

# THE PRACTICE OF PHILOSOPHY WITH CHILDREN

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*To Isabelle,  
the « moving machine »  
behind this work.*

## Chapter I

### Philosophizing at School

#### 1 - PHILOSOPHIZING IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

What has philosophy to do with primary school? Whether in a positive way or critically, most of those who hear of such an initiative are puzzled and raise the question. How could this activity even be considered with children aged three to eleven while eighteen years old teenagers, whose Bachelor results in the field are not particularly good, often struggle with this strange material of dubious reputation? Or else, let's ask the question differently: at eighteen, isn't it too late to philosophize, too late to start in any case? Which professor does not periodically feel helpless while striving for a whole year to induce a kind of critical thinking in his students, amongst other skills, often without much success? If, for reasons generally related to a favorable family environment towards this type of method, some students seem to be able to develop a certain intellectual fitness to move about within the philosophical path, this is not the case for the majority. For most, critical thinking and the development of speech as a reflective tool remain foreign and unusual practices.

It is not that an initiation into critical thinking would necessarily produce miracles and solve all pedagogical problems, but if we were to

think that it is somewhat necessary, could we not avoid the artificial veneer, the tardy and drop out side of the matter, the idea of a single school year set up as a coronation? Could we not instead chose to gradually accustom our children to such a state of mind, according to their gradual cognitive and emotional development? Of course, and there probably lies the crux of the matter, it would be required to extract philosophy from its mainly cultural and scholarly coating in order to conceive of it as a probation of the singular being, as the constitution of an individuality that builds up since tender years through the formation of the mind. The true difficulty certainly lies in this Copernican revolution: it requires the toppling of a certain amount of educational concepts.

From our point of view, we are here involved in a 'philosophizing' defined as a pedagogical practice and not as a separate field of inquiry or as a specific subject. To begin with, let's try to identify how, for example, a discussion with children could be philosophical. This is because the form of the exercise often amounts to a discussion, especially when writing skills are still missing, when it comes to confront various perspectives or when one must harass the mind in order to bring its errors to light. We were once asked: "Would it not amount to a mere propaedeutic to philosophy, a simple preparation to philosophizing?" But in the end, within the Socratic tradition, is not philosophizing in essence a propaedeutic? Is it not a never ending training? Is not ongoing questioning its live matter? Is not any particular idea a simple hypothesis, a momentary event in an ongoing thinking process?

Therefore, do we engage in philosophy less when we actually make a practical attempt at philosophy or when we get stuck in thick and complex philosophical theories? Does the scholar engage in philosophy more than the child in kindergarten? Nothing is less certain. What is worst, the question is irrelevant. For, if philosophizing is a trial of the singular being, it is by no means certain that the awakening of critical thinking is not a much more fundamental transformation on the personal level than what any intricate analysis of the seasoned scholar could ever offer. It is for this reason that philosophical practice should be incorporated early on in a child. There is otherwise a risk that the life of the mind be later on perceived as a peripheral operation, something external to existence. This is a common phenomenon observed within the philosophical establishment and more generally in education.

However, let's imagine that in attempting to inculcate a philosophical practice in the early beginnings of the schooling process we might run the risk of reaching the limits of philosophy. Haven't we fall in the mere learning of language in general? Or in some minimal art of discussion? The philosophical ingredient here seems to be so diluted that it is to flatter oneself to continue to make use of such a label to define the pedagogical practice. Here again, let's look at the problem from another angle. Let's ask ourselves if, on the contrary, the fact of facing liminal situations, all the while challenging the very idea of philosophizing, its mere possibility, does not force us to restrict to a maximum the definition of such an activity, so as to articulate its constitutive and limitative unity in a more essential manner. In other words, is not by any chance the emergence of philosophizing the

very essence of philosophy? This seems to be the question towards which Socrates is pointing at when, to the bewilderment of the modern scholars, he continuously engage in philosophy with the uninitiated, including the learned sophists, those so-called enemies of philosophy. It is as if he was challenging us by showing just how much can thus be accomplished. Could not this extreme trivialization of philosophy become its most revealing expression, a dramatization of its mysterious activity which escapes from anyone who tries to grasp at it as a vulgar object, like the amorous feeling?

## 2 – THE THREE REGISTERS OF PHILOSOPHIZING

As a starting point to our practice, let's determine three registers of philosophical requirement, in other words three aspects that will be used to constitute the practice. These three aspects of the activity seem to define a requirement that comes in addition to the mere exercise of speech or to the use of reading and writing, similar to what any elementary teacher is already doing. We are referring to the three intellectual, existential and social dimensions; three terms that anyone can rename has he pleases. All three registers could be summarized as the idea of thinking by oneself, being oneself and being among the group.

### *Intellectual (To Think by Oneself)*

- To propose concepts and hypothesis.
- To structure, articulate and clarify ideas.

- To understand the ideas of others and one's own.
- To analyze.
- To reformulate or modify an idea.
- To work on the relation between an example and an idea.
- To argue.
- To practice interrogating and objecting.
- Initiation to logic: the link between concepts, coherency, and the legitimacy of ideas.
- To formulate one's judgement.
- To use and create conceptual tools: error, lie, truth, triviality, contrary, identical, categories, etc.
- To verify the comprehension and the sense of an idea.

### **Existential (*To be oneself*)**

- Singularization and universalization of thought.
- To express and assume one's identity through one's own choices and judgements.
- To be aware of oneself: of one's own ideas and behavior.
- To master one's reactions.
- To work on one's own way of being and thought.
- To question oneself, so as to discover and to recognize errors and incoherencies.
- To see, to accept, to say and to work on one's own limits.
- To distinguish between one's way of being, one's ideas and oneself.

## **Social (*To be and to think within the group*)**

- To listen to the other, to give him space, to respect and understand him.
- To be interested in the ideas of the other: to reverse self-centeredness by reformulating, questioning and engaging in dialogue.
- To risk oneself and to integrate a group: to test oneself through the other.
- To understand, to accept and to apply functional rules.
- To discuss functional rules.
- To take responsibility: modification of the status of the student towards the teacher and the group.
- To think together instead of competing: to learn to confront ideas and to emulate.

### **2.1 Thinking by oneself**

One possible summary of the activity that we are describing here is the principle of “thinking by oneself”. It is an idea cherished by the philosophical tradition, something that Plato, Descartes or Kant articulated as the first and fundamental injunction. Of course, some might smile at the idea of “thinking by oneself” in kindergarten. We will discuss this reluctance later on. For now it suffices to say that, if we maintain this pattern of doubt till the end, we won’t hesitate to assert, in Final, if not even in College, as is



common, that students don't have anything interesting to say anyway. No wonder then, that we see ignorance and contempt, for oneself and others, flourishing in a more or less conscious and explicit manner.

“Thinking by oneself” means, first of all, to understand that thought and knowledge do not fall from heaven already armed and shielded, but that they are produced by individuals whose sole merit is to ponder on ideas, to express them, to examine and to refashion them. Thus, the thinking process is a practice, not a revelation. Otherwise, if from his early days a child is led to believe that to think and to gather knowledge amounts to learning and repeating the ideas of adults, all preconceived ideas, then it is only by accident that he might ever learn to think for himself. Generally speaking, it is heteronomy rather than autonomy that he will be prompted in his behavior. A difficulty remains: how can one who assume the Master's function, the teacher, ever encourage a child to think by himself?

One must consider In the first place that the thinking process might be defined as a natural act which every human being possesses in varying degrees from his early days onwards. However, considerable work must be done, and this is the responsibility of the parents and teachers. In class, any exercise in that direction will require the child to articulate the ideas that arise and dwell in his mind in a more or less conscious manner. Their articulation constitute the first and most crucial component of the practice of “thinking by oneself”. On the one hand because verbalization allows for a greater awareness of these ideas and of the mind that generates them. On the other hand, because difficulties encountered during the formulation of these ideas directly relate to the difficulties inherent in thinking itself:

imprecisions, paralogisms, incoherencies, etc... One must therefore not simply incite a child to talk, to express himself, but to do so with a greater mastery of his thought and speech. By the way, let us mention that even if understanding, learning and summarizing a lesson might also help to acquire this capacity, this traditional mode of teaching, left unto itself, tends to encourage parroting and formalism, a disembodied speech and, most of all, a double language. In other words, it leads to a radical rupture between expressing what one thinks and holding a discourse expected by authorities. This catastrophic rupture has severe consequences on the intellectual and social level.

In brief, 'thinking for oneself' consists in several components. First, it means to express what one thinks on a given topic, which already requires that one reflects on the question, and to clarify one's own thought in order to be understood. Second, it means to become aware of what one thinks, an awareness that already partially refers to the implications and consequences of such ideas. From this, a somewhat forced reasoning draft comes about. Third, it means to work on this thinking process and this speech so as to fulfill the requirements of clarity and consistency. Fourth, it means to venture towards the other, this other who questions us, who contradicts us, of whom we must assume the ideas and speech while reviewing and rearticulating ours. However, there is no formal lesson that could ever replace this practice, nor would discourses on swimming ever replace a jump in the bath and movements in water.

## 2.2 Being oneself

As shocking as this may seem to some, going to school is an alienating activity for the existing and thinking subject of the child. This being said, to reassure our readers, we may add that all educational and institutional activity is alienating in one way or another, since it pretends to root out the child from its natural state in order to initiate him to the human community. The purpose here is simply to become aware of the paradoxical pretensions of such an enterprise. It is even more pronounced in the French educational establishment, which is rather traditional. In the West, the French system is one of those who insists the most on that uprooting dimension of education, despite certain inflexions in primary education undertaken in the last decades. The whole issue is to what extent one can decide between a “naturalistic” vision, where the child is left to himself, where his natural tendencies must find their own expression, and a “classical” vision resting primarily on the transmission of values, knowledge, truths and so on. There is no readymade and perfect recipe able to guarantee the success of the enterprise. It is simply a matter of being aware of the tension through which operates all educational action. This is the only safeguard between Charybdis and Scylla.

To be concrete, let's describe two kinds of resistance to philosophical activity in class, be it in primary or in secondary school. First, the good student syndrome: this one will not commit himself unless he is certain to get the right answers. He knows that, when a question is being asked, a “right” answer or the way to find it has already been provided to him. If a

question is asked while no help is provided to find the answer he remains silent. He won't risk anything. He is usually very perceptive and able to guess the expectations of the adult. To model his behavior on those expectations does not cause him the least problem. In fact, he trusts the adult more than himself. He is generally a quite pleasant student and one would wish to have more like him since he is quite rewarding for the teacher. He is thus well schooled and appreciative of the established order, something which somewhat prevents him from being creative. He does not value the self, especially if he swears by the established order. In this sense, he does not allow himself to be who he is, since all his identity rests upon the institution's sanction. He has no distance from external pressure.

A mirror of "the good student", the "duffer", like any inversion, preserves in essence what he is opposed to. The second is the "cunning" version of the first. He is as equally aware of the institutional mechanisms in place at school as the first one, but he is much more cynical. Maybe he is so because he does not feel capable of playing the game, or maybe he simply does not feel like it. But he knows how to "play" in his way. He can consciously cheat. He must be in class while he would probably prefer to be somewhere else, so he learned how not to be there while pretending that he is. He knows very well what the limits not to be exceeded are and, even when he transgresses them, he knows that he does. He knows what should be done and that's why he is not doing it. He places no trust in the adult, or very little. But he knows how to get what he wants, however destructive his "desires" might sometimes be.

Why do we spend time on these “caricatures”? To give a negative sample of what we mean by “being oneself” in the philosophical practice. It means to take a personal risk in exposing oneself to judgement without having any certainty nor warranty regarding the correct answer; to risk oneself in confronting the other without knowing who is right. It means to accept that the other, our kin, might have something to teach us, and this without him having received any form of authority from some kind of institution. The hierarchical relation between the teacher and the student is here more or less dissolved. This might be problematic since, from then on, in the eyes of some, it is not obvious anymore whom or what to obey. Others might wonder what they should be resisting from. One is therefore left with the only option to get involved and to engage in the process, to risk making mistakes and shortcomings, to be oneself and to become aware of the limitations and weaknesses of our being. This must happen while avoiding both the complacencies of self-glorification and of self-contempt. We must help others.

### 2.3 Being and thinking together

The practice of philosophical discussion mainly boils down to connecting the student with the world he lives in, something that can be called a process of “socialization”. Here again could be argued that this process has nothing particularly special, since any school activity implies a dimension or another of socialization. On the other hand, one may wonder about the relationship between this socialization and philosophy. Let’s suggest the idea that the increased dramatization of the relation to another, a relation

that is central to the functioning of our exercise, allows for the creation of a situation in which this relation becomes an object to itself. This can be explained from several viewpoints. First, the rules set out require everyone to stand out. Second, they imply to know the other, to know what he said. Third, they involve entering into a dialogue or to risk oneself in confrontation with the other. Fourth, they involve being able to change the other and to be changed by him. Fifth, they involve verbalizing these relations, to raise in conversation topics that usually remain in the shadow of the unspoken, or confine themselves to a mere alternation between reproach and reward. To turn the problem or difficulty into an object to be considered in itself, something to reflect on, is a specific feature of the philosophical practice, something that is called “problematization”. Problematization requires that the thinking process be caught in its flow, taken as it comes, as it is, and to work with that spontaneous reality instead of with some predefined theoretical ideas.

