action implies to know in advance

the ideas used, and then to combine them among themselves, at the risk of freezing thought. Rather than proceeding by successive general assumptions and thus bringing to light the concepts or ideas used. In the first diagram, the student may propose some first concepts, but later he will no longer seek to analyze his work finely by trying to perceive the concepts generated by the flow of writing. Concepts as important as the former ones, concepts which may also modify or even contradict the proposals originally announced. It is for this reason that we propose to work on the principle of 'recognition of the concept'. It is not a question of claiming the primacy of a method, but of envisaging different possibilities, with their various advantages, from the philosophical and pedagogical point of view. Especially since some students will feel more at ease with one path than with another, facilitating their own thought construction. Some will prefer to start from a general movement, at the risk of being vague, others from well-defined bricks, at the risk of rigidity.

4. The use of the concept

The concept must be recognizable. By its definition, but especially by its usage. For example, it should allow one to solve a problem, to answer a question. Above all, it must be able to establish links; this is his principal operation. The concept of 'glass' binds all glasses together, despite their many differences. It must also link two terms of a different order to one another. Thus, the concept of glass connects drinking with water, as a means for example. This idea of relationship corresponds to an ordinary reasoning. But much of the work of philosophical teaching is to make the pupil conscious of the ordinary, making it special, giving it meaning beyond the evidence. This is what characterizes concept and conceptualization. What is the link between glass and water? The glass contains water. Beyond the intuitive answer, we have to realize that we have introduced a new concept: contain. Between different glasses, this is another role, another type of link: generality, or abstraction, categorization that groups entities of similar qualities, rather than the operation of relation, causal or anything else. Perhaps we have another possibility of distinguishing between the idea, closer to the category, and the concept. However, it is also an operation, but it is more qualitative than functional. This second operation represents another type of difficulty. The 'what makes two things similar or not?' Or, again, 'what predicates do two entities have in common?', is distinguished from 'what is the interaction that connects two objects or two ideas?'

From this, a number of exercises become visible. What is there between A and B? What is the relationship between A and B? What are the concepts used, which give meaning to this or that sentence? We will discover that establishing a link is difficult. The natural tendency is to force every idea to remain in its corner, in its intellectual isolation, in its empirical or ideal singularity. The common and current expression: 'it has nothing to do with it!' is its most obvious manifestation. The 'that is another thing', which sends back the resolution of the problem or the

elaboration of thought to the Greek calends. Conversely, there is a symptom consistent with the preceding one, wherein, in spite of formal opposition, the ideas will be linked together without any consideration of logic or substantiality, without articulating precisely the link, without putting it to the test. It takes the form of a grocery list, where ideas are completely isolated or artificially gathered. Philosophical *doxa* easily falls in the same manner, by an extreme concern with precision linked to the deformation of the definition, a concern which often takes precedence over any other consideration.

The difficulty is to conceive that the concept is only a tool, fluid in nature, which will appear explicitly or will not appear in the finished product. And, in any case, to be able to identify it and to clarify its meaning in order to explain its usage. If the concept appears in a sentence, it is simply a question of recognizing the key word around which the proposal is articulated. To weigh its meaning and consequences. To see the novelty that it brings and to ask oneself what it is answering. If it affirms, if it answers something, it is necessarily some form of negation. Let us then ask what it denies, what it refuses, what it claims to rectify. For this reason, it is interesting to use the principle of opposites. What would happen if this concept was not there? What is its negation? What does it refuse? What does it hide? It is therefore necessary to raise the stakes associated with this precise concept. This makes it possible to better understand what is said, and to change the concept if, by putting it to the test of its meaning, it suddenly appears inadequate. Also, the concept may not appear in the proposal. It is then necessary to express it in order to qualify the latter. To add, if need be, the articulation of this concept in a complementary proposal. Or to use its articulation to formulate a new problem. To formulate the unspoken concept, the principle of opposites is also useful. What does this proposal say? What is at stake between this proposal and what it meets? How are their respective qualifications opposed? Invariably, as one operates here at the meta-level of thought, one should find the great antinomies of philosophy: singular and universal, subjective and objective, finite and infinite, noumenon and phenomenon, etc. We refer the reader to the later part of the book concerning antinomies.

One of the common difficulties in this type of exercise – probably due to the relativistic and consensual tendencies of our time – is the current refusal to seize oppositions. In a relationship between two propositions, one sees the 'other thing', the 'complement', the 'precision', but with more difficulty does he ever see the opposition. Faced with the antinomy between singular and universal, which will serve to distinguish a general proposition from a concrete and specific case, many will hesitate to speak of opposition and prefer to use the terms mentioned. It would otherwise not be a problem if, because of this, the issues were not left unexpressed, if the consequences of the proposal were not gummed; but, in the end, the conceptual axis is not clearly encamped anymore.

Another classical way in which the pupil will try to escape from opposition is by resorting to the 'more and less.' Thus, he will write that

the first proposition is concrete, the second less concrete. But he will refuse to really qualify the second: he will qualify it by default, negatively. Yet the meaning of the 'concrete' concept he uses will differ according to whether he uses the opposite as 'universal', 'abstract', 'vague' or 'general'. It is therefore a matter of refusing the use of 'more and less' to qualify the concept more specifically. The square table is not 'less round' than the round table: it is square. The aim here is to understand that the use of opposites, in the choice of their specific couple, makes it possible to clarify the thought and to put it to the test. Such an exercise helps to bring out a given concept from its status as evidence, highlighting it through its opposite. Let us take an example: a student suggests that a general proposition be qualified as 'universal,' and after various hesitations, qualifies the one that opposes it, a more concrete one, as 'natural'. Being questioned, in opposition to 'natural', he proposes 'artificial'. Is the universal artificial? He then rejects these consequences and replaces 'natural' with 'particular'. He could also have assumed a new antinomy, like 'natural and artificial', insofar as he could have accounted for it. Thus, thanks to the principle of opposites, the connotation is articulated, allowing one to clarify the concept and to move forward in reflection and even to raise new problems. In this specific example, the student will formulate a 'universal' and a 'particular' proposition, linking the two, which also allows the possibility of testing the 'universal' proposition. All this in a conscious and explicit way, rather than a vague, intuitive, and implicit one.

Another common obstacle in this kind of exercise is the refusal to work in the intensive. The extensive generally seems more comfortable and less anxiogenic. Rather than analyzing a given proposal, the student will prefer to add words, add new propositions or new examples. Allegedly to explain the first proposal. Now, either what follows is another idea which does not really explain the first one, or, rather tautologically, it repeats in other words what has already been affirmed. Sometimes, almost by chance, the idea is actually explained, but it will be by addressing the consequences of the idea rather than by confronting the idea itself. The reason is simple: the ideas we formulate seem so obvious to us that it does not seem necessary to dwell on their status, on their meaning. We prefer to 'move forward'. Standing still is too painful, we prefer to run. Yet it would allow us to better problematize our own thinking, but such a desire is not always at the rendez-vous. The mind finds it easier to add ideas than to work on concept and conceptual justification.

Certainly, the definition of concepts can be an interesting exercise, but it is too often proposed as absolute and fixed determination, which makes the exercise reductive and limiting.

5. Learning or miracle?

The practice which we have just described ought to be an object of classroom studies, otherwise one should not expect the pupil to commit himself miraculously to a conceptualization of his own thought. For this we must be ready to account for such processes, and not to suggest that it is the own and irreplaceable genius of the teacher, or, incidentally, of the pupil, which produces the concept. It's about being ready to identify and to report on the strings of thought. Perhaps some students, and the teacher himself, naturally have access to conceptualization, but it would be absurd to believe that this is the case for the majority of them. And even if there is intuition in this area, there is everything to gain by conceptualizing the conceptualization. Although Mozart probably did not need many courses in music theory or composition, this is not the case with ordinary mortals. It would therefore be presumptuous to think that our pupils and ourselves can dispense with them. And if the concept is confined to established concepts, to the alleged objectivity or universality provided by the genius of their author, let us not be surprised that the pupils offer, for their dissertation, a collage between quotations more or less understood and ready-made opinions. The core of a reflection and the true criterion of evaluation nevertheless remain the conceptualization and the articulation of a singular thought. Better to teach the actual practice then, rather than merely visiting museums.

Chapter V

Problematizing

What is a problematic? This term, this concept, is so embarrassing that voices are periodically raised, which demand their elimination pure and simple. A vague concept, a complex concept, an elusive concept, yet a banalized concept, since it is understood and used in numerous areas today. But it may be necessary to accept this banalization as the truth of this concept – as of any concept – the generalization of its operativity guaranteeing the vivacity of its substance, at the risk of its enfeeblement. After all, why should exclusivity be a guarantee of philosophical quality? Is not the genius of a concept summed up in its blatant evidence, in so far as this evidence, once baptized, jumps before the eyes of everyone? Is genius not that outlook which perceives simplicity at first glance? Until then, nothing was visible, vague colors, vague forms, but once the finger is pointed at the thing, once it has named it, no one will be able to look at it as before. The thing is born, animated and defined by the concept that gives birth to it. The more this thing is visible, the more the concept is alive. It is by a perversion of thought that the concept which is to be admired becomes the preserve of some subtle and sufficient elite. Thus, if the concept of problematic disappears in the eyes of fine minds, it may be necessary to appeal to this universally shared common sense in order to see and admire what it makes of it.

1. Doubtful

What is problematic is doubtful, undermined by a doubt that raises a problem, a doubt that worries and for this incites to the discussion. In French, the historically first meaning of the term 'problematic' rests there, upon this uncertainty which leads us to hesitate before certifying or using any entity qualified as problematic. The problem, from the Greek *problema*, is what is thrown before us, the obstacle that threatens to make us stumble. At best, it attracts the eye, it obliges us to slow down our pace, to make an effort, whether to circumvent it or to step over it. At worst, it interrupts us squarely, paralyzes us. From Kant onwards, the problematic character will be defined as that of the hypothesis, in opposition to two other terms: the 'assertoric', what is simply affirmed, and the 'apodictic', what is proved, necessary. Between two certainties, the act of faith and demonstration, creeps in what is uncertain, the shadow that creates doubt.

What is problematic emerges from the order of the possible. It is a mere hypothesis. Even if this hypothesis appears necessary or unavoidable, as in the anhypothetic, whose presence is crucial in the

Platonic architectonics: a hypothesis whose presence is necessary, but whose articulation poses a problem. It is the hypothesis per excellence or the negation of the status of the hypothesis. For example, should we not think of the unity of the self in order to attribute any predicate to it? Do we not, in the same way, postulate the unity of the world in order to be able to speak of it in any way? While doubting the nature of this unity. For, if we can affirm, induce, deduce, prove many things about the world or being, the crux of thought hurts as soon as it is a question of grasping or of defining its unity. We are obliged, without even thinking about it, without being able to conceive it, to postulate this elusive unity in order to be able to think. And if we stop for a moment, to question the legitimacy on which this discourse is based, the gap of the thing in itself offers itself or imposes itself upon our bewildered gaze. The pretended postulate then assumes its true nature again, that of a hypothesis. Finally, we realized that we had taken options, which we had advanced, too quickly perhaps, by taking sides in a dark business, simply because of functionality and utility, because we wanted to move forward. Risk cannot be more legitimate, if indeed it was taken knowingly, if indeed the hubris who had sponsored it remained aware of the transgression thus carried out. The concepts of the 'Universe' and of 'singularity' can well capture, as examples, the problematic nature of transcendental concepts, since they touch the limit of our thinking.

2. Anhypothetical

Whether it be time, space, being, unity, freedom, existence, reason, or any other fundamental concept absolutely necessary to thought, the necessity of the mind from which philosophy makes its field of action, everything that is the basis of discourse, cannot escape problematization. A problematization not conceived as an external and contingent action, but conceived as the vital and constitutive substance of the concept itself and of the thought that sustains it. For, as evident as the least of these transcendental terms are to us, their indecisive, ambiguous or even contradictory nature obliges us to let go whenever we believe that we can grasp them firmly, by any operation of thought.

It is always possible to make a proposal problematic, insofar as every proposition necessarily articulates a definite relationship between two terms. Now if it is possible to articulate a first term with respect to a second term, it is also possible to engage it rather in a relation to a third term, or even to a fourth, and so on, a more or less finite and determined process which makes the apprehension of things unstable. But there are terms, or concepts, which, more than others, seem in themselves to contain a sort of alterity, no longer extrinsic in its relation, but intrinsic. They have a clear power of thought. They may be called founding concepts, or boundary concepts, depending on whether we inaugurate with them the process of thought or whether this process finds its end, its outcome, which in general comes back to the same thing. These founding

concepts are decreed anhypothetic: their meaning depends on unsustainable but necessary hypotheses, an unconditioned condition of thought.

Naturally, the propositions that concern these concepts take the form of paradoxes: these concepts attract the formulation of questions, they generate contradiction and antinomy. Which contradictory questions and propositions have not been formulated about the one and the multiple, the finite and the infinite, on freedom and necessity, on discrete and continuous, on being and non-being! As many couples of which each member retains an unmatched prestige, an opposition which we cannot divide, and nevertheless our reason cannot grant them any 'concrete' reality. We are therefore obliged to concede to them a primordial role, and therefore an essence or an existence, but we find it difficult to define them in ourselves other than by the ridicule of a tautology. Being is being. Unity is unity. And again, it is not certain that by bringing the least of these concepts into contact with itself, we do not already offer ourselves a marked transgression.

3. Set of Questions

Thus, what is eluding us is problematic. This does not mean that we cannot give reality to this fleeing game. Otherwise, how could it escape us? We would not dare to assert anything, or to prove anything. We are forced to ask questions. We are obliged to articulate paradoxes. Any affirmation will advance under the Caudine Forks of conditions, under the guise of the conditional mode, a formalism that will necessarily refer to circumstances, specifications, determinations, necessary reductionism, second-best, whose nature must never escape us. We will have to move on a path of which we know fully well that it is only the other side of the truth, even though it could also be its location. The reversibility of a reality that only makes sense insofar as it is known that it is senseless. The unconditional is asserted, which cannot be substantiated; the conditional is supported, which cannot be asserted.

For this reason, we arrive at the third meaning of 'problematic', derived very naturally from the first two. After the doubtful and the hypothetical, the problematic is the set of questions posed by a particular situation or proposition. Which may very well be summarized by one of the particular questions, considered more essential, supposed to capture the generality of the given situation. It can also be the set of sub-questions of a given question, this set being called the problematic of the first question, or it is underpinned by it. Of course, the term 'problematic' could in some way be replaced by that of question. To the extent that a set of questions can be summarized by a question. To the extent that a question which poses a problem to reason, such as a paradox, can also be replaced by a question. However, even if all this is reduced to a matter of forms, it seems that the question of form is not deprived of substance. The distinction between unity and multiplicity is not trivial, even though it is a matter of forms.

That distinction between affirmation – whether it be a hypothesis or a paradox – and question is not less significant. But it is not really on this battlefield that it seems to us the most urgent to start the fight for the moment.

4. Rehabilitating the Question

The crucial place where we want to start working at this moment is on a presupposition that terribly interferes with philosophical work, because it always leads to a suspicion of opinion, of habit or of conviction, as to the inherent value of a problematic. This blind spot is the status of the issue, with its consequences on the status of the problem. In everyday thought, a question is a disease which we can only cure through a response. An unanswered question is like a handle-less hammer, or a ship without a rudder: you cannot do anything about it. Worse, a question in itself encumbers us, it embarrasses us and prevents us from sleeping. It is a problem, a 'pebble' across our path, an obstacle that slows us down and prevents us from advancing. Now, if this problem can be perceived as a challenge, as the unexpected, likely to stimulate us or to keep us awake, it is often advertised in its negative dimension. That which is opposed to our will, which is opposed to our reason, which is opposed to our action, which is opposed to our determination. A question is a hole, a lack, an uncertainty, it explicitly refers to our finitude.

We would be unkind to play astonishment at such an attitude. To perceive the question as a problem of which we would like to be promptly relieved is a most legitimate reflex. And it is precisely this legitimacy that we would like to analyze and criticize. For, if the position in question had nothing legitimate, we would not really see the value of dissecting its substance. Only what is true deserves to be proven false. But what is false is deprived neither of substance nor of interest, and we do not see why we should not dwell on what is thus deprived of being.

The human being is engaged in matter, he exists, he is embodied. Because of this, he is a being of need, of lack, of pain and passion. He desires, however, to persevere in his being, and in order to do so, he must confront and surpass all that could be an obstacle to this being, through its limits, its constraints and its fragility. If he did not know frailty, what would he need anyway, to persevere in his being: that would be absurd. Perseverance has no reason for being except in the resistance imposed upon it. Without this, being would simply be, without worrying about any otherness, without worrying about the other, without worrying about what would be opposed to it. Nothing else would oppose him, since he would be ignorant of otherness.

In the face of this situation of want and displeasure, it is above all to solve, to solve in order to know, to solve in order to choose, to solve in order to act, in short to decide at all costs. Here we see the crucial role of free will, of freedom, for without uncertainty, without doubt, without question, there is no possible freedom, but only the dictates of blind

necessity. Thus, let us distinguish two moments in our case: the moment that precedes the choice, the moment of waiting, the moment of reflection, the moment of interrogation, the moment of uncertainty, and the moment that follows the choice, moment of relief, moment of commitment, the time of action and deployment. For all intents and purposes, we decide to ignore the moment of the choice itself, a simple and indivisible instant, a classical discontinuity, that of an ephemeral present whose nature we do not know and whose role consists in separating a forward from an after.

5. Power and Act

The temptation is great to subordinate the before to the after, as if the anterior found its reason for being only in that which succeeds it. Beyond the natural tendency of the human mind, which constantly seeks to satisfy its needs, a scheme that induces a mechanism of utilitarian thought – what does it give me? –there is another given, linked to the first but more explicitly philosophical, which accounts for this bias of posteriority. This pattern is roughly that of Aristotle, which opposes ‘power’, the capacity or power to do things, to the ‘act’, to do things, to give a kind of primacy to the act, as an accomplishment and realization of the couple power/act. This pattern is opposed to that of Plato, for whom power has value in itself, since it represents one of the first forms or definitions of being. The power of action could, in this perspective, be considered as ontologically prime, since specific and determined action would be but one of the infinite possibilities of action of the power to act. Although Plato grants a certain vigor and legitimacy to the action through its concept of *kairos*: a timely moment, timely situation, making the committed act unique, valued in relation to any other specific act, since this act knows how to take care of the alterity of the world, characterized by temporality.

The value of a problematic would thus lie in its capacity to be, in its capacity to act, in the freedom it grants to the subject. To know how to position a problematic is to grow in being, it is to make oneself free, to act with full knowledge of the facts. Knowing to ask the real questions is to free the being from the weight of its determinations and immediacy. Life is no longer posited as an act destined to satisfy its own needs, but as a moment of freedom from contingency, not to escape this contingency, but rather to take possession of it. Eastern non-action, that of the tiger lurking in the shadows, ready to jump, making itself available to the world to better apprehend it, is entirely in keeping with this vision. But to be available to the world, to grasp it, it is a question of unlearning, questioning the conditioning of our thought and of our being. It is then necessary to think of the unthinkable, to opt for this radical position of no longer taking anything for granted. Not by pretending to any factitious neutrality, nor to a vague and ephemeral suspension of judgment, but by identifying the most ingrained, most incontestable presuppositions, and by posing the interrogation which might temporarily suspend the affirmation.

Through this desperate attempt to think the unthinkable, the hidden postulates will appear, which during the previous instant were so taken for granted that it would have been impossible to formulate them.

6. Problematic and Existence

Our thesis can be summarized as follows: any proposition is problematizable. Or: nothing is acquired. Or, again, any proposition is only a conjecture. The meaning or quality of veracity that is given to a given proposition is only the tacit, fragile, and momentary agreement that is accorded to a particular position. Or, any proposition is a hypothesis, capable of operating and carrying out its work in a given context and within given limits. Context, limit, and operativity which it is of course necessary to delimit and define, in order to problematize the said proposal. Beyond a simple theoretical bias intended to make us reflect further, or beyond a simple academic exercise, this rather radical bias, which a priori sows suspicion in any thought, may seem excessive. One could accuse him of paving the way for relativism, indifferentism, passivity or cynicism, and this accusation would not be totally unfounded. Like any attitude pushed to excess, or by simple deformation, this one may necessarily lead to some form of abuse or rigidity.

For this reason, it seems useful to uncover the link between problematization and existence, if the latter does not appear yet. Let us assume that existence is a form of commitment: commitment in matter, commitment to society, commitment to others, commitment to oneself, commitment to temporality, commitment to a priori principles, etc. In this sense, problematization is a form of disengagement, since it draws us into an intellectual distancing, in a critical position, through speculation and abstraction. One can thus understand how it would be perceived as a surrender or a betrayal of existence, and why any attempt at dialectization will tend to generate, depending on the situation, a certain resistance by instinct of survival. Nevertheless, once this has been expressed, we must also admit with Plato that an existence which does not know how to examine is doubtless suffering from a serious deficiency. What, in fact, is self-consciousness? What about the process of deliberation that theoretically should serve as a preamble and preparation for important decisions? In other words, is problematization not the very condition of freedom, a freedom of choice which alone protects us from a certain conditioning: that of our education, that of society, that of the immediate, that of utility, etc. In other words, if problematization is a betrayal of the commitment of existence, is not this betrayal a necessary measure of hygiene for this other dimension of human existence: consciousness? And there we shall see that consciousness is indeed an inhibitor: inhibitor of the act, inhibitor of desire, inhibitor of the will, inhibitor of the self. Some will say, for example, that the work of consciousness inhibits the state of love. But without the work of undermining this inhibitor, how to establish the tension indispensable for

the life of the mind? And, like any work of negativity, the latter, abandoned unto itself, will risk inducing a pathological annihilation of being. But, no tool is in itself the guarantee of any perfection.

7. Technics of Problematization

To problematize is to look for objections or questions that make it possible to show the limits or imperfections of an initial proposal, so as to eliminate, modify or enrich it. The postulate of this skill is that any statement poses a number of problems. It is a matter of considering any proposition as a mere hypothesis, possible or probable, but never as absolute or necessary. To think critically is to analyze what is said in order to verify whether the proposal is valid and to see how it is false, limited or unnecessary. It is not a question of inventing a problem, but of articulating a problem without obligation to solve it. It is to be able to simultaneously take a perspective and its opposite, so as to test a hypothesis, to construct it and to elaborate it. Some important questions underlie this assumption, such as: "Are there times when this proposition is false?", "What are the truth limits of this proposal? What are the conditions of truth of this proposition?"

There are two different contexts for problematization, which in some way change the meaning or purpose of the problem-solving action. In relation to a definite affirmation, to problematize means to extract a sentence from its definitive, categorical and necessary status. In this case, to ask the question 'Why?' does not problematize since it only asks the reason for this status. This does not upset the presupposition, or maybe purely accidentally. The question of problematization must necessarily 'deconstruct' or 'break' the basis of this sentence. For example, suppose an initial sentence 'We must always act on moral values'.

If someone asks "Why do we always act according to moral values?", the person will respond by explaining and justifying its position, which can be very coherent and in itself will not cause any problems. But, if someone asks "Can moral values be opposed to each other?", a question in which the answer should logically be "Yes", since, according to common sense and experience, moral values are rather divergent, then the speaker has a problem. Because acting in accordance with moral values regularly involves acting against moral values opposed in their content. Also, what was obvious and unquestionable has now become a problem, since by affirming something we affirm the opposite as well.

In the case of life, a story or an entire text, the concept of problematization changes its form, function or nature. Because in an unequivocal sentence, there is not in itself a problem a priori, there is only a categorical or prescriptive descriptive sentence. Consequently, the problem must come entirely from the subsequent question. When we are dealing with a narrative, whether invented or in relation to an event in life, nothing is unequivocal. In a way, we can say that everything is then

explicitly or implicitly problematic. Thus, the function of a question of problematization is no longer to relate a problem to the 'outside,' it suffices to emphasize it, to reveal it, to explicate it, to show it. For, we can say that in life or within a history there is no explicit presupposition of content, there is only one interpretation, necessarily subjective in scope. But we cannot deconstruct something that does not really exist. But we can make visible a problem that is implicitly contained in a sequence of events or in the experience we have of a situation. In such a context, problematization no longer means making visible the impossible or the necessary, in order to question it, but to make implicit what is explicit, or to abstract from a concrete situation a general problem in a conceptual mode. We see that in the latter case, more questions are acceptable as questions of problematization. For example, a question "Why?" may raise a problem in a narrative, which is not the case in an affirmation. The same is true for an entire text, given its complexity.

For example, if I ask "Why do people refer so much to authority?", which questions life in society, I have to face various possibilities, of opposite nature. On the one hand, I can consider it legitimate to assert that we cannot invent for ourselves the totality of knowledge and that we must therefore refer to experts or books. On the other hand, I can criticize such a position by saying that because of fear or insecurity people do not dare to make judgments on their own. So, this question has created a problem about our behavior in life. This does not mean that all issues are problematic.

But if I ask "What is the capital of France?", This does not seem to create a problem a priori, since it will probably be answered unequivocally and categorically, and this will not give rise to doubt or debate. But we can establish that, in a context of narration, more questions can problematize than in a conceptual context, especially when the text is brief. It is therefore more difficult, more demanding, and more restrictive to problematize a sentence than to problematize life or a history. In the case where no framework is specified, in order to determine whether a question is problematic, we can consider that it refers to the totality of existence, knowledge or to any other conceivable context. In other words, if there is no context, the question is unlimited and can refer to everything we can think of.

8. Problematic, Concept and Dialectic

The formulation of a problematic is not only an operation of negation. It is not the mere doubt or the confession of a state of anxiety. It is also an act of creation: the creation of concepts. Indeed, how to problematize without generating concepts? It seems almost impossible. Any problematic deprived of the emergence of a concept would only be the articulation of a doubt or a suspension of judgment, which in itself would not be useless, but it would be only the first step in the process. The state of mind that

would allow – a necessary but not sufficient condition – to produce new ideas.

As an example, let us put the following statement: the human being is free to act as he wishes. Suppose now that I want to problematize this proposition. A simple doubt would be expressed thus: is the human being always free to act as he wants? This, although insufficient, is already in itself an attempt at problematization: it is asked to verify the universality of the proposal. But, to go further in this process, it will be necessary to bring out concepts. Let us look at some examples. Consciousness: Can I be conscious of my desires? Conditioning: Can desires be the product of conditioning? Being: are our desires always in conformity with our being? The will: must the will give way to desire? In other words, to question our proposal, we must introduce new concepts that will serve as a tool for investigation and verification. From this we can even hypothesize that problematization is the relation between a proposition and a new concept, or the new light produced by a new concept on a given proposition.

Through this same bias of negation or interrogation, which in any case invites criticism, a process of dialectization takes place. It is time to work here on the emergence and nature of the initial proposition by studying the conditions of its affirmation or negation. By means of concepts external to the initial proposal, which we call for 'new concepts', a work of deepening can be carried out, showing the meaning, the many meanings, the shifts of meaning, the reversals of meaning and the non-meaning of the proposal in question. But we will see this in our next step: the dialectic.

As a conclusion for this chapter, we will assert that there is a tragic dimension of problematization, as the history of philosophy shows us. Let us take this inaugural gesture of Plato described by himself as 'parricide'. When he reverses the famous tautology of Parmenides: 'Being is, non-being is not,' stating that 'non-being is.' To the 'force of certainty' of his predecessor, the second, the pupil of Socrates the dialectician, responds by problematizing reality, for example the 'good', a supreme evidence. It is a question of envisaging the virtual, the potentiality, as a first reality, underlying the immediacy of the rational evidence. This did not prevent him from reaching certain more dogmatic visions in his later works. And, his pupil Aristotle will also accomplish his own betrayal by returning to the concept of evidence and acquired. Let us take as another example the 'Copernican reversal' of Kant, which inaugurates a crucial break in the vision of the world: it is no longer the object that is at the center of knowledge but the subject. Ontology suddenly gives way to epistemology. Transcendence is that of thought and no more that of being.

It is therefore a question of acting directly on paradigms, on the conditions of possibility of thought, on its structural principles, on its foundations, by upsetting them, reversing them. One searches for limits, counterexamples, the exception to derive new principles that reverse the situation. Not just on the bottom, but on the form itself. Thus, Nietzsche criticizes the laborious and reductive vision of Socratic questioning, to which he prefers the generous and aristocratic aphorism immediately

given, of course, to the one who is capable of receiving it. From this author one can also retain an important problematizing concept: that of transvaluation. Nietzsche uses it in the ethical field, in order to restore the natural order of values, perverted according to him by Christianity, which has reversed the natural order of values. This 'religion of pity', by glorifying the weak and condemning the strong, goes against the very principles of life. Here again, it is necessary to carry out a 'Copernican reversal', by reversing the connotation of terms. Thus, what was positive becomes negative, that which was negative becomes positive. But, if this 'revaluation of values' can be carried out in one direction, it can also be carried out in another. But Nietzsche is not Hegel. For the former, transvaluation is unidirectional, contrary to the dialectical principle of the later. Nevertheless, the concept remains, marking the annals of thought. And the simple fact of naming this ability to reverse conceptual polarities indelibly marks the power of thought.

Chapter VI

Dialectic

Among commonly sold philosophical terms, which can say everything and nothing at the same time, after those of 'concept' and 'problematic', there is a third one which seems interesting to approach: dialectic. An ambiguous term if it is one, which can both be used to attest the precision of an argumentation and to denounce its vague or sophisticated nature. From the dawn of philosophy, in Plato, this term takes on a strong connotation: it is the only mode of knowledge superior to geometry, the means per excellence of access to truth and to the divine. An antiquity that no doubt explains the trivialization or the sclerosis of the term. However, more specifically, we can identify two main traps to the dialectical path, a delimitation that allows us to better understand the problem. On the one hand, the logical or formal temptation of thought, a dogmatism which, on the pretext of truth or scientificity, refuses to question its own presuppositions. On the other hand, the fusional temptation of thought, for whom everything is in everything and vice versa, and in particular the famous 'complementarity', which is very much in vogue these days, which ignores or refutes the very concept of contradiction.

To clarify our point of view, we will take as a starting point the following definition of dialectic: a process of thought which takes apparently contradictory propositions and which is based on these contradictions in order to bring forth new propositions. These new proposals make it possible to reduce, solve or explain the initial contradictions. However, at the etymological level, dialectics is nothing else than the art of discussion: in Greek, *dia* means one *with* the other, or *through* the other, and *legein* means to speak. How has the art of discussion been transformed into the art of manipulating opposites? As is often the case, once the question is clearly stated, the possibility of an answer is clearer. Indeed, what is the main characteristic of a discussion, if not the opposition that emerges from a difference? Opposition between terms, between presuppositions, between judgments and choices, between registers. Even in this silent soliloquy, this dialogue with oneself which, according to Plato, is thought itself, the mind operates through oppositions and contradictions, by and through contradictions. It is from the word, or the verb, the *legein*, and therefore from contradiction, that emerges the concept of logos, of reason.

1. Heraclitus

We shall later return to the modern tendency, if not the pathology, which consists in evacuating or flattening the idea of opposition or contradiction, referred to as a mere diversity of opinions. Perhaps it will suffice for the reader hampered by the conflictual or dramatic perspective that we propose to suspend for a short moment any negative connotation of these terms in order to follow more comfortably the thread of our thought. In Heraclitus, one of the principal influences on Platonic thought, with Parmenides and Pythagoras, we find the following fragments. "Struggle is the father and king of all". "The world is a harmony of tensions in turn stretched and relaxed, like that of the lyre and the bow." "Disagreement always agrees." Aristotle relates that "Heraclitus blames the poet who said: May conflict, among gods and men, perish. For, there would be no harmony, if there was no high and low pitch, and no living without the female and the male, which are contrary." "All things are engendered by discord." Thus, if unity is not excluded, on the contrary, this unity expresses itself, exists and is discovered through the tension of that which is opposed and contradicted, through a conflict that is the life of the world and of soul. Let us specify, moreover, the very restrictive access of the individual to unity with the following two fragments: "The invisible harmony is more beautiful than the visible." "The logos, which is always what men are incapable of understanding, both before hearing it and after hearing it for the first time." Thus, the infinite task is that of human reason, which tries to perceive the coherence or cohesion of all things, including that of its own existence, but which constantly clashes with the reality of the opposition, the fracture. In order to show the agreement between the thoughts and the behavior of the Ephesian thinker, Diogenes Laertius, an ancient historian of antique philosophy, describes Heraclitus in the following way: "as a bragging bird, insulting the public and speaking in enigmas, he appeared standing." Obviously 'conflict' was the very essence of the one who was called 'the obscure one'.

2. Plato

In this perspective, the murder of Socrates, hopefully, loses its purely anecdotal and singular status, on the contrary it brings to light the stakes of a specific functioning and its philosophical dimension, a tragic gesture that inaugurated what could be called Western philosophy. Indeed, Socrates is the one who insults his fellow citizens with his constant questioning. Apart from a small coterie of friends and disciples, either he is misunderstood and ignored, or he is hated. What does it consist of in practice? By calling into question the discourse of those who claim to possess knowledge, whatever the subject, in order to put their knowledge to the test and make them grasp its limits, and by questioning those who do not know so as to make them discover knowledge by themselves. The specific means used to make this questioning operational and effective is

contradiction. To produce or to cause to be produced propositions or concepts that more or less directly contradict the propositions or concepts already advanced: this is the role of questioning and of maieutic. Overcoming these obstacles forces the abandonment of an initial hypothesis now considered as a dead-end. It allows us to overcome this by the production of a new hypothesis, or at least by working on it. The implicit presupposition of the exercise is that: any postulate, proposition or concept is considered from the beginning to be limited and wobbly. All discourse can be constituted only by conjectures or hypotheses, which are operative only within well-defined limits. The truth of a proposition consists therefore in discovering this threshold of dysfunction and indetermination, since the absolute cannot by definition be articulated, except by pure convention. To accede to truth is to go beyond ordinary opinion; it is also to go beyond righteous or learned opinion, to enter into that awareness of the ignorance which obliges us to let go and to give up all certainty, all that is taken for granted. It is fragility of discourse and of being which is painful to accept, a work of pure negativity just as liberating as it is terribly ungrateful. Dialectic consists here in producing objections and questions enabling us to enter the anagogical process of ascending to being, or to good, or to any other particular form of the unconditioned, the absolute.

Three general accusations are made against Socrates, by the sophists or others, in the course of the dialogues of Plato. "You cut my speech into pieces, you put it in tatters." "You make me say what I do not mean." "You want me wrong." These three accusations constitute irrefutable proof as to the historical and actual reality of the Socratic practice. Indeed, any questioning that requires a given word to be accountable for the reality of its content, will encounter periodically this type of specific resistance. These three accusations nevertheless circumscribe fairly well the stakes of the Socratic dialectic. To discover the anchor points of a speech: 'To cut the speech to pieces'. To oblige the author to discover its presuppositions and consequences, an often undesirable discovery: 'To make say what one does not want to say'. To force the abandonment and the overtaking, usually it is unpleasant: "You want me wrong." We can see here the terribly confrontational dimension of dialectic, especially because it deprives the thinking subject of everything that could comfort and reassure him. He stands alone, somewhat resisting this corrosion of thought, the permanence of being, but a being which does not really recognize any substantive status to the existent, since even the individual human soul is led to reabsorb in the divine fire. To know oneself is to rediscover the originary or the totality, by the yardstick of which we are nothing.

3. The Cynics

A less known lineage of Socratism, other than Platonism, developed during the Hellenistic period: the Cynics are less known than other

currents because they did not take much root in the history of Western philosophy. Apart from a few heirs, diverse, varied, and more or less direct, such as Montaigne, Rabelais, Pascal, Voltaire, or Nietzsche, they will remain largely ignored and, above all, misunderstood. Despite their radicality or their anti-intellectualism, it seems useful to mention them in this presentation of the dialectic, because of their attempt to criticize or to overthrow the dominant values of their time: one finds in them the subversive dimension of dialectic: the *parrhesia*. This term refers to a genuine attitude, a strong and straightforward talk, a solid assurance, a simplicity that is unstoppable, a radicality that nothing stops.

Disturbed terms, such as nihilism, will be invoked, which will mask or obscure the reality of this current, closer in spirit to oriental thought, to Zen for example, than to the general philosophical functioning of our culture. Our business is not here to embark on a history of philosophy, but merely to shed light on the problem of dialectic. Let us see some principal aspects of this philosophical current. Its recognized founder, Antisthenes, professed utter contempt for all conventions, opinions, or values received and accepted by society. Not a free refusal, contrary to what is sometimes believed, but for the sake of truth, integrity, and authenticity. Of course, such an extreme concern tends to carry speech and attitude to a certain radicality, inciting to a provocative posture.

Varying according to individuals, virtue consists, for the cynic, in unlearning what is bad, especially that which belongs to facility, tradition, established authority, property and convention; an unlearning that never delights anyone. For this, it tends to be apolitical, asocial, and stateless. Happiness and truth are deserved, through a certain asceticism. Its values are those of the individual: will, freedom, endurance, self-control, especially mastery of desires and passions, and for that it does not respect faint-heartedness, considered to kind and docile. It distrusts beautiful speeches and intellects to which it prefers acts, often violent, which lead it to confrontation. Its permanent pedagogical concern is uncompromising, its main tools are surprise, irony, symbolic gesture. It does not give in the explanation and multiplication of words, but in the grasp of its interlocutor, through a single sentence or a strong gesture. It criticizes the starched pace and the serious word of service thinkers, who spread their knowledge all over: it contrasts the natural with the cultural, which is always false. For that, it does not argue, it shoots arrows.

An insupportable character, he generally becomes a marginal, he passes for an anarchist. Plato called Diogenes, the most famous of the cynics, 'a Socrates who has gone mad.' To which Diogenes replied by saying of Plato: "Of what utility is for us a man who, though practicing philosophy for a long time already, finds himself disturbing no one." The same Diogenes, who manifested his contempt for his fellow-citizens, with a lantern in his hand, repeating to those who wished to hear him, "I am looking for a man." Another famous phrase: "Go away from my sun!", addressed to Alexander, invincible conqueror who approached him to meet him. Humor is its master weapon, it allows us to access the derisory nature of existence.

4. Zen

In order to illustrate a non-Western example of the dialectical spirit, let us briefly discuss Zen philosophy, which advocates both the work of opposites and the practice of authenticity. A Chinese and then Japanese version of Buddhism, it is distinguished by certain characteristics: its harshness, its radicality and its relationship to physical exercise. The Zen denomination is the romanization of a Japanese term which means 'silent meditation', whose Chinese equivalent is 'Chan'. This refers in particular to the posture of the historical Buddha, when he obtained the awakening under the Bodhi tree in India, more than two thousand five hundred years ago. As in the French term for meditation – which comes from *medium*: center, space and mediation – the idea is based on the principle of centration, to be in the middle in order to act better. It is said that Buddha suddenly stopped to preach, took a flower, and turned it in his fingers, surprising his interlocutors. We see in this gesture the common experience of a perfect attention to reality as it is, an attitude that is at the heart of Zen practice. It is a question of going beyond speech, speculation, and habitual speech, in order to reach reality. Even the knowledge of the Buddhist doctrine and the sutras is relativized. For, it is a question of privileging a direct experience of consciousness. It is also a famous injunction that shows the radicality of this philosophy: "If you meet the Buddha, kill him!"

The three pillars of Zen are meditation, wisdom and discipline. This practice is also supposed to help us live. According to the Lotus Sutra, it is a matter of resolving 'the great affair of life and death.'

Zen is part of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, the 'Great Vehicle', which establishes that each being has in itself, independently, what is necessary for enlightenment and salvation. "Everything is Buddha", some will say. For Zen, consciousness captures the totality of reality: it is therefore a matter of realizing the true nature of one's own consciousness in order to attain enlightenment. Although awakening is not the end in itself.

Some practitioners work rather from Koans, absurd stories, paradoxical phrases, aimed at causing cognitive dissonances and bringing the subject out of his mental routines in order to attain enlightenment. The pupil must penetrate emptiness through nonsense, thus eliminating his ego, egocentric, possessive, and eager for certainties. Thus freed, it becomes a perfectly smooth surface that reflects reality like a mirror. An important point to understand about 'Zen' philosophy is that it is not a doctrine, but a knowledge of oneself, linked to a dissolution of the self. 'To study Buddhism is to study oneself. To study oneself is to forget oneself.' The only Zen you can find at the top of the mountain is the Zen you'll bring. The rest is only circumstances and decorum. The annihilation of the subject and of being is more marked there than in the Socratic "know thyself."

5. Reversal and Conversion

Why this little historical survey of philosophy? Because at the heart of the philosopher lies dialectic, which feeds on oppositions and contradictions, the aim of which is the overthrow of thought, which religion traditionally calls 'conversion.' And while it is always possible to analyze the history of philosophy in terms of inheritance and continuity, it is equally valid, no doubt more enriching, to consider it from the point of view of negation, of rupture and discontinuity. Aristotle vis-a-vis Plato, who opposes materiality to ideality. Descartes in the face of scholasticism, who refuses authority a priori and proposes 'thinking by oneself.' Kant, which makes metaphysics fall from its foundation and transforms it into a process of thought. Hegel, for whom philosophy must cease to be timeless and incarnate in history. Schelling which rehabilitates the narrative in the face of the primacy of the concept. Marx, for whom philosophy must no longer analyze the world, but transform it. Heidegger, who wishes to return twenty-five centuries back in order to regain the Being and no longer be confined to a being (*das Seiende*).

What would be the philosophical stakes if the history of thought were not articulated around these oppositions, was not structured around a certain number of these great antinomies? One of Kant's important contributions is undoubtedly to have identified some of the most crucial: finite and infinite, discrete and continuous, conditioned and unconditioned, and so on. His work remains one of the main historical attempts to clarify fundamental antinomies after Plato and his dialogue with Parmenides.

6. Nothing is granted

Beyond the philosophical generality and the antinomies, let us see if there is a dialectical specificity. Rightly or wrongly – absolutely speaking, the problem must not really arise – philosophers take sides with their predecessors or their contemporaries to the extent of what they believe is right and true. Is it nevertheless sufficient to take sides and to oppose oneself in order to speak of dialectics? If opposition and contradiction, which Hegel calls the work of negativity, are absolutely necessary to the dialectical operation, it does not seem to suffice in itself. Unless we consider that all philosophical opposition actually contributes, dialectically, to the totality of philosophy, which is, in a way, the Hegelian perspective.

To deal with this question, let us introduce an Aristotelian distinction: that between dialectic and analytic. For Aristotle, analytics deals with what is certain, whereas dialectic deals with propositions which have no value but the possible or the probable. Kant will take up this distinction between a logical dialectic of appearance and a logical analytic of truth. In Plato, for example, this distinction does not need to be, for certitude has no real status in this sense: all discourse is conjecture and imperfection. It would seem, therefore, that any particular philosophical approach is not, or does not claim, dialectic, which would enable us to

discern what is related to the dialectic and what is detached from it. Although this difference in dialectic already leads one to redefine dialectic, unless it is the reverse: the fact of defining dialectic in a certain way brings the author to practice it or not.

From the start, what essentially opposes Plato and Aristotle is the status of the sensible, the reality of perception, the value of empirical knowledge. For the former, it is a matter of mistrusting it: it is illusory. For the second, it constitutes a guarantee of validity for thought. This line of demarcation is one of the most important among those which pass through the history of philosophy. If, for Plato alone, thought is a source of true knowledge, for Kant, for example, thought cannot produce by itself its objects of knowledge. It is constrained to depend on an empirical exteriority. This position has another consequence: the relation to certainty, which will determine whether philosophy is an art or a science. Indeed, if science sometimes pretends to provide reliable knowledge, art is content to produce beauty, usefulness or truth, without claiming the right to the articulation and assertion of any incontestable truth. Now, this claim to certainty is generally articulated around two main criteria of knowledge: the empirical, which concerns matter, and logic or the analytical, which concerns thought. Thus, Kant and Aristotle have established rules and principles a priori concerning the functioning of reason, rules considered by them as unsurpassable and inviolable.

For Plato and for Hegel, these a priori limits and rules are devoid of meaning, since dialectics, the privileged way of access to truth, is a process of thought which necessarily passes and repasses through the thinking subject, posited as an object of thought, and not as a postulate. In other words, contrary to logic, nothing is acquired for dialectic. Let us take what is perhaps the most striking example, at the heart of the logical operation: the principle of non-contradiction. This principle, which excludes thinking of a thing and its opposite under identical modes, the pillar of logic, is not obscured or radically denied by dialectic, but it is not an unsurpassable limit to thought. The transcendence of this principle is for dialectic a crucial moment: the redoubling of thought unto itself, which thus elaborates and constructs itself. Dialectics is an art, capable of producing, of making explicit and of verifying the rules that govern its development. Even the method is an object for itself.

7. Dialectics

Contrary to science, based either on demonstrated efficiency or established rules, dialectic is aesthetic, singular and performative, like artistic work, although it is of course necessary to address reason, in that it is universal. Science obviously also claims universality, but not in the same way. At the heart of dialectic is an anagogical process, a return to unity starting from the plurality of the singular, a process already identified by Plato. Naturally, this unity is an anhypothetic, a necessary hypothesis which cannot be formulated, since it goes beyond or

transcends any formulation: it is founded and cannot be founded. Thus, any contradiction, the articulation of any problematic, allows us to reach a higher level of thought, where what appears contradictory at first is unified by accessing a new concept. This new concept is what Hegel calls synthesis, the culmination of dialectics. By a concern for operativity and completion, the latter considers that thought cannot remain at the stage of contradiction: it cannot be confined to the work of negativity. All tension and division must be resolved in the articulation of a new affirmation by a principle of identity or reconciliation. This is not the case in Plato, for whom the *aporia*, the impasse, the paradox, is not a problem in itself. Moreover, the problem thus posited must be valued in itself, for it establishes an indispensable tension, the life of thought, since it perpetuates its dynamics. This is an 'open' and not a 'closed' dialectic. In the latter, the concept or the idea is not the finality of thought, nor can any particular object constitute an end, for the good reason that reason is not a means but a cause, and that a cause cannot be subject to its effect. Reason is its own finality as reason, in relation to the object, since reality is only the reflection of an absolute reason, a thought which is no longer one because it surpasses itself. Being, unity or the good, no name is adequate to characterize the cause of all things, of which reason is one of the primary characteristics.

This position, more Socratic than Platonic, is closer to Oriental thought than to Western tradition, scientific in orientation, concerned with positivity and efficiency. It is for this reason that in the latter the concept is king, the definition remains fundamental. For, without this thought of the affirmation and of the finite, without the postulate of the 'definitive', however temporal, it is hardly possible to decide and operate in worldly and everyday reality. Here, a question, a problem, a contradiction is only valid for its usefulness, that of a response, of a resolution or of a synthesis that follows. In this perspective, the dissatisfaction caused by *aporia* is considered untenable. The mind cannot accept to remain in suspense. At the very least, it needs an explanation, some assembly of words that reassures it. The proposition which consists in offering to merely meditate on a difficulty, to contemplate directly the inability of the mind to grasp at a single glance a disparate whole, or its powerlessness to decide quickly, without any other satisfaction, at best, than a vague aesthetic feeling inspired by a radical absence or by its own emptiness, seems untenable. For thought, unlike art, astonishment is not self-sufficient.

8. Charybdis and Scylla

The work of negation seems, as we have tried to explain, the essential part of the dialectical operation, or of the dialectical perspective. For, it is as much a look as a particular mode of action. The fundamental obstacle – or opposition – to dialectic thus remains the refusal of negativity. An opposition which appears in three different forms, as we briefly mentioned in our introduction. On the one hand, a scientific opposition, which hardly

suffers from remaining in the uncertainty and suspension of judgment, a position which requires definitions, procedures, established rules, established logics, and means of settling. Right opinion, Plato would say, is a knowledge that hinders the truth. On the other hand, a sentimental, fusional opposition, which does not bear conflict, confrontation, opposition, a state of mind which rules, rigor and demands, prefers intention, desire, faith and the postulate of undivided unity. Such a tendency invites itself a little too quickly at the table of the divine, says Hegel. Lastly, we encounter a thought of the fracture, which postulates respect for an irreconcilable difference, a condition indispensable to the postulate of a singular which represents its own finality. In such a scheme, one affirms the unavoidable irreducibility of the singular, thus saving the confrontation, rendered superfluous.

If dialectic is a work of negation, its living substance is in uncertainty. It is therefore understandable why discussion is also indispensable. How can we find in ourselves the radical otherness necessary for our own 'mise en abyme'? One better understands the Socratic instance, which, in an obsessive way, questions all that moves and questions in order to fathom the souls and to see where may lead the many ways of traverse. For, dialectic is not eristic, that art of speech which is akin to pleading, where it is a matter of conquering and convincing, that is, of being right. It is not merely a contradictory debate, nor a demonstration. It is an interrogation, a testing, a hollowing out of the singular, in order to pierce its foundations and its fragility, the multiplicity of the nothingness which alone allows the unveiling of being.

There are two ways of avoiding the reality of the discussion: either posing as absolute and incontestable truths a particular position or proposition, or merely cumulating perspectives without confronting their presuppositions. Dogmatism and relativism make up a marvelous household to stem the dialectical process. According to temperaments, situations and fashions, they conspire surreptitiously to asphyxiate thought and to drown the requirement of truth. For the latter relies on a constraint: that of the opposites. And, it is in this that the discussion well posed raises a real problem: how to think simultaneously of a thing and of its opposite? Yet, it is from this apparently absurd act that meaning can emerge, from novelty. But, for this, it is still necessary to know how to abandon the prey that is held firmly between the teeth, and to risk oneself in the uncertainty of the shadow. Unless we privilege a perspective that does not bother about truth, because it chooses the option of sacralizing difference.

Chapter VII

Intuition

1. The status of intuition

At one time or another, any professor of philosophy in office will be seen – it is to be hoped – worked by a certain dilemma: what is the status of intuition? Indeed, while some students do quite well in the academic exercises of scholarly 'dialectic', which consists in understanding and retaining formal elements of courses, providing arguments, contradicting their own ideas, formulating problematic, using various citations; others, without any ill will, succeed much less well. This would be no problem in itself, except that from time to time, however rarely, certain pupils of this second category appear philosophically more clearly inspired, creative and original than the first ones. A regret, or a bad conscience, then invades the corrector confronted with this problem, who sees himself a priori obliged to give a good note to the first and a bad one to the second, since, to go fast, one can affirm that, compared to other study subjects, in the teaching of philosophy, the method overrides the content.

2. Presuppositions

Contrary to the widespread illusion, there is hardly any philosophy, little reasoning, which is neither grounded nor based on presuppositions. This, in itself, does not constitute an objection to the validity of a philosopher. There is a condition, of course: that one is aware of it. After all, since the human being is engaged in space, time and matter, one does not see why his thought would not be so. Unless we forget that the construction of thought is of a thetic, local, biased and partial nature, and that access to pure reason, devoid of empirical objects and subjects, totally objective, is a very interesting and useful skyline or fantasy indeed, but nevertheless it is suspicious. It is only in fairy tales that the hero succeeds in riding rainbows. What, then, are the presuppositions of philosophical teaching? Is it possible to determine such an anchor, common and unavoidable, when the sources, styles, schools, or perspectives that punctuate the history of philosophy diverge so much? What, then, is the expression 'the professor of philosophy is the author of his course,' if there are dogmas from which one cannot escape? But, conversely and symmetrically, can one not ask on what criteria to evaluate and mark the pupil, if there were no specific and collective Caudine Forks, through which the apprentice should pass to determine if he actually learned something or not during his or her schooling. What, then, are the criteria for the success of

philosophizing, if it is not a question of ingesting a particular content capable of producing the right answers, although this view of things is in no way excluded? This is a long-standing problem faced by the difficult and tumultuous community of professors of philosophy.

Everyone here will bring his own answers and, although some will know how to articulate these questions and the answers that follow, it seems that the philosophical institution has established over time various non-negotiable acquisitions, and it is not clear how it could have been otherwise. Now, there is a philosopher who has left us a whole legacy of consequences on this point: Hegel.

3. Hegel

For more clarity, let us illuminate this thesis by various of Hegel's commonly quoted remarks. "A philosophy that is not a system can have nothing scientific. It expresses a subjective opinion, and its content is a contingent content" (*Logic*). "The true figure of truth is thus posited in this scientificity – which amounts to saying that in the concept alone truth finds the element of its existence" (*The Phenomenology of the Spirit*). "What is rational is real, and what is real is rational" (*Principles of the Philosophy of Law*). As for the opposing thesis, that of the 'romantic' philosophy he criticizes, and to which he practically rejects the very status of philosophy, he summarizes it thus: "If, precisely, truth exists in what, or rather as what is called intuition, or sometimes immediate knowledge of the absolute, religion, being (...) then, from this point of view, it is rather the opposite of the conceptual form that is required for the presentation of philosophy. The absolute must not be conceived, but felt and intuited: not its concept, but its feeling and intuition must have access to speech and be expressed." He concludes with this comment: "Those who abandon themselves to the disorderly fermentation of substance believe, by burying self-consciousness and renouncing the understanding, to be the elect of God, to whom God infuses wisdom in his sleep, but in this sleep, what they receive and actually generate, there are only dreams" (*Phenomenology of the Spirit*). Out of the concept, therefore, no philosophical salvation. This will make Schelling say, in reply to Hegel: "For him, God was not so much a mere concept, but the concept was God..." (*Contribution to the History of Modern Philosophy*). According to this enemy brother of Hegel, there is a great megalomania in the latter, the author of a philosophy which "boasts of having, unlike the preceding ones, absolutely no presuppositions" (*ibid.*). A boasting which, visibly, has now been instituted.

In order to point out the stakes of the affair, let us show the 'parricide' to which Hegel ventures in his desire for an ultimate philosophy. In his Lectures on Plato, a passage entitled 'Mythical Form and Representation in Platonic Thought', the author explains: "The mythical form of the Platonic dialogues is the attractive element of these writings; but it is a source of misunderstanding. It is already one to hold these

myths for the best element. A myth is always a representation which uses the sensible way, of sensible images, which are destined for representation, not for thought; it is an impotence of thought which does not yet know how to establish itself for itself, does not know how to be sufficient. On the one hand, it is the popular image, but on the other one cannot avoid the danger that what belongs only to representation and not to thought is taken for something essential."

The parties involved are clearly established: the all-powerful discursive reason and the concept on the one hand, the image, the feeling, the intuition and the fragility of the subject on the other. Philosophy is not poetry. Truth and thought definitely hold privileged access through a process of analysis, synthesis, criticism, logic, and the rigor of dialectics. Let us now attempt to respond to Hegel in a rash manner, and test the path that he enjoins us to adopt.

4. Immediacy

The term intuition generally refers to direct and immediate knowledge, which avoids any process, especially reasoning. The word comes from the Latin *intueri* which means: 'to look attentively', 'to admire', to 'take account of'. Reason, which is opposed to intuition, derives from *ratio*, which means 'calculation', and hence the sense of reasoning, of a conscious process of thought, in which the 'truth' is scarcely given. First, let us see more closely what constitutes this antinomy. The most striking aspect, as we have already said, is the opposition between the immediate intuition and the mediation of reason. In this sense, it appears initially that, for intuition, knowledge is given, while, for reason, something remains to be done. In this sense, reason takes on the appearance of an activity, while intuition assumes that of passivity.

It would be good to relate the term passivity to its origin, the one it shares with passion and patience, derived from the Latin *pati*, meaning to suffer, to tolerate, to bear, to admit, to allow. In these different meanings, if it is possible to oppose inactive intuition to active reason, it is equally possible to show that intuition is the manifestation of another type of activity, no less painful and meritorious, no less productive and constitutive of knowledge, than the much-celebrated work of reason. The primary work of intuition is availability, that of mind and being, which is more the manifestation of an attitude than of a specific act, something which refers more to being and less to doing, to oneself and less to an object. Now, what shocks here the defender of the reasoning reason, and in this it seems that there is nothing to be done about it: it is enough to lazily observe, and the trick is played. Perhaps wrongly, because it is still about making oneself available, a task which is not a given.

5. Contemplation

Intuition is contemplation. For, in spite of the apparent instantaneousness that characterizes it, it can well be inscribed in time. The absence of procedure and stages tends to portray as a lack of temporality and as a simple discontinuity a moment which can however persist. Without this continuous and sustained dimension of contemplation, a given intuition would be too fugitive: the mind would hardly have time to apprehend it. Contemplation is discredited because, from the point of view of reason, it is considered a waste of time, since nothing is developed. Yet, for a very long time, it represented philosophical activity par excellence, if only because of the gratuitousness which characterizes it. In the vision of the liberal arts, for which utility or the act of doing were often perceived as subordinate activities, contemplation, especially that which allowed one to contemplate metaphysical objects, great transcendental entities such as truth, beauty or good, presented itself as the noblest of mental activities. "For, this activity [contemplation] is by itself the highest; of what is in us, the spirit occupies the first place; and among those of knowledge, the questions embraced by the mind are the highest. [...] Moreover, this existence is the only one that can be loved for itself: it has no other result than contemplation, whereas, by practical existence, even outside of action, we always arrive at a more or less important result" (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*). "The visible world must be assimilated to a journey in prison, and the light of the fire with which it is illuminated to the effect of the sun, whereas, regarding the rise in the higher world and the contemplation of these wonders, you must see therein the rise of the soul in the intelligible world. [...] The idea of the good, which one sees with difficulty but which one cannot perceive without concluding that it is the universal cause of all that is good and beautiful. [...] It is the one who dispenses and procures truth and intelligence, and it must be seen in order for one to conduct oneself wisely, either in private life or in public life." (Plato, *The Republic*).

Thus, it would be a question of 'seeing'. From this perspective, does reasoning not become the intellectual activity of the needy and the working-poor, of all those who are incapable of directly perceiving the truth of things, or those who pursue a goal without ever knowing how to stop? Does not the anagogical approach, the process of returning to unity and origin, as initiated by Plato and resumed in particular by the mystical religious tradition, propose, as the culmination and finality, the vision of the absolute? Besides, there is another temptation of omnipotence. Reasoning would be no more than a second-best: the apprentice must still decompose and calculate what the master knows by a simple glance, or even what he accomplishes without having any need at all to think about it.

6. Evaluation intuition

Consider another problem: the objective value of intuition, its universality. The problem does not arise for the discursive approach: following a procedure involves entering into a meta-reflection applicable to different particular situations. This perspective is distinguished from a situation where one gropes by piecemeal without recognizing the generality of the situation. It is the same for a mathematical function or a philosophical problematic: they establish a general relation between different pairs or sets of numbers, values or ideas. It is about building links, deepening knowledge, becoming aware of reality. If it is a matter of consciousness, the art is that of recognizing what we already know in what we do not know. By recognizing someone, I become aware of his identity, since, in fact, I already knew him; without realizing it immediately, I could know some things about him without knowing it initially. Chemical analysis offers such analytical procedures which make it possible to identify the constituent elements of a compound, elements known a priori, since it is a matter of reducing and assimilating the unknown to the known.

To discover is to learn and to apply these procedures, which make it possible to reach another level of knowledge than the immediate one. But, as we have already pointed out, are these procedures not likely to become short-circuits of thought? In other words, cannot procedures, such as formulas, concepts, or established ideas, rather than allowing an increased degree of consciousness, sometimes obscure thought by installing it, packing it in hollow forms devoid of any substance? The procedure and the concept, symbols of knowledge and mastery, would therefore fall from their pedestal. Kant, moreover, warns us against the danger of pure form. "Intuitions and concepts, then, are the elements of all our knowledge, so that concepts without an intuition that corresponds to them in some way, or intuition without concepts, cannot provide knowledge" (*Critique of Pure Reason*). However, if it is possible to formally verify the manipulation of concepts, through definitions or articulations, just as it is possible to verify the use of chemical formulas and mathematical functions, to what extent are we able to evaluate intuition? How to measure what the other sees? Perhaps he does not see the same thing as us, and we will be tempted to tell him that he is mistaken. For, if the procedure has a vocation of communicability and explicit universality through verification or thanks to it, it is not the same for intuition, quite immediate and subjective. The question remains whether or not subjectivity is antinomic with universality. If this is definitely the case in the general tone of Western philosophy since Aristotle, it is not a position that is unanimous. For example, Kierkegaard, who in this goes back to the Socratic inspiration of the convocation of the subject, is an exception: "Since subjectivity is truth, the determination of truth must contain the expression of the antithesis of objectivity [...]" (*Postscript to the Philosophical Miettes*). Of course, Hegel is opposed to this view of things, since subjectivity is synonymous with contingency, with fragmentary and

superficial truth. Having said that, following Kierkegaard, if this truth is not necessarily shared, how can we objectively evaluate its content?

7. Availability

This is where a philosopher or teacher of philosophy should come in, which is rarely mentioned explicitly: listening or availability. Does he know how to recognize without any formal procedure of recognition? In philosophizing, one of the criteria on which he grounds himself is the argumentation. Does the student provide evidence to show that he knows what he is talking about, in order to deepen his idea, in order to justify it? For, it is not a question of staying on a simple personal opinion, often a mere echo of common opinion, that is, of remaining in the 'known', a thousand times rehashed, but of producing meaning. The good pupil, in the classic sense of the term, is the one who, by referring to the matter studied, to the procedures indicated, will perform a certain task, of a fully anticipated nature: the 'new' meaning is already known. But, do we not also find these pupils uncomfortable with formal rigor, unwilling to give precisely what has been given to them beforehand, but endowed with a certain creativity? "Our students are not geniuses! They are not Kierkegaard or Nietzsche", exclaimed the professor, "otherwise it would be known!" Thus, to be intuitive, intuition can only be brilliant? But, do we ask them to be brilliant when we evaluate the procedure used? No, no doubt, but it seems easier to recognize what we have planted in a pupil than to detect the singularity of his speech. Does not the difficulty of the discussion between teachers, which is easily stormy, not show this unavailability of freedom and originality?

This idea of availability finds its roots in our philosophical tradition, among others in Plato, in *Politics*, with the principle of the *kairos*, that grasp of the opportune moment, which precisely distinguishes the politician from the philosopher. Now, if the politician is to become a philosopher, the philosopher must become political, and the *kairos* represents precisely the weakness of the philosopher. What is the blind spot here? The ability to listen to this inner path which is called intuition. Thus, the politician must above all be perceptive and effective, as Machiavelli later theorized, a great thinker of this art often misunderstood or decried. Historically closer to us, De Gaulle, a man of action inspired by Bergson, adopted similar arguments. "Often, however, intelligence does not accept instinct to play its part. (...) Working in the solid, it wants to deduce the conception of known constants, whereas in each particular case it must be induced by contingent and variable facts. Such a tendency, it should be noted, exerts a singular attraction on the French mind. Curious and understanding, it needs logic, it likes to chain facts by reasonings, it relies on theory more readily than on experience" (*The thread of the sword*). The same is true of the poet, who does not care to prove, justify or explain his intuition. The question remains: must

philosophy be modeled on science, as Descartes wished, or is it an art, with all its share of contingency, subjectivity, singularity and invention?

8. The assertoric

In his table of categories, Kant proposes three modalities of 'the function of thought in judgment': apodictics, problematics and assertorics. Apodictics is a necessity, since it proves. The problem lies in the possibility, since it establishes conditionality reports in relation to hypotheses. While the assertoric asserts, makes judgments that fall within the scope of the fact, without conditions. Now what is a fact? If, for material objects, the judgment seems less debatable, the one concerning the objects of thought seems clearly more subject to debate and disagreement. Yet, in what way would he who makes a judgment in this field be less authorized to do so than he who judges materiality? Admittedly, the assertoric can be a matter of banality and lack, of false evidence and of facility, but can it not also express the operability of a thought in action? Is Zarathustra seeking to justify himself, to demonstrate, to prove? What about the metaphors of Heraclitus? Or the aphorism in general? No doubt this is more a specificity of Oriental philosophy, for which the student is not the one who must understand and repeat what the master has said and demonstrated, but the one who must discover and understand, even explain and prove by himself what the master tries to teach him. Naturally, contemplation plays a very important role here. A problem is posed in a short sentence, generally of a paradoxical nature, a problem on which it is necessary to meditate in time in order to work on one's own thought.