It would be possible to compare our practice with that of team sport, an important socialization factor for children. It is something that involves getting to know the other, what he does, how to act on him and confront him. This type of activity can be distinguished from classical intellectual activity, which generally occurs alone, even within a group; an intellectual individualism naturally encouraged by the school, often without the teachers fully noticing it. It is a tendency that gets exacerbated over the years. It causes many problems along the way, amplifying the “winner and loser” aspects of the game.

On the contrary, the philosophical practice that we are describing here encourages the “thinking together” dimension. It aims at introducing the idea that we are not thinking against the other or to defend ourselves from him, either because he scares us or because we are lock in a competition with him, but that we are thinking together with him, through him. On the one hand, it is such because the general reflective process evolves along the students’ contributions to the discussion. During the workshop, the teacher will have to periodically summarize the important contributions that gave the context to and formed the discussion. On the other hand, it is such because, while discussing with him, while changing our mind, or while changing his, instead of coldly clinging to our views, if not angrily, we learn to benefit from the other. There again, the fact that problem management difficulties arise, coming from a colleague or from the teacher, is part of the discussion and helps to defuse individual tensions. It encourages the child to reason instead of wanting to be right. Let us mention that this kind of fear, if left untreated, creates major difficulties, ever more visible as school years go by, and this goes without mentioning the impact on the adult to be. If a child learns to think in common at an early age, he learns both how to assume a singular thought, how to express it, and how to defend it. He learns to benefit from the ideas of others and to let others benefit from his. Thus, the philosophical dimension consists in making sure that the child is becoming aware of the processes of individual and collective thinking, that he notices the epistemological obstacles that constrain the thought process and its expression, and that he can verbalize these blockages and obstacles by raising them in conversation topics.

A last argument in favor of this increased socialization process of thought is that inequalities among children appears very early on. Already in kindergarten one can see that some children are not accustomed at all to discussion. Regardless of the relative individual ease or difficulty to engage in discussion, the teacher realizes that some children are not surprised to see that we want to discuss with them, while others seem at lost to understand what is expected of them when they are invited to speak up. These behaviors are most likely linked with the familial context. For these reasons, speech, which should be a source of integration and socialization, becomes a source of segregation and exclusion.

### 3. Types of discussions

To better establish what we mean by philosophical discussion, let's briefly sketch some sort of typology of discussion. Let's define the broad categories of discussions in order to clarify the nature of what we seek to foster. Not that the other forms of discussion are devoid of interest, but rather because each plays a different role and performs another function than that of philosophizing. Any exercise contains specific requirements. Any exercise aims at accomplishing specific tasks. One must be clear about these requirements and tasks, since by this very determination it becomes its own truth. This delimitation allows one to achieve what he can, and at the same time it prevents him from pretending to achieve what he can't. However, to the extent that the time for discussion is part of the



instructions guiding the work of the primary school teacher, it is best to know what is going on before the discussion begins and the rules are set.

### a. The “what’s up?”

This exercise, well known among teachers, consist in having the students speak up in turn, to relate what happened to them or what is their concerns. There is no other constraint than the mere fact of speaking in turn, to express oneself clearly so as to be understood from others. On the one hand the goal of this method is essential. It allows students to share their existence with others, events that they face or worries that they might have. Knowing that, for some children, this discussion in class will be the only occasion where they will be able to peacefully share their joys and troubles while socializing their own existence. On the other hand, the goal is verbal expression. How to find words and articulate sentences to express what is dear to our heart, simply to tell something, regardless of what is just, good or true, solely for the sake of being heard by others.

## 3.1 The class council

The main purpose of this discussion is to expose difficulties and to solve issues, concerning in particular the social functioning of the class. It is primarily intended for practical and ethical problems for which it would be best to find a solution, even if it is not always possible. Decisions are taken democratically. They are supposed to engage the whole class. This presupposes that the group reaches an agreement of some sort where the

majority prevails over the minority. Indeed, the discussion must end. It is a discussion where the teacher might have to moderate the content, depending on the situation. This type of exchange can be used as an introduction to citizenship since it places the student in a situation of responsibility. It also naturally leads to work on oral expression and to take into account the general problems arising out of particular situations. Thus, it allows to work on the relation between examples and ideas, even if we might tend to emphasize the practical aspect of the activity.

### 3.2 The opinion debate

This relatively free pattern is similar to the “what’s up?”, apart from the fact that it focuses on a single topic. This additional requirement is not trivial. Everything then depends on the awareness and on the quality of the interventions of the teacher, or of the students, so as to refocus the discussion and to not get bogged down along the way. Another determining parameter is to know to what extent the teacher should intervene to rectify the situation in terms of content, or to seek clarifications and justifications. In our eyes, while understating the risk of doing so, or while attempting any kind of formalization, one might turn the discussion into something else. Nevertheless, the student learns to wait patiently before speaking. He learns to structure his thought in order to express it in a way that can be understood by others. Especially since this type of discussion is conducive to such expressions as “yes, but...” or as “I do not agree”, expressions that stress an opposition or a worry more or less consciously supported by a singularization of the speaker. Sincerity, conviction, passion and feelings in

general are playing here a significant role characteristic of the spontaneity of the interventions. They are accompanied by a lack of formal requirements that favors the influx of ideas rather than strict rigor. Therefore, the discussion can easily get bogged down in a ping-pong exchange between two or more individuals who cling on to their thesis without necessarily understanding each other. One could consider that this is part of the exercise and cherish the hope that the issues at stake will become clearer as the exchanges go on. It should be added that such opinion debates are often based on egalitarian and relativistic assumptions.

### 3.3 The ferment of ideas

This kind of discussion looks like the American “brainstorming”. It is naturally applied in education, particularly under its directive or teleological form, having an intentional end. This mode of discussion is rather fusional. Therein, the class is conceived of as a sum total. There is little attempt to single out speech and thus, the fact that two or more students might speak at the same time is not particularly troubling. The point is first of all to generate ideas, or fragment of ideas, or even simple words. The scheme can be open: ideas are taken as they come, written on the board or not. Or it can also be close: the ideas that are taken are only those approved or expected by the teacher, who selects them as they appear. The valorization of ideas is generally carried out by the teacher immediately or at a later time. Unless a different kind of discussion or a subsequent written work allows students to produce this analysis later. The main quality of this scheme lies in its dynamism and vivacity. Its defect is that it is not really

made for articulating ideas or to argue, but to launch intuitions or bits of knowledge in bulk. It is here either a matter of stating a list of ideas or to find the one (or the many) good answer, or again simply to “involve” the group in the teaching.

### **3.4 The oral exercises**

Such discussions are intended to put elements from the lesson into practice. It consists in vocabulary exercises, grammar, science or whatever else. The aim is to implement specific lessons so as to have the student reflect on it and to check his level of assimilation. These exercises are generally made into smaller groups. They sometimes aim at producing a small written text, in the form of a summary or of an analysis. If the initially undetermined shape of the discussion must later on be determined by the students themselves, in a more or less random fashion, its result must however meet the specific expectations of the teacher. This result will be evaluated according to the degree of comprehension of the initial course. The formal requirement is not insignificant. It requires one to know how to articulate and to justify his ideas, to summarize them and so on.

### **3.5 The argumentative debate**

This model is more traditionally used in Anglo-Saxon countries, although its influence began to be felt in France. It corresponds to the ancient form of rhetoric, an art of discussion that was once considered to be a necessary introduction to philosophy. It primarily aims at learning to

argue in favor of a particular thesis so as to defend it against another one. For this purpose, it is sometimes necessary to know in advance the various forms of arguments, forms which it is necessary to demonstrate the use or else, at least, to identify. But this can also be done in an intuitive and informal way. A certain “de-centering” is required, since the point is not always to defend a thesis on which we agree. This kind of exercise, a college specialty more difficult to apply in primary school, should be kept for Cycle 3 or beyond.

### 3.6 The formalized discussion

The formalized discussion, a category in which belongs the philosophical discussion as we intend it, is characterized above all by its slow pace. It is generally operating in the “lag” since its forms, imposed as rules of the game, are primarily aimed at setting formal mechanisms supposed to allow for the articulation of a meta-reflection which is essential to philosophizing. It invites the participants to not only speak and act, but to look at themselves while doing so, to take a distance from themselves, to de-center their focus, so as to become aware of and to analyze their words and behaviors, and those of their neighbors. Of course this is also possible within other modes of discussion but, in this particular context, that aspect is somewhat “forced”. Thus, one must suggest rules, or rather impose them. They could be discussed at the outset but they must be applied and this is, in itself, a demanding exercise. A certain ascetism is thus introduced *de facto*, unlike the spontaneity and naturalism of the opinion debate for example. If, to begin with, the teacher generally introduces the rules,

students can also stimulate the debate and set their own rules, knowing that everyone will have to follow them for the game to be successful. These rules can be very different. They will guide the nature of the meta-discussion either on content analysis, on production of synthesis, on emerging problems, on deliberation, on conceptualization or on whatever else. Even if these rules, with their heavy complexity, can weight on the discussion – by formal requirement and never by content – and lead toward a more abstract functioning, they can have a tendentious side effect. They tend to favor the discourse of the ones most skilled in abstraction, unless certain other rules are set to compensate for the elitist tendencies of the first rules. However, shier students might find it easier to dwell in these more rigid conversational spaces, with reserved or protected talking time.

Any discussion exercise, specific by nature, will tend to favor certain functioning and categories of student over others. None of these types of discussion can therefor pretend to hegemony or to be almighty. All of them offer a useful method, an alternative, oriented toward a certain goal. It may be productive, in this respect, to use various alternatives so as to enable students to distinguish the many states of speech and of verbal exchange. These alternatives can sometime be intermingle without problem.

The summaries that we have established above do not pretend to be exclusive nor exhaustive. Their sole purpose is to establish elements of comparison to better understand the issues at stake, to clarify the expectations and rules, requirement from which a teacher should deviate as less as possible.



## Chapter II

### Philosophizing

#### 1. THE NATURE OF PHILOSOPHIZING

In any exercise, it is not always easy to distinguish the substantive requirements from the formal ones, to link the formal rules to the skills required to work. However, we will do our best to describe our exercises by distinguishing what falls into one or the other of these characteristics, so as to perceive what comes from the spirit and what comes from the letter. To do this, since operating rules are nothing but a more or less successful application of a theoretical project, it seems illuminating at this point to bring forward a thesis on the nature of the act of philosophizing. Although we can't deny either the fact that, in turn, theory undergoes an inflection in the face of practical outcomes, from either the successes or failures of practice. If it was not so we would give substance to the idea that philosophy is the preserve of theorization and that any practice must be but a pale representation of that theory, a kind of makeshift, a philosophy for the 'crippled', if not to the idea that 'philosophical practice' is a pure contradiction in terms. In order to distinguish our approach, let's quickly state that the common representation of philosophy is to perceive it primarily as a scholarly and speculative discourse on scholarly discourse itself, whereas our view is that philosophy is a reflection on the discourse



*and* on the very 'being' of a subject, whomever that might be, a pupil in kindergarten or a university student. In this perspective, let's summarize what constitutes, for us, the essence of philosophizing, or of philosophical practice. We request some patience from our reader for the following abstract and theoretical discussion, however short.

## 1.1 Practice and materiality

A practice can be defined as an activity that confronts a given theory to a materiality, that is to say, an otherness. Matter being what offers resistance to our will and actions, it is that which is other, that upon which we pretend to act. Or, what, for our mind, is other? First, the most obvious materiality of the philosophizing is the totality of the world, including human existence. A world that we know in the form of a myth (mythos), a narration of daily events, or under the form of scattered cultural, scientific and technical information shaping a discourse (logos). Second, for every one of us, materiality is the 'other', our own image, our fellow, with whom we can enter into dialogue and confrontation. Third, materiality is the consistency, the presupposed unity of our discourse, whose flaws and incompleteness force us to confront ourselves with higher and more comprehensive mental architectural orders.

With these principles in mind, in fact inspired by Plato, it becomes possible to conceive of a practice consisting in exercises stimulating individual thinking, in group situations or in singular ones, in school or outside of it. Through dialogue, the basic *modus operandi* consists in first

identifying the presuppositions from which our own thinking operates, then in critically assessing these presuppositions so as to identify specific problems. One must then formulate clear concepts to express the global idea that has been enriched by the problematization, thus creating terms able to take contradictions into account and maybe even to solve them, by naming them. In this process, everyone aims at becoming aware of his own apprehension of the world and of himself, at deliberating on the possibilities of other schemes of thinking, and at engaging oneself on an anagogical path where one can outreach his own opinion, a transgression at the very heart of the act of philosophizing. Within this practice, knowledge of classical authors or of cultural elements is very useful, but is not an absolute prerequisite. Whatever the tools used, the main challenge remains the constitutive activity of the singular mind.

Practical philosophical activity involves confronting the theory with the otherness, a vision to another one, a vision to a reality that goes beyond it, a vision to itself. It therefore implies a dualizing mode of the thinking process, a dialogue mode, with oneself, with others, with the world, with truth. We have here defined this confrontation in three modes: 1. our representations of the world, in the narrative or conceptual form; 2. the 'other', like the one with whom I can engage in dialogue; 3. and the unity of thought, as the logic, dialectic or coherence of the discourse.