Descartes, a sure value or alibi of 'philosophical scientism', also gives a major role to intuition. "The propositions which are the immediate consequence of the first principles are known from a different point of view, sometimes by intuition, sometimes by deduction; as to the first principles themselves, they are known only by intuition" (*Rules for the Direction of Mind*). Thus, the fundamental is the intuitive! It already augurs from the Kantian distinction between the understanding, which deals with concepts and the empirical, and the reason which deals with the first principles. In case of doubt, through his provisional ethics, does Descartes not enjoin us to pursue our first intuition? But do not these various 'first principles', according to one and the other, have, like proofs and demonstrations, a greater or lesser value? And, do we really know how to judge the intuitions offered to us? Or do we value only those we know or those we like? According to the readers, having a greater preference for form or for the background. Is Baudelaire, a producer of ideas if he is, less philosophical than another because he does not build a system? Or because it does not offer justification or references? As for the pupil who meditates – to varying degrees – on an author or a problematic, letting him operate on his imagination, is he less philosophical than he who knows how to cite and analyze in a precise way, without being

shaken at all by what he develops? Obviously, everything depends on what the teacher is looking for, as a man and as a teacher.

Leibniz describes this to us: "There come to us involuntary thoughts, partly from without, by the objects which strike our senses, partly from within, because of the (often insensible) impressions which remain of the preceding perceptions... We are passive in this respect, and even when we watch, images come to us, as in dreams, without being called (...) But our mind, perceiving some image that belongs to it, can say: halt there, and stop it, so to speak. [...]" (*New Essays on the Human Understanding*). Is this a lesser philosophical work, on the pretext that we are ignorant of the process? Should we not expect a philosopher to furnish us with these clarifications which give meaning? Are not some images more meaningful than their explanations? Should we still produce them, perceive them and bear witness to them?

9. Making choices

To conclude this reflection on intuition, we will appeal to Schiller, both a philosopher and a poet, who, for this reason, tries to give an important place to two fundamental instincts of man: sensibility and reason. For him, two dangers lie in thought: savagery and barbarism. The savage is the one who only hears the immediacy of his thought, his emotions, his desires. The barbarian is the one who elaborates formal systems, the one that works in the a priori and imposes a shackle on the mind. Both give unconcerned validity to their thoughts of truth or absoluteness. Between pure sensibility and formal reason, the mind goes astray and becomes tense: in both cases, it tightens on what seems to it to be self-evident.

But, if in our anthologies used as an introduction to philosophy, Hegel, his logic and his concepts find a place of choice, what of Schiller's aesthetic education, to remain in the same era, or of the truth of Jacobi's feelings, of the power of intuition and of the immediate knowledge of Schelling, so many critics of the hegemony of the concept? Certainly, you have to make choices. So why not the one of the omnipotence of the scientific model...

Chapter VIII

The Art of Questioning

1. The role of the master

If we were to summarize the role of the professor of philosophy by a single function, we would say that it is to introduce the student to the art of questioning, the founding act and the historical genesis of philosophizing. Philosophy is a process of reflection, a treatment of thought, before being a culture, which is only its product, its matter or means. (Although we can just as blithely assert the opposite, reversing the end and the means). As with all art, this process results from an attitude, it is based on it. However, in the absolute, as Plato suspects, an attitude cannot be taught, which should lead us to affirm that we cannot teach philosophy. At the same time, this attitude can be discovered, one can become aware of it, one can feed it; so, it will be stated in the same way that the philosophical approach can be taught. The term 'attitude' derives from the same Latin origin as 'aptitude', of *agere*, which means 'to act': disposition and capacity are intimately connected with one another, as well as with action, of which both are conditions. The philosophical fiber must therefore be supposed to be present in the pupil, to pretend to teach philosophy, as well as the aesthetic feeling, to teach painting or music. Here, the Aristotelian *tabula rasa* is reductive, presupposing to fill a void with knowledge, which advocates the conception of philosophy as transmission, a conception widely spread in the institution. The presuppositions of Socratic maieutic are different: only the divine spark which nests in the heart of every human being, whether it is to enliven or to revive, is the only one that operates.

But it can also be assumed that philosophy is above all a sum of knowledge, if one assumes this encyclopaedic vision and its consequences. Similarly, let us ask whether philosophy is a codified practice, dated historically, geographically connoted, or whether it belongs by nature to the human mind, in all its generality. The problem rests in the same way as to its origin. At the same time, can we honestly, without blinking, claim to be without a father or mother, believe to proceed from spontaneous generation? Little naive beings who would only know the song of the birds and the strawberries of the woods, but would be creative and conceptual. Why deny what our ancestors bequeathed or imposed on us? Did they not try to teach us to question? Unless for this precise reason they deserve to be relegated to the dungeons.

2. Nature and culture

We are therefore obliged to confess the presuppositions from which we operate, when we summarize philosophy as an art of questioning. Philosophy is for us inherent in man, but the one or the other, according to circumstances, have more or less developed this natural faculty. Tools have been produced in the course of history, which we have inherited, but no more than technical progress makes man an artist, established philosophical concepts do not make man a philosopher. Thus, the art of questioning, which embodies the legacies of history, an art which would have no reason to ignore the works of the predecessors, favors the emergence of philosophy. For, if we have denounced the encyclopaedic and bookish temptation of philosophy, we must also warn against the other form of *tabula rasa*: that which purports to make the economy of history to favor, it says, the emergence of an authentic and personal thought. Between these two pitfalls, it seems to us necessary to draw a path, in order to guide our own steps, in order to encourage each teacher not to neglect either the pupil's abilities or the inheritance of the elders. For, if it has seemed necessary to condemn philosophical cramming and the great abstract and pontifical discourses, it seems equally urgent to condemn the discourse of philosophizing without philosophy, which tends to glorify singular or collective thought under the pretext that it is made of flesh and bone, real and alive, and that it owes nothing to anyone.

Let us propose the following paradox: philosophical art, or the art of questioning, is the art of knowing nothing, or the art of wanting to know. A question that states a discourse is not a question. The more the discourse states, the less it questions. How many teachers pretend to ask a question of their pupils, by questions so laborious, so charged, so heavy, that they stun the student, who can only answer yes, by lip service, by politeness, or because he is impressed by the erudition so deployed, or because he has understood nothing of the so-called question. The first criterion of a good question is that it does not want to demonstrate or teach directly: it must be conscious of its own ignorance, believe it, display it, seek by all means to escape the knowledge from which it emanates. Like an arrow that has to prune its empennage to really strike. The more refined it is, the greater its range. The more it penetrates its target.

To practice this art, every interlocutor is good: the mind blows where it wants, whenever it wants, as it wants, the whole idea is to listen and to know how to hear. It is for this latter reason that our artist cannot be an ignorant, but can only practice the art of ignorance, in order to refine his hearing skills. He knows how to split himself, to cast himself in the abyss, to abstain from himself, what his pupil does not know, and who, moreover, believes he knows even if he knows nothing, even when he does not know. He believes he knows what he knows, whereas the philosopher educator knows that he himself does not know what he knows. Already, because he never sufficiently knows what he knows, the implications and consequences of which he still does not know, because

he does not perceive all the contradictions. On the other hand, because he knows that what he knows is false, because it is partial, it is partial and vague. This opacity does not worry him much, for he knows that absolute speech, totally transparent to itself, does not exist, or cannot be articulated. But, at the same time, it obliges him to listen, to grant a true status to this indefinite multiplicity that constitutes humanity, always to expect everything from everyone.

Yet, if our philosopher knows nothing, he must know how to recognize, and in this redoubling of knowledge about itself all the difference is nested. One cannot question if one recognizes nothing, if one does not know how to seek and recognize. The questions will be awkward, odd, devoid of vigor, decentered, general, even out of place, and they will not really hear what is being answered. To be able to recognize, you must be armed, your eyes and your ears must be seasoned. He who has never opened his eyes, he who has not learned, is not on the watch. He cannot be on the lookout. For, it is by learning that one learns to learn. To be alert in the woods, one must appreciate the various rustling in the foliage, the various songs of birds, the varieties of mushrooms edible or not. Otherwise, we will not see anything, we will hear nothing, nothing but noises, colors, shapes, indistinctly. We will not seek to know if we do not recognize forms.

3. Typical questions

Thus, our teacher of philosophy has a dual function: to simultaneously teach knowledge and ignorance, or knowledge and non-knowledge, for those whom this term of ignorance worries. But, if some teachers focus on knowledge, others specialize in non-knowledge. Both think they teach, and both teach, but do they teach philosophy? And do they philosophize? Absolutely, it does not matter, and we continue our journey. Let us see what questioning consists in, and see in what consists the role of the teacher of philosophy. Let us therefore take a few typical, recurring questions throughout the history of philosophy. Recurring, no doubt because they are of the utmost urgency, of the greatest banality and of the greatest efficiency. But we must still be sensitive to it.

What is it all about?

As we have already stated, the first condition of action is attitude, the cousin of aptitude. So, as with a sport, as with a song, it is a question of putting oneself in a good position, in a good disposition, both to allow philosophy and also to work on what is the foundation of it. In this first stage, which is indispensable, some pupils will exhibit severe handicaps, which cannot be ignored or disregarded as if nothing had happened. To philosophize, it is necessary to pose the thought. If this attitude must be provoked by the teacher, it is because it is not natural. Indeed, in general, there reigns in the mind of man, child or adult, a certain hubbub, whose outward and verbal manifestation is but a pale reflection. In order to pose

the mind, it is first of all a question of asking for a silence, or of demanding it, according to the degree of 'violence' implied by the nature of the group. Then, the request is made to contemplate an idea, to reflect on a question, to meditate on a text, to reflect without expressing anything. "What is it all about?" He asks himself. Finally, in a third time, to express an idea to oneself, orally or in written format. Knowing that if it is orally, it is a matter of asking for the floor and waiting for his turn. And, as soon as someone speaks, there's no reason anyone else should keep his arm up. A fourth step, which is a reversal, may be a request for verification by an author or by the auditors as to the relevance of the remarks made. Are they clear? Do they correspond to the instructions? Do they answer the question? It is not a question of entering into problems of agreement or disagreement, but merely of examining whether, on the formal plane, the remarks are adequate, in order to verify whether the thought is at the 'rendez-vous'. The requirement is to precisely identify a content.

Examples of questions asked to clarify the situation: "Does the answer answers the question asked or another question?"; "In your opinion, is your answer clear to your listeners?"; "Does what has been expressed satisfy the instructions given?"; "Did you answer the question or give an example?". The problems posed here are those of the relationship of meaning, coherence, nature and clarity of speech. They ask to identify what is happening, to verify its nature and content. This going back to one's own thought, the analysis that one makes of it, constitutes the first entry into philosophizing.

Why?

The second question, the foundation of thought, is the 'why?' '. Asking 'Why?' is to pose the problem of the finality of an idea, its legitimacy, its origin, its proofs, its rationality, and so on. It can be used in all its forms, without any need for specification, and the pupils have understood this well, who use it as a system: "Why do you say that?" A very undifferentiated question, it asks everything and, as a result, it does not ask anything. But, it is useful because it introduces pupils, especially the younger ones, to this dimension of the hereafter or of the below of the discourse. Nothing comes from nothing. The why implies genesis, causality, motive, motivation, and to work this dimension we accustom ourselves to justify automatically our arguments, to argue them, in order to grasp their deeper content. It makes us aware of our thought and of our being, for which every particular idea is only the pale reflection or roughness from which we can practice the escalation of mind and being.

Example or idea?

The first tendency of the child, as often of the adult, is to express himself by an example, by a narration, by the concrete: "It is like when..." "For example..." "There are some who..." Plato describes this natural process of the mind, which tends to proceed from one case to several cases, then to finally access the general idea. To ask the child what is the idea

underlying his example, to ask him whether the case is specific or not, is to ask him to articulate the process of generalization of his intuition, formalizing it; to ask him to move on to the stage of abstraction. An idea is not an example, although they contain and support each other. In the same way, certain ready-made generalities also represent a short-circuit of thought, a concept without intuition, Kant would say. No intuition without a concept, no concept without intuition, he enjoins us.

Even or other?

To think philosophically is to think about the link. Everything is bound up in human thought, everything is distinct. A dialectic of the same and of the other to which Plato invites us. All that is different is even, everything even is different: no relation is possible without community and distinction. But, then, everything rests in the articulation or in making this relation explicit, in the proportionality of community and difference, framed by a context. Nothing can avoid the judgment, always questionable and revisable. For, in order for a real reflection to take place, it is a question of not repeating oneself indefinitely, unless for consciously re-examining. Nor is there any question of repeating, without being conscious of repeating. What is the relation between an idea and that which precedes it? To build, to dialogue, ideas must be aware of each other, to take charge of each other. Is the content nearly the same? What is the nature of difference, that of contradiction? What does what I say or what I have just said say about what has already been said? On what concepts are the stakes or the similarities grounded? These are the questions that must accompany any new formulation of ideas. Questions that can only be dealt with in relation to a specific context. With two possible pitfalls. Either distinctions will always be possible, the trap of the nuance to infinity. Or, everything is connected, united, beginning with the opposite with its opposite, a sort of fusional drive.

Essential or accidental?

A powerful distinction proposed by Aristotle. To think is to sift through what comes to mind, preferably before we say it. Without that, we speak, we say what passes through our head, but we do not think, or then in a very vast and fuzzy sense. It is above all to discriminate what comes to mind, according to the degree of pre-eminence, importance, efficiency, beauty, truth, etc. To ask whether an idea is essential or accidental is to invite an axiology, or to explicate it, because every thought operates from a hierarchy and a classification of priorities, however unconscious or unspeakable. The essential is also the invariant, which means that an entity, a thing, an idea or being, holds a certain quality, not in an ancillary but in a fundamental way, which belongs to the essence. Does one thing remain what it is without this predicate, or does it become something else? The fruit grows in the trees, but can a fruit not grow in a tree? Is any quality or predicate granted to an entity really necessary? Is it also valid for a radically different entity? These are questions which reflect on

the nature of things, ideas and beings, on their definitions, their differences and their respective values.

What is the problem?

Once we have an idea, we can wonder about its degree of universality. To do this, it is necessary to think of the exception, an exception which has the right to be because it can both disprove and confirm the rule. It invalidates it because it deprives it of its degree of absolute, it confirms it because it determines its limits. This treatment characterizes the scientific approach, according to Popper, according to which the fallibility of a proposition establishes scientificity and protects the religious schema, which is based on incontestable propositions. All that belongs to reason is debatable: the absolute word belongs to the act of faith. Knowing the limits of generality is tantamount to grasping the profound reality of it, and above all, not to fear the objection, but to desire it. So, for any proposed idea, let us ask from the outset where the fault is, positing as a starting postulate that it necessarily exists and must be identified. Moreover, the emergence of any singularity will allow us to reach another degree of universality, some new hypotheses.

4. To give the example

In the beginning, the teacher somewhat monopolizes the questioning function, in order to set an example, in order to set the tone, to inspire rigor, but promptly, he invites the students to undertake this task. Little by little the pupils are initiated, some quickly, others slowly. The role of the teacher is to be a foreigner, like the one staged by Plato in his late dialogues, whose only patronym is the 'Stranger'. The stranger is one who takes nothing for granted, one who does not accept any habit, one who does not know the pact and does not recognize it. The pupil becomes accustomed to becoming a stranger to himself, a stranger to the group, not to seek protective fusion, recognition, or agreement of any kind. He is not there to reassure, neither the others nor himself, he leaves it to the psychologist or the parents. He is there to disturb, to provoke that anxiety which is inherent in thought, the living substance of thought, as Leibniz says.

But to induce philosophy, one must philosophize. The teacher who wishes to make his pupils philosophize cannot claim in this respect any extra territoriality, exempt from requirements and reflection. He must therefore philosophize himself, and also become a stranger. If he does not get used to loving, desiring and producing what does not belong to him, how could he engender philosophy in his class? It would therefore hardly be understood that he would not seek a minimum of what our famous ancestors had been saying. Certainly, their speeches are not always easy to read or to understand, and they are not all exciting. Especially since we can all have subjects of predilection. But, if ignorance becomes a posture, in search of justification, which would claim to be a spontaneous

philosopher, ready to marvel at infantile or adolescent speech as a substitute for thought, then imposture is not far off. *Sapere aude!* Called the teacher, as Kant to his pupils, without putting into practice this imperative. "Dare to know!" Said he, but his acts will betray him. What energy does he convey, if he pleases himself with letting erroneous words go unrecorded or being vaguely associative? From time to time, maybe, some stroke of genius occurs, by some mysterious chance, but no mastery emerges, as consciousness is hardly solicited. If there is no rigor in the treatment of thought, the teacher necessarily opposes the thought of the pupils to the knowledge inculcated in class, in mathematics for example, where it is a matter of reporting the result by a process. It will therefore have created a pleasant place of exchange, useful perhaps, but without allowing everyone to accede to the universality of his purpose. For, only the approach is validating, of what otherwise remains an opinion. But an approach cannot be accidental. The process demystifies, it releases, insofar as the mind deliberates in full knowledge of the cause. And, to deliberate, if the human mind will never be reducible to defined processes, just as in mathematics, there are processes that are better known. Why not take advantage of the past? If it is fun to try to recreate mathematics, it is at least as fun to do so by relying on what has already been done.

One can think indefinitely about the procedures to be set up, about their subtleties and complexities, about the multiple rules of discussion, about the psychological and affective dimensions of the case, even if philosophizing remains above all an art of questioning which, like all art, uses techniques and knowledge that condition the emergence of creativity and genius. Attitude and aptitudes are the conditions of action. But why disregard what is, what is given?

If we love problems, nothing else can alienate us. It is then that one becomes the stranger, because habit does not like problems, it appreciates above all the certainties and the evidences. To love problems, for their contribution to truth, for their beauty, for their 'mise en abyme' of the being, for their aporetic dimension, is to love difficulty, strangeness, and question. In this, it is an education of emotions: to go beyond the urgency of expression, the rigidity of opinion, the fear of the problem, in order to allow the mind to no longer revel in immediacy, to interrogate the subject on the basis of what emerges from the world, and not from nothing, from arbitrary and frozen rules or from some academic reading grid.

Who are you? Asks us Socrates. Do you exist? Nagarjuna asks us. Do you know what you say? Asks Pascal. Where do you get that evidence? Asks Descartes. How can you know? Kant asks us. Can you think otherwise? Hegel asks us. What material conditions make you speak thus? Marx asks us. Who speaks when you speak? Nietzsche asks us. What desire animates you? Freud tells us. Who do you want to be? Sartre asks us. Why not let yourself be questioned? And to whom do we pretend to

speaking when we do not want to hear these questions? Unless we prefer to discuss only between ourselves.

Chapter IX

Conditions of philosophical discussion in Class

Philosophical discussion in primary and secondary school has met with some success in recent years, in many forms. Especially among teachers who often lack real philosophical training. This, in itself, is hardly a problem – and may even represent a certain advantage in view of the traditional and cumbersome conception of philosophy – except that it poses the problem of the nature of this discussion. How is a discussion philosophical? What makes a philosophical discussion? It is not so much the label that interests us here, but the stakes of content posed by the very form of the discussion. For the particular problem which imposes itself on us in this type of exercise is precisely to perceive the content not as a content, but as a form. This is a relatively new situation for many teachers.

1. Working on the opinion

Let us start from the hypothesis that to philosophize is to wrest opinion from itself by perceiving it, analyzing it, problematizing it, testing it. In other words, the philosophical exercise consists of working the idea, kneading it like clay, removing it from its status of petrified evidence, shaking its foundations for a moment. In general, by this simple fact, an idea will be transformed. Or it will not be transformed, but it will no longer be exactly identical with itself, because it will have lived; It will nevertheless have changed insofar as it has been worked, in so far as it has heard what it did not know, insofar as it was confronted with what it is not. For, philosophy is above all a demand, a work, a transformation and not a simple discourse; the latter, strictly speaking, represents only the finished product, or the apparently finite one, the one which often reached an illusory rigidity. To get rid of the idea of its protective gangue, that of unformulated intuition, of the shaky utterance, or of the ready-made formulation, from which we now foresee the multiple readings and the implicit consequences, the unacknowledged presuppositions. Here is what characterizes the essence of philosophizing, which distinguishes the activity of the philosopher from that of the historian of philosophy for example.

In this sense, to set up a discussion in which each one speaks in turn represents already a conquest on the level of philosophizing. To hear on a given subject a discourse different from ours, to confront it by listening and by speaking, including through the feeling of aggression that may

inflict on us this foreign word. The mere fact of not interrupting the discourse of the other means already an important form of acceptance, an asceticism not always easy to impose unto oneself. It is only necessary to observe how natural children or adults instinctively and incessantly intersect speech, with what ease some abusively monopolize this same word. That said, it is still possible to use the other to philosophize, to philosophize through dialogue, even in the course of a choppy conversation in which ideas clash loudly and confusedly, ideas intertwined with conviction and passion. But, in this case, it is to be feared, unless one has a rare and great self-control, that philosophizing will be carried out only after the discussion, once extinguished the fire of the action, in the calm of solitary meditation, reviewing and rethinking what has been said here or there, or what could have been said. Now, it is a pity and a little late to philosophize only after the fact, once the tumult is blurred, rather than to philosophize during the discussion, at the present moment, where one should be more able to do so. All the more so because it is not easy to silence the passionate impulses linked to the anchorages and various implications of the ego once these have been violently solicited, if they have not completely obstructed any perspective of reflection.

2. The speech set up

For these reasons, insofar as philosophizing requires a certain framework, artificial and formal, to function, it is first of all to propose rules and to appoint one or several officials or arbitrators, who will ensure the proper functioning of these rules. As we have said, the rule which seems to us the most indispensable is that of 'each in turn', determined either by a chronological inscription or by a decision of the arbitrator or by another procedure. It avoids the rat race and protects against a tightness associated with precipitation. Above all, it allows breathing, an act necessary for thought, which, in order to philosophize, must have time to abstract oneself from words, to free oneself from the immediate need and desire to react and to speak. A certain theatricalization must therefore take place, a dramatization of the verb which will make it possible to singularize each speech. A rule which proves to be effective is that which proposes that a speech be pronounced for all or for no one, and not privately, under the impulse. It protects the group from these many 'asides' that set up a kind of hubbub, a background noise which restricts listening and deconcentrates. It also prevents verbal energy from spreading and exhausting itself in many small interjections and auxiliary remarks, which often serve more some nervous discharges than any real thought.

Theatricalization allows objectivation, the ability to become a distant viewer, accessible to analysis and capable of a metadiscourse. The sacralization of the speech thus carried out makes it possible to emerge from a consumerist vision where speech can be completely trivialized, braced all the more easily because it is free and that everyone can

produce it without any effort whatsoever. We then proceed to weigh the words, to choose in a more circumspect manner the ideas that we wish to express and the terms which we want to use. A self-consciousness is established, careful of its own words, eager to place itself in a critical position, in front of oneself, capable of grasping the stakes, implications and consequences of the discourse it unfolds. Then, thanks to the perspectives which are not ours, by the principle of the counter-foot, a mirror effect occurs, which can make us aware of our own presuppositions, of our unspoken assumptions and of our contradictions.

3. The dimension of the game

This alienation, the loss of self in the other which is demanded by the exercise, with its many trials, brings to light both the difficulty of dialogue, the confusion of our thinking and the intellectual rigidity associated with this confusion. The difficulty of philosophizing will manifest itself very often through these three symptoms, in various proportions. It is then important for the facilitator to see to what extent he can demand rigor with this or that person. Some will have to be pushed to face the problem further, others will rather be helped and encouraged, by somewhat erasing imperfections in functioning. Exercise has a trying side; for this, it is important to install a playful dimension and to use humor if possible, which will serve as an 'epidural' for childbirth. Without the game side, the intellectual and psychological pressure placed on listening and speaking can become too difficult to live. The fear of judgment, that of the external gaze and of criticism, will be attenuated by the dedramatization of the stakes. Already explaining that, contrary to the usual discussions, it is neither the purpose to be right nor to have the last word, but to practice this gymnastics like any sport or board game.

The other way of presenting the exercise uses the analogy of a group of scientists constituting a community of reflection. For this reason, each hypothesis must be subjected to the test of comrades, slowly, conscientiously and patiently. One after the other, each concept must be studied and worked through the questions of the group, in order to test its functioning and validity, in order to verify the threshold of tolerance. From this point of view, it is to render service to oneself and others to accept and encourage this questioning, without fear of not being gentle or of losing face. The difference is no longer between those who contradict each other and those who do not contradict each other, but between those who contradict and do not know, and those who contradict each other and know it. All the stakes are then to display the inconsistencies and the lack, thanks to questions, in order to construct the thought. To do this, it is important to impart the idea that a perfect discourse does not exist, no more in the teacher than in the student, however frustrating these beginnings can be.

4. What are we looking for?

The common difficulty for any teacher who wishes to engage in this type of exercise is to understand its nature and purpose, somewhat out of step with his usual practice, of which the finality mainly rests upon pre-established contents. If a discussion takes place, either it leads to acceptable conclusions, as in the case of the class council, or it only serves to express oneself and knows no other issues than the liberation of speech. Philosophical practice is based on specific competences, which we define as follows: to identify, to problematize and to conceptualize. To identify means to deepen the meaning of what is said, by us or others, to establish the nature, implications and consequences of the words spoken. Problematizing means to provide objections, questions, and various interpretations that make it possible to show the limits of the initial proposals and to enrich them. Conceptualizing means producing terms capable of identifying problems or solving them, allowing for the articulation of new propositions. In this framework, we are not far from the Hegelian and familiar scheme: thesis, antithesis, synthesis.

Thus, the aim is not so much for the teacher to arrive at this or that particular conclusion, but to implement this type of skills, depending on the level of the group, by not trying to embellish the results or to activate the process, whether through anxiety or by indulging. He must take his time – that is to say, to reserve certain moments of class life in this activity – to ensure that thought arises, sometimes with difficulty, in order to see and to work itself. He himself will have difficulties, but rather than perceiving them as handicaps, they will enable him to better understand the difficulties of the pupil. From then on, the teacher is part of the exercise, a situation that may be incongruous, even unpleasant, to which he can take pleasure if he simply accepts the game. Philosophy is above all to see the thought, to allow it to develop, by becoming aware of the issues that arise and are created through words. It is about walking, observing and naming, and not engaging in a race against time.

5. Typology of class discussion

In order to better establish what we mean by philosophical discussion, let us attempt to outline a kind of typology of the discussion. Let us define some broad categories of discussion, in order to clarify the nature of the one we are seeking to elicit. Not that these other types of discussion have any kind of interest, but rather because each of them plays another role, fulfills a function other than the one we want to deal with. Any exercise contains specific requirements, any exercise can accomplish specific tasks. It is a matter of being clear about these requirements and tasks, because in this delimitation it holds its own truth. This delimitation enables him to realize what he can achieve, and at the same time prevents him from pretending to realize what he cannot achieve. Insofar as the moment of

discussion is part of the guidelines guiding the work of the primary teacher, it is better to know what it is before the discussion begins and rules are proposed.

The 'What's new?'

This exercise, known to primary school teachers, which resembles thematic or therapeutic focus groups, involves having the students speak in turn, so that they can relate what has happened to them or what concerns them, without other constraint than that of speaking each in his turn and of expressing himself clearly in order to be understood by the comrades. The challenge of this modality is, on the one hand, existential: it allows pupils to tell others about their own existence, about the events they are confronted with, about the worries that inhabit them. Knowing that, for some children, this moment of class discussion will be the only one where they can quietly share their happiness, their troubles and socialize their own existence. On the other hand, it is that of verbal expression: to find words and to articulate sentences to express what we care about, to relate, without concern for what is necessarily right, right or true, only to be heard by others.

Class Council

The primary purpose of this discussion is to bring to light difficulties, to solve problems, in particular concerning the social functioning of the class. It can also be used by a working group in a company to solve a common problem. This format focuses mainly on practical and ethical problems, for which it would be preferable to find a solution, although this is not always possible. Decisions are made democratically to involve the whole class, which presupposes that the group reaches a kind of agreement where the majority outweighs the minority, since it is a matter of closing the discussion. Discussion in which the teacher will more or less model the content, depending on the situation. This type of exchange can be used as an introduction to the exercise of citizenship, it puts the student in a position of responsible actor. It also naturally leads to the working of oral expression and to account for the general problems posed by particular situations, and therefore to work on the relation between example and idea, although one tends to emphasize the practical side of things.

Debate of opinions

This relatively free pattern resembles the 'What's new?', apart from the fact that he asks to treat a particular subject, an additional requirement which is not insignificant, and is inviting a certain argument. It all depends on the degree of vigilance and intervention of the teacher or the pupils, in order to refocus the discussion and not to get bogged down in cross-roads. Another determining factor is the extent to which the teacher intervenes to rectify the shift in content, as well as to seek clarification or justification. For us, if he dares to do so in a sustained manner, or dares any other attempt at the formalization of thought, the discussion becomes of another nature, by its rigor. At a minimum, the pupil learns to wait

patiently for his turn to speak, to articulate his thought to express himself and to try to be understood by others. A tranquility that is all the more necessary because this type of discussion is very propitious to the “yes, but...” or to the “I do not agree” which mark the opposition and a more or less conscious concern, of singularization from the speaker. Sincerity, conviction and passion, and feeling in general, play a rather marked role there, because of the spontaneity of the interventions, accompanied by a lack of formal demands which favors the flow of ideas rather than rigor. As a result, discussion can easily get bogged down in ping-pong games between two or a few individuals who cling to their thesis without necessarily listening or understanding themselves, although these exchanges may be considered an integral part of the exercise, with the hope that the stakes will become clearer. It should be added that the debate of opinions is often based on egalitarian and relativist assumptions.

Bubbling of ideas

This modality of discussion is somewhat modeled on the American model of brainstorming. It is practiced very naturally in teaching, especially in its directive or teleological form: that of an intended purpose. This mode of discussion is rather fusional: the class is conceived as a totality, there is little attempt to singularize the speech, and the fact that two or more pupils speak at the same time does not necessarily interfere. Above all, it is a matter of bringing out ideas, or bits of ideas, or even simple words. The schema can be opened: ideas are taken as they arrive, noted on the board or not: the ideas that are chosen are those approved, and even expected, by the teacher, who selects them as they appear. The development of ideas will generally be carried out by the teacher, either immediately or in a second stage. Unless another type of discussion or subsequent written work allows students to subsequently produce this analysis. This scheme has for its first quality its dynamism and its vivacity, and for the first defect that it is not really a matter of articulating ideas or of arguing, but of throwing intuitions or elements of knowledge in bulk. Here it is either a matter of formulating a list of ideas, of finding the right answers, or of simply ‘involving’ the class in teaching.

Discussion exercises

Such discussions are meant to put into practice elements of course: exercises of vocabulary, grammar, science, or other. They aim to implement specific lessons, in particular to make pupils think about the lesson and to verify the degree of appropriation of its content. These exercises will usually be done in small groups, and often they will be written, in the form of a summary or of an analysis. If the form of the discussion, not determined, remains to be established by the students themselves, more or less randomly, its result must correspond to specific expectations of the teacher, which will be evaluated according to the degree of understanding of the initial price. The requirement of form is

nonetheless not insignificant, since it requires knowing how to articulate and to justify ideas, to synthesize, and so on.

Argumentative debate

This model is more traditionally used in the Anglo-Saxon countries, although its influence is beginning to be felt in France. It also corresponds to the ancient form of rhetoric, an art of discussion that was once considered an essential preamble to philosophizing. It is above all to learn to argue in favor of a particular thesis, to defend it against another thesis. For this, it is sometimes necessary to learn in advance the various forms of argumentation, forms whose use is then to be demonstrated, or even to be identified, and also to learn to recognize errors of argument. But it can also be done very intuitively and informally. A certain decentering is required, since it is not always a question of defending a thesis with which one agrees a priori. This kind of exercise, a specialty of the colleges, which is more difficult to use in primary schools, would be more reserved for college and high school students.

Formal Discussion

The formalized discussion, the category to which the philosophical discussion belongs, as we understand it, is characterized above all by its slowness. It generally operates in the shift, since the forms, imposed as rules of the game, have as their primary goal to install formal mechanisms supposed to allow for the articulation of a metareflexion which seems to be essential to philosophizing. It invites participants not only to speak and act, but to see themselves talking and acting, to decenter and to distance themselves from themselves, in order to become aware and to analyze their words and their own behavior, their neighbors. This is also naturally possible in other modalities of discussion, but in the present context this aspect is somewhat 'forced'. It is therefore a question of proposing, or rather of imposing rules, which may, moreover, be discussed, to put them in place, which in itself is sometimes a very demanding exercise, since a certain asceticism is introduced in fact, contrary to, for example, spontaneity or the naturalism of the debate of opinions. If the teacher usually puts rules first, students can also lead the discussion and set their own rules, knowing that they will have to be respected by all for the game to work. These rules can be very diverse, and they will guide the nature of the meta-discussion: either on content analyzes, on the production of syntheses, on the emergence of problems, on deliberation or on conceptualization, etc. If these rules, with their complexity and their weight, can somewhat weight on the discussion – a requirement of form and never of content – and invite to a more abstract functioning, they may have the tendency to initially privilege the speech of the pupil who is the most skilled in handling abstraction, unless certain other rules compensate for the elitist tendency of the former. However, more timid pupils can find themselves more easily in these spaces of more square words, with their moments reserved or protected.

Thus, any exercise of discussion, which is necessarily specific, will tend in a certain way to favor certain kinds of functioning, and therefore certain categories of pupils, rather than others, at least initially. Each of these types of discussion cannot therefore claim a kind of hegemony or omnipotence: each of them represents a usable modality, alternately with others, depending on the aim pursued. Moreover, it may be productive to use various functions, in order to enable the pupils, who will learn to distinguish them, the various statuses of speech and of verbal exchange. These various modalities can sometimes be intertwined, without this in itself posing a real problem. The summaries or definitions we have established above are not intended to be exclusive or exhaustive. Their sole purpose is to establish comparisons, in order to better understand the issues and to specify the expectations and rules, a requirement that should be avoided as little as possible by the teacher. And if it is a matter of philosophizing, it is simply a matter of being clear about the meaning we attribute to this term, of clarifying the competencies we wish to use and of examining the extent to which the proposed rules are implementing the said competencies.

Chapter X

Ten principles of the philosophical exercise

1. To play the game

For any game, any practice, as for any exercise, rules are to be installed, rules that involve specific requirements and constraints, rules that call for special skills. A game is not a simple outlet: it challenges through rules. Rules that must be articulated, proposed, defined, understood, used, imposed, without forgetting to constantly review them. Indeed, the rules are worth only what they are worth, accomplish only what they accomplish, nothing more. According to circumstances, individuals or demands of the moment, according to expectancy and many other parameters, the rules will be better reviewed, renewed, adapted, rectified, relaxed, abandoned, and so on. Moreover, the rules can – or must – be an integral part of the discussion: they will be debated periodically, by a debate on debate, an essential element of the reflexive and dialectical perspective that we favor here. For, not only do the rules vary, but from one 'animator' to another, whether he is a teacher or a pupil, similar rules take a different turn, depending on the rigor of the application of some aspects rather than others.

Let us not forget that rules have a content: they orient the functioning of the pupil and his thought in one direction rather than in another, they try to palliate one difficulty rather than another. Thus, if pupils have difficulty expressing themselves through timidity, because of a difficult class context or by any language handicap, the emphasis will be more naturally put on the simple operation of articulating ideas rather than on the capacity for abstraction or explanation. The affirmation will be privileged in relation to the questioning, and in fact the teacher will reserve by default the role of the interrogation. Similarly, for conceptualization or problematization: the teacher will, depending on the situation, be obliged to carry out the work of valorization of the singular speech to the degree he deems appropriate. Sometimes he will have to work mainly on the vocabulary, or on the logical arrangement of the sentence, because the words and phrases used will suffer from too great a gap in their use or in their comprehension. From time to time, the implementation of the elementary principles of behavior, such as speaking in turn, will constitute most of the work, especially at the beginning of the year. But, since it is a matter of taking children where they are, as they are, this will not be a problem in itself, unless one wants to speed up the maneuver too quickly, for reasons of personal or administrative expectations, which easily interfere with the operation of the workshop.

However, let us not forget that these basic rules, rather than being perceived as a chore and pure disciplinary formalism, can very well be presented as a game, and can win to be so. If, at first, these requirements of form encounter a certain resistance, this resistance gradually diminishes, proportionally to the capacity to assimilate and to put into practice the obligations, according to the ability to take pleasure in playing with these constraints. As with chess or cards, it is a matter of passing the arid stage where we must appropriate the data of the game in order to be able to actually play. For the majority of children, such a constraint never presents a big problem in itself, even though these rules represent a certain challenge: more than adults, they are animated by the instinct of the game, they do not yet believe too much in what they do, their functioning is not yet too over-invested by a desire for appearance and various existential fears: they still know how to trust. What would be a real problem, however, would be an inappropriate set of rules, aimed at skills that are too foreign to the students concerned. It is therefore a question of maintaining a permanent tension between demand and impossibility: to place one step forward, not one step too far. This is the famous principle of Lev Vygotski called 'proximal zone of development'. In this sense, the making and use of rules of functioning as a primary teaching tool is already an art in itself, to which the teacher will not necessarily be prepared, initiated or even disposed. An art that is never reduced to recipes, but necessarily results from the continuity of a practice.

To facilitate this appropriation of the rules of operation, it is important to insist on their playful and questionable dimension. They are playful in the sense that they do not constitute a kind of truth or absolute good. They represent only a means of playing. They are debatable in the sense that they have a 'raison d'être', and there are so many reasons for not being, that is to say, to be suppressed or replaced by other rules, which it is possible to discuss in all serenity. It is in this perspective that we can talk about knowing and understanding the rules. For they are no longer merely the product of a regal power, that of a master with mysterious power, but the product of reason, a reason or a contractual and questionable, even arbitrary arrangement. Consequently, they can be the subject of reflection, instead of soliciting membership alone or provoking refusal. What is a game? A collective (or individual) exercise enabling everyone to confront each other and himself, through any procedure involving specific skills. The law is no longer an end in itself, it is no longer the *dura lex sed lex* which derives its substance and legitimacy from its hardness, but a mere means of existing, because it offers to the being a possibility of doing and being. Such a perspective invites generosity, rather than the punitive harshness of simple discipline.

Playing the game refers to another issue: the construction of knowledge. Indeed, if knowledge is not constituted a priori, where does it come from? How does it emerge? Playing the game already implies that knowledge is a practice, a know-how, and not a set of theoretical knowledge established a priori, that is to be reproduced. Knowledge is the

result of a know-how, rather than being perceived as the prerequisite of this know-how. We forget too quickly that knowledge is born of thought. Certainly, any implementation presupposes a certain knowledge, even if it is only that of a minimal language in the exercise which concerns us, but rather than worrying about making the students formally acquire these prerequisites – which can be done besides, at other times – let's launch them into the exercise. This bet of dynamics will enable all teachers and students to evaluate the skills and weaknesses of each other and to determine what to do next.

What we are talking about here is a journey. The required procedures invite the group to summon what they know, to use this knowledge, to perceive its limitations, to identify the needs and, as the case may be, to solve the problems and obstacles that present themselves by mobilizing new ideas and new concepts. Even if the participant is left with the mere perception of the problem, the work would be accomplished, which consists in arousing a need for knowledge and in creating an air window for thought. This state of mind will induce additional motivation and provide insights for the teacher who can then explain some important principle on the basis of concrete experience. This genesis of knowledge, a knowledge asserting and demonstrating in a substantial way its necessity, should help on the one hand those pupils who undergo the work in the classroom and the apprenticeship like an immense *pensum* where one has to ingurgitate strange things, but also those who succeed precisely because they have understood the system and know how to reproduce what is inculcated, sometimes to the detriment of a lively and authentic thought. To play, without excluding rigor – for it would no longer be a game but a recreation – is to make thought operative and dynamic, to restore its breath.

2. The master of the game

If, in the ideality of the absolute, the function of mastery hardly needs to be incarnated by a particular person, the group being able to self-suffice as soon as responsibility is assumed by everyone, this does not go well with the reality of everyday life. Especially if the group is large and if the game presents some important issues or particular difficulties. However, let's face it, the more the role of the teacher can be minimized, the more successful the game can be. Without, however, succumbing to the temptation of a minimal game for practical reasons – although it is still possible to orientate oneself towards other operating options, as long as one clarifies the nature, implications and consequences of these options.

Every banquet, like every ship, needs a captain, recommends Plato. If navigation, a complex task, is carried out by more than one person, it is nevertheless necessary to appoint a person who, ultimately, according to the events, will make the final decisions which he deems just, at the risk of error and injustice. Knowing that this is not a divine power of law, but only a tacit agreement established for practical reasons. This role can

therefore be assigned to different people in turn. A political role which, according to Plato, consists in weaving diversity into a single work. And if the teacher, who is more familiar with the practice he is trying to introduce, initially assumes this function, he is recommended to delegate it periodically to pupils, depending on the timing of the circumstances. The difficulties that will arise then will be an integral part of the exercise, the two pitfalls of philosophical practice being authoritarianism and demagoguery.

What is the role of the master here, since he is no longer the one responsible for 'telling the truth'? First of all, he is a legislator: he establishes the law, states it, recalls periodically the terms, and even modifies its articles. As we have already said, the rules are subject to debate, but it is a question of delineating the place of the debate, specifying the appropriate time, and deciding when it should be interrupted, so that the exercise is not a permanent debate on the debate, some traps in which it is easy to fall. Even if they ask the group, at the end of the game or at the start, whether a discharge is granted to the person in question. There are different ways to set up such a process; what seems to us the most effective is to grant the full powers to the person appointed in the game and then to reserve a discussion space at the end of the game in order to assess the work done.

The master of the game is also an arbitrator, a judicial function, insofar as he must ensure that the rules in question, whether his own or those established in advance, are respected. However, it seems preferable to refer any decision to the group, for example by means of a show of hands. His role as an arbitrator will then be to raise what appears to him to be a problem, to solicit the opinions of a few persons, and then to produce a decision, direct or indirect. Arbitration must not be conceived as an ancillary activity, but as an intrinsic part of the exercise, since the elaboration of judgment, the formulation of arguments, is nested at the very heart of the philosophical activity. Often, the most interesting questions during a discussion will arise in these often-delicate arbitration debates, which is not surprising since they require thinking about the form, the logic and the relationships of meaning, in other words, to reflect on the level of metadiscussion, not on the mere exchange of opinions. It is therefore a question of going beyond the level of agreements or disagreements of content which refer mainly to subjectivity, however argued. To think of conformity to rules is to work the demand for truth, which is never anything but conformity to something, however arbitrary it may be: another idea, a principle, logic, efficiency, etc.

The role of the game master is to be an animator, an executive function. Often, the role of the executive is perceived solely through its discretion, as a prerogative abused unscrupulously, which installs mistrust before any other sentiment, instead of its opposite, trust, without which however no group can function in a peaceful and serene manner. Moreover, his authority is arbitrary, since no one asks for the opinion of all, or he counts so little that the personal contribution of the common is considered negligible. In our exercise, it is a matter of establishing a

relationship of mutual trust between the animator of the moment, whether the teacher, another adult, or a student, and those who participate in the game. For, although the game can go on without him, he cannot preside over the meeting without the others, without each of the participants. Not for purely formal reasons, but because if the slightest participant is bent on interrupting the game by untimely behavior, he can. Just as the smallest participant who puts forward a promising idea allows the whole group to move forward. Let us not forget that it is not the animator who provides the ideas, but the participants, which places the latter in a relationship of psychological and cognitive dependence, which is quite destabilizing for certain teachers who have difficulty to trust their students.

Thus, power must no longer be a bad word, an object of fear, nor must it be incontestable. It is an art and a responsibility, a practice to which one exercises like any other. This practice refers to the functioning of the city, the separation of tasks. It learns to trust others, as well as oneself, and thus revalorizes the individual through this pact between peers. It also learns to accept the arbitrary dimension of life in society, and of existence in general, not as a factor undergone, inducing passivity and resentment, but as one of the constituent elements of the establishment of a group, which must be dealt with at a distance, and to settle in time insofar as one remains aware of the general problem which it presents. This ability to accept arbitrariness requires a consciousness on the alert, it implies a distancing with oneself, a capacity to minimize oneself in favor of the group, and the learning of how to mourn one's own claims and desires. Such a functioning involves an undeniable risk-taking, especially for the one who, in normal times, has the power a priori, but also for those who must exercise it momentarily. The alternation of the presidency and the moments reserved for the debate on the debate, where each one evaluates its own functioning and that of the others, forge the solidity of the pact precisely because it is criticizable and revocable. It is so at all times, although it is generally agreed to let the chairman go to the end of his term of office, unless there is a major difficulty. The exercise of citizenship also involves protecting what creates the game. This means, among other things, ensuring that the person who is responsible for the smooth running of the game can work with confidence. Reactivity is a way of being. Such a perspective implies quite a phenomenal psychological and identity reversal, but it is nevertheless relieving. This can be called 'learning the principle of responsibility'.

3. Asking for the right to speak

Most pupils are familiar with the rule of speaking by raising their hands beforehand, but it is not certain that they practice it in a rigorous way, and above all that they grasp its meaning. In general, the two most common and relatively unconscious conceptions are, on the one hand, that which gives the teacher the discretionary power to grant or refuse

speech, and on the other hand, the one who conceives this act as a ritual – more or less obligatory – that automatically grants the right to speak, like the gesture of politeness that would guarantee the satisfaction of an application or legitimate a gesture, like ‘please’ or ‘forgive’. The first scenario is found more rarely in primary school, it takes place later. The second is respected to varying degrees: in many classes, there are pupils who begin to speak as soon as they raise their hand, without waiting for any authorization.

Again, we wish to emphasize the idea of understanding the rules, their questionable nature, understanding and discussion, which do not exclude the possibility of imposing these rules or of considering their arbitrary aspect. The problem here is that of ‘Why are we talking?’. Is it because the word jostles in us and must come out at all costs, in other words is it to express oneself as one ‘ex-presses’ the juice of a lemon? Certain discussions can play this role, which establish in the classroom the space of a speech free and without constraint. But if it is a question of philosophizing, that is, of ‘thinking thought’, then other determinations intervene. To begin with, and this is not the least of the criteria, by listening. Indeed, what is the use of speaking in the hubbub, while others speak or nobody listens? The idea would be to speak when we have ensured maximum listening in order to maximize the impact of words and to ensure the best possible return. But what about the master? What is the example? Did he, out of lassitude, discouragement, or deafness, become accustomed to speaking in a vacuum or chaos? Or does he consider it normal, perhaps not by his speech but by his behavior, that if his word of authority demands silence, that of the pupil may, as well as possible, arise in noise?

Let us present some issues of the case. First, as we said, raising one’s hand before speaking is to make sure that listening is active before pronouncing anything, rather than letting go of words by simple flushing. There is no way to talk if someone else is talking. Secondly, the status of the pupil and the mutual respect that is actively contributing to the definition of this status. Neither should one interrupt a pupil who elaborates his thought, even if it seems slow to emerge, incongruous or incomprehensible: error or misunderstanding are an integral part of the learning process, they cannot be a vector of devaluation of the individual. All the more so as the pupil can, in the course of his intervention, gradually correct his remarks. Unless there is an excessive length or a speech that definitely gets lost in its own confusion.

To ask a pupil to listen to his neighbor is to guarantee him in return that he will also be listened to. Also, remember that if the teacher can still follow the thread of his ideas when interrupted by a student, the student will find it harder to keep his concentration if someone else speaks. This is all the more so for the shy or rough student. Moreover, in order to ensure a greater listening as well as the manifestation of this listening, it is better to ask the students not to raise their hand while a fellow speaks: this is tantamount to asking him to activate or to shut up. Anyway, we do not listen better to the arm raised in the air...

Thirdly: to accustom the pupil to articulate his own thought, to perceive its limits and to become aware of its difficulties. In this respect, it is a common practice for the teacher, whose potential is harmful, to regularly finish the student's sentences himself or to rephrase his words in an abusive manner. It is not always possible, depending on the context, to take the time to let everyone express themselves, so much so that the natural reflex is to speak for the pupil, instead of the pupil, but one will perceive the limits of this kind of behavior. It is therefore important to reserve certain moments of class life for this 'loss of time', which we call philosophical discussion because we allow the pupil time to think his own thought, failures, understood mistakes and misunderstandings, since they are the reality of his thought, a reality which it would be inappropriate to erase. Especially since the pupil takes the habit of this artificial and unsolicited aid, by facility. This does not prevent the teacher, as we shall see later, from actively helping a pupil by proposing ideas that he cannot articulate, but it is preferable that other pupils play this role.

Fourthly, the interest of this hand-raising ritual relates to the ability of the student to distance himself from himself, to shift in time, not to be impelled and automated. Often the student who releases words as soon as he 'feels' them, does not take the time to construct his speech, and often does not retain what he has just said: it will be enough to ask him to repeat himself in order to realize it. If only because he will not dare, out of fear and shyness, to assume this word again in the ears of all. It is often costly to repeat, because doubt and shame are naturally required. Who has never experienced in the classroom the situation of the pupil who, in the hubbub of the class, throws out ideas which he will not dare to repeat once all listen attentively to what he has to say.

This brings us to the fifth point: the singularization of speech. To dare to speak in a singular way as an individual who addresses his peers, the whole of the 'city', with all the dimension of the risk taking that it implies. This is a practice that is not natural to everyone and requires a certain amount of work, some experience that the teacher must promote. Through forms, it is nothing less than learning to assume an explicit and articulated singularity, to assume the temporary seizure of power that it represents, taking the risk of listening, of the gaze of others and the image of ourselves that they send back to us. It is taking the risk of existing openly and fully facing the world.

The simplest form of demanding to speak is the commonly used form of the hand or finger raised. But there are other techniques to invite the pupil to distance himself from his own speech, to teach him to suspend and temporize, to delay his gesture while awaiting a favorable opportunity, to shape his idea as best as possible before expressing it, to leave the immediate and to decenter, to take into account the group while separating it from himself. You can use a speech stick, or even a microphone, that circulates in the group, and no one can speak without holding it. Either the one who just spoke invites someone else to speak by naming him by name. The important thing, as we have said, is to instore some meaning into the gesture, as a means of establishing a relationship

with the community, to restore its symbolic value, and to extract the rule from its reduced gangue of mere authority, in order to make it fully play its educational function.

4. To stick to one idea

This rule is undoubtedly one of the most fundamental cognitive factors, which requires constant attention to a given subject, to remain focus on a specific idea, in order to discuss, deepen, and analyze it, in order to illustrate and problematize it. The key to all intellectual exercise, both its Ariane's thread and its substance, the subject, as an object of reflection, must constantly be present in the minds of all. This is not always evident, insofar as any discussion, any reflection, will attract our attention on ancillary tracks, towards associative connections, digressions more or less legitimate and useful, even on the stakes of metareflexion which will have to be evaluated without abandoning the first subject. This task is all the more arduous because our discussion exercises are realized in multiple and crossed voices, multiplicity and crossing, the interlacing of which creates innumerable opportunities for drifting and losing oneself in parallel paths, bushy roads and dead-end impasses. Listening to others, even if we recommend it or impose it as a rule, offers us the permanent temptation to forget the subject to be dealt with, in order to react and rebound to the various words we hear. In order to characterize the general problem posed here in thought, let us resume the idea of Plato, which enjoins us to grasp simultaneously the whole and the part, each particular idea taken alone being capable of trapping thought in an inadequate partiality. Following a subject involves sometimes contradictory acts and functionalities. Let us look at some of these, before seeing to what extent this conflictual diversity contributes to the construction of thought.

First, it is a question of being able to contemplate an idea, before trying to establish its usefulness, and especially before asking whether one agrees or not with it. This last reaction in particular, often assimilated to a simple reflex, embodies the first obstacle to the understanding of many words and many texts. The position, or reaction, usually precedes the comprehension in operative speed, the latter is often distorted by the first. According to the Cartesian injunction, therefore, to follow on a subject is first and foremost to suspend judgment, to retain its approval or rejection for a moment, to keep subjectivity away, in order to receive the idea with a relatively open mind. It is therefore a question of inviting the participants to avoid in the first place any statement of the type "I agree with this sentence" or "This idea is false" or "This idea does not please me." For, it is above all to weigh the idea, to examine it, to understand it.

If it is a question, it is crucial to assess it initially as a question, without interfering with it by the automatism of a response. Let us beware of this reflex which, like any other reflex of thought, connects two concepts or ideas, moves or grafts them unto each other, or even

telescopes them, without taking the time to apprehend them separately and to observe what they contain within themselves. To answer a question is to reduce it to almost nothing, to take away its interrogative potential, it is to fix its meaning in a single outcome, rather than to consider the magnitude of the problem posed and to envisage the questioning potential of this question. Since, by definition, a question poses a problem, since it is a problem, why not invite the participant to contemplate the problem for himself? An aesthetic moment, as in the museum, when one lets himself be questioned by a given work, instead of rushing to the next one, instead of watching his watch and wondering what remains to be seen in order to finish the visit.

It is not that it is forbidden to answer the question, on the contrary, and, as we shall see later, nor is it forbidden to object or to agree with a given idea, but it simply seems useful to artificially decompose the movement in order to grasp its moments and to take away their chained, compulsive and systematic character. The skills are diverse, and since this is a game, lets justify this requirement by explaining that its dynamics are set up and structured at times when actions, roles and functions differ. Most sports have different strategies, and part of the training is to work separately on the dexterities, subtleties and techniques that are attached to them.

We are advised to take time, to contemplate ideas, ideas being both the object and the finality of our exercise. Let us recall that at one time, before the reign of utility and subjectivity was established, it was highly recommended, in ancient Greece for example, to contemplate ideas, especially those which seemed worthy to us, those which precisely edified the architecture of thought itself, for example the 'great' concepts, the transcendental ones, such as the true, the beautiful, and the good. The concept of transcendental, as Kant explains, refers to what conditions and allows thought to be constituted.

But the rule demanding the contemplation of ideas is difficult to put in effect. For, if the mind of the pupils is somewhat rebellious to this slowing of the movement of the mind, what about the teacher? Is he himself able to get at it? Is he not accustomed to wanting to move the discussion further at all costs? For the sake of efficiency. For fear of annoying or bullying students. Out of uncertainty about the value of the ideas in question. Because he expects specific ideas that alone interest him. Out of fear for the void. By simple impatience or manner of being. Posing thought, breathing, interrupting the process that takes place, artificially installing interstices in the discussion, all the common and understandable obstacles that hold the teacher back. Yet, if one thinks of all these children and adults, who live in the excitement of the world, in the permanent zapping and desire to save time, if it is not in school that one learns to take some time to think, to give value to ideas in themselves, when and by what happy or miraculous chance will one ever learn it?

More actively, to remain on one idea is to explain it, without commentary, it is to rephrase it, to ask to recall it by enunciating it, to repeat it as a kind of mantra in order that it penetrates the mind. If a participant wishes to question or object to an idea, first ask him to reiterate the idea to which he wishes to put an end. If a participant wants to answer a question, ask him to repeat the question he is asking to answer. Especially when he has already answered and it is evident through his answer that, obviously, he hardly remembers the question. If a listener believes he has understood the idea of a comrade, ask him to verify what he understands with the author of the idea, even if the latter does not know if he poorly expressed himself or if he was not well listened to. In other words, before going any further, check whether the starting or anchoring point is still clear and present. These simple demands often constitute an exercise in themselves, which leads everyone to become aware of the bad habits which we maintain in our hygiene of thought: we mean something, but we do not know what we are talking about, what we are responding to.

Let us not forget, however, that if the game sometimes consists in staying on an idea to take the time to appreciate it, it is also a movement, since it invites the participant to go through various stages. And, it is the ability to follow in these steps, to meet the various requirements and to know how to change roles, a role that is then put to the test.

5. Rehabilitating the problem

We have already mentioned the concept of a problem, but it seems that we need to take it up again as a principle in itself, constitutive of the philosophical exercise. The challenge is to rehabilitate the problem, to consider it as an integral part of teaching and learning, rather than as an obstacle, a regrettable hindrance to be eliminated at all costs, if not to hide it altogether. The difficulty rests on the bad press that the problem attracts: the problem as a problem. "There are no problems", says the teacher in his words, actions and silences. He has his conscience for himself. For the student, there is one. Sometimes the worst of the problems: when the student does not understand it, and does not even know how to express the nature of the problem. If he knew it, the problem would begin to disappear. For now, he only feels a pain and say "I do not like this matter", when it is not "I do not like this teacher." A reflex which could not be more appropriate, as a defense of the territorial integrity of being: the other inflicts a pain upon us, it is normal that he is perceived as an enemy. The less the student is able to express the problem, the greater the pain, the livelier the reaction will be, whether through confrontation or absence.

Faced with this, what is the point of speaking? In any dialogue, talk is above all about problematizing, to change perspectives. Problematization is not only a matter of inventing a problem, it is also articulating a problem that is present, an articulation that does not

necessarily solve the problem, but it at least identifies and treats it. A problem needs not necessarily be solved, although it can be. A problem must above all be perceived, be seen, be manipulated, become substantial. As a practice, painting will always be a problem for the painter, like mathematics for a mathematician, like philosophy for a philosopher. The most catastrophic illusion is the one which suggests that this is not the case, since it suggests that the teacher is a magician, in the traditional sense of the word, that he has particular powers, rather than showing that he is an illusionist, someone who simply knows how to pull the strings, because he sees how these intertwine and organize.

But, to do this, one must above all rehabilitate the concept of problem. "There is no problem!", "I do not have any problems!" Pride or some concern for tranquility compel us to deny the very idea of a problem. The problem is what keeps us from acting, it is an obstacle, a brake, a speed downer. And what if, exactly in this apparently perverse purpose, were its substance and interest! For, are we not always tempted to reduce a material and its learning to a set of data, to a few different operations, as many educational elements that are quantifiable, verifiable and evaluable? Nevertheless, what about the spirit, among others that of the subject taught? Certainly, the mind filters through the various activities proposed, but why should we abandon it to its sad fate, that of a random, accidental and secondary factor, which is hardly a preoccupation in itself? Especially since this intuitive knowledge is not given to all students. If some are prepared to receive it for reasons and circumstances that are hardly within the competence of the teacher, the others, those who struggle with the strangeness of the approach, enter precisely into its field of action. For this, it is necessary that the matter be a problem for the teacher himself, and that it is not carefully stored in the department of household items. A storage that the student in difficulty would disturb.

The student's difficulties serve a specific purpose: rethinking the subject taught, its nature, its effectiveness, its truth, and its interest. If all this goes without saying, the difficulties become a mere obstacle which must be disposed of as quickly as possible in order to advance. The program becomes the alibi par excellence, the refuge of fear and insecurity. We have all these things to learn, what time do we have to work on the mind? The mind of the studied subject and the mind of the thinking subject. We have to focus on the matter. We soon forget the lesson of the Ancients, and we find ourselves with a substance without any soul, reduced to learning and to perform. Useful indeed, but so reductive.

Thus, in the first place, it is possible to say: "I have a difficulty", "This specific task raises a problem for me", which can also be articulated in the form of "I do not know", "I cannot answer", or simply "I do not understand." These words, which by their relative absence of content or reply may appear to mean nothing and to bring nothing to the discussion, but a simple admission of a difficulty, which may allow it to be assimilated to a loophole or to a ritual form of politeness of some sort, are on the contrary heavy with consequences. Already, these words openly pose the

existence of the problem, which then opens the door to the ensuing meaningful events. By recognizing this productive status, the problem is extracted from its gangue of guilt and of bad conscience, which in general forbids those who suffer from the opacity of a given knowledge or practice. On the contrary, this 'painful' observation becomes an agent of reflection. For, the problem of one becomes the problem of all, and first for a good reason: it is evoked. Secondly, because it may well be that this singular problem is also shared by other people who have not been able to admit or acknowledge it. But, it is also the problem of those who think they have no difficulty with the problem in question, who will have to publicly check their ability to treat it. For, once the problem of one becomes the problem of all, each one is invited to take care of it by a seemingly innocuous sentence pronounced by the author of the problem: "I do not understand and I ask for help." From there on, those who think that they are able to articulate or to deal with the problem will explain themselves, in turn, or by some sort of selection process. Until the one who had expressed a difficulty is satisfied with it or by concluding, after a few unsuccessful attempts, with a temporary impossibility of resolution.

Of course, this process is slow, which requires trampling on a specific and reduced aspect of the journey, perhaps even an ancillary aspect, but there is no question of doing 'as if', of passing as if nothing, in spite of the 'lack of time'. And, if one allows the slightest impression that the problem to be treated prevents the procedure from 'advancing', implying, in other words, that there is better to do, then all the work of rehabilitation of the problem and of the confession of ignorance will be reduced to nothing. This does not mean that one should get bogged down during a session in one single difficulty; a 'safeguard' procedure, such as the one which proposes to limit any attempt to solve a problem to three consecutive tests, makes it possible to extricate oneself from a thorny matter without, however, having ignored it.

Thus, there would not be on one side the problems worthy of the name, well intellectualized, baptized with the pompous name of problematics, and on the other the 'beasts' problems, those emanating out of lack, by ignorance and incomprehension. Such a distinction would encourage the denial of the real, deep and existential dimension of the problem, unavowable, in order to express only the problems that would result from the elucubrations of subtle minds. The teacher himself would no longer dare to have problems, even unacknowledged ones. And, why would he then launch himself into risky procedures, of which he cannot foresee either the pitfalls or the culmination of the exercise? An exercise like that of a reflection in common, taken with all its rigor, imposes on each one a certain minimum humility, and in any case a capacity to openly admit difficulty and error, a refusal of omnipotence, and an acceptance of some dependence on others. Thus, ideas will be able to live.

6. Articulating choices

As we have explained in part, from the outset the workshop starts with some risk taking on the part of the pupil and the facilitator, who take a risk of choice and of judgment, which is prolonged throughout the exercise. By reflecting on their choices, by articulating them, while knowing that they will have to argue them over, or even justify them, in order to go deeper into their contents and to verify their content, the student takes a risk that should not be underestimated. Periodically, some will not make it. The risk of expressing what he thinks, the risk of speaking in front of comrades, the risk of speaking before the teacher, the risk of not being able to justify his choices, the fear of 'doing wrong', etc. For the teacher, taking risks is to hear choices and arguments that may seem aberrant, disturbing or even false. Without expressing his disapproval or concern. While continuing the questioning procedure, with this student or with another. Some teachers also admit their impatience in this kind of situation, revealing a certain anxiety: they prefer to 'rectify'.

In general, the workshop begins with a question. A question that incites to think, to judge, that does not rely so much on specific knowledge authorizing any authority to validate or to invalidate the answer as good or bad, as true or false. It is a question of producing a thought, not of providing the right or the true answer: it is simply asked to be clear and relevant. A requirement that may surprise the student, unaccustomed to this type of request. For, if the demand for truth is not there, there are others which are no less demanding. Does the answer answer the question? Does it dodge it? Does it answer another question? Is the answer clear? Is it a minimum justified by an argument? Already, it is necessarily to produce sentences, rather than to express a simple assent or to articulate a single word. It is about building thought, not about checking the assimilation of a lesson.

Uncertainty about the lack of immediate and assured validation will often hamper the most 'academic' of pupils. They will feel like they are being delivered to nothingness. They will ask and will ask again what to do, incredulous, having difficulty in believing that they are only asked to think, without expectation of specific answers, validated beforehand. When it comes to a discussion with the class as a whole, these meticulous and studious pupils will feel abandoned by the master, a betrayal depriving them of a secure presence, the usual and comforting guarantee of a certified judgment of compliance. Even the 'dunces' will be worried by this type of procedure, which also removes them from the specificity of their status, voluntary or not, in which they have settled. For, it is in the judgment of the class as a whole that each pupil must measure himself, a moving and unexpected, unpredictable and destabilizing judgment, which he is asked to confront. Confrontation is otherwise more perilous than that of the quasi-indisputable authority of the master, even if the speech assumes a more free and spontaneous appearance. Thus, what appeared to be too easy turns out to be rather arduous, very difficult for some.