## 1.2 Operations of philosophizing

In other words, beyond the cultural and specific content which is its appearance, generous and sometimes misleading – if it is at all possible to do without this appearance – what is left for philosophy? In answer, in order to focus solely on the operability of philosophy as a producer of problems and concepts, rather than on the complexity and scope of its corpus, we will propose a formulation defined in a rather lapidary way, which may seem like a sad and impoverished paraphrase of Hegel. We will define the philosophical activity as a constitutive activity of the self, determined by three operations: identification, criticism and conceptualization. If we accept these three terms, at least temporarily, the time to test their solidity, let's see what this philosophical process means, and how it involves and requires otherness to constitute a practice.

### 1.3 Identify or deepen

How can the 'me' that I am define and become aware of itself, unless being confronted with the other? Myself and other, mine and thine, mutually define each other. I must know the pear to know the apple, this pear that is defined as a non-apple, this pear that defines the apple. Hence the appropriateness of naming in order to distinguish. We have proper nouns to singularize, and common ones to universalize. To identify, one must postulate and know the difference, postulate and distinguish the community. To classify between the singular, the gender and the specie as recommended by Aristotle. One must establish propositions which can be distinguished from others while sharing common elements without which the comparison would be meaningless. Dialectic of the same and the

different: all is the same and different. Nothing can be thought of and exist without a relation to something else. Thus the first moment of the philosophical practice consists in an attempt to identify the nature of the subject, both the subject of the discourse and the subject who holds the discourse. What is he saying? What is he saying about himself when he says something about something? What are the implications and consequences of the ideas he puts forward? What are the ideas that form the cornerstone of his thought? What should be clarified? What to elaborate? How is that thought to be distinguished from another one? Why is she saying what she is saying? What are her arguments and their justifications?

To further deepen and identify we mainly use the following tools:

- Analyzing: to break down a term or a proposition, to determine its content, whether it is originally explicit or implicit, in order to clarify its scope.
- Synthetizing: to reduce a discourse or a proposition to more concise or common terms that make more explicit the content and the intention of what was said, or simply to summarize what one wants to say.
- Arguing: to prove or to justify a thesis with further proposals to support the initial assertion, or with a series of proposal in guise of a demonstration. A philosophical argumentation has a different purpose than the rhetorical one. Rather than proving it, it deepens a thesis.

- Explaining: to make a proposition more explicit by using terms different from the original one, so as to clarify its meaning or purpose.
- Exemplifying: to give examples and to analyse them: to produce one – or many- specific case to illustrate a proposal, to give it more meaning or depth by justifying it. The next step is to clarify the content of this example and to articulate its relation with the initial proposition.
- Looking for presuppositions: to identify the underlying propositions or non-expressed postulates that an initial proposal assumes, which are not explicitly mentioned.

#### 1.4 To criticize or problematize

Any object of thought, necessarily entrapped in choices and biases, is rightfully subjected to a critical activity. In the form of suspicion, of negation, of interrogation or of comparison, as many forms of opposition susceptible of fostering a certain problematic. But to submit my idea to such an activity, and even to simply accept, in good faith, that the other might play that role, I must momentarily become other than myself. This alienation or contortion of the thinking subject, sometimes arduous and painful, express the initial difficulty of criticism which, in a second step, through practice, can become a second nature. In order to identify, I must thin the 'other'. In order to distinguish myself, to criticize, I must think through the other, I must think like other, at least temporarily. This 'other' might be the neighbour, the world or the unity of my own discourse. It is not only the object that changes anymore, but the subject. The duality becomes more radical, it

becomes reflexive. This does not imply to 'fall' in the other. It is necessary to maintain the tension of this duality, precisely through the formulation of a problematic. Plato tells us that to think is to engage in dialogue with oneself. For this, it becomes necessary to oppose oneself.

And while trying to think the unthinkable, this foreign thought that I can't think by myself, I must keep in mind my fundamental incapacity to truly escape from myself. This remains the fundamental problematic: the hypothesis that any particular hypothesis is limited and fallible, and that it is only from an externality, not always identifiable, that it can discover its own limits and truth. This is a fundamental assumption that Plato calls 'anhypothetical': a hypothesis which I absolutely need but that I can't formulate on my own since, by definition, externality escapes us. One sees here the interest of the 'other', the interlocutor who very naturally embodies this externality, the very possibility of a work by negativity.

In this perspective, the notions of criticism or of problematization are valorised, as constitutive of the thinking process itself, like a beneficial and necessary valorization of the idea. In brief, philosophically, all propositions can *a priori* be problematized.

The problematizing work can be undertaken by producing the different interpretations of the same proposition or concept, or the various responses that can be imagined to the same question. These two main tools are the question and the objection.

## 1.5 Conceptualizing

If identifying means thinking the other from myself, if criticizing means to think of me from another, conceptualizing means to think in the simultaneity of myself and the other, since it allows for the unification or the resolution of the dilemma, to unify a plurality. Nevertheless, this eminently dialectical perspective must be wary of itself since, as all powerful as it pretends to be, it is also necessarily confined to specific premises and special definitions. All concept implies some presuppositions. Thus, a concept must at least contain in itself the enunciation of a problematic, a problematic that it embodies both as the instrument and the manifestation. It addresses a given problem from a new angle that makes its identification easier. In this way, it is what allows interrogation, a basis from which to criticize and distinguish, that enlightens and builds the thinking process. And while the concept appears as if it was the final stage of the problematization process, let's note that it thus initiates discourse just as much as it ends it. Thus the concept of 'consciousness' answers the question "can a knowledge know itself?". And from this 'naming' it becomes the very possibility of the emergence of a new discourse. A concept is ultimately just a keyword, a key or a cornerstone of a thought process, which should become visible to itself in order to truly play its role as a concept.

To conceptualize is to identify the keyword of a proposition or of a thesis, or to produce this ubiquitous term even if it is not pronounced. The term can be a simple word or an expression. It is mainly used to illuminate a problem or to solve it.

## 2. THE PHILOSOPHIZING PRACTICE

### 2.1 Working on the opinion

Let us assume that to philosophize is to wrest the view to itself by problematizing it, putting it to test. In other words, philosophical exercise boils down to working on the idea, to knead it as clay, to extract it from its status of petrified obviousness, so as to shake its foundations. Generally, by this simple act, an idea is transformed. Or maybe it won't be transformed but it won't be identical either, since it will have lived. To the extent where it will have been worked upon, where it will have heard what it ignored or where it will have been confronted with its opposite, it will be modified. To philosophize is above all a requirement, a task, a transformation. It is not a simple discourse. The latter represents, at best, a finished product, by times affected by an illusory rigidity. To take the idea out of its protective shell, made of unspoken intuition, or of readymade formulas of which we can glimpse the multiple possible readings and the implied consequences, the unacknowledged presuppositions, this is the essence of philosophizing. This is what distinguishes the activity of the philosopher from the one of the historian of philosophy.

In this way, to set up a discussion where everyone speaks in turn is already an achievement in terms of philosophy: to listen to a discourse different from ours, on a given topic, to confront ourselves by listening and by speaking, even while going through the feeling of aggression that might



inspire in us such a foreign speech. The mere fact of not interrupting the other's discourse already indicates an important kind of acceptance. It is an ascetic attitude not so easy to adopt for oneself. One has only to observe how natural it is, for children and adults, to instinctively interrupt each other, or how easily others monopolize the conversation. This being said, it is still possible to use the other to philosophize, to philosophize through dialogue, including during a sharp conversation where ideas are loudly confronted, ideas mingled with convictions and passion. But unless one has an exceptional mastery over oneself, one can expect that the actual philosophizing will only take place after the discussion, once extinguished the fire of passion, in the quietness of solitary meditation, rethinking and reviewing what has been said, or what might have been said. But it is unfortunate and somewhat untimely to philosophize only once all the clamor has faded instead of while the discussion is ongoing, in the present moment, where we should be most prepared to do so. It is certainly not easy to silence the passionate impulses tied to the trappings of the ego once they have been so violently solicited, if they haven't obstructed all possibility of reflection yet.

For these reasons, since philosophizing requires a certain framework to function, both artificial and formal, one must first lay down some rules and appoint one or several officials or referees who will guarantee their proper functioning. As we have mentioned already, the most important rule, in our eyes, is the "everyone speaks in turn" one. The order can be determined by chronology, according to the will of the referee or by any other procedure. It avoids the rat race and protects from tensions related to

precipitation. Above all, it allows for breathing, an act necessary for thinking. Thinking is a process which, to philosophize, requires some time. It needs to abstract itself from words and to free itself from the impulsive need to react and speak. A kind of dramatization should thus take place, a dramatization of the verb which will single out each speaking attempt. A rule that happens to be very effective is the one that suggests that a word be spoken for all or for none. It protects the group from the many 'asides' that tend to create a commotion, a background noise that distracts and limits attention. It also prevents verbal energy to scatter and to get dissipated into many small interjections and related annexes, which happen to serve nervous outbreaks more than any real reflection.

Dramatization allows for objectification. It offers the ability to become a remote viewer, accessible to analysis and capable of holding a meta-discourse. This kind of sacralization of speech takes one out of the consumerist outlook where speech tends to become too banal, sold off evermore easily since it is free and produced effortlessly by anyone. Thus, one starts to weight his words, to choose with more circumspection the ideas to express and the words selected for that purpose. A new self-awareness is established, concerned about its own speech, eager to adopt a critical position towards itself, able to grasp the issues at play, the implications and consequences of the discourse being held. Thereafter, thanks to the perspectives of others, by the principle of opposition, a mirror-effect is produced which can make us aware of our own presuppositions, our unspoken assumptions and contradictions.

## 2.2 Answering to the other

To think is to engage in dialogue with oneself, which involves knowing what one says. Similarly, when engaging in dialogue with another that is not oneself, one must know what he says. A first requirement appears: to listen and to hear what arises from the stranger, or the strangers. On one hand in order not to repeat what they say, on the other to compare their answers with ours. And subsequently, in order to answer to what they say, in the case where a disagreement or a problem emerges. Periodically, in order to attract the attention of all, the facilitator of a conversation will ask if everyone agrees with what was said by someone, especially if the proposal has an original or provocative content. Or, to facilitate contextualization, he will launch or re-launch the discussion by asking who liked or disliked this or that aspect of the proposition. This allows for the expression of a plurality of perspectives, for a growing awareness of oppositions, allowing everyone to take position for or against their peers and thus, in fact, forcing everyone to distinguish themselves from the group or from authority, be it the authority of the teacher, of the group or of the neighbor. A new reflex will be acquired, naturally, as individual speech will slowly gain in weight, allowing the student to emerge out of the trivial dimension of the opinion debate where answers rush without proper reflection.

The articulation of thought and the critical work spent on these disagreements, which disagree on the basis of the summary of facts given, on their assessment or on the overall judgment expressed, incite and train the disputant to argue and to justify his own speech rather than remaining at the level of mere “yes” and “no”. This staging of speech must foster a

reflective and releasing situation which gives the opportunity to use the other in order to review one's own thoughts and affirmations. At the same time, a certain work on concentration and memory is being done, since everyone is supposed to remember what the others said, something which will be periodically assessed by the facilitator, especially when an issue will be found, such as opposition or repetition.

### 2.3 Mutual questioning

As we have seen, simply to install a formal listening procedure already initiates to philosophizing, but we should not delude ourselves: opinions are tenacious and the habits of a reflected speech are not acquired in such a miraculous and instantaneous way. Therefore, additional devices are useful to introduce philosophical thought within the discussion. Among these devices, we find one to be particularly useful: the practice of mutual questioning. The principle is simple. Once a thought is expressed on a given topic, before moving on to the expression of another perspective, before giving way to another reaction, a certain amount of time is exclusively saved for questions. In this part of the game, each participant must conceive himself as if he was the expression of "Socrates", as if he was the midwife of an *a priori* newborn discourse. Thus every idea or hypothesis will be studied and deepened before moving on to another.

Surprisingly, once we manage to correctly distinguish a question from a statement, which is not obvious, it appears to be more difficult to question than to assert something. This is the finding that will first strike the participants of such exercises. For a question must be genuine: a real

interrogation. Are excluded all disguised assertions that will certainly come in the way. In our game, we understand a 'question' as being an interrogation that stands for what Hegel calls "internal criticism", that is to say, a trial of the coherence of a discourse and a request for the clarification of its initial hypothesis.

This practice also reflects the anagogical ascent principle as defined by Plato, referring to the Socratic Method, where the unity or the origin of a discourse must be identified. There can be witnessed how, step by step, the interviewed becomes aware of the limits and contradictions implicit in his own statements. Such a confrontation leads him to review his position, at least to the degree where he is able to perceive the underlying issues that had thus far remained hidden. The unveiling of such issues is usually induced by the discovery of a paradoxical unity, substantial and primary, previously obscured by the scattered multiplicity of the discourse.

In order to find maximum efficiency, a question must remain as close as possible to the wording of the discourse that it aims at interrogating, sticking to the articulation of its structure and elements. The best example of a 'bad' question comes in the form of a: "Myself, I think that... What do you think of it?" One criteria of a good question is that the receiver must be able to ignore to the maximum the opinion of the interrogator. His position must be confined to a predominantly critical perspective, even if, absolutely speaking, a position completely devoid of subjectivity is inconceivable. But the mere fact of attempting such an ascetic exercise is relevant. It is first of all a listening and understanding exercise, since it obliges a cautious

hearing and understanding of the person to be interrogated. Then it also teaches us to let go of our 'backpack': the sum of our opinions and convictions. Finally, it teaches us to 'forget' ourselves: to take a distance, to de-center ourselves from our self by the simple fact of re-centering ourselves around somebody else, holding another discourse, other premises, and another logic.

## 2.4 Questioning in order to learn how to read

In principle, these elements are essential to discuss or to read a text. Often, what prevents the reading or listening is not so much a misunderstanding towards what is being said than a refusal to accept the concepts proposed by the author, to the point where the whole text may seem senseless. The proposed exercise, which amounts to thinking the unthinkable, constitutes a kind of 'placing into abyss' of the reader or the interrogator. Faced with the difficulty to question, the interrogator comes to notice the rigidity of his own thought. Often, before asking any question, he will embark on an affirmative discourse, will lose oneself therein and become unable to conclude and to ask anything. By the time he will eventually realize it, he will notice that he is currently developing his own ideas, having completely forgotten the thought of the person he had interrogated. Another way to obtain this awareness is to ask the interrogator what he considers to be essential in the words of his interlocutor, or to rephrase his speech. Thus, we come to realize that the difficulty in questioning mainly comes from a lack of attention and listening.

A similar process operates in the person who is being questioned. Time and again, while claiming to answer, he will embark on a foreign development alien to the question or will get lost in a confused spiral that leaves unanswered the initial question. To notice it, it should be enough to ask him to what question exactly is he answering. Either he will have forgotten, either he will only have a vague or biased memory of it. This verification is a procedure to be permanently applied, so as to ensure a maximum of concentration and precision during the dialogue. Once someone developed an idea, especially if its elaboration has been somewhat long, the facilitator may require a synthesis of three to four sentences, or even of a single sentence able to clarify the problematic. Or, once the question asked, he may ask its recipient if the question is explicit enough. His understanding might be checked through a reformulation. A similar process is also applied to the answers given: first the interrogator will be asked if the answer is clear; second, he will say if the answer covers the issue or if it dodges it. A reformulation may at any time be requested as a verification tool.

Two types of problems will arise here. On the one hand the difficulty to hear, understand and assume a consequential judgement, as it sometimes costs us to tell our interlocutor that he did not understand our thought, or that he did not answer our question. On the other hand, the fear of not being understood and the permanent feeling of having been “betrayed” by the other, will lead some people to constantly express their dissatisfaction, to the point where all discussion might become impossible. The first ones will function on a too conciliatory scheme while the seconds

will adopt a too personal and conflictual one. These two cases will arise more frequently in adolescents, more nervous in the relationships they entertain with their own speech.

## 2.5 The game's dimension

This alienation, the temporary loss of our self in the other which the exercise requires, with its many challenges, uncovers the difficulty of the dialogue, the confusion of our thought and the intellectual rigidity related to this confusion. The difficulty of philosophizing will most often appear through these three symptoms, in various proportions. It is then important for the facilitator to acutely perceive just how much rigor can be expected of a particular person. Some will be pushed to confront the issue deeper, others will require further support and encouragement, somewhat overseeing the operating imperfections. The exercise has a grueling dimension; for this reason, it is important to install a playful dimension and to make use of humor whenever possible, as it can serve as an 'epidural' to the labor. Without the game's dimension, intellectual and psychological pressure put on listening and speaking may become too difficult to bear. Fear of judgement, of the outsider and of critic will be mitigated by the de-dramatization of the issues. This is already made possible by explaining that, contrary to usual discussions, the purpose is not to be right or to have the last word, but to practice this intellectual gymnastic, just like any other sport or game.



The other way to present the exercise is to use the analogy of a group of scientists constituting a reflective community. For this reason, each hypothesis must be slowly tested by the comrades, carefully and patiently. One after the other, in order to test their functioning and validity, and to verify their tolerance threshold, each concept needs to be studied and worked upon through questions from the group. From this point of view, to accept and encourage this kind of questioning without fear of not being nice or to lose face, is to serve others and oneself. The difference no longer lies between those who contradict themselves and those who do not, but between those who contradict themselves and do not know it, and those who contradict themselves and know it. The whole challenge is therefore to show, through questioning, inconsistencies and gaps, in order to build on the thought process. However frustrating the idea might be, it is important to transmit the idea that a perfect speech does not exist, neither in the master nor in the pupil.

## 2.6 The teacher's function

Within the parameters that we have so far described, the teacher may seem to lose his traditional function: to be the one who knows the answers. Traditionally, either the teacher gives his answers or he verifies to what degree students can provide them. From that perspective, only the essay remains as a form of solitary work, where relative value is attributed to the personal contribution of the student, depending on the criteria of the correctors. Whereas here, in our set up, the teacher is rather to be seen as a referee or as a moderator. His role is primarily to ensure that thoughts are

clearly expressed and understood, something that the teacher verifies not only through his own understanding but also by relying on the expressions of those participants who react to a discourse or to a given question. He must use to a maximum the inter-actions between participants, rather than issuing his own judgement. By acting that way, he allows each student to measure the clarity of his own concepts, which in many cases is already achieving much. Then he is there to underline the issues raised by the exchange. He has to be able to recognize the “main” issues (problematics) at the moment when they arise, without those who are holding the discourse even being aware of them. He can thus adequately reformulate the discourse and establish the links with the speaker’s main issues. Instigating this new awareness will help both to conceptualize the discourse and to value its author. Here the teacher faces a particular challenge: in order to detect a classical problematic expressed in new guise, often unclear and poorly sketched, he will have to display a genuine intellectual flexibility. In the end, the purpose is to learn to listen to oneself in order to gain the maximum from our intuitions, like in the context of a dissertation, and to learn to listen to others so as to benefit from their insights.

The specific task of the teacher remains the initiation of students to practical philosophy, by introducing a certain amount of constitutive principles of thought within the debate, notions like logic, dialectic, or the principle of sufficient reason, even if these tools are not absolute. Or again, to promote the idea that it is a necessary condition to rigorous thinking that failure to justify an argument in the face of contradiction should lead to its withdrawal, at least temporarily. But this learning will occur during debate

instead of through prior theorizing, allowing each participant to perceive by himself the value of these tools. How to avoid the trap of relativism, which constantly states that “it depends”, something that means nothing in itself? Or, how to avoid the trap of the infinite multitude which claims the obvious without providing any proof? How to build a meta-discourse instead of falling into the “yes-no-yes-no”? How to weight the terms to be used? All these issues are necessary elements in the production of a dissertation. They are also skillful observations that can be used as arguments in the face of a teacher who may entertain doubts about this kind of philosophical project, being weary of following a set program and not losing time.

It is clear that the average teacher is not well formed for this kind of practice. However, this is not a problem as far as he does not fear trial and error. For, if there is a major difficulty shared equally by teachers and students, it is the fear of uncertainty in taking the risk to engage in an activity where one must leave his comfort zone. But this might be a good opportunity to bring closer the master and his pupils, who will experience precious philosophical moments together, frightening yes, but formative and memorable. In the end, is not philosophizing about instigating a certain state of mind?

### 3. KNOWING WHAT WE ARE SAYING

“Indeed, truth is in their opinions, but not at the point where they imagine it to be.” (Pascal)

There is a recurring obstacle when it comes to understand the nature and issues of the philosophical exercise taking place in the form of a discussion. It consists in thinking that to philosophize amounts to merely expressing oneself, communicating something or defending a thesis. Even if it is possible to lead a philosophical exchange in many ways, including those just mentioned, we want to emphasize here the idea of a philosophical discourse that reflects itself, that sees itself and that develops in a conscious and determined way. We are starting from the assumption that to philosophize is not merely to think, but that it raises a more specific injunction: philosophizing enjoins one to think about thinking, to think about one's own thought. It thus convenes ideas, while being conscious, or at least trying to be, of the nature, fragility, implications and consequences of the ideas that we express. Here we mean being conscious of our ideas and, of course, of those of our partners. Then only can speech be an interpellation of our 'being'.

The principle we are referring to here does not claim to diminish the role of intuition, of spontaneous speech, or even of the approximate understanding that guides many discussions, but we hope to catch the reader's eye, for a moment, so that he can behold the visible limits of certain types of exchanges which, out of complacency or ignorance, remain below themselves. Overall, let's say that the problem is what can be called 'associative thinking'. It functions under the general scheme of "it reminds me of something", modeled on "I want to bounce back on" so popular in televised debates, or again the popular "I would like to add that" or the "I want to nuance that". So many expressions that, in the end, mean not

much, often saying what they do not say or stating a point that they did not mention.

In the classroom, this takes the form of a tendency, on the part of the teacher, to prioritize the expression of ideas, as vague as they may be, over any other considerations: the student expressed himself, it is good! This consideration is pushed to such an extent that the teacher is ever ready to conclude the statements of the student, to put words in his mouth under the pretext of reformulation, solely to be able to say: he said something, he talked! If such concerns and behaviors can be understood within certain types of linguistic exercises, it may become problematic for the philosophical work. In support of our hypothesis, we will describe some specific skills related to the discussion, which we deem essential to philosophical work.

### **3.1 Speaking at the right time**

Some people will object us that the requirement to “speak at the right time” is only a superficial concern, devoid of real substance. There are two possible reasons for this. Either because the rule is conceived as a mere act of politeness: not to interrupt a speaker, for example. Either because it is motivated solely by a practical concern: to speak at the same time as someone else prevents proper listening and understanding. But such perspectives forget the primary goal of philosophizing: the relation to one’s own speech. The mere fact of being able to solicit or to deliberately mobilize one’s speech and mind, not through some kind of fortuitous and

uncontrolled chain of events but by a willful act, conscious of itself, is already fundamentally modifying the relationship between oneself and one's thought. What is more, if the idea in question does not become the subject of a dialogue with oneself, it is to be feared that the idea, as it will arise unexpectedly, will neither be understood nor heard from its author. To verify this, to see the problem, simply ask a child or an adult whose words sprang spontaneously to repeat what he just said. More often than not he won't be able to do so.

There is a reason for this omission: the clumsy and awkward aspect of this behavior indicates self-devaluation. "My own ideas have no value, why would I express them? Why would I care about their form and appearance? Why would I talk to be heard? Besides, how can I chose the appropriate time to utter them? My speech comes out in spite of me, maybe even against my will. It does not belong to me." Thus, when we ask this individual to talk at the "right time", it is a significant effort that we ask from him, but a most necessary one. This kind of work involves going deep into oneself, something which, although not always easy, is vital.

The problem is the same when we ask that people raise their hands before talking, even if it seems difficult, especially with young children. Why not turn this requirement into an exercise in itself? But it might be a bit frustrating for the teacher, who primarily wants to show to others and to himself that "his" children have ideas. Yet perhaps they simply repeat what they heard at home or at school, but it feels so good to hear it. While the fact of talking at the right time, on the contrary, shows that the child knows how to do what he must, and that a non-accidental inner debate has been

initiated. And, with nuances, it is the same for adults. To take distance from oneself, by decoupling one's speech and self, is a constitutive act of being.

### 3.2 Finishing one's idea

As we have mentioned, it is so tempting to finish the sentence of one's interlocutor, child or adult! But if we think about it, what drives us if not some kind of impatience taking the guise of a superficial and complacent empathy? If the child falls, is it necessary to rush to lift him up, or can we give him the opportunity to do it by himself, even if he cries, so that he learns to help himself on his own. Especially since the words or sentence parts that are obligingly provided by the teacher or the neighbor might be very far, or very short, of what the speaker wanted to articulate. But just like a drowning man rushes on whatever is thrown at him, without thinking, even if that thrown object might be of no use to him, someone who looks for his words often instinctively grabs whatever words are told to him, without analyzing their content nor even their effectiveness or correctness.

Invariably, while claiming to help the other, what we seek above all is to please ourselves. We shamelessly give in to our impulses. While the one who is struggling to complete his task is trying to do important work on himself and his thought. This does not mean that he must toil without any assistance whatsoever, but the first kind of help that he deserves is to be allowed time, so that he can find his way by himself without the external pressure of the group or of the authority, to rush him while pretending to help. If there is really a deadlock, some procedures might be devised to

allow him out. For example, by learning to say “I can’t make it”, “I am stuck”, or by asking “can someone else help me?” Because, from that moment onward, the problem has been articulated, it is signaled, and in this way the person remains free and autonomous, since he is conscious of the issue and is able to express it in his own words.

### 3.3 The role of the idea

Leibniz makes the risky assumption that it is not in the thing in itself, but in the connection that the living substance is to be found. Taking advantage of this insight, we suggest that what distinguishes philosophical thought from the general one is precisely the “connection”, that is to say the expressed relationship between ideas. In itself, an idea is just an idea and a word a word, but within the grammatical, syntactic and logical articulation, the word, since it becomes operative, reaches the status of concept, and the idea takes part in the elaboration of thoughts, since by joining other thoughts it helps to construct and build.