However, as we have already said, in order to de-dramatize risk-taking among pupils, the exercise is often presented as a game, comparable to another, and the playful aspect must be recalled periodically, alternating with more serious moments. For children who have difficulty expressing their opinion, it is a question of being patient, of resorting to them from time to time, so that they do not feel excluded, even if they do not succeed in verbalizing easily, or even very little, and reassure the shy by suggesting that they talk later if they feel stuck. The teacher must ensure that everyone can express a minimum, making sure that the most loquacious do not overwhelm others, a recurring danger of any discussion. Especially since those who produce themselves orally in a more laborious way are not necessarily the least interesting and the less profound.

Answering questions of knowledge presupposes a specific learning: a lesson learned, elements of information retained. Articulating a thought involves the totality of being. It is in this sense that discourse no longer refers to mere issues of theoretical and formal knowledge, but rather to a know-how, even to a knowledge of being, to the ability to determine an existential positioning. For, it is the whole thought that is summoned when it comes to making a choice. Hence the interest of risking the articulation of a choice, conceived as the inaugural act of thought. There is then a need to justify the initial proposal by mobilizing the acquired knowledge, by elaborating arguments and possible reasoning, and by attempting to answer questions and objections in a second step. Even if it means revisiting its original judgment, which is a fundamental decision, because it shows a certain freedom of thought and an honest and courageous relation to others, as well as what can be called a quest or a concern for truth.

The last important point about judgment: it corresponds to an existential reality insofar as knowledge is generally what allows us to make choices, day after day. Such a practice thus makes it possible to give back its usual reality to teaching, since it no longer refers solely to the class, the good and bad grades and the foreseeable succession of years, but to what constitutes the relation between a subject and the world around him, the world he inhabits. It is therefore a matter of working on the body of the schizophrenic tendency of the double life, of the double language, between the school and the street, between books and the house, between the classroom and the playground, a gap which greatly weakens – when it does not mince outright – the work of the teacher and the process of education to which the child is supposed to participate. Thus, during the philosophical exercise, the pupil will be led to make choices to answer the questions, to analyze his own choices and those of his comrades, to justify these choices, to determine the degree of validity of the arguments invoked, and even to make judgments about the behaviors that govern the speeches, reactions and responses of each. These are crucial decisions that must be slowly constructed and examined, because they are not only ancillary to daily functioning, but also form the substance and the melting pot. And, if it is a matter of thinking, discussing

and working more directly on specific school subjects, the appropriation of this subject will be facilitated, since the pupil will be invited to implement it, to make it operational, to take a stand in relation to it, a practice which forbids a sort of formal exteriority to class work. No one can therefore confine themselves to an external position, since the rule of the game poses as a preliminary the need to situate oneself in relation to the matter studied. Life is restored to matter, matter is restored to life.

7. To question, to argue, to deepen

If there is a fundamental principle to be inculcated in our case, it is the reflex of questioning, questioning the other and questioning oneself, questioning all that is stated. Now, there is a privileged access to questioning: the 'why?', a dynamic and triggering element, the founder of thought and discourse, which will give thought and discourse its substance, asking it to support and deepen itself. The 'why?', to which echoes a 'because', responds to various types of request: "What makes us say this?" "On what right are we saying this?" "How do you explain that?" "What is the purpose of this?" "What does it mean to say that?" "What does it imply to say this?" Both the meaning of the words, the purpose of their object, the legitimacy of their author, etc., are questioned. This multifaceted process, triggered by a powerful interrogative adverb, invites us to extract the discourse from its flat and immediate evidence, in order to unravel its mysteries, to illuminate its genesis, to glimpse its implications and consequences. A 'magic word', shall we say with the younger ones, in order to let them glimpse the strength and the innumerable possibilities of the questioning contained within the 'Why?'. If there is a term that enables us to show the power of words, it is that which, when it is thrown at an interlocutor, often leaves him embarrassed, whereas the author of the discourse must simply account for a minimum of his own words.

Students grasp the meaning of 'why?' because once they are introduced to this term, when they have to ask a question, they hasten to use it repeatedly, if not erroneously, as a solution of ease: 'Why did you say that?'. For, if 'How much?' 'When?' 'How?', 'where?', 'Who?', 'What?', 'Which?' or 'Does it?' require for their use the understanding of specific circumstances and the elaboration of an appropriate sentence, the 'Why?' can always be framed in a simple way, without great effort of the imagination. To such an extent that it will sometimes be useful to temporarily suspend its use, in the case of an abusive systematization which seems to hamper the progress of work. For, if the question is easy to ask, it is all the more difficult to answer; but the questioner must also realize a real work, allowing new ideas to emerge, posing problems specific to the interlocutor, and not finding a 'trick' that can be framed at any point.

Questioning therefore requires the student to justify his or her remarks, to provide arguments, evidence, reasoning, new proposals that

should in principle support the initial proposals and deepen their content. In this perspective, a certain number of classical arguments are held in check, which, if they are not openly pronounced, nevertheless act as a law, especially in the classroom: the authority argument, for example. For, in the philosophical exercise, it is no longer a question of referring to the teacher, to the parents, or to any book, to establish the value of an idea. Not that these 'first' sources of knowledge are automatically invalidated, far from it – it would be difficult and vain to pretend to abstain from them – but they will find their place only within the framework of an intellectual construction, that is to say, in an arrangement of propositions established by the pupil. In this sense, the latter becomes the author of his own discourse, even if the imprint of a certain influence can be felt in an obvious way.

The process in which each participant is engaged through this questioning is called, in Plato, an anagogical principle. It is a question of tracing the origin of a particular thought in order to verify its content, for it is in this origin that the true meaning of an idea is found, and not in its apparent evidence. Moreover, the process of re-emergence of the idea within the being restores its vigor to thought, which makes it possible to pass from the stage of opinion to that of the idea. Indeed, the distinction between opinion and idea is summed up in the work that engenders and surrounds it. The same proposition can therefore be considered opinion or idea according to the mode of reading or analysis used, depending on the degree of intensity of the interpretation. Finally, this inquiry into the causality of an idea also furnishes in time a certain number of ancillary ideas, correlates of the initial idea, which illuminate the latter. Some contradictions or inconsistencies emerge, which are open to study and criticism. This confrontation between the different perspectives thus becomes an opportunity, through an effort of coherence that can be assimilated to a concern for truth, to identify and rework various postulates that until then remained unconscious in the mind of their author. Confronted with a multiplicity of propositions, the intellect must discover its founding and causal unity, or at least understand its contradictions.

Thus, the initial work of providing arguments for answering questions as to the justification of an initial statement quickly turns into a work of deepening. The argument can practically be reduced to a mere pretext, that of a more thorough exploration or examination. This permits us to evaluate the legitimacy of an idea not by some canon established a priori, or by belonging to an official text, but by the relation that a specific idea maintains with its intellectual environment. But, to realize such a project, it is necessary to learn to ask questions, an exercise that constitutes an art in itself. For, while certain questions, striking ones, facilitate the work and give rise to a deepening, others, on the contrary, find close door or invite in no way the production of concepts.

The work of questioning oscillates between two pitfalls. On the one hand, the question resembles a course, difficult to understand, with a long preamble which often contains the expected answers: those that leave the

speaker on the tile, either through incomprehension or because he feels that nothing is expected of him but an acquiescence. On the other hand the vague question that does not ask for anything specific: the uninspiring "Tell me more!" or the "Can you develop better?" that invites nothing more. On this aspect of the work, more than on other aspects, the teacher will learn from the pupils, that is to say from multiplicity, for it is difficult to predict what kind of question will work more than another in a special case: it is only through experience, 'on the job', that this practice will improve. For if it is more easily possible for the teacher to perceive a blind spot or a contradiction in a given word, it is not a given that he will find the words that will catch the interlocutor, causing him to become aware of the internal problem which his speech incarnates. This is why the whole class is invited to consider the proposals of an 'author', because everyone must realize that it is not so much to give 'his' answer that represents the real work, but to forge the appropriate questions. All the more so because a real question requires one not to put forward his own ideas, which implies a redoubling of work: to become aware of the ideas that are conveyed and to succeed in silencing his own concepts and convictions, to put them aside in order to talk to someone so as to know what he thinks, without trying to communicate some 'good thinking' to him or to induce some content. Internal criticism, says Hegel, who interrogates a thesis from within, to be distinguished from external criticism, which consists in advancing arguments and concepts used to object. Questioning is giving birth, which means that the ideas must emerge in the interviewee, and not be supplied in turn by the questioner. Questioning is creating a breathing gap and not obstructing the hole.

8. Singularity of the discourse

The singularity of the discourse presupposes a kind of originality, which constitutes its specificity. Yet it would be difficult to say that all that is heard in a class discussion has such a characteristic of originality. Also, without excluding the sometimes-unexpected side of certain answers, for the least surprising, we propose the hypothesis that the first form of singularity is rather that of engagement. To embark on an idea, to take options on an idea, is to make it singular, or personal, by a phenomenon of appropriation. Thus, during the course of the exercise, the pupil must take part, whether by the production of an idea or by his relation to the ideas of others. Not only on the fact of agreeing or not, but also on the very nature of the proposed discourse, its coherence, its logic, or its correctness, his own or that of another. A prejudice which, as we have seen, should as far as possible be explained, argued, justified, etc.

The idea of determining one's position in relation to a given question, whatever the degree of abstraction, implies an act of reflection, an awareness, which requires pupils to make an effort, to some more than to others. For, it becomes necessary to ask consciously the question of personal choice, which in small classes is not necessarily a given. For this

act to take place, it is first and foremost important not to fall into a first trap: the reflex of repetition, very common in these ages. To say, like the others, be they the pupils or the master, is the temptation and the solution of facility, the fusional reflex so common in children. Fusion with the group, because it is less scary, because you feel less alone or because you have to do like the others. Fusion with the master, because he is an adult, because he is the one who knows, because he must be right. Later, this will turn into a fear of error, the 'first error' according to Hegel.

For this reason, during our exercise, it is crucial that the teacher does not show agreement or disagreement, at least on content, even on form, which should not prevent him from returning at some other times on a given problem that seems to require him to treat it by himself. As for the relationship between peers, in order to ensure that there is no mechanical repetition, one of the rules of the game is to prohibit repeating what has already been said by someone else, at the risk of a symbolic 'rejection' or a momentary elimination. We sometimes observe some pupils who propose different formulations of the same answer in order to take up an idea already expressed without being penalized by the rule of the game which prohibits repetition, which in itself is an interesting mechanism. For, it will be a matter for all to ask whether this 'new' answer is identical or not to the previous one, or whether it has produced any conceptual novelty. The teacher may at any time ask the class: "Has anyone ever said that?" And in order for the proposal to be rejected, it will first be necessary for at least one student to recognize that it is the same answer as someone else: he must explain how these answers are similar and preferably name the author of the initial response. In case of doubt or dissent, the facilitator may propose a discussion and cause a vote on the question, a vote during which each one will have to resolve the dispute.

Do not repeat. Ensure that an answer answers the question. Determine whether the question is a question, whether it is about the object it is supposed to question. Identify inconsistencies in a proposal. Various rules among others, as many different demands which invite everyone to arbitrate the discussion by using his judgment. Such a function has the following advantage: it obliges everyone to listen and to remember what the others say, because at any moment the student can be solicited in order to evaluate the legitimacy of what has been said. Any analysis, any particular and personal reading of the ideas evoked may change the discussion in one direction or another, since the discourses are elaborated in reciprocity and are not impermeable to each other: they validate or invalidate each other, they deepen one another or become problematic among themselves. This leads us to another aspect of singularization: the principle of responsibility, underlying the exercise.

Certainly, any discussion implies a certain sense of responsibility, if only in relation to the ideas that one sends out oneself. But, insofar as we forbid arbitrarily jumping from one subject to another, where we prevent one from passing from one idea to another according to individual fancies without establishing any link, because the whole group remains on an idea before moving on to another, in order to work, each becomes implicitly

responsible for the ideas of others. Whether it is by questioning it, in order to make it say what it has not yet said, by putting formal judgments on it, or by raising substantive problems, we take a heavy responsibility vis-à-vis the author of the idea and of the whole class. The fact of decentering oneself, in order to give priority to the ideas of the neighbor, offers in a paradoxical way an increased degree of singularization, through taking responsibility. To distance oneself from oneself means to become responsible, since we are more than ever listening to others, since we respond to others. Nevertheless, there is a fracture within this responsibility: the tension between oneself and others, between the singular and the collective.

Another crucial aspect of the singular character of the idea is: the justification or the explanation. For, if a given idea can have a common and obvious sense, or even an apparently objective meaning, it can also find in the mind and the words of its author or its interpreter a very particular content. As incongruous as the latter may be, it is out of question to remove it with a simple hand gesture. Especially since certain apparently absurd propositions, or ones endowed with some strange turns, will really take shape unexpectedly after some explanation or modification. Specific words will also know such a drift, used in strange meanings, when they will not settle, on occasion, squarely in the opposite sense to their classical definition. In these various situations, whether it be paralogism, incomprehension or inadequacy, the role of the teacher will not be to 'rectify' things that do not belong to him, but to trust the author and the group, to attract the attention of all and to solicit their opinion on one particular point or another, avoiding, of course, to project any remotely guided 'good' thought. He will trust the group, and he will realize that many 'shooting errors' will be rectified on their own, a more rewarding, pedagogical and coherent procedure than if he corrected everything himself, albeit much slower.

Moreover, no one will be able to modify the proposal of another participant without his consent. Already because every proposition or idea inscribed on the painting is signed, which singularizes thought. The 'we' does not have a right here. Any suggestion of modification or explanation by a comrade must therefore be accepted by the author in order to be entered on the board. But the group can sanction a proposal that it considers inadequate, by way of a majority vote, for example, a proposal that is out of context, contradictory or confusing. This is the only role assigned to the group as a group: to act as a jury, in order to approve or sanction a hypothesis or an analysis, since the facilitator of the discussion does not have that right. It will be useful, however, to specify that this arbitration function is purely pragmatic, explaining that the group can be quite wrong, insofar as a single person can be right against all. But let us admit that, in class, in general, the group remains relatively relevant in its judgments, enough in any case to allow it to be used as a referent, if only for practical reasons. However, we must remain open to significant changes in the situation, and for this reason it is advisable to bar the rejected proposals rather than delete them.

9. The substantial link

We take up Leibniz's expression on our own account, for it specifies for us precisely what distinguishes 'ordinary' discussion from philosophical discussion. For this author, the reality or substance of things does not reside so much in their distinct being as in their relation to what they are not. What distinguishes an entity rather calls for a definition, a relatively static analysis of a fixed and isolated object, while grasping an entity in its relation to one or more other ones invites to problematization, a more lively and dynamic intellectual posture. Not that the definition is excluded, but because it is subordinated to a set of situations whose moving nature modifies and works at the core the meaning which can no longer be defined a priori. The work of thought consists then in testing the resistance of an idea or of a concept by rubbing them with what at first seems foreign to them, thus revealing the constitutive limits of their being. To be coherent with ourselves, let us suggest the principle that the relation between an 'ordinary' discussion and a 'philosophical' one consists precisely in the explicitation of the relation, a constituting and determining relationship, because the explanation of the relationship modifies, by enlightening them, and thus by modifying them, the very elements of the report.

To be more concrete and visible, let us take the first stage of this report, as we integrate it into our practice: the reformulation, used as a verification tool for listening. How could we pretend to conduct any discussion, and a fortiori a philosophical discussion, if the interlocutors do not listen to each other? All the more so because one of the characteristics of the philosophical exchange could consist in the contiguity and the 'rapprochement' between the arguments in order to bring out the essential elements of the architectonic. "Take off your shirt, and join the melee!" enjoins Plato. Not a melee to know who will prevail, but in order to test the ideas and the relations which they maintain in themselves and among themselves. It is never the presence of words or their existence that can be challenged, but only their use or function, that is, the occasional connection they keep with other words, and the finality to which they are theoretically subject.

The reformulation, which refers to the agreement of the parties concerned as to the object of their discussion or to the nature of their differences, a condition of a real discussion, seems to represent the first stage of the 'link' which we are trying to establish as a principle. An intellectual link, as we have just defined, but also psychological link: to establish a minimum of empathy with the interlocutor. Indeed, reformulating quietly, seeking the agreement of the partner on the summary of his remarks, requires one to not merely interpret in a reductionist way, it prevents caricature, and above all it obliges one to distinguish clearly the understanding of the arguments heard and the various nuances, corrections, or objections that arise and which are about to be moved forward in response to what has been heard. As for him who

hears his reformulated word, such an exercise compels him to hear what is heard by his listener, an experience which in itself is not obvious. For, to hear our own ideas or words pronounced by a mouth other than ours can represent, in itself, a rather painful experience. If only because it forces us to rethink our remarks, more distantly, with all the critical dimension that this redoubling infers. Often we will feel a certain irritation towards the one who acts as a mirror, which thus increases our anxiety. On the other hand, our listener is not a recording machine: he translates with the words that are his own, he summarizes as he can. We must then be able to distinguish the essential from the accessory, to mourn the 'magnitude' of our thought and everything that we would like to say or add, in order to be able to admit that these foreign words correspond to ours. Such a judgment is delicate, which must evaluate the adequacy between two formulations: without a certain freedom of thought accompanied by rigor, it becomes impossible. If one plays the game, however, the reformulation will allow us to get a better glimpse at what our ideas contain, to perceive their weaknesses and limits.

The substantive bond, as we see it already, is also the unity of a discourse, a transcendent unity, not necessarily expressed, which contains in a condensed form the content, the abridgment or the intention of our thought, a reduced proposition whose form and substance often escapes us. Once formulated, this underlying unity may even surprise or insult us. It is the unifying or generating principle of our examples, the antecedent cause of the famous 'it's like when...' so popular among children, and even among adults. The explicit establishment of this connection requires the requisitioning of key words, or concepts, chosen terms that make the discourse operative by extracting the intimacy of the meaning. To do this, it becomes necessary to work on the art of breviloquence. Thus, a speaker may be asked to forge a simple proposition, a single sentence which seems to him to capture the essence of what he attempts to signify through a multiplicity of sentences, the tangling of which often has the primary role of obscuring the meaning rather than making it manifest. It is this sentence that will be noted on the board, to serve as an exclusive witness to a given thought. However, we should not be surprised if a student fails to meet this challenge, and if he or she has to seek the help of his or her classmates to accomplish his or her task. Periodically, it will be necessary to transform some crucial aspects of the initial speech to succeed in this bet: from the moment our discourse becomes more explicit, we often find ourselves obliged to change its terms.

The substantive bond is therefore the unity of a discourse, but it is also the unity of two or more discourses: the conditional possibility of dialogue. Of course, to the extent that words come from different origins, they can be expected to have a contradictory or conflicting dimension. Contrary to a single word that must be constrained by a concern for coherence, the multiplicity of authors in no way obliges any consensus. However, the requirement of the discussion implies a unity: that of the object. It is therefore important, first and foremost, to identify, in spite of the variety of forms of expression, the angles of attack of the subject or of the

diversity of perspectives, some community of meaning without which we find ourselves engulfed in absurdity, solipsism and some deaf dialogue. At the same time as this community of objects, and thanks to it, we will discover the conceptual differences, accompanied by the worldview underlying them, which will allow us to estimate and pronounce the stakes of the discussion. A 'dialectics of the same and of the other', proposes Plato: in what is the object of the discussion the same or different? The simple sentence, a single proposition that always seems so necessary, will naturally take the form of a problematic. A proposal which poses a problem in the form of a question, a contradiction or a paradox. We find here the same demand: the art of the breviloquence. But often, in order to place two propositions in opposition, we must discover one or more antinomies whose terms are not expressed consciously in the initial propositions. In the same way that we have to dig in a single discourse to grasp its meaning and intent, producing new concepts and a simple proposition, a certain work of deepening must be carried out in order to capture and to visibly show what opposes two speeches. Surprisingly, we will then discover periodically that statements which are considered contradictory are scarcely paraphrased, arguing exclusively on some point of semantics or other insubstantial subtlety, while those who claim to 'go in the same direction' maintain a fusional illusion devoid of any justification.

10. To think the mind

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant distinguishes two types of concepts: empirical concepts, drawn from experience, and pure concepts, some products derived from reason. Thus, the concept of 'man' originates, for a good part, out of experience, but that of 'contradiction' is generated by reason. For, if I can perceive through the sense organs of concrete men, I cannot perceive contradictions by these same organs, the latter concept referring only to a problem of the intelligible and not of the sensible order, and therefore to a work of analysis and of synthesis. Now, it seems to us that philosophical work must tend to the production of concepts, certainly empirical, but also to pure concepts of reason. A process of abstraction which we have already dealt with. But we want to come back to the production of these pure concepts through which a thought conscious of itself and of its functioning is forged. A thought that can and must periodically withdraw from itself in order to engage in a process of meta-reflection.

The most obvious aspect of this process exists very early on, on the intuitive level, in what we will call the logical intuition. For, if childhood is characterized by a magical vision of the world, a world where everything can happen without anything surprising, little by little the mind is initiated to the 'order of things'. Through an associative process, a prelude to the journey of reason, objects, beings and phenomena are connected together. Different links are established which will slowly become the

structuration of space, time, causality, logic, language, existence, with all the cumbersomeness and rigidities that this fixed view of the world implies, but which also proves to be the necessary condition for the advent of reason. To reason is to know or recognize the reality of things, to understand it and therefore to foresee. For, if nothing is foreseeable, if nothing is recognizable, our reason becomes obsolete. This explains our astonishment, when an event transcends the boundaries of our reason and its expectations. The transformation of which we speak is that of a mind for which everything is possible, which gradually distinguishes the possible and the impossible, as well as the 'compossible': that which is possible in relation to a given condition, the very foundation of logical thought: 'if this, then that', or 'if on the one hand this and on the other hand this, then that', the very basis of the classical syllogism.

The philosophical exercise, through discussion or otherwise, consists in inviting reason to carry out a double work on itself. On the one hand, to go 'till the end' of its interrogations, its problems, its analysis. On the other hand, to see oneself functioning, to identify the mechanisms, both those that operate and produce thought, and those that slow down, deflect or interrupt the process of reflection. These two aspects of work are mutually nourishing, since the perception of limits makes it possible to grasp the precise nature of a process, and the identification of a process makes it possible to rework or to go beyond the limits. Thus, the work of metareflexion allows thought to progress. It is precisely the problem that is raised by some teachers who tell us "I do not know what to answer the students' questions" or "It goes round in circles, I do not see how to advance the discussion": how to bring thought forward. The solution is neither to provide ready-made answers on which the students will rush, nor simply to propose a track that 'save the group', but to invite each of them to observe their own functioning, their ideas, their contradictions, their shifts in meaning, etc., simply by a few small methodological rules that specify the role and the purpose of each moment of reflection.

The first aspect of this process consists in being conscious of the nature of our remarks and of our actions, and for this to know how to categorize these words, to know the form or the finality of our word. Are we asking a question, proposing a new idea, answering an objection or providing one, demonstrating or proving an idea, arguing or problematizing, giving an example or conceptualizing an illustration, reporting facts or interpreting them? We are here concerned about emerging from the "I want to say something... It makes me think of... I would like to add...", or the simple compulsive and recurring "yes but..." All are expressed wishes to 'comment', 'nuance', 'complement', 'bounce', or 'specify' which, when verified, do not mean much, are very vague or remain far from what they intend to say. The type of analysis that we propose refers first to the intention of the speech to be identified, because, for its author, it is often experienced and perceived exclusively as a 'speech impulse', something which comes to mind and asks one to come out, as soon as possible, some opinions of primarily associative origin, whose nature and role we do not know. An ignorance which

explains a certain number of difficulties in articulation, some stammerings, erasures and contradictions. To become conscious of what one wants to say, also means to work and to smooth out this word according to an authoritative finality allowing one to better structure one's thought. Although, during the first attempts, categorization or definition seems to make our speech even more confused. Making and seeing oneself, as a simultaneous action, can be thought of and initially experienced as a splitting factor, burdening the task, but more or less rapidly, as the capacity to be both 'in' and 'outside', this process facilitates the work of thought and of the expression by clarifying one's understanding.

To tell some words is to think, says Hegel, affirming that it would be illusory to believe in thinking without forging this thought with concepts. Intention, feeling, impression, intuition, so many inadequate, insufficient and deceptive forms of thought, a thought not conscious of itself. Of course, this presupposition, like all presuppositions, knows its limits, but it also knows its usefulness. To know what one says is to say what one says, to announce one's intention, to define the form, to articulate the relation to what has already been said. However, as with the whole of the exercise, it is not a matter of doing vocabulary work on the terms 'hypothesis', 'objection', 'abstract', 'essential' or on other such terms, although it is hardly excluded to do so at another time. Not to know, but to know-how; not to know something, but to use it. Our business is above all in making sure that the pupil trains himself in thinking his thoughts through, that is, in trying to specify the nature of his discourse. In a sense, whatever words he uses, those that will be his at first, approximate and unusual, or those that he will acquire during the practice, more precise or more conventional. The important thing is to unseal the immediacy that binds him to his word, to dig a gap, to install a breath, to pass from the implicit to the explicit, so that the subject detaches itself, so that thought becomes an object for itself. Our opinions are truths, says Pascal, on the condition that we hear what they say, and the truth of our opinions is not always where we think it is. Let us try to get closer to it.

Chapter XI

The philosophical consultation

Still little known in France, the philosophical cabinet or philosophical consultation is an activity that is more commonly practiced in Holland, Spain, Italy or in the United States. Methods vary enormously depending on the practitioners who design and apply them. In this paper, we discuss the concepts and methods used in the work which we have been doing for several years in this field.

1. Principles

Philosophical Naturalism

In recent years, a new wind seems to blow on philosophy. In various forms, it has as its constant aim to extirpate philosophy from its purely academic and scholarly framework, where historical perspective remains the main vector. Diversely received and appreciated, this tendency incarnates for some a necessary and vital oxygenation, for the others a vulgar and banal betrayal worthy of a mediocre epoch. Among these philosophical 'novelties' emerges the idea that philosophy is not confined to scholarship and discourse but that it is also a practice. Of course, this perspective does not really innovate, insofar as it represents a return to original concerns, to this quest for wisdom that articulated the very term of philosophy; although this dimension has been relatively obscured for several centuries by the 'learned' facet of philosophy.

However, despite the 'already seen' side of the case, the profound cultural, psychological, sociological and other such changes that separate our era, for example, from classical Greece, radically alter the data of the problem. The *Philosophia Perennis* is obliged to account for history, its immortality being hardly able to avoid the finiteness of the societies which formulated its problems and its stakes. Thus, the philosophical practice – like philosophical doctrines – must develop the articulations corresponding to its place and time, depending on the circumstances that generate this momentary matrix, even if at the end of the day it does not seem possible to avoid, to leave or to go beyond the limited number of major problems which since the dawn of time have constituted the matrix of all reflection of the philosophical type, whatever may be the external form taken by the articulations.

The philosophical naturalism that we are discussing here is at the center of the debate, in that it criticizes the specificity of philosophy on

the historical and geographical level. It presupposes that the emergence of philosophy is not a particular event, but that its living substance nests in the heart of man and lines his soul, even if, like any science or knowledge, certain moments and certain places appear more determinant, more explicit, more favorable, more crucial than others. As human beings, we share a common world – in spite of the infinity of representations which makes this unit undergo a serious barrage – and a common condition or nature – again in spite of the cultural and individual relativism – and we should be able to find, at least in an embryonic way, a certain number of intellectual archetypes constituting the framework of ‘historical’ thought, at least some of its elements. After all, the strength of an idea being based on its operability and universality, every master idea should be found in each of us. Is it not, therein, expressed in other words and perceived from another angle, the very idea of Platonic reminiscence? Philosophical practice, then, becomes that activity which enables everyone to be awakened to the world of ideas that inhabit oneself, just as artistic practice awakens everyone to the world of forms that inhabit us, each according to its possibilities, without all being Kant or of the likes of Rembrandts.

The double requirement

Two specific and common prejudices are to be discarded in order to better understand the approach we are dealing with here. The first prejudice consists in believing that the practice of philosophy – and thus of philosophical discussion – being reserved for a learned elite, the same would apply to philosophical consultation. The second prejudice, unlike the first – its natural complement – consists in thinking that philosophy being, in fact, reserved for a scholarly elite, philosophical consultation cannot be philosophical since it is open to all. These two prejudices express a single fracture; it remains for us to attempt to demonstrate simultaneously that philosophical practice is open to all and that it implies a certain requirement distinguishing it from mere discussion. In addition, we will have to differentiate our activity from psychological or psychoanalytic practice with which we cannot fail to amalgamate it.

First steps

‘Why are you here?’ This inaugural question imposes itself as the first, the most natural, the one that one has to permanently ask to anyone except to oneself. It is unfortunate that any teacher in charge of an introductory course in philosophy does not start his academic year with such naive questions. Through this simple exercise, the pupil, accustomed for years to the routine school, would grasp from the outset the stake of this strange matter which interrogates to the most obvious evidences; the difficulty of actually answering such a question, as well as the wide range of possible answers, would quickly reveal the apparent banality of the question. Of course, for this purpose, one must not be content with one of these empty responses dropped from the tip of the lips so as to avoid thinking.

During the consultations, many of the first answers are of the kind: "because I do not know much about philosophy", "because I am interested in philosophy and want to know more", or "because I would like to know what the philosopher says – or what philosophy says – about..." The questioning must continue without delay, in order to reveal the unacknowledged assumptions of these attempts at answering, not to say those non-responses. This process will not fail to reveal some ideas concerning the subject – the person engaged in the consultation – about philosophy or any other topic discussed, involving him in a position necessary for this practice. Not that it is necessary to know 'the substance' of his thought, unlike psychoanalysis, but because it is a question of venturing on a hypothesis in order to work on it.

This distancing is important, for two reasons intimately related to the basics of our work. The first is that truth does not necessarily advance under cover of sincerity or subjective 'authenticity', it may even be radically opposed to it; an opposition based on the principle that envy often thwarts reason. From this point of view, it does not matter whether the subject adheres to the idea or not. "I'm not sure what I'm saying (or will say)", we often hear. But what would one want to be sure of? Is not this uncertainty precisely what will enable us to test our idea, while any certainty would inhibit such a process? The second reason, close to the first, is that a distancing must be established, necessary for a reflective and posed work, an indispensable condition for the conceptualization which we want to induce. Two conditions which by no means prevent the subject from venturing on precise ideas, he will in fact do it more freely. The scientist will more easily discuss ideas on which he does not inextricably engage his ego, without forbidding that an idea pleases him or suits him more than others.

"Why are you here?" This also amounts to asking: "What is the problem?" "What is the question?" That is, what necessarily motivates the meeting, even if this motivation is not clear or is unconscious at first. It is therefore a matter of carrying out some identification work. Once the hypothesis is expressed and somewhat developed (directly or through questions) the interrogator will propose a reformulation of what he has heard. Generally, the subject will express a certain initial refusal – or a cold reception – of the proposed reformulation: "That is not what I said. That is not what I meant." It will then be proposed to him to analyze what he does not like in the reformulation or to rectify his own speech. However, he must first clarify whether the reformulation has betrayed the discourse by changing the nature of its content (which must be stated to be possible, since the interrogator is not perfect...), or whether it has betrayed it by revealing, in open daylight, what he did not dare to see and admit in his own words. Here we see the enormous stake that a dialogue with the other poses on the philosophical level: insofar as one accepts the difficult exercise of 'weighing' words, the listener becomes a pitiless mirror that sends us hard back to ourselves. The emergence of the echo is always a risk whose scope we do not know.

When what has been initially expressed does not appear to be reformulable, out of confusion or by lack of clarity, the interrogator may without hesitation ask the subject to repeat what he has already said or to express it otherwise. If the explanation is too long or becomes a pretext for a 'release word' (associative and uncontrolled), the interrogator will not hesitate to interrupt: "I'm not sure I understand where you are going. I do not quite understand the meaning of your words." He will then be able to suggest the following exercise: "Tell me in a single sentence what you think is essential. If you had only one sentence to tell me about it, what would it be?" The subject will not fail to express his difficulty with the exercise, especially since he has just demonstrated his disability to formulate a clear and concise word. But it is in the recognition of this difficulty that also begins the consciousness connected with philosophizing.