It is not so much the ideas that we are seeking, however smart and brilliant they may be, else the discussion would look like a vague shopping list, like a vulgar debate of opinions, thus producing a disordered and inchoate global thinking. What we are looking for are links, connections, relations, involving the mastery over these connectors generally so poorly understood and applied, beginning with the “but”, and proceeding through the “yes, but”. We are aiming at an increased understanding of the relationships and correlations between the propositions. How many



dialogues are exchanging conflictual statements without noticing the slightest contradiction, without evaluating the potential problematic! How many statements of disagreement that fail to precise or to perceive the specific character of the disagreement, while the competing statements are not even concerned with the same object, or again they state the same idea but use different words.

So, rather than hastening out other ideas, or other intuitions, before piling up even more words, why not taking some time to identify and to evaluate the relationship between concepts and ideas, so as to become aware of the nature and scope of our words. But there again, impatience reigns: this is laborious work. It is apparently less glorious and most frustrating, yet, is it not more consistent?

Also, a simple exercise, let's ask the one who is about to talk to announce first the intention of his speech, to articulate the link between his intention and what has already been said, to qualify his speech. If he can't make it, he should recognize it and try to fulfill this task once his speech has been said. If he still can't make it, he can then ask others if they can help him. But to achieve this, one must be interested in the already expressed words, and not solely to think about what one wants to say, even if the grass is always greener on the other side. One must set himself a goal, bind himself to it, focus and not let oneself be overflowed by the inner turmoil when ideas are scrambling at the gate like a subway exit at rush hour. Hegel would call it a, "Schwärmerei", the roar of a swarm of wasps where nothing can be distinguished anymore.

It is not sufficient to simply say something, but one must determine in a deliberate way what he wants to say, to tell effectively what he wants to, and to know what he is saying. Otherwise the discussion can be quite nice and friendly, but is it philosophical? It is not sincerity nor profound words that qualify a philosophical talk. One like the other fall into the trap of evidence, because it is possible to transmit an idea or to repeat what we have heard without knowing what we have said, without grasping the content of our speech, its implications and consequences. What are the key words of our statements, what we could call the 'concepts'? What is the principal proposition that underpins the others? How to synthesize our words? What is the main idea that is not expressed but that is nevertheless present? What allows us to say what we say? What are the propositions and how are they articulated? What is the potential for contradiction in our discourse? On what ignorance does it rest?

To philosophize, as an attitude, perhaps stands on a fundamental act of faith: all discourse is limited, biased, contradictory, incomplete or false with respect to various requirements, such as truth, reality, efficiency, transparency, intent, etc. Thus, the opposition does not lie between those who have a perfect speech and those who suffer from various imperfections, but between those who are aware of their own shortcomings and those who prefer to ignore them.

## Chapter III

### Practical operations

Various working anchors will be outlined briefly, and more specific discussion patterns will be presented. These descriptions will use various skills at different levels, particularly with respect to abstraction. Depending on the age and abilities of the students, the teacher will tailor or simplify the operation, or he may lower the requirements, while not hesitating to venture, from time to time, to ask difficult questions, if only for student to momentarily consider the difficulty at hand. The simple fact of perceiving a problem is useful in itself and, on occasion, the teacher may be surprised by the capacities of his students. Surprises that we will share, to varying degrees.

An important warning must be raised here. Although various schemes will be described here, they merely offer some working tools to the teacher, and not any kind of readymade recipes that one could apply strictly as presented. Especially since some descriptions are quite complex when taken in details. It is therefore recommended to choose here and there tools that seem suitable for the specific student group and for oneself, and to concoct operations where one feels at ease, modifying and developing them as the practice develops. Otherwise the exercise would fall into a lifeless formalism.

## 1. ANCHORING DISCUSSIONS

Various formulas may be used, which, while using different supports, operate in much the same way. The main difference lies in the types of anchoring of the discussion. A workshop on a specific issue or on a general theme, on a text, a film, a situation, an object. As many possibilities which, in absolute terms, can be declined to infinity, although one always tend to fall on those few choices. In all these cases, the operation is still based on the fact that the teacher operates from an empty standpoint, not from the full, that is to say, he works as a facilitator rather than as a teacher. His role is primarily to interview the children, to allow and ensure that children are reflective, to invite them to articulate their thoughts and choices in a precise and concise manner, so as to justify them, to value interventions and their issues, to relate together the different propositions, to instigate philosophical moments, to regulate, dramatize or de-dramatize the debate.

### 1.1 Workshop on a theme

Either the topic is imposed by the teacher, for various reasons: existential, social or, more directly, school related problems which appear relevant for discussion. Here are some examples: “Must we be nice to our friend?”, “Must we always obey?”, “Why are we going to school?”, “Do we prefer class time or recess?” Or the theme can be chosen by the whole class, where the choice and vote become an integral part of the exercise, or is the exercise in itself, since the primary purpose could be to develop questions, to justify or to compare them. In any case, students will preferably be

invited to not only propose question individually and to choose one together, but also to argue over their choice and that of others. In the case where students formulated their own question, according to their level, the theme could be one sentence, or be reduced to a single word: parents, television, animals, Santa, cars, etc. However, a question is usually preferable to a single word or even to an affirmative statement since it is more effective and offers a better frame to the discussion, while avoiding that words scatter in all directions. One may also produce concrete examples to illustrate the theme, so as to approach it in a less abstract manner, while not totally avoiding conceptualization.

## 1.2 Workshop on a text

This is usually a story, a tale, which is preferably read to the children two or three times so that they can hold the key elements of the narrative in their mind. Else the written text can also be provided. At the workshop, the basic frame of the discussion will revolve around questions such as: “Did you like the story, and why?”, “Which was your favorite character, and why?” Again, on a more directly discursive and analytical manner: “What is the moral of the story?”, “What is the author trying to show?”, “What is the main idea of the text?” One can also ask the students to identify the various questions raised by the text. They will have to articulate, argue and compare their choices with their peers. The texts can also be more informative in nature, such as newspaper articles, to the extent that they allow for multiple analysis and interpretation.

### 1.3 Workshop on a movie

Here the principle is identical to that of the text workshop, although, for practical reasons, the film can be viewed only once. The purpose will be to articulate and compare various narrative elements, different rejections or preferences of characters, and diverging assessments and interpretations of the film. This exercise is of particular importance, since students tend to spend a considerable amount of time in front of a television.

### 1.4 Workshop on a situation

In general, these situations will refer to moral and social issues, useful to approach classroom issues or various phenomena of society. As always, one will formulate questions or judgments, and justify them by connecting them to the situation experienced or described. In the case where the situation is, or has been, experienced by the participants, the first part of the exercise could also consist in producing an individual description of the event, thus showing that, already, there is a divergence of analysis, in the perception of the facts and the choice of words. This applies even in the case where one must relate crucial elements of an external event known by all. It would then be desirable to define the issues that emerge within this diversity of interpretation.

### 1.5 Workshop on an object

This type of exercise is especially useful with small classes in kindergarten. Starting from concrete objects, such as tree leaf, a person or any ordinary object of the class, it will verify the relationship between things and what one says of them, between discourse and sense perception. It may also be a comparison between various objects, to bring out a number of descriptions and comparisons, by practicing the articulation of judgment and argumentation, thus learning how to relate sentences together.

## 2. EXERCISE OF “MUTUAL QUESTIONING”

Mutual questioning is a procedure with multiple variants, whose goal is to train students to question and develop further ideas. In his usual intellectual habit, the “natural” tendency of the student is to be satisfied with the expression of a barely sketched idea, or even by a simple yes or no if such an answer was appropriate. The principle of mutual questioning is to work specifically on the act of questioning, seen as the driver in the development of ideas. This scheme uses the basic model upon which rests most of the other exercises. The idea, above all, is not to “react” to what is being said, but to contemplate and think about the words of the other and one’s own, to determine their nature and meaning.

For more clarity, it is recommended for the teacher to use the board as a “witness”, both for himself and for the class, to structure the discussion around the main ideas.

### 2.1 Initial process

On a given subject, preferably a matter of reflection, open enough or identical to those raised in a homework or in an exam on a variety of issues, cognitive, moral, aesthetic, existential or other, students are invited to submit an initial idea, more or less supported, according to the formal requirement determined by the teacher. The subject may be determined in advance, so that everyone reflects and prepares prior to the workshop, or on the same day in an unexpected manner. A written text, slightly built, or brief, consisting in a few lines, may also be required.



This has the advantage of inviting the student to immediately provide a personal effort and to start from a relatively constructed idea. This preparation is additionally useful when students are struggling to express themselves: they can prepare their statements, either at the beginning or during the course of the discussion, by momentarily interrupting the oral process to pass on to the written one.

## 2.2 Formulating an hypothesis

At the beginning of the session, a first student, appointed or volunteer, presents what we will call a hypothesis, or an idea. The term hypothesis is important, in its spirit at least: it introduces a certain distance from the ideas, especially with one's own, ideas that can then become a working tool, able to be modified as the reflection unfolds. Before even studying its validity, the first criterion of judgment, as for any discourse, remains the clarity of meaning. Therefore, if there is any lack of clarity, the moderator will question the speaker, or will wait for other participants to ask questions, encouraging them in that direction. If the discourse is confused, the board can be used as a testing tool, in order to briefly note down some keywords and questions, or to summarize in one sentence, or maximum two, the essence of the hypothesis, a sentence pronounced by the author of the hypothesis himself. This exercise of the "sentence", which requires the student to briefly summarize his point or to choose the main idea, embodies in itself a requirement of thought and speech, an exercise in concision which sends back the participant to his own difficulties in precise conceptualization. If a student has trouble articulating his hypothesis, the

teacher will ask other participants to help him in his reformulation, rather than reformulating the idea himself, so as not to distort the exercise. Moreover, in many cases the teacher would be embarrassed to summarize by himself what the student wanted to express, if only for the lack of clarity of the student's statement, and he will thus save himself a task that is not his. If the teacher writes the hypothesis on the board, the student must dictate the words one by one. The teacher could ask the student to confine his formulation to a single line on the board.

Once the hypothesis articulated, the author and the entire class will be asked to verify if it actually answers the question. In case of doubt, after everyone has argued, the class will determine by vote if the hypothesis is admissible or not.

### 2.3 Questioning the hypothesis

Once the hypothesis is expressed and validated, all are invited to question its author. The questions need to be real questions, and not disguised statements. For small classes, and sometimes even for larger ones, the mere fact of distinguishing a question from an answer is an important learning. Small exercises can be devised in parallel to work further on that distinction, for example by trying to distinguish what constitutes a question, if only by looking at beginning of the statement. This is not just a question of form. It is about becoming aware of the mental attitude involved in the act of questioning and answering. If questioning is an art, particularly in the philosophical domain, one cannot make the economy of learning the basic tools.

The questions asked will have as primary function to explain obscure points of the initial hypothesis, to develop some aspect in want of completion. They will raise issues related to contradiction of principles or of facts. The archetype of a false question comes as something like: "I think that, what do you think?" A valid question must be an internal critic, according to the concept of Hegel, which requires one to enter into a particular thesis, to deepen it from the inside, and not to criticize it on the ground of external premises. This practice trains the student to de-center himself, to leave behind his own opinions in order to deepen a scheme which is not his own. With surprise, he will come to see the challenge of questioning, in that it differs from a mere statement.

It is not always easy to distinguish a "real question" from a "wrong" one, or a "useful question" from a "useless" one, if only because of the ambiguity or the fineness of such discrimination. But let's not forget that it is not so much the decision that matters, but the articulation of the process of decision making: is the student clear about the implications of his question? It is necessary that the question be clear in its statement to the questioned person. In case of a different perception of the clarity of the question between its author and the receiver, the whole class can be called in reinforcement, to clarify the question or to decide on its admissibility.

Various appreciation criteria can be designed and used for that purpose, but five of them appear to be particularly useful:

- First: Do we know or do we guess the questioner's assertion? Can an underlying assumption be seen in his question? In this case, it is a disguised assertion.
- Second: Does he offer a readymade concept? If, in the articulation of his answer, the author of the initial hypothesis merely repeats the wording of the question, without bringing about any concept by himself, it is not a question since it already offers a concept. The idea is that the question requires the questioned person to produce his own concepts, and not simply to accept or reject any.
- Third: Calls for definitions should be avoided. For the questioner, they become a system through which he seeks to define each term of the initial hypothesis without really finding real issues.
- Fourth: A question to which the initial hypothesis has already answered. The aim is to avoid the repetition of questions already asked or questions that do not really challenge the hypothesis.
- Fifth: The out-of-topic question, which has no link whatsoever with the hypothesis. This concern leads everyone to think, at least intuitively, about the logical consistency or the link between ideas.

## 2.4 Objecting to the hypothesis

In case of difficulty in questioning, or as an alternative procedure, it is possible to ask for objections rather than questions, as objections can also

be useful in carrying the reflection further. Indeed, in order to answer, the author of the initial hypothesis will have to mobilize new concepts in support of his argument. He may also have to review his initial hypothesis. These objections will sometime focus on observed formal imperfections and will correct them. This can be useful. This kind of exchange aims at working on the initial idea, and not only to move on, without transition, from one idea to another.

One must however identify if the given statement is an objection or a question. For example, if he is given the choice, before speaking, the student must determine whether he will ask a question or raise an objection. His interventions will be admissible if the class determines that he has kept his words. To do so, it will be asked systematically, before any answer is given to the statement, if the identification was correct. In case of differing views, arguments will have to be provided and the class will decide. In the same way as for questions, it will have to be determined if the objection was met or not by the author of the initial hypothesis.

## 2.5 Answering the question

Once the question is asked, the author of the hypothesis will determine if it is clear to him and if it relates to his idea. If he thinks otherwise he will be entitled to refuse it. In fact, he will have to. His decision is final since he does not feel able to answer the question. It is also possible to take the class as witness, as a jury, to decide between the protagonists, if the author of the question does not agree with the judgment. However, it is

important not to engage in an endless debate. The inability to agree is also part of the learning process here. This creates a certain tension that forces the participants to weigh their words, to clarify their thinking, and to measure the consequences of their words on an interlocutor.

If the author of the hypothesis accepts the question, he must now justify his answer: he will have to bring forward an idea, a concept within the argument, and this will help him to develop further or to somewhat deepen his initial hypothesis. Thereafter, the moderator will enquire after the questioner in a similar way, to determine whether the answer is clear and if it fits the question. He will be mindful of a common difficulty: often, the questioner will confusedly mix “agreeing with the answer” and declaring that “the answer does not respond to the question”. To bring about this distinction the moderator will again have to leave his opinions aside and verify if the author of the hypothesis responds to the question or if he is avoiding it. He will do so while not expecting a precise answer to be given. Indeed, two different ways can lead to a same destination, so all one has to do is to make sure that both can actually fulfill their promise.

Similarly, he will have to distinguish between an answer from which further precisions are expected and a non-answer. If the answer appears insufficient to the questioner, ask him if it is at least an answer. Nevertheless, the questioner will have priority over his colleagues to quiz the author of the hypothesis anew. The principle is to let him ask several questions at a time so as to obtain a concrete result, unless the moderator decides that time has come to move on to someone else. Of course, the

purpose of questioning is to develop an idea further, but it is also to show the limits of this very idea, by pointing out its shortcomings and contradictions. The author of an idea will often be surprised by the consequences of his ideas, and particularly by the unexpected problems that they create.

An interesting test to be done after an answer has been articulated, especially if the answer appears to move away from the question, consists in asking its author if he can remember the question asked and if he can reformulate it. Often he will only remember a biased version of it, or one that is simply false. This test exposes the students to a typical problem that they routinely face in the course of their work and exams: the question has been wrongly understood. In a similar way, to verify if we have been heard by our interlocutor helps to bring to mind just how difficult it is to be understood: to be understood, it is not enough to speak words and to think that we are clear.

## 2.6 Linking hypothesis

After having spent a certain amount of time with a first hypothesis, the duration of which was determined by the moderator according to interest and circumstances, another student will present his hypothesis. Now, before answering questions, he will have to identify the related implications between his hypothesis and the previous one. Or, he will determine the relation between his idea and the previous one. It is important not to break the flow of the discussion by dispersing it in unconnected directions and

ideas. This conceptual link, or problematisation, might or might not be achieved, but in whatever case, the fact of constantly postulating the possibility of that link will motivate the student to not become a prisoner to a given formulation, but to seek out its presuppositions, by comparing the various ideas. This will sometimes give him some problems because it requires moving further into abstraction.

For example, once the new hypothesis is expressed, summarized and written on the board in pithy points, its author will be asked if it really differs from the previous one(s), so as to determine if yes or no its analysis is original. Normally, once the clamor of words has faded, the speaker realizes that he did not express anything fundamentally new, in which case, if he fails to distinguish his discourse from the preceding one, his hypothesis will be crossed out from the board for its lack of novelty, since it is reducible to a hypothesis already written. The purpose is to learn to distinguish between the difference of ideas and the simple difference of wordings. A real difference will have to manifest itself either through an opposition to a precise and important point or through a substantial difference in meaning. Sometimes the substantiality of the difference will be rather subtle, almost insufficient or inexistent, in which case one of the participants might reject the “novelty” status of the hypothesis. In this situation, everyone could then be invited to express themselves on the opposition. We suggest that a vote of the assembly finally decide of the legitimacy of the new hypothesis. On this point, the mediator will not hesitate to periodically raise the problem again, without trying to prove anything on his own, in order to assist the participants in asking themselves



the relevant question and to draw a conclusion. This work on “similar and dissimilar”, undertaken early on in school, is an interesting reflection tool.

## 2.7 Resuming work

The practice of writing down ideas on the board is useful to visually and schematically display the full set of ideas and arguments that have been expressed, in order to build up a reflection. But it is also possible to ask the students to compose a more thorough and concise work drawing from what has emerged during the workshop; unless the teacher decides to produce it himself. This way, the practice does not have to interrupt the normal flow of the class.

According to each session, the final product will be more or less inchoative, dense or rich. Absolutely speaking, it matters little. The point is primarily to put the students to work and to examine where they are at on a given topic. This can also serve as an introduction to a future class where the teacher would come back on specific elements that were mentioned, clarify them, enrich them, using mentioned elements and highlighting their shortcomings. It is productive and formative for the students to establish a relationship between their work, their ideas, and the inputs of erudition. They will thus confront teachings and book references in a more realistic manner. Amongst other benefits, this practice will demystify the material taught; showing that knowledge does not spring out of books or out of the head of the teacher, but that it comes from everyone.

**EXAMPLES**

These various propositions, coming from teachers and students, have been used in class. They are meant to illustrate our method and to reflect the real nature of the exercise. They do not pretend to be ideal.

### *Example of Questions*

1. Must one be kind towards his friend?
2. Why do we have a job?
3. Why are there rules?
4. What is the difference between a girl and a boy?
5. What is the use of knowledge?

### *Example of hypothesis*

1. **What is the use of debates in class?**
  - a. It is useful to get full of ideas.
  - b. It allows us to defend ourselves with words.
  - c. It is useful to share and mix our ideas.
  - d. It is useful to learn what we do not know.
  - e. It is useful to better communicate.
  
2. **Why do we have a job?**

- a. To make money.
- b. To serve people.
- c. In order to not have to do and to know everything by oneself.
- d. To feel good since we have a job.
- e. To feed our family.

### 3. Is man an animal?

- a. No, since animals do not dress up.
- b. No, since we do not fur or fetters.
- c. Yes, since a very long time ago men were monkeys.
- d. Yes, since we also eat other animals.
- e. Yes, since animals have a head, arms and legs like us.
- f. Yes, since animals have a heart and are alive.

### Examples of valid and invalid questions

Hypothesis: We learn a job to make money.

## QUESTIONS

1. Why do we learn a job?

Useless: This question was already answered.

2. Is it not to serve people that we learn a job?

False: This is a disguised affirmation since we know what the questioner thinks. It is in fact a new idea.

3. Are there any people who do not have a job?

Useless: This question is out of topic since it has no explicit link with the hypothesis.

4. What is a job?

Call for definition: To avoid or, at least, not to abuse since it is too easy. The questioner does not involve himself and can question every term of the hypothesis.

5. Is a job useful to stay with our family?

Obscure question: The author must review his question or ask for help, to see if someone understands him and can help him to reformulate his idea.

6. Why must we make money?

Fruitful question: The question investigates further the desire to make money.

7. Can money make one happy?

Fruitful question: The question forces one to problematize the answer while thinking about the limits of the hypothesis.

## ISSUES

From the hypothesis postulated in “Examples of hypothesis” various issues are at stake:

1. Why do we have a job?
  - a. To make money.
  - b. To serve people.
  - c. In order to not have to do and to know everything by oneself.
  - d. To feel good since we have a job.
  - e. To feed our family.

**Hypothesis a.** can be opposed to hypothesis **b.** and **e.** since in **a.** one thinks more about himself than about others.

**Hypothesis b.** is opposed to hypothesis **e.** since more people are considered in **b.** than in **e.**

**Hypothesis b.** is opposed to hypothesis **d.** since in **b.** it is felt that something should be done while in **d.** what matters is only to feel good.

**Hypothesis c.** is opposed to hypothesis **b.** since in **b.** what can be done for others is considered while in **c.** what others can do for us is considered.

## SUMMARY

“Mutual questioning” is a collective exercise consisting in digging together into a given question by suggesting answers in the form of a hypothesis, developing or modifying them with the help of relevant interrogations, and comparing the various answers in order to extract the fundamental issues from them.

The work to be done lies on the following points: to deepen a question, to produce ideas, to articulate them precisely and clearly, to produce subsidiary questions and to answer them, to listen to others, to guaranty the presence of a logical or conceptual link between ideas, to synthetize or to analyze the overall work accomplished.

## ADDITIONAL EXERCISES

In guise of preliminaries, two short exercises can be suggested.

First, to the initial question, each student must write down three different answers. Second, for a given hypothesis, each student must write down three different questions. These various propositions can then be compared and discussed orally. For classes where students do not yet know how to write, some students from higher levels can be recruited to work as secretary for each session.

A written exercise, more complete, can be suggested as a sort of initiation or complement to this type of workshop. To the question asked by the teacher, each student must answer briefly, on a flying sheet.

Everyone will then pass on his sheet to his neighbor who will question the suggested answer.

The student takes back his sheet and answers the question. A second neighbor asks a new question on the initial answer. The student answers anew. The whole process is repeated a third time. Every student is invited to analyze the results of his exchanges on his initial answer: did his idea change? Was it précised further? What is the nature of that change? Are the answers and questions corresponding? Is the subject discussed? A full discussion ensues in

order to analyze some copies, or the teacher can produce an analysis of some copies by himself.

Other written or oral exercise: each student produces a written answer to the initial question. A round table is done, or every student read his answer. Everyone must ask a written question to a colleague that he chooses himself. Work on the questions and answers is then done orally, one student at a time. Or everyone is invited to choose two answers to the initial question, answers that seem opposed to one another, so as to analyze their issues.

In these different cases, the teacher can choose to focus on a specific aspect of the work done. To use the written format as an advantage: everyone must be invested from the outset and, thus, the teacher does not have to wait that a courageous hand is raised.



### 3.WORK ON TEXT

The exercise of working on text certainly looks like what some teachers are already practicing with their students, in a more or less formal manner. A reading exercise, it is based on the idea that a foundation of all learning is to learn to read, be it a book, the world or existence itself. Our task here is to learn to execute a “close reading” of the text, to produce some analysis and to compare their issues.

#### 3.1 Initial process

A short text (of a page or two) is distributed in advance to the participants. A literary text (tale, fable, journalistic article or something else), a text from the teacher or from the students: according to the nature of the text, the issues at play and the work to be done might vary slightly. Students read the text and reflect on it, without necessarily knowing the name of the author, the origin or the nature of the text, although this is not a strict rule. Of course, the text must be sufficiently self-contained so as to avoid constant references to external authorities. It must adequately manifest its own truth and content.

#### 3.2 Interpretations

The session begins with a loud reading where the reader will be asked to intelligently interpret the articulations of the texts, in a somewhat theatrical way, so as to give life to the text and to get closer to it. This reading will be

done by a single student, or share among the group, one sentence per student. The reading is not compulsory. It can even be problematic if the text is too long. It nonetheless offers a good initial setup. If the exercise takes place in small groups, yet unable to read, the teacher will read the text several times to allow the students to familiarize themselves with its content.

Follows a roundtable, systematic or not, where will naturally be heard a certain amount of possible – and impossible – interpretations of the text. During the exercise, the teacher will “courageously” control his urges to jump upon hearing reading “mistakes” or any gross contradictions. It is essential that mistakes be expressed without fearing repercussions, just like opinions, which would otherwise never be worked on. Let’s not forget Hegel’s warning: “the fear of mistakes is the first mistake”. Otherwise, the fear of external criticism will prevent the shiest students from expressing themselves and will drive the more clever ones to paraphrase what they will perceive as the articulation of the present truth, the one of the established order, instead of asking themselves genuine questions. This does not prevent the examination of mistakes in any way, on the contrary, it makes it even easier.

### **3.3 The function of the teacher**

As for all formal debate, the teacher must become a moderator, even if this word, which tends to have pejorative connotations, might annoy him somehow. Or he might call himself a guide if he prefers. His function is to

highlight both the statements of everyone and the ones of the group as a whole. This is made possible by the following kinds of interventions. He will ask for precisions whenever a reading is not totally clear or if a particular aspect deserves further development. He will ask for explanations if he identifies intrinsic contradictions in a specific reading, without bothering himself about what he might consider to be the correctness or the truth of the statement. From time to time, he will reformulate or synthesize the expressed statement, to bring out the gist of it, while confirming with the concerned person if this is what was meant. In these situations, he must clearly discern the difference between speaking for the participant and helping him to precise his intention. In order to avoid the trap of “speaking for the student”, he will motivate the student to finish his sentence, to make it more concise, or to call upon his colleagues for help. The teacher will ask for precise textual quotations to justify this or that particular interpretation, quotes on which a debate can be opened. A warning against the idea that a reading hypothesis is justified by the totality of the text without being able to provide any precise textual evidence is necessary: it is the classical argument of the student who, consciously or not, tries to avoid really confronting the text under the pretext of its “totality”. Then, the teacher will either progressively juxtapose the readings to the most obvious differences, or he will do it at the end of a roundtable, by underlining them, to bring out the most contradictory aspects of the ongoing process. Presented as a game, this situation should stimulate the participants.