Anagogy and discrimination

Once the initial hypothesis has been somewhat clarified, as to the nature of the philosophizing which brings the subject to the interview, or on another subject that concerns him, it is now time to launch the process of 'anagogical return' described in the works of Plato. The essential elements are what we will call on the one hand 'origin' and on the other hand 'discrimination'. We begin by asking the subject to account for his hypothesis by requiring him to justify his choice. Either by means of origin: "Why such a formulation? What is the point of such an idea?". Either through discrimination: "What is the most important elements of the various expressed ones?" Or, again: "What is the keyword in your sentence?" This part of the interview is carried out by combining in turn these two means.

The subject will often try to escape from this stage of the discussion by taking refuge in circumstantial relativism or in undifferentiated multiplicity. "It depends [...] There are many reasons... All words or ideas are important." Choosing, forcing to 'vectorize' thought, makes it possible, first of all, to identify the anchorages, the 'refrains', the constants, the presuppositions, and then to put them to the test. For, after several stages of rise (origin and discrimination), a sort of frame appears, making visible the central foundations and articulations of a thought. At the same time, through the hierarchization assumed by the subject, a dramatization of terms and concepts takes place, which brings out the words of their undifferentiated totality, of the 'mass' effect that erases the singularities. By separating ideas from one another, the subject becomes conscious of the conceptual operators by which he discriminates.

Of course, the questioner here has a key role, which is to emphasize what has just been said, so that the choices and their implications do not go unnoticed. He may even insist by asking the subject whether he fully assumes the choices he has just made. However, he must avoid commenting, even if it means to ask some supplementary questions, if he sees problems or inconsistencies in what has just been articulated. The whole idea is to get the subject to freely evaluate the implications of his

own positions, to glimpse what is concealed in his thought and thus in thought itself. This slowly extirpates him from the illusion entertained by the feelings of evidence and neutrality, a necessary propaedeutic for the elaboration of a critical perspective, that of opinion in general and that of his own in particular.

Thinking the unthinkable

Once a specific anchor, problem or concept has been identified, the time has come to take the opposite view. This is the exercise we will call 'thinking the unthinkable'. Whatever the anchoring or the particular theme that the subject has identified as central to his reflection, we ask him to formulate and develop the opposite hypothesis: "If you had a criticism to formulate against your hypothesis, what would it be? What is the most consistent objection you know or you can imagine with regard to the thesis that is close to your heart? What are the limitations of your idea?" Whether love, freedom, happiness, body or anything else is the foundation or the privileged reference of the subject, in most cases he will feel incapable of making such an intellectual reversal. Thinking of such an 'impossibility' will have the effect on him of plunging into the abyss. Sometimes it will be the cry of the heart: "But I will not!" Or, again: "This is not possible!"

This moment of clenching serves above all to raise awareness of the psychological and conceptual conditioning of the subject. By inviting him to think the unthinkable, he is invited to analyze, to compare and especially to deliberate, rather than to take for granted and irrefutable this or that hypothesis of intellectual and existential functioning. He then realizes the rigidities that form his thought without his perceiving it. "But, then, one can no longer believe in anything!" He will lament. If, at least during the time of an exercise, for a very short time, wondering if the opposite hypothesis, if the opposite 'belief' does not hold the road equally well. Strangely enough, to the surprise of the subject, once he risks this inverse hypothesis, he realizes that it has a lot more meaning than he thought a priori and that in any case it illuminates his hypothesis of departure, from which he succeeded in better understanding the nature and the limits. This experience makes one see and touch the liberating dimension of thought insofar as it allows one to question the ideas on which one unconsciously tense oneself, to distance oneself from oneself, to analyze one's thought patterns – concerning their form and substance – and to conceptualize one's own existential stakes.

Switch to 'First Floor'

By way of conclusion, the subject will be asked to summarize the important parts of the discussion in order to review and summarize the highlights or the significant ones. This will be done in the form of a feedback on the whole exercise. "What happened here?" This last part of the interview is also called 'moving to the first floor': a conceptual analysis in opposition to the experience of the 'ground floor'. From this elevated perspective, the challenge is to act, to analyze the course of the exercise,

to assess the stakes, to emerge from the hubbub of action and the thread of the narrative, to capture the essential elements of the consultation, the points of inflection of the dialogue. The subject engages in a metadiscourse about the groping of his thought. This moment is crucial because it is the locus of the sudden awareness of this double functioning (inside/outside) of the human spirit, intrinsically linked to the philosophical practice. It allows for the emergence of the infinite perspective which gives the subject access to a dialectical vision of his own being, to the autonomy of his thought.

Is it philosophical?

What are we trying to accomplish through these exercises? How are they philosophical? How is philosophical consultation different from psychoanalytic consultation? As has already been mentioned, three specific criteria specify the practice in question: identification, criticism and conceptualization. (Let us mention another important criterion: distancing, which, however, we shall not retain as the fourth element because it is implicitly contained in the other three.) In a way, this triple requirement captures quite well what is required in the writing of a 'dissertation'. In the latter, on the basis of an imposed subject, the student must express some ideas, test them and formulate one or more general problems, with or without the help of the authors. The only important difference concerns the choice of the theme to be treated: here the subject chooses his own object of study – in fact he is the subject and the object of the study – which increases the existential outreach of the reflection, perhaps making the philosophical treatment of this subject even more delicate.

The objection to the 'psychologizing' side of the exercise is not to be dismissed too quickly. On the one hand, because the tendency is great in the subject – when faced with a single interlocutor who is dedicated to his listening – to unburden himself without any restraint on his feelings, especially if he has already taken part in interviews of the psychological type. He will also feel frustrated at being interrupted, having to make critical judgments about his own ideas, having to discriminate between his various propositions, and so on. So many obligations that are part of the 'game', its requirements and its tests. On the other hand, since, for various reasons, philosophy tends to ignore individual subjectivity, to devote itself especially to the abstract universal, to disembodied notions. A sort of extreme modesty, even puritanism, causes the professional of philosophy to fear public opinion to the point of wanting to ignore it, rather than to see in this opinion the inevitable starting point of philosophizing on everything; whether this opinion is that of the ordinary mortal or that of the specialist, the latter being no less a victim of this 'sickly' and fatal opinion.

Thus, our exercise consists firstly in identifying in the subject, through his opinions, the unacknowledged presuppositions from which he operates. This allows to define and to dig the starting point(s). Secondly, to take the opposite side of these presuppositions, in order to transform

indisputable postulates into simple hypotheses. Thirdly, to articulate the problems thus generated through identified and formulated concepts. In this last step – or earlier if utility is felt earlier – the interrogator may use ‘classical’ problems, attributable to an author, in order to enhance or to better identify issues that arise during the course of the interview.

It is doubtful, of course, whether a single individual could recreate the whole history of philosophy by himself, just like that of mathematics or language. In addition, why should we ignore the past? We will always be dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants. But should we not risk the gymnastics, just watching and admiring the athletes, on the pretext that we are short on legs, or even disabled? Should we just go to the Louvre and not put our hands into clay, on the pretext that our mental functions do not have the agility of those inspired beings? Would it be a matter of disrespect to the ‘great’ if we were to imitate them? Would it not be honoring them, at least as much as by admiring and quoting them? In the end, have they not for the most part enjoined us to think for ourselves?

2. Difficulties

Our methodology is mainly inspired by the Socratic maieutic, where the philosopher questions his interlocutor, invites him to identify the stakes of his discourse, to conceptualize it by distinguishing key terms in order to implement them, to problematize it through a critical perspective, to universalize its implications. For the sake of comparison, this practice has the specificity of inviting the subject to move away from a mere sensation to allow him a rational analysis of his speech and of himself, a *sine qua non* condition for deliberating on the cognitive and existential stakes which must be made explicit at first. The removal from oneself that this unnatural activity presupposes, for which it requires the assistance of a specialist, poses a certain number of difficulties which we shall here attempt to analyze here.

The frustrations

Beyond the interest in philosophical practice, there is a regular predominance, at least temporarily, of a negative feeling in the subject, which is most frequently expressed – during the philosophical consultations as well as during the group reflection workshops – as an expression of frustration. First, the frustration of the interruption: since a philosophical conversation is not the place of release or of conviviality, a misunderstood and long speech, or one which ignores the interlocutor, must be interrupted; if it does not feed in the dialogue directly, it is of no use for the interview and has no place in the context of the exercise. Second, the frustration associated with harshness: it is more a matter of analyzing speech than pronouncing it, and everything we have said can be used ‘against us’. Thirdly, the frustration of slowness: it is no more a question of provoking accumulations and jostling of words, we must not be afraid of silences, nor of stopping on a given word in order to fully apprehend its substance, in the double meaning of the term apprehend:

to capture and to dread. Fourth, the frustration of betrayal, again in the double meaning of this term: betrayal of our own word which reveals what we do not want to say or know and betray our word that does not say what we mean. Fifth, the frustration of being: not being what we want to be, not being what we believe to be, being dispossessed of the illusory truths that we maintain, consciously or not, sometimes for a very long time, about ourselves, our existence and our intellect.

This multiple frustration, sometimes painful, is not always clearly expressed by the subject. If he is somewhat emotional, susceptible or unwilling to analyze, he will not hesitate to lambaste censorship, or even oppression. "You prevent me from speaking", while long unused silences, unoccupied by speech, periodically punctuate that same speech which has difficulty in finding itself. Or, "You want me to say what you want", whereas at each question the subject can answer what suits him, only to the risk of engendering new questions. Initially, frustration often expresses itself as a reproach, however, by becoming verbalized, it makes it possible to become an object for itself; it allows the subject who expresses it to become conscious of himself as an external character. On the basis of this observation, he becomes able to reflect, to analyze his being through testing, to better understand his intellectual functioning, and he can then intervene on himself, both on his being and on his thought. Certainly, the passage through the moment, or through certain moments, imbued with psychological overtones, is difficult to avoid, without, however, dwelling upon it too long, for it is a matter of passing quickly to the subsequent philosophical stage, by means of the critical perspective and by attempting to define a problem and some issues at stake.

Our working hypothesis consists precisely in identifying certain elements of subjectivity, snippets that could be called opinions, intellectual opinions and emotional opinions, in order to take the opposite and to experience 'other' thought. Without it, how do we learn to voluntarily and consciously leave conditioning and predetermination? How to emerge from the pathological and the pure felt? Moreover, it may happen that the subject does not have the capacity to carry out this work or even the possibility of considering it, for lack of distance, lack of autonomy, insecurity or because of some strong anxiety, in which case we may not be able to work with him. Just as the practice of a sport requires some minimal physical dispositions, philosophical practice, with its difficulties and demands, requires some minimal psychological dispositions, below which we cannot work.

The exercise must be practiced in a minimum of serenity, with the various pre-conditions necessary for this serenity. Too much fragility or susceptibility would prevent the process from taking place. From the way our work is defined, the causality of a lack in this field is not within our purview, but that of a psychologist or a psychiatrist. By limiting ourselves to our function, we cannot go to the root of the problem, we could only notice and draw consequences. If the subject does not seem to be able to practice the exercise, even though he feels the need to reflect on himself,

we will encourage him to move rather towards psychological consultations or at the very least towards some other types of philosophical practices, more 'flowing'. To conclude, as far as we are concerned, as long as it remains limited, the psychological passage has no reason to be avoided, since subjectivity does not have to play the role of a scarecrow with sparrows, even if a certain philosophical approach, rather academic, considers this individual reality as an obstruction to philosophizing. The formal and chilly philosopher is afraid that, by rubbing against it, the distancing necessary for philosophical activity is thus lost, whereas we take the option of making it emerge.

Speech as a pretext

One aspect of our practice which is problematic for the subject is the relationship to speech which we are trying to set up. Indeed, on the one hand, we ask the subject to sacralize speech, since we allow ourselves to carefully weigh together the least term used, since we allow ourselves to dig from within, together, the expressions used and the arguments put forward, to the point of making them sometimes unrecognizable for their author, which will cause him from time to time to scream to scandal on seeing his word thus manipulated. And, on the other hand, we ask him to desacralize speech, since the whole of this exercise is composed only of words and that whatever the sincerity or the truth of what it advances: it is simply a matter of playing with the ideas, without necessarily adhering to what is said. Only the coherence, the echoes that are reflected in words between each other, interest us, the mental silhouette that emerges slowly and imperceptibly. We simultaneously ask the subject to play a simple game, which implies a distancing from what is conceived as the real, and at the same time to play with words with the greatest seriousness, with the greatest application, with more efforts than he generally puts in constructing his discourse and in analyzing it.

Here, truth goes masked. It is no longer a truth of intention, it is no longer sincerity and authenticity, it is a requirement. This requirement obliges the subject to make choices, to assume the contradictions unveiled by working on the clutter of speech, even if to carry out radical frontal reversals, even if to move abruptly, even if refusing to see and to decide, even if one were to be silent before the many cracks which allow us to envisage the most serious abysses, the fractures of the self, the gaping of being. No other quality is necessary here in the interrogator and, little by little, in the subject, except that of a policeman, of a detective who tracks down the slightest failures of speech and behavior, which demands one to account for each act, for each place and every instant.

Of course, we may be mistaken in the fact that the discussion has changed, which remains the prerogative of the interrogator, the undeniable power that he has and must assume, including his indisputable lack of neutrality despite his efforts in that sense. The subject may also be 'misled' in the analysis and ideas he puts forward, influenced by the questions he is subjected to, blinded by the convictions he wishes to

defend, guided by biases for which he has already opted-in and on which he would perhaps be incapable of deliberating: 'over interpretations', 'misinterpretations' or 'sub-interpretations' are flourishing. No matter these mistakes, apparent mistakes or alleged mistakes. What matters to the subject is to stay alert, to observe, to analyze and to become aware; his mode of reaction, his treatment of the problem, his way of reacting, his ideas that emerge, his relation to himself and to the exercise, everything must here become a pretext for analysis and conceptualization. In other words, making mistakes here does not make much sense. It's all about playing the game, practicing gymnastics. What matters is only to see and not to see, consciousness and unconsciousness. There are no more good and bad answers, but there is 'seeing the answers', and if there is deception, it is only in the lack of fidelity of the word towards itself, not anymore in relation to some distant truth pre-written on the background of a starry sky or in some subconscious shallows. Nevertheless, this fidelity is doubtless a more terrible truth than the other, more implacable: it is no longer possible to disobey, with all the legitimacy of this disobedience. There can only be blinding.

Pain and epidural

The subject quickly becomes aware of the issues at stakes in the case. A sort of panic can thus set in. For this reason, it is important to install various types of 'epidural' for the ongoing delivery. First, the most important, the most difficult and the most delicate, remains the indispensable dexterity of the interrogator, who must be able to determine when it is appropriate to press an interrogation and when it is time to pass on, when it is time to say or to propose rather than to question, when it is time to alternate between the rough and the generous. It is a judgment not always easy to emit, because we easily allow ourselves to be carried away in the heat of action, by our own desires, those wanting to go to the end, to arrive at a certain place, those linked to fatigue, linked to despair, and many other such personal inclinations.

Second, the humor, the laughter, related to the playful dimension of the exercise. They induce a sort of 'letting go' which allows the individual to free himself from his existential drama and to observe without pain the derisory of certain positions to which he sometimes clings with a touch of ridicule, when it is not in the most blatant contradiction with himself. Laughter releases tensions that otherwise could completely inhibit the subject in this highly corrosive practice.

Third, the duplication, which allows the subject to come out of himself, to consider himself as a third person. When the analysis of one's own discourse goes through a perilous moment, when the judgment encounters issues that are too heavy to bear, it is useful and interesting to transpose the case studied to a third person by inviting the subject to visualize a film, to imagine a fiction, to hear his story in the form of a fable. 'Suppose you read a story where it is said that...' 'Suppose you meet someone, and all you know about him is that...' This simple narrative effect allows the subject to forget or relativize his intentions, his

desires, his wills, his illusions and disillusion, in order to deal solely with speech, as it arises during the discussion, allowing it to perform its own revelations without permanently erasing it by heavy suspicions or with patent accusations of insufficiency and betrayal.

Fourth, the conceptualization, the abstraction. By universalizing what tends to be perceived exclusively as a dilemma or as a purely personal issue, by problematizing it, by dialectizing it, the pain gradually diminishes as the intellectual activity begins. Philosophical activity itself is a sophrology, a 'consolation' of sort. It was considered as such by the Ancients, like Boethius, Seneca, Epicurus or more recently by Montaigne. It is a balm which allows us to better consider the suffering intrinsically linked to human existence, and ours in particular.

3. Exercises

Establishing connections

Some additional exercises are very useful for the reflection process. For example, the exercise of the connection. It allows the discourse to emerge from its 'flow of consciousness' side which functions purely through free associations, by abandoning to the darkness of the unconscious the articulations and joints of thought. The link is a concept all the more fundamental because it deeply touches the being, since it links the different facets, the different registers. A 'substantial link', says Leibniz. 'What is the connection between what you are saying here and what you are saying there?' Apart from the contradictions which will be revealed by this interrogation, so will the ruptures and jumps which signal nodes, blind points, whose conscious articulation allows the discourse to work closely with the spirit of the subject. This exercise is one of the forms of the 'anagogical' approach, which makes it possible to go back to unity, to identify the anchoring, to update the point of emergence of the thought of the subject, even if only to later criticize this unity, even if it is necessary to modify this anchoring. It makes it possible to establish a sort of conceptual map defining a pattern of thought.

True Speech

Another exercise is that of 'true speech'. It is practiced when a contradiction has been detected, insofar as the subject accepts the term 'contradictory' as an attribute of his thought, which is not always the case: certain subjects refuse to envisage it and deny, by principle, the mere possibility of a contradiction in their speech. By asking which one is the true discourse – even if, at the generally staggered moments in which they are spoken, they are expressed as sincerely as the other – the subject is invited to justify two different positions which are his, to evaluate their perspective, to compare their relative merits, to deliberate in order to finally decide in favor of the primacy of one of the two perspectives, a decision which will lead him to become aware of his own functioning and of the fracture which animates him. It is not absolutely necessary to decide, but it is advisable to encourage the subject to risk it,

for it is very rare if not impossible to meet a real lack of preference between two distinct visions, with the epistemological consequences which are derived from it. The notions of 'complementarity' or of 'simple difference' commonly used in everyday language, although they hold their share of truth, often serve to erase the real, somewhat conflicting and tragic, stakes of any singular thought. The subject may also try to explain the reason of the discourse which is not the 'true' one. Often, it will correspond to the expectations, moral or intellectual, which he believes to be perceiving in society, or even to a desire which he considers illegitimate; a discourse revealing of a perception of the world and of a relation to authority or to reason.

Order

Another exercise, that of 'order'. When the subject is asked to give reasons, explanations, or examples of any of his words, he will be asked to assume the order in which he enumerated them. Especially the first element of the list, which will be related to the subsequent elements. Using the idea that the first element is the most obvious, the clearest, the safest and therefore the most important in his mind, he will be asked to assume this choice, usually unconscious. Often, the subject will rebel to this exercise, refusing to assume the choice in question, denying this offspring born in spite of himself. By agreeing to assume this exercise, he will have to account for the presuppositions contained in a particular choice, whether he adheres to it explicitly, implicitly or not at all. At worst, as with most consultation exercises, it will accustom him to decode any advanced proposition, in order to grasp its epistemological content and to glimpse the concepts conveyed, even if would dissociates himself from the idea somehow.

Universal and singular

On the whole, what do we ask of the subject who wishes to question himself, the one who wishes to philosophize from and about his own existence and to think about himself? He must learn to read, to read himself, to learn to transpose his thoughts and to learn to transpose himself through himself; a duplication and alienation which require the loss of self through a passage to infinity, by a leap into pure possibility. The difficulty of this exercise is that it will always be a matter of erasing something, of forgetting, of momentarily blinding the body or the mind, the reason or will, desire or morality, pride or placidity. In order to do this, the speech of occasion, the speech of circumstance, the speech of space-filling or of appearance must be silenced: either the word assumes its charge, its implications or its content, or it learns to be silent. A word that is not ready to assume its own being, in all its scope, a word that is not eager to become conscious of itself, no longer has to present itself to the light, a game in which only the conscious has the right of city, theoretically and tentatively at least. Obviously, some will not want to play the game, considered too painful, the word here being too heavily charged with meaningful stakes.

By forcing the subject to select his speech, by referring him back to the image he deploys, through the reformulation tool, it is a question of installing a procedure in which the speech will be the most revealing possible. This is what happens through the process of universalization of the particular idea. Of course it is possible and sometimes useful to follow the paths already traced, for example by quoting authors, but it is then the rule to assume the content as if it were exclusively ours. Although the authors can serve to legitimize a fearful position or to trivialize a painful position. Moreover, what are we trying to do, if not to find in each singular discourse, as unpopular as it may be, the great problems, stamped and codified by illustrious predecessors? How is articulated, in everyone, the absolute and the relative, monism and dualism, body and soul, analytic and poetic, finite and infinite, etc. This happens at the risk of creating a feeling of treason, for one can hardly bear to see his cherished word treated thus, even by oneself. It creates a feeling of pain and of dispossession, like the one who would see his body being operated upon even though all physical pain would have been annihilated. Sometimes, sensing the consequences of an interrogation, the subject will try by all means to avoid answering. If the interrogator persists in a roundabout way, a sort of answer will doubtless emerge, but only at the moment when the stake has disappeared behind the horizon, so much so that the subject, reassured by this disappearance, will not know how to establish a link with the initial problem. If the interrogator recapitulates the steps in order to re-establish the thread of the discussion, the subject can then accept or not to see, as the case may be. It is a crucial moment, although the refusal to see can sometimes be only verbal: the path cannot have failed to trace some kind of imprint in the mind of the subject. By a purely defensive mechanism, the latter will sometimes try to verbally make any work of clarification or explanation impossible. But he will not be less affected during his reflections later on.

Accepting the pathology

As a conclusion on the difficulties of philosophical consultation, let us say that the main test lies in the acceptance of the idea of pathology taken in the philosophical sense. Indeed, any singular existential posture, a choice that is more or less consciously made over the years, for many reasons makes the impasse on a certain number of logics and ideas. Basically, these pathologies are not infinite in number, although their specific articulations vary enormously. But, for those who experience them, it is difficult to conceive that the ideas on which they center their existence are reduced to the simple, almost predictable, consequences of a chronic weakness in their capacity for reflection and deliberation. Yet, is not the 'thinking by oneself' advocated by many philosophers an art that is worked and acquired, rather than an innate talent, a given, which would no longer have to reflect back unto itself? It is simply a matter of accepting that human existence is in itself a problem, burdened with dysfunctions which nevertheless constitute its substance and dynamics.

Chapter XII

Philosophizing through antinomies

1. The philosophical requirement

What qualifies a discussion as philosophical? Are they not the same characteristics that make it possible to qualify a dissertation as being of a philosophical nature? And, as every professor of philosophy knows, although it is sometimes forgotten, it is not enough to consider that a writing or a discussion is held within the framework of a philosophy course to consider it philosophical, the context not being sufficient in itself to confirm or invalidate a philosophical content. The most brilliant of professors will not suffice, by its simple presence or by its mere contact, to guarantee the substantiality or the quality of the intellectual production of his pupils. Thus, whatever the place may be, a series of little-worked opinions, a list of 'clichés', a set of unsubstantiated and unsupported statements, that jump unconsciously from one topic to another, do not in any way constitute a philosophical whole, whether orally or in written.

An overloaded qualifier

Each will therefore use its particular criteria to determine the value or the philosophical content of a statement or an exchange. These determinations will be intuitive or formalized, explicit or implicit, arbitrary or justified. But before putting forward any hypothesis on this subject, a first warning is necessary. The qualifier of philosophy seems very charged to us. For one reason: it seems to mean anything and everything. No doubt because the term philosophy is used in very varied meanings, ranging from daily, general, and without real content, on the affairs of the world and of man, to the elaboration of learned doctrines, a more or less appropriate display of scholarship, through the production of rare abstractions. Faced with this blurred situation, each one will be tempted to outbid the other on the value of his own position, denouncing and vilifying any other particular or general perspective, the most reckless philosophical zealots do not hesitating to resort to invective and to excommunication.

Nothing prevents anyone from attempting to establish what defines and constitutes the philosophical path or content. But beforehand, in order to avoid cognitively and emotionally overloading this task, it seems

important to us to affirm and recall this truism: philosophy does not hold the monopoly of intellectual and pedagogical interest. In other words, a practice, a teaching or a knowledge, even considered as non-philosophical, may very well be of great interest, of another nature. This explains why, in describing an exercise or a teaching as non-philosophical, we should ask ourselves how this activity is of any use, before calling for deception on the merchandise and denouncing the abuse of trust. Even though we would have the greatest love and respect for the philosophical 'object', we can believe that there is a life of the spirit on this side and beyond philosophy. And, if for a given perspective the term can be judged to be inadequate, too loose or indeterminate, we will not feel obligated to pronounce the anathema. Moreover, by accepting the problematization of the term and its conceptual plurality, we will grant a greater chance to the philosophical exercise than by giving ourselves the role of a chilly and rigid guardian of the temple. Without forbidding rigor, on the contrary, since it will be a matter of engaging in a meaningful and fruitful dialogue, forcing us to rethink the basis of the discipline.

Philosophy and usefulness

To make our remarks more substantive and more palpable, let us take an example that is close to our hearts: discussion, whether it be dialogue, debate or something else. Whether it is formal or informal, the discussion may or may not be philosophical. Will it be enough that this discussion is about the great themes of life, such as love, death or thought, to call it philosophical? In the particular perspective of the present text, we shall answer in the negative. However, in the first place, as we have said, it does not matter in the absolute sense that this discussion is considered philosophical or not. Exclusion from philosophy for lack of scholarship or for excess of scholarship, exclusion for lack of democracy or for excess of democracy, exclusion for lack of abstraction or for excess of abstraction, exclusion for acceptance of doctrine, or for the refusal of a doctrine. We will refuse as much the romanticism of the teacher who considers that he must minimize his role, or even virtually disappear, as the clericalism of the indispensable professor ever so certain of his science.

There resides in these postures a point of dogma and honor which seems scarcely suited to our affair: we have no copyright, stamp, or piece of land to defend. Do we see any utility in such an exercise? This is the first significant question to ask. It is true that, in our society, as everywhere and always, without doubt, those who wish to ask themselves great existential questions find it difficult to meet attentive and honest interlocutors. In general, the human being prefers to avoid these kinds of questions, very or too busy to go towards 'useful' occupations, little concerned about taking the time to contemplate certain problems in the face. Thus, the simple fact of posing and calmly expressing oneself thus, or even of hardly confronting some worldviews, seems to us a good and useful thing, besides that this type of exchange can spring from deep

intuitions and valiant arguments. But to remake the world, is it really philosophizing?

In a second stage, as we can observe periodically, those who mingle in such discussions are content to simply scratch some banalities, without worrying at all about rigor or deepening. We will therefore refuse to grant from the start the term philosophical to such an exercise, no matter how friendly it may be. A judgment with limited consequences, which in no way constitutes a catastrophe. And, if some wish to use this term to ensure a status for their needs, we will not hold them in any way rigorous: this is part of the game, lady philosophy will have seen many others, she will not die out of it. The 'death of philosophy' is a dramatic concept that is totally foreign to us, except to express the xenophobia of those who claim to frame philosophy to such an extent that they remain its only – or almost unique – promoter, defender, heir or possessor. And, in any case, despite attempts at delimitation and exclusion, and even through them, a debate will begin, which will try again and again to restore the problem so as never to relax the beneficial and necessary tension of the full exercise of thought. Besides, we can always ask ourselves whether the fact that an exercise is philosophical indicates at the outset any usefulness or interest.

Architecture of thought

Once this warning has been pronounced, let us now try to provide a framework for philosophizing it. We will have minimized, it is hoped, the flow of untimely or epidermal reactions, from the party of the 'aristocrats' as well as from the party of the 'democrats'. But, finally, in order to philosophize, let us dare to take risks! We will therefore propose, not as a defining and limiting framework but as an operational and dynamic structure, the principle of antinomies. Indeed, whether in Eastern philosophy, or at the heart of the great myths originating from the four corners of the globe, or in the reflection on everyday life, or again in the history of classical Western philosophy, since its emergence in Greece, oppositions seem to give rhythm to thought. Beginning with good and evil, the true and the false, the just and the unjust. These axes articulate the points of tension around and on the basis of which great principles are stated, they pose the founding oppositions, they formulate the many judgments and axiologies, they make it possible to extract some thought from the simple inhomogeneous magma of opinions and ideas. Bizarrely, contrary to what one might think, through these categorizing and simplifying formalisms, thought passes from the opacity and thickness of the collection of ideas to an architecture that promotes transparency and self-consciousness. It goes like in Gothic architecture, which artificially installed outer buttresses on specific points, thus allowing for a lighter, more slenderly perspective, more structured and less massive than its Roman predecessor. Thus, our postulate argues that thought is not an accumulation or a jumble of opinions that are relatively foreign to each other, ignoring and contradicting one another, but that it is a geometry,

with its echoes and coherences, an architecture imbued with its angular stones and keystones, a music with its harmonies, full of incidentals.

Even if it does not always belong to the conscious – and fortunately because it would have too much to do – each individual or collective intellectual function produces a certain number of concepts and conceptual polarities which serve as good as possible to organize the life of the spirit, in spite of the immensity and of the plurality of its solicitations, perceptions, sensations, intuitions or established opinions, gathered here and there. Pleasure and pain, me and others, to be and to appear, represent as many of these polarities of which no one can make the economy without losing or going mad. It is only at the cost of an immense work on oneself, psychological and intellectual, that some great revolutionary wisdom or schema can claim, as a proposed ideal or divine revelation, to ignore such evidences. If thought operates mainly reactively, producing formulations, mechanically, in order to please oneself or to please the neighbor, it operates nevertheless in the crucible of categories, of codified forms and specific axes.

A naive reading

If some of these antinomies, especially those encountered in real life – generally of a practical, empirical, perceptible and moral nature – strike us by their banality, others seem more abstruse. But in both cases, it matters to bring to light and to clarify these antinomies, the most common ones suffering from the prejudices by which they are abusively depicted, the rarest ones, on the contrary, acting like scarecrows that one dares not freely and serenely approach. Nevertheless, for all practical purposes, we shall proceed from the hypothesis that any important or founding antinomy, in the same way as any meaningful concept, must necessarily refer to a common intuition, which can be basically apprehended by any common mind. In other words, at the risk of shocking sensitive souls, we affirm that any antinomy, any fundamental concept is somewhat banal and evident, at least in its general grasp. So, we advise the reader unfamiliar with the official philosophical lexicon not to rush to a dictionary as soon as he meets one of these terms. In general, it is better to let the intuition speak for itself first: it will know how to make words speak, whether in themselves, or through the sentences that envelop and produce them. Of course, neologisms or other roughly shaped barbarisms will, from time to time, resist any apprehension, and there is no question for us of prohibiting the prohibitive use of a philosophical dictionary, but we encourage the reader to have recourse to these referential works only when, a first, preliminary and naive reading has really been attempted. Let us beware of learned works which, like preambles, footnotes and various appendices, sometimes succeed in constituting the major part of a work, thus stifling the original work and thickening its reading, instead of facilitating it. There is a classic error in philosophy, which affects in particular the 'good pupil' endowed with a few rudiments of philosophical culture: impressed by his masters,

who themselves have probably done too much to dazzle the pupil, he pretends to do things 'well', applies and entangles himself in details rather than reading freely and quietly what is offered to him, without too much concern about risking some faults and omitting the fine nuances. Let us invite the reader to a broad reading, drawn in broad outline which, at the risk of temporary error, will eventually realize the shortcomings and contradictions that hinder it, without seeking to check at each step what everyone will have concocted and epilogued on the subject. The trap of erudition, which only after a long and patient process succeeds in getting rid of itself and of its weight, to discover that simplicity is not necessarily a defect, quite on the contrary.

The challenges

Consider a particular case: being and appearing. More than one scholar in this field would like to show us by various subtleties how the Kantian antinomy 'noumenon and phenomenon' is otherwise more sophisticated, subtle and learned than the general antinomy as we have previously formulated it. But it seems to us that, apart from the one who claims to write a doctoral thesis on the question, intended to impress peers or obtain a diploma, these sophistications, nuances and subtleties are of little interest. If only they still have any substance left, other than a purely lexical and occasional one. On one occasion or another we may have had the chance to observe in his work some quintessential abstractor, which at first might perhaps impress us, while in the end he strikes us by the vanity or the ridicule of his approach. How many theses, in order to claim originality and novelty, engage in minute speculations, which attain unprecedented levels only by the exact disproportion between their absence of substance and the absurd volume of their writing.