Throughout the practice, the teacher will motivate the participants to take part in the process by allowing them or by encouraging them to

practice these various interrogations by themselves. Even more since, with the reiteration of the workshops, they will start to anticipate this questioning game, which they will progressively take responsibility for. By practicing it with their colleagues, they will start to apply it on themselves, that is to say that they will get use to question their own articulations of thought. If a participant expresses a real difficulty with the text, to the point where he dares not say anything, the teacher will suggest that he makes an attempt to explain the difficulty at hand, or again that he chooses one or two random sentences – those that strike him the most or that appear to be the most hermetic – that he will comment upon according to his abilities. Others could help him in the process.

Let's note that the most hesitating words are certainly not the less relevant ones. The whole process serves to learn how to ask open questions, in order to free the students from the fear of external authority, be it the one of the teacher or of his peers. It should be noted that the teacher must impose to the group the same respect for individual speech that he imposes on himself. This is particularly important – and difficult at the same time – when dealing with young children, often unaccustomed to and even opposed to this kind of “self-control”.

### **3.4 Confronting perspectives**

Right at the end of the roundtable, or at the end of the period dedicated to this part of the exercise, the second moment will begin, which can be called the “confrontation of perspectives”. Even if, to a certain degree, this aspect

of the work has already begun, since some participants will certainly benefit from the initial exposition of ideas expressed before their own to rebuke or criticize them. This part of the exercise will serve to condense the problematics: the teacher will insist to the maximum on the need for the participants to restrict their various issues in order to take over the most important ones in the discussion, generally coming from the text, without however blocking new problematics from emerging, so long as they are immediately relevant to the subject. The teacher must ever remain aware of any sketch of thought, of unexploited intuition. For example, he will underline a sentence articulated without any development, asking for reactions. This is valid as much for perspectives that appears to draw on the essential than for others that seem, on the contrary, to fall in misunderstanding or inappropriateness, thus hoping to provoke some reactions.

A modality specific to this exercise is the production, by the student, of a unique sentence destined to summarize the essence of the text. What is even easier, the student can be asked to determine what is the most important or the most significant sentence of the text. These requirements will invite the student to distinguish between ideas and to hierarchically structure his own thought, to separate the primordial from the accessory. These different sentences, accompanied by a quotation or by a brief argument in support, will be written on the board and compared amongst themselves, debated, so as to identify the multiple issues of interpretation, in the same way as for the “Mutual questioning”.

Another important exercise to suggest: the teacher will ask the students if they consider themselves to be in agreement or not with the text, to help them conceive of their own position and to justify it. In the case where there is a disagreement, the participant will have to imagine what the author of the text might have answered to his objection. This shuttle between the author and his reader takes the text out of its objective and untouchable frame, allowing for both a personal appropriation of the issues at play and for a certain distance from oneself.

It is to be noted that this kind of method might generate a certain anxiety in the student, used to provide readymade answers and 'official' text explanations, devoid of ambiguity or contradictions. One will have to maintain the tension thus generated, while still encouraging the students to trust in their own individual intellectual capacities. In a certain way, this situation reflects reality better than a magisterial class. It is closer to the exam context and to life in general, since nothing is ever given in advance.

### 3.5 The "truth" of the text

The teacher will be surprised – if he is patient enough – to see that many wrong ways will self-rectify their trajectory on their own, by team work. These rectifications are far more gratifying than if the teacher had produced them by himself, using his mastery and authority. It goes without saying that these wanderings of the discussion will be intellectually more stimulating for him than if he had been constrained to directly develop his own ideas on the question. He will witness how the studied text takes on a

new life, since each reading session on a same text will be unique and vivifying: the most brilliant of monologue will never match the rich and productive aspect of multiplicity and exchange. For the same reason, to develop such a practice, he will have to make use of his creativity and quiz the extent of his own understanding of the text. This might generate in him a certain feeling of anxiety, but it will also bring about great moments of joy if his insecurity, linked with the inherent risk of the enterprise, is sufficiently assumed.

In any case, he does not let go of his teacher's position, in the traditional sense of the term, since at the time of the conclusion, or preferably in another class situation, he will find the opportunity to rectify a certain number of points that he finds essential to the proper understanding of the studied text. If necessary, he will then produce a kind of brief analysis of the crucial moments of the work done, unveiling methodological and thematic issues, developments that, for the listener, will unfold in an atmosphere much more conducive to listening and appropriation. In one way, the teacher will have grasps more precisely the nature of the difficulties that the studied text raised for its readers. In another way, listener will be more prone to listen to his ideas, so far as they will have established a more personal and substantial link with the text, and thus will feel part and parcel of the ongoing debate. Regarding the context, the one of the author, of the era, of the type of text, maybe will it have been mentioned already by the teacher in the course of the discussion, maybe some more prepared students will have talked about it, but whatever, the teacher can decide to introduce a certain amount of information about it in

the end of the session. This information will put the text into perspective and help to conclude this reading-reflection session.

## WORK ON CINDERELLA

*Moral of the story:*

## HYPOTHESIS

1. To be happy, we must find someone who loves us.  
Cinderella became happy when she found her loving prince.
2. When we are alone we do not know how to solve problems.  
Cinderella is troubled till her godmother comes to help her.
3. If we are patient enough, problems will solve themselves.  
Cinderella finally became happy while at the beginning she was not.

## ISSUES



How do we become happy? Because someone loves us, because someone helps us, or because we are patient? In the two first cases, it depends on others, in the third one, it depends on us. In the first case, we are linked to the other through emotions, in the second through usefulness.

## **SUMMARY**

“Work on text” is a collective exercise consisting in digging together into a given text by suggesting reading hypothesis, by justifying them, by developing them or modifying them through relevant interrogations, and by comparing the various answers to extract from them the fundamental issues at play.

The work to be done lies on the following points: to deepen a question, to produce ideas, to articulate them precisely and clearly, to produce subsidiary questions and to answer them, to listen to others, to guaranty the presence of a logical or conceptual link between ideas, to synthetize or to analyze the overall work accomplished.

## **ADDITIONAL EXERCISES**

In guise of preliminaries, two short exercises can be suggested.

- After the reading of the text, each student must write down a sentence that captures the principal idea of the text and two other sentences that acknowledge two subsidiary ideas, always justifying his choices.
- For a given reading hypothesis, each student writes down three different questions or objections. These various propositions are then compared and discussed orally.

A written exercise, more complete, can be suggested as a sort of initiation or complement to this type of workshop. After the reading, each student will briefly give an answer, on a flying sheet to the following question: "What is the main idea of the text?" He will quote a specific extract of the text to support his claim. Everyone will then pass on his sheet to his neighbor who will question the suggested answer. The student takes back his sheet and answers the question. A second neighbor asks a new question on the initial answer. The student answers anew. The whole process is repeated a third time. Every student is invited to analyze the results of his exchanges on his initial answer: did his idea change? Was it specified further? What is the nature of that change? Are the answers and questions corresponding? Is the subject discussed? A full discussion ensues in order to analyze some copies, or the teacher can produce an analysis of some copies by himself.

Other written or oral exercise: each student writes down a reading hypothesis, with proper references in support. A round table is done where

everyone reads his answer. Everyone must ask a written question to a colleague that he chooses himself. Work on the questions and answers is then done orally, one student at a time. Or, everyone is invited to choose two thesis that distinguish themselves or that appear to be opposite to one another, to analyze their issues.

In these different cases, the teacher can choose to focus on a specific aspect of the work done. To use the written format has an advantage: everyone must be invested from the outset and, thus, the teacher does not have to wait that a courageous hand is raised.

## 4. THE NARRATIVE EXERCISE

In school work, in reflection, the example often has an uncertain status. Often absent, underestimated or misused, in the end we do not even know if it is superfluous or not, if it is sufficient by itself, if it is merely decorative or serving a filling purpose, if it explains or proves anything, if it states a problem or illustrates anything. We can always try to break down and to compare the different values of the example, to comment on their respective significance, but for the exercise that we are suggesting the purpose is to invite the participant to take part in the work on the example through a specific process of discussion and analysis that will force him to reflect on its enunciation, its choice, its use and its meaning.

### 4.1 Initial unfolding

In the same way as for a more classical discussion, one must first choose and articulate a subject, in the form of a question, of a statement or of a simple theme, a choice that will be made by the moderator or by the participants, according to the needs, - using a list of propositions and a vote – before or after the workshop. This also involves determining if the participants can or must prepare their intervention before coming to the session or if it is enough to simply improvise on the spot. A working time can be usefully dedicated solely to the writing of such an example. This exercise will require a good amount of time that could be spread on multiple sessions. It is also possible to focus only on some aspects of the work.

Once the subject has been chosen, all participants will be invited to produce a narration illustrating the subject. All in all, the narration must relate a particular event. For different reasons, the example will always present itself under the guise of a specific case. The main advantage of this rule will become clearer later on, but for now let's say that it allows, amongst other things, to question the coherence and the legitimacy of the case in its sequential and conceptual frame. A simple way to present this requirement is to say that the narration must be able to begin by such traditional terms as "once upon a time" or "by a sunny summer afternoon..."

For example, the narration will discuss an event lived by the narrator, or by a third person known directly or indirectly, or a fiction drawn out of a book or movie, or again on circumstances purely imagined by the author. In fact, the narrator will not have to state the origin of his story, which can be a mix of reality and fiction. He will fully assume its terms, no one being entitled to object external facts or other versions of the story, in the case where that story would be already known. In the same way, let's specify that in this part of the exercise, no objection can be raised regarding the content, be it to state that something is out of context, or to state approbation, disapprobation or even incoherence. The only two legitimate objections, those that are generally done here, regard the narrative status of what is being told as well as the presence of commentaries. These common objections show two difficulties on which work is to be done: first, to think the singular rather than the general; second, to relate the event separated, as much as possible, from its explanation and conclusion. These arbitrary requirements allow the participants to become aware of the

nature of their discourse and to voluntarily determine the flow of their speech.

A fear frequently expressed regarding this exercise consists in casting doubt on the capacity of the group to generate multiple narrative examples. This doubt arises both from the mediator and the participants. Empirically, let's say that on a subject of general interest, any given group will unavoidably manage to produce a certain amount of narrations. Of course, as always with this kind of exercise, one must be patient, de-dramatize the whole event, believe in the creative capacity of the human being and do not necessarily expect unbelievable and fabulous things to happen. One could be surprised by the work accomplished with the help of a simple story of four to five sentences.

## 4.2 The choice of narration

A list of five to ten stories will be established, all designated by a title written on the board, or even accompanied by a short summary. The class will have to decide on which one is the best suited to the subject discussed, the one that highlights it in the best possible way. A discussion will follow where everyone – or some of the participants, depending on the size of the class and the time allowed – will express his preferences and the reasons that motivated them. Two or three narrations will be chosen if they seem equivalent, or if they seem to criticize other narrations that do not fit. It is important to specify again that the primary selection criteria have nothing to do with the originality of neither the content, nor the quality of its narrative,

nor its implicit conclusion, nor its charm, nor its dimension of truth, but primarily its relation to the content. The arguments of choice and exclusion will mainly focus on the capacity of the narration in question to highlight the studied subject, on the meaning that it generates, rather than on its esthetic criteria. Unless, there again, it is decided to give another direction to the workshop.

Participants will be tempted to choose the story that appears to be the prettiest, the one whose spirit suits them or the one that speaks to them the most. The difficulty will be to take on the student to the level of the meta-narrative, something which will create various problems, varying according to age groups, problems that will have to be identified and examined, taking the time necessary, throughout the exercises. The requirement is here to emerge out of the immediate sensitivity to enter into the domain of comprehension and conceptualization. At the end of this roundtable, a vote will be held to determine the story which better fits the studied subject. This part of the exercise will have allow for a work to be done on the relation between the example and the subject, showing the difficulty to think about the conceptual issues of a narration, the meta-narration.

### **4.3 Study of the narration**

Once the narration has been selected, its author will have to tell it again to refresh everyone's mind about its main constituents. After that, participants will be invited to question the narrator, exclusively on factual details. In this

part, the “jury” plays an important role, consisting in constantly evaluating the nature of questions and answers. Any possible transgression must be signaled, and rejections must be argued over and submitted to the approbation of the group. Here, what matters is to distinguish what is factual from what is a mere opinion or judgment, to distinguish what is a legitimate precision from what necessarily implies an important change of data, to distinguish what represents an answer from what evades the answer, to distinguish what solely tries to precisely answer the question from what tries to bring about new elements. Here again, disagreement will be settled through vote, by the majority, after at least some minimal debate. The main difficulty rests in the fact that the author is responsible for his story, that he arbitrarily chooses its terms, and that it is sometimes difficult to discern between the factual and the imperative. On this topic, after arguing, the momentary power of the group regarding the acceptance or rejection of a speech will have to be accepted. Not because the group, as such, has access to some kind of infallible truth, but because the issue of a discussion consists in limiting the arbitrary without pretending to be able to eliminate it.

Once the discussion on factual elements has ended, from the fading out of questions or from the interruption of the moderator, the analytical part will begin. Speech first belongs to the author of the story, who will analyze its issues, its conclusion and the relationship to the overall studied subject: what does that story tell us about the subject studied? Once his analysis is over, other participants are invited to speak. Three types of interventions are possible from then on: first, a question directed to the



author of the analysis or a reading hypothesis; second, a new reading hypothesis; third, the formulation of issues between various reading hypothesis, a comparison between two or more ideas.