Every human being will necessarily have experienced the gap between being and appearing. If only because he has been disappointed by his neighbor or because he has taken bladders for lanterns, because the carp took on the look of a rabbit or simply because his vision has failed him. How many disagreements will have for all foundation this simple difference, between being and appearance, or between various appearances determined by different perspectives. And it is precisely the identification of these perspectives or of those relations, peculiar to the matter, that summarizes the articulation of the philosophical stakes. The anagogical principle of Plato, which asks us to take up a particular idea, at its origin, in the vision of the world which generates it, in order to grasp in its cause the fundamental reality of its idea. It is in this sense that the antinomies we present seem to capture the philosophical approach closely.

At this point, it will be objected that philosophical discussions, whether with children, adolescents or uninitiated adults, will rather seek to answer questions about the meaning of life, the difficulty of human relationships or moral obligations, which seems to us far from the abstract antinomies we propose. But we will respond to this by saying that

philosophizing is not simply a matter of exchanging opinions and arguments, because it requires, in addition, to carry out a work of analysis and reflection on what in itself constitutes the only raw material of philosophizing. The philosophical requirement consists in digging and articulating the stakes of these various perspectives, which will naturally lead to the classical antinomies we have endeavored to enumerate. Thus, the task of the teacher, like that of his pupils, will be to remain on the various ideas emitted, to contemplate them before producing others at infinity, in order to extract their profound meaning, to clarify their internal divergences. There is no longer any question of being satisfied with a simple 'I do not agree' or 'I have another idea', because it will be a question of bringing together these various ideas, which will otherwise be only opinions. It is true that the production of arguments holds, as added value, the fact of attributing a reason to an opinion, already removing us from sincerity as the only justification, but it is also a question of comparing these reasons, in order to clarify their content, to bring them to light, that is to say to conceptualize them, and then to account for the multiplicity of perspectives, that is to say, to problematize.

It will be necessary to make judgments, to qualify one's words, to deepen and to become aware of one's own thought, and that of his interlocutors. Otherwise the exercise might have some interest, though not negligible, in offering an exchange of ideas and a place of expression, but it is less than certain that without any comparison and qualification of the various ideas, it can claim the status of philosophical exercise. The same applies to a dissertation in the philosophy class, with the only difference that it is framed by a definite program, with notions and authors, wherein we can expect to see, here and there, some codified notions or references, which is not necessarily the case when writing or philosophically discussing an established or devoted program of philosophy.

As a conclusion to our preamble, let us take a particular case. Suppose we visited a painter's studio and wanted to express our appreciation for his work. Among others, two possibilities of expression are offered here: "Your painting is very beautiful" or "Your painting pleases me very much." For one reason or another, related to sensitivity or to personal choices more or less conscious, each one will prefer this or that formulation. Nevertheless, for the painter, if he does not pride himself on philosophy and, for all useful or pleasant purposes, he is only concerned with your approval or admiration, then the chosen terms do not matter. In the same way, for the author of these words, he sought only to manifest what he had on his heart.

But what philosophically interests us here is to establish the stakes implied by such a choice. Issues that can be articulated only if we first consider what other way of expressing ourselves we have at our disposal, and if we take the time to deliberate on this choice. It is therefore a question of conceptualizing, of problematizing and of deepening, in order to make a work of philosophy. Thus, in the first case, when we appeal to the beautiful, we convey a more objective and universal vision of the

world, where the transcendent can have a right to the city, while, in the second case, we are rather in the subjective and the particular, and reality is founded on the singular. Thus, what could only represent a simple sentence of appreciation for everyone, can for the philosopher represent the articulation of a whole worldview. But it is necessary to train one's eye and to know the stakes in order to recognize them. It is in this that the classification of classical antinomies seems to us to be a useful undertaking that facilitates the philosophical practice.

2. A list of antinomies and triptychs

Let us now try to draw up a global list of the antinomies which seem to us to be both important and recurrent. We have identified thirty-seven. This list is composed of twenty-eight pairs of opposites and of nine conceptual triptychs. For, it seemed to us that if the binary structure imposed itself very often, a ternary structure sometimes imposed itself, fulfilling the same functions of conceptual constraint. Here comes the list, followed by a short synthesis of the issues at stake, preceded by a problematic serving as an illustration:

One and multiple – being and appearing – essence and existence – same and other – me and other – continuous and discreet – part and whole – abstract and concrete – body and mind – nature and culture – reason and sensible – reason and intuition – reason and passion – temporal and eternal – finite and infinite – objective and subjective – absolute and relative – freedom and determinism – active and passive – current and virtual – matter and form – cause and effect – space and location – strength and form – quantity and quality – narration and discourse – analysis and synthesis – logic and dialectic – affirmation, proof and problematic – possible, probable and necessary – induction, deduction and abduction – opinion, idea and truth – singularity, totality and transcendence – good, beautiful and true – to be, to do and to think – anthropology, epistemology and metaphysics – psychological, moral and legal

1- One and multiple

Problem: Is a dice an entity in itself or a multiplicity of sides?

First and founding issue: every entity is both one and multiple. Thus, the individual is one, he has a unique identity, a determination and a specificity that distinguish him from other individuals, but he is also several. First of all, because he is a composite being, made of body and spirit. Even if some people reject this distinction, his body itself is divisible into parts, more or less essential to his survival. It goes similarly for his mind, or his conscience, torn between different inclinations such as reason, instinct or feelings. So it is for any material object, which can be

conceived as an entity or as an assembly. We can also conceive the multiplicity of an entity through the plurality of its functions and relations, which also participate in the definition of its being. For the human being, we can distinguish its place, its history, its social role, its activities, as so many parameters that constitute it. The same applies not only to beings, but also to things and words, whose identity multiplies with circumstances. Thus, an apple consists of skin, flesh, seed, a peduncle, sepals, just as a word consists of vowels and consonants or of various sounds. In another way, the apple can be considered on an apple tree, in the ditch, on the merchant's stall or in the plate, as various components of the same 'apple' reality. And, a word, according to the sentence in which it is inserted, can see its meaning change considerably, hence the polysemy that defines it.

Nevertheless, multiplicity is a trap, just as unity. Indeed, through the multiplicity of cases, circumstantial or other, through the whole and the totality, there must be a form or another of unity, however hypothetical, problematic and indefinable it may be, without which the entity is no more an entity but a pure multiplicity. Taken in an indefinite multiplicity, the term is no longer a term since it does not refer to any set, to any community, and therefore to no entity. Without any invariance, without community, without unity, one thing is no longer one, but several. But without multiplicity, without community, without parts or attributes, one thing is elusive and non-existent: it can only be a pure transcendence. We must therefore attempt to define unity through multiplicity, just as multiplicity through unity.

2- Being and appearing

Problem: Do we love a person or what we perceive of it?

This problem is easily grafted onto the previous one. For, being, or essence, the thing in itself, can be conceived as the founding unity of an entity, an interiority whose external appearance is only a partial and fragmentary manifestation. In this demanding perspective, the intrinsic reality, the truth of things and of the world, would be difficult to reach, even inaccessible. Appearance, what is perceived, as an intermediary between two entities, between an entity and the world around it, can then be conceived as what veils the essence. But it can also be thought on the contrary as what constitutes its expression or manifestation, since it is thus that the thing reveals itself to the world, through the phenomenon it embodies, the only 'tangible' reality. Because of this impossibility of perceiving the thing in itself, the appearance will be regarded by some as the only reality, by claiming that it alone acts on the outside in an efficient way, it alone is knowable: it is relation and living substance. The idea of an inner reality without expression or bearing on the world would then have only a factitious interest, it would be an empty concept, devoid of substance. Only the perception of a thing, its detention or its instrumentalisation, would constitute its reality.

The requirement posed by the concept of being is that of an invariant, which postulates some particular and specific characteristic that can always be attributed to the entity in question, to the thing in itself, whatever its metamorphoses and the diversity of its reports. This invariant represents a link between the different possible states, beyond the various accidents produced by contingency, a link that embodies the very substance of this entity. Being in itself – the noumene – would be in some way opposed to transformation or to becoming – the phenomenon – which can be considered either as a 'loss of being', by the degradation of its 'original purity', or as a gain of being, by the increase of its power and action over the world.

3- Essence and existence

Problem: Are we what we want to be?

The opposition between essence and existence is a problem that is similar to that of being and appearing, although it is formulated in a more anthropological way, that is, in its consequences for the human being. The crucial problem posed by this antinomy is, on the one hand, whether there exists a human nature, a human essence, and therefore a collective one. If this were the case, each of us would be defined and held by this nature, established a priori. This nature can be determined in very different ways: it can be biological, and we speak then of instincts, it may be spiritual, and we thus speak of the soul, it may be psychological, where we shall speak of intelligence, it will be intellectual, and we will speak of reason, it will be social, and we shall speak of society, to give only but a few

examples. In the same way, each human being may be defined a priori, in a somewhat unchangeable and determinate way, whatever the nature of that determination may be, genetic, cultural or otherwise, taken as a kind of fatality.

This essentialist vision differs from the existential vision, at once singular, changing and defined a posteriori. This perspective is based on a free identity, which can be modified by the subject himself, an identity that, without being relieved of all influence and contingency, is deliberately developed over time. Hence, throughout all of his actions or thoughts, the individual becomes absolutely responsible for his existence, for his being, unable to find any comfort or excuse in any predetermination.

Beyond man, there is also the opposition between the physical object and the object of reason, with the following problem: is what is produced by reason less real than what exists physically? Thus, does a novel character or the theory of relativity have a lesser existence than my tier neighbor?

4- Same and other

Problem: Can we compare everything?

It is one of the most subtle antinomies, eminently ancient and dialectical: strangely, the same is different, just as the other is the same. Indeed, what is even, to be even, must be other, without which no comparison would be possible: strictly speaking, one cannot compare a thing to itself. The expression 'the same as...' clearly shows this paradox of difference: at once similar and dissimilar. And the same goes for the other: for the expression 'other than...' also implies a comparison, a form of rapprochement, and therefore a kind of similarity without which comparison would hardly be possible and difference could not be expressed.

The like knows only by the like, without which no approximation would be conceivable. Antinomies, like all contraries, present a good example of this relation: pairs of terms which are opposed to one another precisely because they treat of the same thing. Moreover, it is not logically possible to place in the same sentence two entities which do not share any parameter or attribute, even if only the strangeness. All that belongs to being is at once different and the same than that which is. Only being itself could be considered non-other, as absolute, for it is nothing else but nothing, since it is 'absolutely' and nothing is foreign to it, and similarly it is not the same as itself, since it is absolutely identical with itself: it is itself. When asked about anything: "Is it the same?" It is because something has changed: the place or the time, the circumstances, the appearance, any attribute that makes it possible to ask the question. Thus, everything is in this sense both at once the same and other than itself. But we can also consider each thing or each being in terms of its irreducibility, its absolute singularity, and consider that in this sense it is

'the same' as nothing else, that it escapes all classification, any categorization.

5- Me and the other

Problem: Can what is human be foreign to us?

This antinomy is a particular case of the preceding one, its transposition in the anthropological mode is probably its most frequent occurrence. Other is other because it is like me, otherwise it would not fit into a relationship so specific to my being: it is my neighbor, even my distant one, but never a complete stranger. However, am I the center of the world, the anchorage, the umbilicus of it all, since everything starts from me, or else am I only one among others, an immense other, more real, much larger than my little self, a tiny part of another? The particular morals permanently oscillate within this polarity. My perceptions, my feelings, my thought, oblige me to say "I", but what am I without another who has begotten me, another who allows me to exist, to think and to act? Beyond the evidences and moral connotations that will be defended by both, should I determine my acts according to myself, egocentrism, or from others, altruism? Moreover, does the self belong to itself, or to some self that transcends it? Is another person, a particular community, the whole humanity? What can I choose between the good of my family and that of all, which often contradict one another? Can one, be it for the sake of practical reasons which cannot claim a radical autonomy, avoid to think of oneself and of others simultaneously, an antinomy that nests at the very heart of major existential conflicts?

6- Continuous and discreet

Problem: Do points constitute the line?

Of what nature is the world? Is it composed of distinct and separate entities, more or less connected to each other in an accessory or necessary way, or is it organized as a compact framework, since things or beings are only the contiguous elements of this linkage, inseparable from what surrounds them, displayed in a continuous space and time? Elementary physics already poses this problem, wondering whether the matter is of a wave or of a corpuscular nature, the first characteristic being related to the continuous, the second to the discrete. The two models seem to work, in a complementary way, but also in a contradictory one, with various scientific and epistemological implications.

The same holds true on the anthropological level, where some see man as an element of society, determined to a large extent by that society, as well as the movements and modes that animate it, while others will opt for the opposite perspective which considers any society as an aggregate of disparate individuals acting deliberately. Again, various philosophical, political and social consequences will arise from these

options, by giving comparatively more value, either to the whole of humanity or to a given society for the former group, or to the individual for the latter. Is it the individuals who make up society, or the society that makes up the individuals? If one is tempted to answer positively to these two questions, simultaneously, the particular perspectives will come to diverge in their presuppositions and in the priority they give to one or the other of these two entities.

7- The part and the whole

Problem: Is the whole the sum of its parts?

Do the parts make up the whole, or does the whole produce its parts? Are the qualities of the whole belonging to its parts, or are they distinguished from it? Are the qualities of the whole the sum of the qualities of the parts, or do they surpass them? In short, is the whole thing reducible to all of its parts, or not? Already, one can ask whether a whole is reducible in parts, which is a problem for space for example, in itself devoid of distinct parts, which lays the problem of the discrete and the continuous. The same for time, elastic and elusive. Then, can we say that a living being is composed of parts, while by separating the constitutive parts of the living being, the latter is no longer alive?

If you know that a pile of sand is composed of grains of sand, how many grains does it take to make a minimum heap? We have here two incommensurable entities, the grain, of a discrete nature, and the heap, of a continuous nature, which cannot, from this point of view, possess the same qualities even if they require one another. By extending this problem, it is possible to ask whether the universe possesses certain qualities which do not belong to its parts, such as eternity, just as one may wonder if any part of the universe possesses qualities which the universe holds not, such as life. But, it will also be a matter of asking whether the totality is a content, of the same nature as that which it contains, or whether it is a container, which then differs from it. This greatly changes the situation, for it is not evident that the whole contains itself. Thus, the set of verbs, called verbs, is not a verb: the verb is not a verb.

8- Abstract and concrete

Problem: Is the self a concrete reality?

Is abstract that which is not perceptible by the senses, therefore that which pertains to mental processes. Is the abstract less real than the concrete? On this subject, various perspectives confront each other, with empiricists, pragmatists and other materialists on the one hand, depriving reality of all that cannot be the object of sensible experience, on the other hand with idealists and realists, which grant in various ways a substantial reality to ideas, sometimes even more than to sensible perception, for

them the source of illusions and errors. The general modern trend among philosophers is to give each of these domains a specific reality, the contradictions of which in principle will ultimately have to be resolved, a postulate of the experimental approach which is of prime importance in the scientific field.

However, the question of primacy remains. Do abstractions proceed from an operation of the mind on the basis of the perception of concrete things? Or does the mind engender the grasp of the concrete through its own operations? What is the degree of autonomy of the mind in relation to matter? Abstraction sometimes refers to a form of absence of concrete reality, but can it not represent access to an in-depth level of reality? If the concrete derives its origin from the aggregation of the parts which constitute all material objects, cannot the mind have direct access to the unity or essence of these things? On the other hand, it may be asked whether the mind does not confine itself to enunciating the qualities or predicates of a thing without being able to grasp the whole thing altogether, while the concrete thing, for its part, is entirely present.

9- *Body and mind*

Problem: Do we think with our brains or with our mind?

The peculiar problem raised by the opposition between the abstract and the concrete brings us to oppose in man the body and the spirit, as components of his being. For, if for some we do not seem able to separate one from the other, since man is endowed with a double nature, we cannot avoid the conceptual dichotomy that is presented to us. This, however, does not prevent one, according to theories, from denying the reality of the body or of the mind. Perhaps, indeed, we are only the body, or the spirit.

Whatever it may be, without pretending to conclude on the reality of these entities, what opposes the body to the mind? The body is a compound, the mind seems relatively indivisible. The body is material, it is inscribed in space and time, the mind is spiritual and cannot be localized. The body is finite, determined, the mind appears comparatively infinite and indeterminate. The body is mortal, the mind can be considered immortal. According to the choices of the parameters and the criteria summoned, one will appear more or less real than the other in his being, more or less reliable than the other in terms of the knowledge he produces. Each will thus establish a personal hierarchy of his being, conscious or not, willed or not, by combining these two different archetypes, articulating this complementary and conflicting polarity.

10- *Nature and culture*

Problem: Is human nature natural?

In the same vein, nature opposes culture as the acquired is opposed to the innate. Is the human being what it is by definition, a priori, or is it established through historical choices, conscious or unconscious? Is culture, if not essentially human, a breach of nature, or is it only a more sophisticated expression of it? Is the human being in line with the evolution of the earth, or does it represent a discontinuity, an accident, or even a natural catastrophe? Do reason, consciousness or mind emanate from life, or do they belong to another reality, transcending the material or living reality?

Nature is opposed to culture as to an artifice. It represents all reality of the world which does not owe its existence to some invention and human labor. In this sense, it incarnates the cosmos, insofar as we discover in it a determinism, an order, or at least a coherence, and it is opposed to freedom, for nature expresses that which in a singular being escapes its free will. Culture, on the contrary, refers to what is generated by man in his historical and social context. It is constituted through a set of rules or norms instituted collectively by a society, a people, or the whole of humanity. Even more singularly, it is the process of intellectual formation, responsible for the judgment and taste that specifies the individual and his identity.

11- Reason and the sensible

Problem: Are the senses conscious of themselves?

Body and mind are both producers of knowledge and thought: they inform the being and guide it. Knowledge of the body is mainly based on the five sensory organs: ear for hearing, nose for smell, eye for vision, skin for touch and tongue for taste. Internal sensations, especially the different forms of pain or pleasure, can however be covered by other information devices. But, globally, sensible knowledge belongs to the immediate, both that of the moment and that of the tangible relation with one form or another of matter. It is from this intuition of immediacy that this mode of knowledge induces the feeling of certainty which often accompanies it: the body hardly doubts, perception leads to a reflex, especially as regards pain or lack, which require an immediate reaction.

In opposition to this functioning, reason is a process which proceeds from temporality: reflection is not immediate, for it passes through a certain number of operations in order to arrive at its conclusions. Though, over time, intuitions are formed. It often starts from the sensible in order to build up its knowledge. The process in question operates deliberately, although various interactions may 'parasitize' it, such as those of the unconscious, of educational and social conditioning, or of the body. For these reasons, because there are constant choices between the intervention of the will, a return of thought unto itself and a confrontation with its own limits and that which is other than itself, reason is subject to doubt. This weakness is coupled with a considerable strength which

guarantees a certain autonomy: it is able to silence all that surrounds it, including the world and sensory perception.

12- Reason and intuition

Problem: Does intuition come from reason?

If reason is founded on sensible knowledge and confronted with it, a similar dialectical relationship opposes it to intuition. Intuition is based on the sensible, in that it operates in immediacy and generates certainties. It is an unreflective thought, produced by experience, desire, education, social pressure, various influences that intermingle indiscriminately. If intuition seems to interfere with reason, since it short-circuits and prevents it from deliberating, relegating to an unconscious process what should be freely and openly analyzed, in order to decide conscientiously, it also plays a positive role, and is even indispensable to the rational process. Indeed, if reason were to rethink infinitely each of the elements constituting its approach, it would become inoperative and could never attain its ends. Intuition, by taking for granted a certain number of elements of knowledge, offers reason a basis from which it can function. This does not prevent it from returning on some occasions to one of these 'acquisitions'.

Intuition, the direct view of things, acts as a kind of act of faith, a faith that moreover claims itself from the heart more than from reason, a reason intervening only in a second stage, as a rationalization a posteriori. In this perspective, intuition produces opinions: ready-made, superficial ideas, ignorant of their own genesis, which do not question themselves and often result from hearsay.

13- Reason and passion

Problem: Do passions have reasons?

The third fundamental antinomy involving reason: opposition to passion, as dialectical as the first two antinomies, in relation to the sensible and in relation to the intuition. If reason is voluntary action, as its name implies, passion is passive, suffered. However, it is at the heart of the will, for it cannot claim to be pure rationality. Reason is often summoned to the service of one passion or another, which is the motor, the soul, and the finality of the reason in question. Even a pretended commitment to pure rationality cannot endure without some passion: the desire for rationality.

Thus, passion is the foundation of reason, it is a necessary cause of it, but it constantly clashes with reason: reason tempers passion, regulates it, models it, subjects it to the critical test, while passion inhibits or annihilates the processes of reason, animates them or transforms them. Nevertheless, passion can be regarded as a reason beyond reason: when a desire moves us without our knowing its genesis or its reasons, a desire that we have not chosen, a desire that nevertheless seems to bear

the truth. Love, the instinct of survival and the act of faith are three classical examples of such a passion, allowing access to the very heart of being, which here intersects the thematic of intuition. If reason is in search of truth, if it is calm in its approach, it is also often cold and calculating, whereas passion carries us away, and it is in this that it can pretend to embody life, being impulsive and dynamic, in the face of rigidity of rigor. Passion knows how to be as implacable and coherent as reason, authenticity being a primary form of truth.

14- Temporal and eternal

Problem: Does the moment escape time?

Some realities are in time, others escape it, as we have already seen with essence and existence for example. What escapes time can claim to be eternal, although this concept may cover different modalities. The first important distinction is between what does not exist and what always does. If a concept can be characterized as eternal, it is because it is abstract and ignores time. If the universe can be characterized as eternal, it is because it is a concrete entity which seems not to be able to exist, which knows time but transcends it. The idea of a single god, the first cause of all that is, oscillates between these two poles. For some, an abstract concept, nonexistent, for the other, primary existences, the absolute model of all existence. Whatever it is, what is temporal tends towards the material and the concrete, whereas that which is timeless tends towards the concept and the abstract. For, even if the universe seems concrete to us, what is invariant in it is elusive.

For these reasons, the temporal, subject to contingency and change, fragile, imperfect and mortal, closer to our way of being, seems alive, while the eternal, far more distant, may seem dead, if not unreal. Or, by a reversal of polarities, a phenomenon typical of philosophical thought, this timelessness can capture the idea of perfection, the expression of an overexistence, the manifestation of primary truth or of being unconditioned.

15- Finite and infinite

Problem: Can we think the infinite?

In the same way in which everything is both one and multiple, everything is both finite and infinite. But for everything, the finite and the infinite arise in different ways. Thus, if an entity is finite in time because it has a beginning and an end, it can be considered infinitely divisible in its parts, or infinite in the chain of causes it generates, simply because of its existence: had it existed differently, then the face of the world would have been changed. At the same time, everything that is apprehensible, everything that is namable, everything that is understandable, is necessarily finished in one way or another, otherwise we would have no

access to it: we can understand only through the finite. Certain approaches, called negative or apophatic, conclude that for what belongs to the real infinite, as a single god, it is only possible to affirm what it is not, for it knows no boundary, no limitation, a process applicable to anything else. Henceforth, the infinite takes the form of the indeterminate and the unthinkable, the finite takes that of determination and thought. What is measurable is comparable and finished, what is infinite is incomparable and immeasurable. This can be understood in terms of quantity, but also quality, by comparing the attributes of various entities, or even by determining different orders of infinitude: for example, the infinity of prime numbers compared to the infinity of integers.

The question remains whether the finite is comparable to the infinite, as a simple antinomy, or if the one ignores the other. For, if what is infinite can be considered perfect in opposition to the finite, one can also affirm that the finite is more finished. Unless we consider that the terms of the finite have no meaning in the infinite, and vice versa: they project improperly one reality unto another, incompatible one.

16- Objective and subjective

Problem: is objectivity a particular form of subjectivity?

Objective is that which belongs to the object in itself, in its own reality, outside of the mind that thinks it. Even if, of course, this reality poses a problem in being thought, since it is theoretically outside of the mind that thinks it. This can naturally lead us to conclude that this reality is not accessible to us, or even that it does not exist at all, since all knowledge is an encounter between a subject and an object and everything that cannot be met, which is unknowable and unverifiable, cannot be postulated. Yet, one declares objective that which is unprejudiced or biased. But who can claim to be free from any subjective commitment? Nevertheless, when this term is used in the real or scientific sense, certain approaches or procedures, even certain attitudes, can allow or guarantee a relative objectivity and produce some certainties, even if only temporarily.

In contrast, what is subjective belongs to the subject, generally referring to a human being, as a person endowed with sensations, feelings, or as a reasoning mind. An adjective which qualifies the knowledge or perception of an object, reduced or modified by the nature of the subject. In opposition to objective, this term generally takes the meaning of partial or fragmentary, when it is not the pejorative meaning of illusory or unfounded. But the subjective refers also to the actual reality of a subject who assumes and refuses to pretend to a factitious and false objectivity, to a subject that produces his own truth.

17- Absolute and relative

Problem: Is the absolute a relative concept?

The absolute is the characteristic of that which is without limits, that which depends on nothing but itself, that which is permanent, that which is not determined by any relation to that which is external to it. It becomes easily synonymous with the ideal, designating a perfect and autonomous entity, like God, since the evoked qualities express a sort of ultimate and maximum being. On the contrary, relative is the status of a thing or an idea which can exist or be thought only on condition of being related, connected to something other than itself. The thing or the idea thus subordinated to what it is not, has in itself neither existence nor absolute value, for its existence is conditioned to what is other than itself. However, it is tempting to conclude that the absolute does not exist, since to exist necessarily implies a relation. The question is whether this non-existence is the expression of an unconditioned, superior and ultimate reality, or that of a mere conception of the mind, empty because it lacks any real content.

However, on a purely conceptual level, the absolute allows one to think of an entity free from all contingency, from all external interference, a knowledge of the thing in itself that will be opposed to that of random phenomena, in which the entity in question breaks out, since it changes completely according to circumstances.

18- Freedom and determinism

Problem: Are we condemned to be free?

On the anthropological level, the attraction for the absolute manifests itself, among other things, by the desire for freedom, or the claim to freedom. The human being likes to think himself autonomous, to believe that he determines himself by proclaiming his own laws, individually or collectively: he would be all-powerful. Perhaps man is freer than other species, but it is also easy to show the different forms of determinism that act upon him, consciously or not. Its biological nature, its personal history, its culture, and its context are all factors that weigh on its way of being and its existential choices, proving the heteronomy that burdens his singular nature.

Freedom can also be articulated as mere consciousness, the ability to realize how our will is determined by our nature and our environment, as freedom of reason, which allows us to reflect on the implications and motives of our actions, to understand the state of the world, to maintain a firm and serene attitude despite adversity, without necessarily being able to intervene in the course of events. The free fall of an object is not to follow a desired trajectory, but simply not to strike another object, not to be braked in its course. In these different senses, freedom and determinism are no longer radically opposed, as is the case with free will, where our simple will reserves itself the right to choose what happens, that of acquiescing or refusing what presents itself to us. And it can be said that every freedom is combined with some form of necessity.

19- Active and passive

Problem: Is receiving being passive?

Is active what produces an action, is passive what undergoes this action. A distinction both material and moral, but a distinction which, like all distinctions, is somewhat artificial. Physics explains to us that every action receives in response a reaction, without which there could be no action. Indeed, how to act on something that does not react? An action is always an interaction, at the same time meeting two natures, two entities, but also encountering two actions that make up a dynamic, conflictual and complementary pair. Is decreed to be active what seems to cause the encounter, which seems to be animated by the purpose of an interaction, but in any dynamics, what is chronologically first is not always ontologically so. What causes action will not necessarily be what will primarily determine its outcome. The efficient cause does not necessarily coincide with the final cause.

What is apparently passive can have, if only by its force of inertia, a greater power than that which moves. Resistance is a form of action which regulates and organizes things. So it is with the great principles, invisible and often unidentified, the powers which reign over beings and things, constituting a web of reality that transcends, limits, authorizes and structures the singular and manifest actions.

20- Actual and virtual

Problem: can we think of an actual devoid of any virtuality?

Is actual what presents itself to us, that which is immediate, tangible and perceptible, which acts directly upon things. Is virtual that which, on the contrary, seems absent, distant, a reality which is sometimes limited to the simple possibility: what can be, what is devoid of materiality. Thus, ideas belong to the virtual, when we affirm 'it is only an idea', like all that is abstract. While material objects, concrete ones, belong more to the present. But it is the same when there is distance in space and time. What is distant, what is waiting, is decreed virtual, for the realization or the encounter seem only possible: a simple power of existence and not an actual existence.

The problem is to know what constitutes reality. Thus, is gravitation, the attraction between solid bodies, as a universal principle, less real than the stars that it moves? Do the various laws of physics have some reality only when they are manifested in our eyes? Is the cause less present than the effect? Does the plans of the architect, without whom the building cannot be built, lack reality? Do truth or the good act upon the world? Or, unwittingly, do we impose by our vision of the world the primacy of materiality and of sensory perception? The reality that is elaborately enhanced in our computers shows us simultaneously the reality of the virtual, both in its beneficial and useful effects, as well as in its illusory and harmful ones.

21. Matter and form

Problem: Where do the forms come from, if not from matter?

Man has always tried to give some form to what surrounds him, to everything that is considered matter, more or less brute. To give such forms for the satisfaction of some needs, both physiological, utilitarian or aesthetic. Transforming matter is engendering what is not from what is, it is making, it is creating. In this sense, the world itself is creative, since there is hardly any matter without any form, nor is there in nature any matter without form.

Form is formative, it is a dynamic, a principle that engenders and animates, while matter is what resists, giving substance, body or weight to form. Form and matter are two archetypes which can hardly be grasped one without the other. Ideas provide an approximation of pure form. Resistance, time and space characterize matter. Form is that which distinguishes one entity from another, by its outline, its appearance, its effects, its attributes, it is of a discrete and luminous nature. Matter is indistinct, it is a matter of continuity, of obscurity, of interiority and of inaccessibility. Yet, material objects often speak more directly to us than pure forms. But is it for their materiality, or for the potentiality of their

form: for example, their use, their exchange value, or the obstacle they represent?

22- Cause and effect

Problem: is one nasty because one strikes the neighbor, or the other way around?

Theoretically, the cause comes before the effect, and this chronology, irreversible, producing temporality, rhythms the world and knowledge. But it is perhaps a truncated vision of reality, as the paradox of the hen and of the egg indicates. For, if one thing generates something else, let us not forget that this operation takes place in a context where everything interacts, where nothing happens without anything. Is not everything simultaneously cause and effect? The idea of a primary cause, the motor of all that is, is a difficult concept that refers to God or to an aporia. For, how can everything that causes all things cause what it is not? Why would God generate anything other than Himself? If there is a prime principle which generates all the others, necessarily in its image, from what would emanate that which is different? We are therefore obliged to grant a true status to the effect: that of 'cause', even if it is a second cause. Strangely, every effect would also be a cause in itself, original and singular, the only one capable of accounting for the diversity of the world, an indispensable and unavoidable cause of what is. But then, where does the second cause come from? Is it a cause of itself? In its own way, it would be the first cause.

In an isolated way, it is possible, useful and indispensable to formulate mechanically the sequence of causes and effects, for the purpose of analysis and of understanding, but it is a question of not being caught in the trap of reductionism. For, if it is possible to distinguish between the orders of causes, according to their relative importance, it is scarcely possible to isolate the cause of its effects, for the latter seem to constitute its causal nature.

23- Space and location

Problem: Can the location be outside of space?

In order to live and think, we have to situate ourselves in a location, to constitute a place. Above all, the location is determination, that which we inhabit, that which enables us to know and to recognize, a recognition without which nothing would be possible: without determination life would be unbearable and we would become mad. What would happen if, every day, objects and beings were different from the day before? If everything was unpredictable? Certainly, for a given time, and within certain limits, we can appreciate the unexpected or the unheard of, but we cannot permanently accommodate ourselves to it. We are therefore anchored in a place, as vast as it is, in which we try to elaborate our existence and give

it meaning. Within the location, things are circumscribed and faithful to themselves. But it would be illusory to ignore what transcends or exceeds the location: space. Otherwise, we would place the location in some absolute, from every point of view: geographically, historically, scientifically, culturally, etc. Let us not forget that if the location is an existential, even ontological, requirement, space, however unlimited, is also what constitutes the place. On the one hand, space is the framework of the location, on the other hand, it is what acts upon the place, and for us, inhabitants of the location, it is by the transgression of the place that the location takes place, which otherwise would be frozen in its being and we in ours. If space symbolizes indetermination, ignorance, incongruity, it is also the infinite from which alone the truth of the place can be apprehended, and we are obliged to live simultaneously in and out.

24- Strength and form

Problem: Can a strength be formless?

This antinomy refers, among other things, to that between the masculine and the feminine which, in general, in our modern West, is primarily perceived as a social, anthropological or biological reality, that of gender difference. But, it is not necessarily so: we would like to perceive the metaphysical or epistemological dimension offered by this pair of opposites. This is expressed, among other things, by the Chinese antinomy of *Ying* and *Yang*. Strength, the quality of what is strong, is a principle of power or action. It is power, energy, capacity; it has recourse to constraint, contempt for the law, contempt for others, but it also serves to enforce respect for the law and the other. It transforms, that is, it upsets the form. The latter, on the contrary, is all in outline, in contact, in exteriority. It is the way in which things are elaborated, the ways in which they must be respected, the principle of continuity which informs, determines and limits; it channels raw material and force, giving consistency and life to the aesthetic thing. If the force is essentially dynamic, the form is not afraid of being slow or static. The form acts, without regular action, by its mere presence, while the tension imposed by force cannot last, which acts mainly by some shaking and discontinuously. Force is related to the specific will of a designated plan, of a particular purpose which is put into effect with a view to a finality, while the form expresses rather a way of being which cannot claim that things are different from what they are.

25- Quantity and quality

Problem: Does everything which exist, exist in a determined quantity?

Quantity is measurable, comparable and countable, it obeys mathematical principles, it can be increased or decreased. The quantity is often perceived as accidental: it does not belong to the order of things, but to

their contingency. Contrary to quality, expressed by attributes, which seem to hold more of the essence of things. Quality is a property, it belongs to its own object, while quantity, which demands 'how much', is plural and extrinsic. If the quantities are variable, the qualities are much less so. On the other hand, qualities are hardly comparable and measurable: the nature of things does not really matter much, at least, even if it does not ignore it. Quality is inscribed in time, in spite of the relative modifications which it undergoes, it absorbs in itself differences, while quantity becomes other than itself at the least transformation. Because of its non-measurable and intrinsic aspect, quality is more elusive and subjective, it refuses itself to technical know-how and to knowledge, especially since it is difficult to modify. At the same time, more anchored in being, quality is opposed to what it is not. It refuses itself to what is opposed to it. It is antinomic. While quantity, anchored in plurality, is modifiable and contingent, by its plasticity, it is not opposed to anything.

26- Narration and speech

Problem: telling, is it explaining?

The narrative tells, establishes a sequence of events, takes place in the concrete, respects a chronological order, while the abstract discourse, articulated on a sequence of ideas, privileges the ontological order. If both concern themselves with meaning, the first sense is that of history, the second is that of explanation. Although one can also say that there is a story that tells, and another story that interprets: the first pretends to account for the raw facts, the other pretends to account for the phenomena of causality, two sequences that do not graft immediately on top of each other.

The elements of the narrative are given externally, they are objective. The narrative describes, even if the choice of what is offered by speech is tinged with subjectivity, a choice that also affects the way of telling and which sometimes tries to deny its bias by presenting itself as a pure observation. The discourse demands a clearer contribution from the producer, it requires arguments, proofs and analyzes, it is by definition debatable, opposable to another discourse. The discourse does not pride itself on objectivity and reality, although it can claim the status of truth: it is interpretation. If human life presents itself as a narrative, the need for discourse seems equally constitutive of being, even though it is apparently more random, more abstract, less immediate and less substantial.

27- Analysis and synthesis

Problem: Should we conclude with an analysis or with a synthesis?

The analysis is an intellectual or material operation, which consists of decomposing a whole to dissociate its constituent elements. Synthesis is an intellectual or material operation which brings together or combines

what is initially dissociated. According to the different tendencies, there is a great temptation to associate or dissociate. But, in the same way in which everything is both one and multiple, everything is at once united and separate. All that is, can and must be conceived in itself, all that is, can and must be conceived through a relationship. The difficulty is to envisage the simultaneity of the two operations. For, the immediacy of things seems on the one hand to oppose both analysis and synthesis, and on the other hand, they oppose analysis and synthesis.

To analyze is to shred the thought or the discourse into tiny pieces, without knowing a priori when to interrupting this process, to the point where the initial entity becomes unrecognizable. To synthesize is to amalgamate elements among themselves, to the point where these elements disappear, drowned in the totality which absorbs them. To analyze is to distinguish elements in order to bring out conceptual stakes, to synthesize, to implement complementarity in order to generate unifying concepts.

28- Logic and dialectics

Problem: Does dialectic free us from logic?

Logic makes it possible to establish and verify the coherence of a reasoning, its absence of contradiction. It determines the conditions of validity of the reasonings, their coherence, a crucial tool of logic, a science whose object is the judgments by which truth is distinguished from the false. Logic is based on two fundamental principles. The principle of contradiction, or principle of non-contradiction, which establishes that one cannot simultaneously affirm a thing and its opposite under the same conditions. Its corollary, the principle of identity, which establishes that a thing is what it is, and is not what it is not. Thus, faced with two contradictory propositions, one is true, the other is false.

Dialectic does not a priori refuse the presuppositions of logic, but it does not erect them as absolute rules. Moreover, dialectic recognizes no a priori rule, even if it uses them and articulates around them, the very principle of its functioning being precisely to be always able to return to the rules that constitute it. As such, it refers to a process of thought that takes over seemingly contradictory propositions, and is based on these contradictions in order to bring forth new propositions. These new proposals make it possible to reduce, resolve or explain the initial contradictions. Thus, for dialectic, every entity is what it is not, for it is constituted of what it is not. This leads to the scandalous proposition that being is not and non-being is. Of course, the work of dialectic is to produce the articulations that underlie this type of reversals, which also requires a coherence, a logic.

29- Affirmation, proof and problematic

Problem: Should we privilege a particular form of discourse?

If philosophy feeds on questions, a particular philosophical thought affirms something. If doubt creates thought, it is also intended to encourage the emergence of new propositions. Sometimes peremptorily, but above all in an argumentative way. Nevertheless, the formulation of these various propositions: judgment, production of concept or analysis, is already a work in itself, whatever its status may be: postulate, certainty or hypothesis. However, much of the philosophical work is also about justifying the proposals thus put forward. To prove, this can be demonstrated by any logical process, it may be to produce a bundle of ideas that converge in the same direction; it can also provide examples, preferably analyzed, which testify to the veracity of the initial propositions. Contrary to the affirmation, a self-satisfying proposition, the evidence is part of a report or of a process. From this point of view, like a proposal that claims its autonomy, the legitimacy of the link in question can be challenged.

A third form of discourse, the problematic. It is no longer a matter of affirming or of proving, but of envisaging what is simply possible, on the verge of the impossible, without opting or choosing. Both because the proposition in question is a mere hypothesis, but above all because another proposal can replace it in order to play the same role: for example, two or more different answers to a given question. A problematic is thus the formulation of a series of opposing hypotheses, linked together by the same object, or a set of questions, capable of raising a fundamental problem. It represents the overall difficulty and the stakes of a given reflection. The paradox, which in fact contains a contradiction raising a fundamental problem, is a privileged form of the problematic.

30- Possible, probable and necessary

Problem: Is reality possible, probable or necessary?

Is possible what is not impossible or proved such. The possible is not obvious or certain: it sometimes borders on the impossible and it is perhaps by simple fault that it is not eliminated as a possibility. It often seems unthinkable, it touches the limits of our thinking. The possible is a singular case from which we can derive no generality. In opposition to this, the probable seems more familiar, more obvious, more acceptable, more probable, and therefore more general. It imposes itself as a sort of empirical certainty, or by a reasoning of common sense. Is probable what has a good chance of being. Although the possible may sometimes prove probable by some procedure of reflection, which disturbs thought. But the probable still remains of the order of the contingent: it ignores the implacable nature of necessity. The latter is mainly imposed by a logical approach, of the type of 'if this, then that...', that is to say, in a conditional form. Necessity does not directly concern the existence of material, concrete or temporal entities: nothing exists by necessity,

except perhaps God or the universe, or other entity which is subject to the absolute. But the necessary treats the relations between things and their predicates. For example: "The man necessarily lives because he breathes."

These three determinations qualify the various propositions according to their degree of certainty for thought, but also engage the nature of the discourse. The possible one simply amounts to the envisaged hypothesis: "It is possible that I win at roulette if I take a number". The probable is what happens or should normally happen without saturating the field of possibilities: "It is likely that I win at roulette if I take the majority of the numbers". While the necessity comes from an analytical, formal or logical approach that usually binds various predicates among themselves, categorical judgment excluding the exception: "It is necessary that I win at roulette if my number goes out."

31- Induction, deduction and abduction

Problem: what can we be certain about?

By what process are the ideas engendered? Induction takes for granted what is found by sensible perception and experience, and induces what must happen in general or should happen in the future. A repeating phenomenon should continue to repeat itself: "Up to now, the sun rises every morning, it will do so tomorrow." It can make it an absolute forecast, a certainty, but it is not necessarily the case. Deduction is a logical step that takes two propositions and draws a third, such as the classic syllogism: "Men are mortal, Socrates is a man, so Socrates is mortal." In general, it is a combination of a universal and a particular. Again, a specific logical approach may assume as incontestable the premises from which it draws its conclusion, but it can also simply assert that the conclusion is true on condition that the premises are valid. Theoretically, the basic form is 'if this, then that', but often the 'if' is forgotten, in favor of a 'this, then that', the initial proposition or propositions being asserted unconditionally.

If induction is produced by experience, if deduction is produced by analysis or synthesis, abduction is an intuition, an invention, produced by creative reason in order to deal with a given problem. It is an approach that consists in producing a hypothesis to illuminate an apparent contradiction or to solve a problem. Thus, the principle of universal gravitation makes it possible to solve in part the problem of the relative motion of the planets between them. The hypothesis must put forward a new concept allowing another type of relationship between contradictory phenomena or ones deprived of an explicit link. Any hypothesis will entail a number of new deductions, which will form the framework of a new pattern of thought. If induction is founded on the repetition of phenomena, deduction is founded on the coherence of reason, and abduction, or creation of hypotheses, on a dialectical relation between the world and reason, although these distinctions are quite relative.

32- Opinion, idea and truth

Problem: Can an opinion be true?

On all that is, in any case on all that appears to us, we have opinions, to which we hold more or less, to which we attribute more or less certainty. We are more or less conscious of the nature of these opinions, their content, their functioning and especially their origin. In other words, opinion seems to embody thought in its most basic and elementary way. This does not mean that an opinion is necessarily false, but merely that it is not thorough and is rather little conscious of itself. In opposition to this, the idea is the fruit of a real work. Production work, analysis work or probation work. Either the idea is aware of its origin or it is conscious of its content, its implications or its consequences, or it is aware of its limitations, the questions that can be asked of it or which can be opposed to it. Thus, the idea is based on a genuine approach, while the opinion proceeds from hearsay and approximation. Though everyone can use these terms as he sees fit.

If opinion is primary, if the idea is a work done, the truth is hence a relation to some certainty, a conformity to a referent. In the most general way, is true that which conforms to reality, often defined as the material and physical nature, a reality verifiable by sensible experience. Here, ideas are true if they correspond to observable objects or phenomena. But there is a second type of conformity: that of reason, human, singular or collective. Is declared to be true what belongs to a reasoning that seems probative to the one who analyzes it or to a majority. A third type of conformity: that of individual reality. Is true what is authentic, what seems coherent in a given being, within a given vision, without claiming automatically any universal reality. A true being, a real play, a true masterpiece, are expressions that refer to a particular truth. Is considered false that which, in these three cases, is not in conformity with the referent.

Thus, the truth may also be an opinion or an idea, although one may believe that the idea tends more towards the truth than towards opinion, since it is more deliberate and conscious of its own genesis. In any case, truth determines the nature and presence of the relation between opinions and ideas, the false being the absence or fragility of the relation. The latter would therefore be an incoherence, a lack, which explains why it is difficult to define in itself.

33. Singularity, totality and transcendence

Problem: can we avoid transcendence to conceive a singularity or a totality?

Is singular what is taken as an entity in itself: an object, an idea, a phenomenon, even a reasoning or a category of things. However, the

importance of any singularity, however singular, is that it can be distinguished and opposed to another singularity, to several other singularities of comparable nature. In this sense, these singularities will share some form of community: they will have something in common, a common nature, a common basis, but they will also have some particular, minimal or important characteristic that will distinguish them from each other, which will oppose them to one another: they will thus stand out, both from each other and from generality. In this perspective, these singularities of the same type can be grouped into one species, or even into subspecies, as well as into genera regrouping several species, different terms expressing a totality that the particular singularities do not necessarily exhaust. All these terms are relative, they depend on a starting-point and on the general classification which one seeks to establish. The main thing is that what is singular can belong to a totality and distinguish it, in turn, by its specificity.

One thing is singular because it is different, a difference necessarily articulated in a community. A human being is singular because he accomplishes things that the majority of human beings do not accomplish. But what is singular for man is perhaps not singular for the zebra or the albatross. In other words, there is no singularity without a reference to some totality.

In general, we will define transcendence as the essential characteristic of a totality or its unity, as that which allows the community of a set of singularities. In schematization, this characteristic can be seen as a reality in itself from a metaphysical perspective, as a tool of the mind from an epistemological perspective, or as a mere attribute from a materialistic perspective. Thus, the quality of humanity is at the same time what conditions the singular man and makes it possible to conceive humanity as a totality. Humanity, as transcendence, is of a different order than man: it surpasses it while constituting it, it escapes it while defining its horizon. It presupposes an essence that defines existence. However, if this quality cannot be considered in itself, as extrinsic to the singularities it generates, animates or determines, it can also be called immanence, the horizontal form of transcendence. Thus, it may be asked whether being is of a transcendent nature, whether it is in itself, or whether it is only a predicate of what is: an immanence. But, the state, an entity in its own right, seems to transcend the whole of society composed of individuals.

34- Good, beautiful and true

Problem: can one think outside of the good, the beautiful and the true?

These three normative concepts, founders of axiology, sometimes called transcendentals, allow us to distinguish between existential and philosophical attitudes and to think the world. They refer to three major archetypes of functioning: ethics, aesthetics and science. Is defined as 'good' what is useful, which responds to a lack, which attenuates and

dispels a pain: it is what causes both desire and satisfaction. The good thus symbolizes the fullness of being, in opposition to what is considered partial, wobbly and failing, even harmful: evil. The attractiveness of good causes us to act, to question ourselves about our actions, their purposes and their modalities, in order to achieve well-being, happiness, whatever their form or nature. Are our actions just, legitimate, effective, good or appropriate? Morality, of an ethical, hedonistic, utilitarian or otherwise nature, is therefore a determination or a rationalization of our behavior with a view to a better being, or a pursuit of happiness, fullness and totality.

The beautiful characterizes rather the harmony between the parts of a whole, the perfection of a whole or the originality of the singular forms, in opposition to the ugly, which is chaotic, imperfect or banal. The beautiful calls for perception, sensory or intellectual. It incites contemplation and admiration rather than action, although an act, or an idea, like all things, can be described as beautiful. The beautiful arouses a disinterested pleasure, gratuitous, since it is satisfied with itself. In general, the sensibility that gives access to the beautiful is considered more subjective than the access to the good, more immediate, less reasoned, although the beautiful can still claim the universality and fullness of being.

If good refers to action and the beautiful to contemplation, the true comes from intelligence and knowledge. It asks to understand, to observe, to analyze and to compare, it is based on the coherence of the world and of reason, whose absence produces the false. This activity has no purpose other than itself, it demands to go ever further, for truth is never attained in its integrity. True is the match between words and reality, between a particular idea and the reason that engenders it, between an appearance and the being that underlies it. For, truth presupposes the false, implying a nonconformity of some entity to another entity, considered ontologically superior. More focused on the reality of the world, more conscious of the human drama, it is less directly a bet on happiness than its two other counterparts.

We will notice that these three concepts express each in their own way the unity of being or being itself. This has often allowed them to be made absolute, to personalize them, to divinise them and to assimilate them all to a supreme being, their opposites simply signifying a lack, a deprivation or a cessation of being.

35- Being, doing and thinking

Problem: what is the primary reality of man?

The existence, or essence of things, can be apprehended under three modalities. Already, for the human being, what does his identity consist of? Is it sufficient for it to exist, or is it primarily necessary for it to think, since there lies its specificity, or else must it act on the world in order to be fulfilled as a concrete and historical being? What is the basis of man?

The fact of being born a man, an animal species or a particular category of existence, which implies that every man is man, from the beginning, genetically. The second possibility is that only the *homo sapiens* is man, because he thinks, since the origin of man, signaling his rupture with the animal world, dates back to the first traces of intelligence. Thirdly, the *homo faber*, which places the identity of man and his origin in his capacity to act on the world, for example through the manufacture and use of tools, assumed to be human characteristics.

Beyond a simple anthropological and historical problem, this distinction refers to the vision of the world that animates the existence of each one of us. Is it enough to be in order to exist, by continuing, as the days go by, the initial impulse of our coming into the world? By assuming existence, for what it is, in what it offers, in its limitations, in its generous plenitude. An attitude which can generate both a certain naive and immediate happiness, and a corrosive cynicism towards all human endeavor. Do we need to think in order to exist? Whether it be by identifying oneself with reason, scholarship, knowledge, artistic creation, and culture, which alone are capable of providing meaning and dignity to life. An attitude capable of raising the soul towards the spiritual and ideality, or of taking a sly or bitter look at life, the world and human actions, or even of completely ignoring these realities. Do we have to take the world together, the physical world or the human world, the world on which we must act so that our lives are worth it? The human being is defined by his actions, his capacity of accomplishment, by his work, a cause of transformations on the environment. An attitude which can both value the totality of the human being, in order to put everything into action for this task, just as it can despise and brutalize man, simply by a productive concern, for efficiency and immediacy.

36- Anthropology, epistemology and metaphysics

Problem: Is there a perspective that should dominate others?

These three terms intersect at once the major divisions of philosophy and the visions of the world which it conveys. For anthropology, philosophy is exclusively a human affair. Man, not only as a thinking subject, but also as a mere object, singular or collective, holds the primacy. Everything is thought of in terms of the historical man, at the same time being biological, intellectual, psychological, political and social: we postulate a primacy of the human. Epistemology is primarily concerned with the knowledge and conditions of this knowledge, independently of the subject. Of a formal nature, it prides itself more naturally on scientificity and certainty: the subject poses itself as an observer who observes, as an experimenter who verifies. It is suspicious of any subjectivity, since it claims to have access to a tangible and material reality capable of confirming its procedures and affirmations.

Metaphysics claims to surpass the human and cosmic nature insofar as this reality is engendered or conditioned by a different reality that

'surpasses' it. This is the first reality, which can be regarded as ideal, or of any nature which transcends both mind and matter. Matter and man, worldly knowledge, are then only a somewhat de-realized vestiges of being, of an unconditional or of a similar presence: its vision is rather symbolic.

While these three fields of philosophy encompass contiguous and related realities that can be interpreted or juxtaposed without difficulty, they also tend to generate visions of the world which, through the specific options which animate them, function through their opposite and exclusive postulates and their consequences. Thus, most of the particular philosophies or worldviews will naturally fit into one of these perspectives, articulating the different fields and their relationships according to the given perspective, establishing in fact a hierarchy of thought and being.

37- Psychological, moral and legal

Problem: What determines human actions?

There are different ways in which human beings determine their thoughts or actions, different ways in which they can be evaluated or analyzed. The first is psychological, that is to say, genesis is the instincts, impulses and needs of the individual, whether primary or educated. This determination may be affective, but also intellectual, insofar as thought or reason sometimes become in man a psychic necessity. This is what we can call subjectivity.

The second determination is moral. That is to say, motivations refer rather to a set of rules or principles, written or tacit, supposed to serve as a regulating ideal, in order to determine a priori the behavior of each one, even his thought. This morality often conforms to a given culture, since it constitutes the individual from an early age, but it can also be more personal, insofar as the individual emancipates himself from his context, or rebels against it. It can also be in conformity with subjectivity, because it is integrated by the latter, or it may be in conflict with it. In general, there is always a certain psychological tension, or dilemma, between the immediacy of the psychic need and the intellectual construction embodied in morality. Nevertheless, we can also conceive of morality as a feeling, which does not prevent it from entering into conflict with other, more primary, feelings more connected with the immediate satisfaction of pleasure. Good and evil are the most widely used concepts in this field, whatever the nature of this good and evil may be.

The third determination is legal. It most often refers to written rules or laws, which necessarily involve a sanction in case of transgression. Although one can also refer to a 'natural right', the 'law of the jungle', the 'principle of reality', the 'principle of least action' or other such principles. The legal field does not give advice or recommendations, it enacts and compels, whereas in the moral field the distinction is not always so clear. The legal field does not care about subjectivity, except in extreme cases such as alienation, which in general makes the individual irresponsible

under written law. Fear comes to play an important role because the constraint is sustained, even brutal. This coercion may even be considered as alienating, by its total negation of the subject, or be considered as servitude, but it has the advantage of limiting the aberrations of subjectivity which morality addresses in a weaker or more ambiguous way. The arbitrary dimension of the law will also create a very problematic tension between legality and legitimacy, insofar as some legal codes may be considered immoral.

Chapter XIII

Annex : Obstacles and resolutions

This list results from an analysis of the usual difficulties of reflection and discussion. It was realized within the framework of the elaboration of a collection of works of initiation to philosophy: *The Apprentice Philosopher*, published by the *Nathan* editions. It can serve as a complementary tool for philosophical practice, enabling us to better understand the requirements of the construction of thought.

The various obstacles or resolutions mentioned are sometimes quite close to one another. During a discussion, they overlap, and can therefore be replaced or accumulated in the same place.

1. Obstacles

1- Slide of meaning

Transformation of a proposition or idea, proceeding surreptitiously and insensibly, by the conversion of this idea or proposition into a close neighboring formulation, but of a substantially different meaning.

Example: transform the proposition "to each his own opinions" by the proposition 'one has the right to his opinions.' The second proposition implies a notion of legitimacy of opinion that is not necessarily contained in the former.

(See Precipitation, Emotional Abuse)

2- Indetermination of the relative

Refusing to reply, to explain an idea or to test its meaning by invoking the indeterminate multiplicity of possible subjective points of view frequently induced by 'it depends', 'it is according to', 'it is more complicated than that'...

Example: to the question "Is truth a useful concept?", one can simply answer that it depends on each one and the point of view from which one places oneself.

(See Undifferentiated Concept)

3- False evidence

The fact of considering as undisputable a common place, a banal statement, justified from the outset by their apparent obviousness, which in fact belongs to prevention, prejudice or to a lack of thought.

Example: to take for granted the following proposition: "There is not one truth but many." One might ask then why the same term of truth is used as a meaningful common name, as a concept.

(See Dogmatic Certitude, Alibi of Number, Emotional Abuse, Received Opinion)

4. Dogmatic certainty

An attitude of the mind which judges incontestable a particular idea and is content and which is content to state it hastily, even to repeat it, without seeking to justify it, without digging its presuppositions and consequences without attempting to test it, nor even to consider a contrary hypothesis. A failure of thought that curbs any possibility of problematic.

Example: when someone asserts that "ignorance is opposed to knowledge" without considering how "conscious ignorance can allow one to learn."

(See Emotional Behavior, False Evidence, Opinion Received, Reducing Idea)

5- Alibi of the number

Allegation of an alleged multiplicity whose evocation is supposed to confirm undoubtedly a previously expressed proposition.

Example: "Everyone agrees: we have the right to our own opinions." The number in its generality proves nothing in itself, unless at the very least it is specified or explicit.

(See Dogmatic Certainty, False Evidence, Opinion Received)

6- Opinion received

To admit an idea or a proposition merely because it is validated by the authority of tradition, habit, social milieu, recognized or unknown expert, or by the evidence of any 'eternal nature'.

Example: to affirm the proposition "to each one his truth", by justifying it by the following expressions: "history proves to us that...", "Since antiquity, men know that...", "The philosopher so-and-so says that..." or, again, "Society is founded on the idea that...", by way of an explanation.

(See Alibi of Numbers, Dogmatic Certainty, Emotional Abuse, False Evidence, Reductive Idea, Precipitation)

7- Precipitation

An attitude of responding early or even unclearly without first identifying the various factors that may be involved in resolving the issue. It causes a risk of confusion and misinterpretation.

Example: To the question "Is truth a necessary concept?" One replies: "to each one his own truth", without taking any time to ask oneself in what way the truth would be a necessity or not, in which way would its multiplicity answer the question.

(See Slide of Meaning, Dogmatic Certainty, Emotional Abuse)

8- Emotional Abuse

The moment of reflection in which our convictions lead us to refuse the analysis and the testing of our remarks, in order to continue our discourse without considering other possibilities of meaning.

For example, when I support the idea that "our opinions belong to us" and once engaged in my speech, I do not answer the following objection: "Public opinion ignores its origins, it is foreign to itself." This can happen either because I refuse to answer the objections made to me, or because I do not take the time to formulate such objections myself.

(See Dogmatic Certainty, Undifferentiated Concept, Reductive Idea, False Evidence)

9- Unexplained example

The misuse of an example consisting in considering that its only formulation in narrative form, or even its mere evocation, is sufficient to justify an idea or a thesis, without providing the analysis which would demonstrate the interest and the scope of the given example.

Example: when, in defense of the idea that 'we invent knowledge', I mention the name of Einstein by way of example, without any other explanation.

(See Undifferentiated Concept, False Evidence, Reductive Idea)

10- Undifferentiated concept

The imprecise and truncated use of a concept, resulting in a proposition that is not pushed to the end, both in the exploration of its implicit presuppositions and in the analysis of its various possible consequences. The adopted position is not assumed in its full argumentative logic.

Example: "There is no knowledge without reason." But, does the term 'reason' refer here to the idea of cause, to the idea of reasoning, to the idea of meaning, to the idea of consciousness? The proposal varies enormously according to the various interpretations expected, producing different meanings that can radically oppose each other.

(See Dogmatic Certainty, Precipitation)

11- Reductive Idea

Arbitrarily selecting and defending a single point of view, which is incapable of taking into account all the data of a question or of a concept, thus reducing it from its true stakes. A rationale for a particular idea, but no critical position.

Example: to the question "must we defend our opinions?" One answers positively and works solely on the elaboration of this point of view, without mentioning how this position can limit the reflection. (See Dogmatic Certainty, Emotional Abuse, False Evidence, Received Opinion)

12- Paralyzing uncertainty

The attitude of the inhibited mind in the progression of its reflection, because two or more contradictory options present themselves to it, without any one succeeding at the outset in gaining its adhesion, and without daring to venture an analysis of the present theses or to articulate a problematic.

For example, to state first the idea that "one has to defend one's opinions", to state later that "intelligence is knowing how to change one's opinion", and then simply to say that one hesitates between the two propositions, to finally conclude that the problem is difficult and cannot be resolved. (See Undifferentiated Concept, Difficulty to Problematize)

13- Illusion of synthesis

The refusal to consider separately two or more components of an idea by keeping them in a factitious unity, which prevents one from formulating an adequate evaluation of the conflictual dimension at stake and from formulating a problematic taking into account these various aspects. The superficial resolution of a contradiction.

Example: the proposition: "In each one, opinions and feelings go well together." The point here is to explain how the two can agree, but also how they may be in contradiction. (See Difficulty to Problem, Loss of Unity)

14- Loss of unit

When the link between the various elements that constitute a reflection is forgotten, in favor of a fragmentary and pointillist approach, and to the detriment of taking into consideration the overall unity of the subject. A breakdown of coherence in the development of ideas.

Example: to answer the question "do we have the right to express what we believe to be true?" To deal with the legal and intellectual aspect, or even to elaborate a problematic in this respect, and then to

approach the moral angle of the question without worrying about linking this new aspect to the work already done.
(See Difficulty to problematize, Illusion of synthesis, Reductive idea)

15- Paralogism

The transgression, during argumentation, of the basic rules of logic, without any awareness or justification of this transgression.

Example: to affirm that "a valid truth, for an individual, is valid for all" without showing or justifying why in this case the singular becomes universal, an operation which in itself is contrary to the laws of logic.

(See False Evidence)

16- Difficulty to problematize

An insufficient reflection which, when it meets two or more contradictory propositions on a given subject, hesitates or refuses to articulate them together. From then on, it oscillates between the two, or even merely attacks them, without seeking to treat them and to connect them truly by producing a problematic.

For example, two propositions are spelled out in two distinct moments: "Every man has the right to express his opinions" and "certain opinions should be prohibited from expression." They are stated in turn, or joined together, and it is simply concluded that it is impossible to decide, without articulating them together, among other things, in the form of a problematic, which would make it possible to verify on what notion pivots the opposition between the two proposals.

Thus, one could propose the following formulation: "One can express one's opinions insofar as they do not contravene the law or the moral obligation not to offend one's neighbor."

(See Synthetic Illusion, Reductive Idea)

2. Resolutions

1- Suspension of judgment

A temporary setting aside of any bias, in order to state and study the various possibilities of reading a given thesis or a problem.

Example: even if one thinks that "everyone has the right to express his opinions", to suspend one's conviction in order to study and problematize the question.

(See Critical Position, Thinking the Unthinkable)

2- Completing an Idea

The study and management of the important elements of a thesis, the recognition of its presuppositions or consequences, the explanation of its different meanings or nuances.

For example: if one states the idea that "knowledge liberates man", to show the different meanings of 'knowledge', as belonging to the senses, reason, consciousness, or convention, or, again, to opt for one of these meanings, specifying it and explaining its consequences.

(See Completed Issue, Introduction of an Operative Concept)

3. Critical position

To submit questions or objections to a thesis in order to analyze it and to verify its limits, which makes it possible to define its content, to deepen the understanding of its presuppositions and consequences, and to articulate a problem.

For example: if we state the idea that "truth is a necessary concept", to object that truth can represent a negation of the singular, a negation of reality, a negation of subjectivity, and to respond to these objections.

(See Suspension of Judgment, Thinking the Unthinkable)

4- Thinking the unthinkable

To imagine and formulate a hypothesis, to analyze the implications and the consequences, even if our a priori convictions and our initial reasoning seem to refuse this possibility. To accept a hypothesis which imposes itself upon us by demonstration, even if intuitively it seems unacceptable to us.

Example: if the starting hypothesis is the idea that "knowledge releases man", to try to justify the opposite position: "knowledge is a hindrance to existence."

(See Suspension of Judgment, Critical Position)

Analyzed Example

To cite or invent and then to explain an example, setting out a problem or a concept, in order to study them, to explain them or to check their validity.

Example: if one wants to defend the idea that "truth is a dangerous concept", one can cite the example of religious fundamentalism and show how truth serves as a justification for the imposition of an ideology, to the detriment of individual thought and liberty.
(See Completing an Idea, Introducing an Operating Concept)

6- Introduction of an operational concept

An introduction in the reflection of a new notion or idea, in order to articulate a problem or to clarify the treatment of an issue. The role of this concept is to avoid a meaningless relativism, such as 'it depends', to clarify some hypotheses, and to establish links between ideas.

For example: to justify the idea that "knowledge releases man", one introduces the concept of 'consciousness' and explains it.
(See Completing an Idea, Completed Issue)

7- Accomplished problematic

The concise linking of two or more distinct or contradictory propositions on the same subject, in order to articulate a problem or to make a concept emerge. The problem can take either the form of a question or that of a proposition expressing a problem, a paradox or a contradiction.

For example: in order to deal with the question of the beautiful, to formulate two propositions: "truth is a universal principle" and "truth is a subjective concept", then to articulate a problematic in the form of a question, "Is truth accessible to the individual?" Or, in the form of an affirmation: "The concept of truth is in each man the privileged access of the singular to the universal."

(See Completing an Idea, Introducing an Operating Concept)