Before expressing himself, each participant will preferably, if possible, declare the nature of his intervention: question, hypothesis (idea), issues (comparison). The requirement of a declaration beforehand forces the participant to be conscious of the discourse that he will hold, something which is not always obvious. This subscription avoids, amongst other things, a thought which expresses itself without necessarily determining its purpose, without thinking about its function and, above all, without conceptualizing itself in relation with what has already being said. The monologue, flux of consciousness or associative thought, must here be excluded since the exercise requires thinking collectively, by the means of a dialogue. In this context, the other must always be kept present in the mind and in the discourse; the common discourse, regardless of its multiplicity and its relative fragmentation, is at the center of the reflection, making it compulsory to maintain some kind of a guideline, a permanent requirement to re-center and to focus.

Often, the participant who asks to intervene ignores the reason of his discourse. An idea came to him that he wishes to express, but he does not know yet what do with it. Either he forgets about the rules of the game and he starts to speak without stating the precise nature of his discourse, in which case, if possible, the mediator will interrupt him to request the prerequisite, either he starts by stating a category only to modify it later on

in the course of his discourse, or once it is over, thus realizing that he did not hold on to his commitment. The assembly of participants, naturally, here again plays its function of jury, and objects, if needed, as in the case where the initial declaration has been transgressed. The main difficulty for the participant is to think simultaneously on two levels: the one of the discourse and the one of the meta-discourse, in other words to think his discourse at the same time as thinking the nature and meaning of the discourse, or else to think of its nature and meaning before articulating the discourse. The difficulties encountered will lead the participant to better understand his own intellectual process.

#### **4.4 The issues**

Distinctions between the various kinds of discourses are not purely formal; they incarnate substantial differences in regard to their content and function. We already paused upon hypotheses and questions, let's now examine, for a moment, the nature and the arising of what we call issues.

To distinguish issues between two or more hypotheses represents the most difficult type of intervention, since it is the most abstract one, the most complex: it requires thinking at least two ideas at a time. It represents the meta-discourse per excellence, since the precise nature of the opposition or of the relation between two hypotheses must be determined, in what they contain as the most fundamental in terms of their substance. For example, one tries to signal in suitable terms the opposition between presupposed objective elements or subjective ones, egocentric or altruistic

ones, materialistic or idealistic ones, metaphysical or political ones, between various visions of mankind or of society, often referring back to the great antinomies of philosophy. Trying to identify these presuppositions trains the participants in discerning the implicit discourse, the non-said of an analysis, by foreseeing how such and such discourse naturally comes out of such and such presupposition, a presupposition often ignored by those who carry it.

The first one to try this analysis of issues is the one who just expressed a new hypothesis, purposefully new and different: if it is not already done, he will be invited to identify the supposed difference between his discourse and the previous one(s). Most of the time he won't immediately succeed, in which case the moderator moves on to another intervention. It is often others, the observers, who most successfully accomplish the task, for the good reason that the one who expresses his difference is trapped in the immediacy of his discourse, by the conviction and the feeling of evidence that pervades him, and he is not used to identify his own intellectual presuppositions. The level of thought and of expression required can also be called, for pedagogical reasons, "the first floor", in opposition to the "ground floor" of the opinion and of the common analysis. One must indeed go to the source of the intellectual matrix, enter an anagogical process that allows one to identify the structural schemes, in order to perceive a kind of 'space of phase' of the individual spirit.

Sometimes, in a first exercise, according to the group, it won't really be possible to generate a genuine identification of issues. The mediator

can then decide to do it by himself in guise of a conclusion, without, of course, definitely dictating the comparative validity of the presuppositions, which would make no sense. Whatever the case, he will have to make sure that the participants were able to realize in which way the various presuppositions differently qualified the narration and its relation to subject to be discussed.

Regardless of the last step (the issues), the main difficulty to which the moderator will pay attention will be the capacity of the participants to follow the various parts of the exercise. Indeed, one must be able, at any time, to move from the narrative discourse to the analytical one, from the question to the statement, from the analysis to the meta-analysis, from the concrete example to the abstract subject, from his own discourse to the one of others and vice versa, and this within two hours, a requirement to follow the game and to focus that some might have difficulties coping with. Also, he should not hesitate to constantly remind the participants about the actual stage of the game. He must keep in mind that it is precisely this flexibility of thought, its awareness and its self-mastery that the participants must develop and learn.

## **EXAMPLES OF NARRATION, ANALYSIS OF ISSUES**

Question:

Do we need to be kind with our friends?

Narrations:

- a. When I was young, I had a friend that I loved very much. But one day I have been punished for a mistake that she had committed, and she did not say anything. I broke our friendship thereafter.

Analysis 1.

We must learn to choose kind friends.

Analysis 2.

We must tell the truth, even if it does not please our friends.

- b. I had a friend, but one day she would talk to me, another day she would tell me: I don't talk to you. I had enough, so I told her that I would not talk to her anymore, for a week. Since then, she is much kinder to me.

Analysis 1.

We should not be too kind to our friends.

Analysis 2.

We must act with our friends as they act with us.

c. I have a friend who always wants help in class, even when it is not allowed. But when he asks me for help I don't manage to tell him that we should not do it. Therefore, he is still my friend, but I do not sit with him anymore.

Analysis 1.

We must be kind with our friend, but not always.

Analysis 2.

A real friend should not always ask for something: it is not nice.

Issues:

If we want to be kind, do we have to be totally nice? Do we have to do like our friends? Do we need to learn how to choose our friends before being nice with them?

## SUMMARY

The "Narrative exercise" is a collective exercise consisting in digging together into a given question by giving specific examples to be analyzed in order to provide answers, in the form of hypothesis, by developing them or modifying them through relevant interrogations, and by comparing the various answers to extract from them the fundamental issues at play.

The work to be done lies on the following points: to deepen a question by giving examples, to analyze these examples, to produce ideas, to articulate them precisely and clearly, to produce subsidiary questions and to answer them, to listen to others, to guaranty the presence of a logical or conceptual link between ideas, to synthetize or to analyze the overall work accomplished.

## ADDITIONAL EXERCISES

In guise of preliminaries, two short exercises can be suggested.

- After the reading of the text, each student must write down an example and give two possible analyses of this example.
- For a given example, each student writes down two different possible analyses. These various propositions are then compared and discussed orally. A written exercise, more complete, can be suggested as a sort of initiation or complement to this type of workshop. After the reading, each student will briefly give an answer, on a flying sheet to the following question: "What is the main idea of the text?" He will quote a specific extract of the text to support his claim. Everyone will then pass on his sheet to his neighbor who will question the suggested answer. The student takes back his sheet

and answers the question. A second neighbor asks a new question on the initial answer. The student answers anew.

The whole process is repeated a third time. Every student is invited to analyze the results of his exchanges on his initial answer: did his idea change? Was it précised further? What is the nature of that change? Are the answers and questions corresponding? Is the subject discussed? A full discussion ensues in order to analyze some copies, or the teacher can produce an analysis of some copies by himself.

Other written or oral exercise: each student writes down an example to illustrate the original question. It can be a real or fictitious example. A round table is done where everyone reads his answer. Everyone must ask a written question to a colleague that he chooses himself. Work on the questions and answers is then done orally, one student at a time. Or, everyone is invited to choose two examples that appear to be opposite to one another, to analyze their issues.

In these different cases, the teacher can choose to focus on a specific aspect of the work done. To use the written format has an advantage: everyone must be invested from the outset and, thus, the teacher does not have to wait that a courageous hand is raised.



## 5. VARIATIONS

### 5.1 Exercise on the characters

For the youngest ones (kindergarten, Class One, Class Two) who still have difficulty to conceptualize the whole of a text, it is possible to begin with a conceptualization exercise focusing on the characters. For this purpose, it is possible to tell them a story or to project a movie, and to ask them to choose a character, either because it is their favorite, or because they do not like him. This rule asks from the students that they make use of their reasoning and that they involve themselves existentially. On a second stage, or in the course of the process, they will justify their choice. This justification can take different forms. The most immediate one for the children consists in relating narrative elements that marked them. They will have a tendency to say “and so, and so, and so...” This should be limited by asking them to choose a specific element or to articulate a synthetic thought. Thus, instead of telling all of what the hero has done, either they will say that he won over the dragon, a specific element that requires a choice to be made concerning a specific part of the text, either that he saved the life of the princess, a synthesis that summarizes the adventure.

At this point, some children might already have formulated a judgment qualifying one of the characters: they prefer the princess because she is pretty, the prince because he is courageous, the clown because he is funny, or they will not like the witch because she is mean. If, for example,

they say that they don't like the witch because she scares them, they will be invited to determine why she scares them, in order to avoid being stuck on a simple impression produced by the character. They will have to qualify the character, to think about and to conceptualize him. However, once this qualification is done, it is useful to quote a passage of the narration or a synthetic summary that justifies the qualification: the prince is courageous because he fought against the dragon; the witch is mean because she wants to kill the innocent princess. Those who can read can also point out where, in the text, the passage that they have used is to be found. For the children who remained with a passage to be quoted, they will have to produce an appropriate qualification for their chosen character, corresponding to the narrative element that they have mentioned. They might find it difficult to produce such a qualification. In this case, like in similar exercises, they will ask for help after having tried in vain to formulate their idea. However, in order to move beyond this call for help, which is rather passive but however very important, the student will listen to the suggestions of his colleagues and will have to choose the one that appears the most relevant to him.

Within these different options, any chosen term will be subjected to debate. The teacher could ask, for example, if anyone is opposed to the suggested term. Any student can thereafter try to explain what is wrong with the selected term, or suggest another one. A vote from the class can be called for in order to see where the different students are at and to confront the author of the concept to his colleagues.

This vote can have the role of a sanction or of a simple consultation, depending on the mode of functioning preferred by the teacher. The consultative role appears to us to be the best one, in order for the student to learn to assume his own thought, even if alone against all. In any case, if there is a 'mistake', it will generally solve itself, if not on the spot then in the course of the process. If there is any kind of dissension, the most important will be to host a debate which will deepen the general understanding of the story and of its issues. Through this process, by times, students might come to realize that multiple readings are possible; something that already initiates them in the art of problematisation. Thus, the hero who uses tricks to reach his ends could be consecutively labeled as a liar or as crafty. This apparent paradox, offering simultaneously positive and negative visions of the same character, requires a moment of reflection that might very well instigate fruitful exchanges. For this to happen, the teacher will have to insist on the provocative aspects of the observation, in order for everyone to benefit from and to work on the issue.

Thus, through such work on characters, by both summarizing their role and by qualifying them, each child will bring his contribution to the overall understanding of the story. A schema could be traced on the board to summarize all the comments. If characters have been forgotten, especially if they are relevant to the story, the teacher will ask the group to undertake a similar work on them as was done previously on others.

## 5.2 List of words (difficult class)

A difficulty raised by the exercise, as we have seen, lies on the fact that speech is controlled and that it is not sufficient to simply mention whatever passes through the head, since what needs to be done is building, deepening, arguing and so on... If some students have difficulties controlling their speech, this can easily be solved, to the extent where their colleagues will serve as regulators and will come to their help, the second leading the first ones in the philosophical enterprise. But if an entire class or the majority of it has difficulty with the requirements, a difficulty that is manifested through a certain commotion, slightly discouraging for the teacher, there is a particular technique, progressive in nature, which might prove useful. Instead of starting with formal requirements which ask for completed ideas and constrain expression, the teacher will ask the students to produce simple words on the subject, of which he will write the list on the board without further commentary. The teacher will however have the possibility to question a student on the relevance of his word for the subject. Or, again, another student will be allowed to raise an objection or a question of comprehension, without necessarily insisting heavily on the analytical dimension. This first period consists in a moment of “discharge” where everyone will have the possibility to participate and to contribute to the debate, to express what is on his mind, since what is required is simply to mobilize words that take no time to speak out or to write and that are easy to formulate.

After this first time, that can take up to half of the session allowed for the exercise, comes the actual work on words, supported by the list on the board, which constitutes the written mark of what has been done so far.

The task will be to uncover words or couples of words having a potential for contradiction, or words which are redundant because they are repeating the same idea, or else, words that appear out of topic. For everyone, this analytical phase consists in rethinking the words given in their relation with the subject and in their relation with each other. This involves a rethinking of the terms, in order to conceptualize and to problematize them, since different and even opposite words will be given for the same subject.

Each time an issue will be raised by a student, a short debate will follow, the purpose of which will be to dig further into and to articulate a short problematic. It can sometimes be ended through vote, for the class to decide when it must be determined if a unique solution is out of topic.

Moving along with the exercise, the list of words will be reduced, redundant and out of topic words being eliminated, and couples and groups of words will be identified that will structure the overall commentaries on the text.

### 5.3 Quotations from texts (difficult class)

It is sometimes difficult for a student to produce a sentence that summarizes the idea of a text or that gives its moral. There is another way to proceed, making the task of students easier, which consists in choosing a sentence in a given text according to the following instruction: "What is the sentence that should be chosen to capture the main idea of the text?" The student must recopy the sentence or encircle it on a stencil, and try (or

not) to write down a justification for his choice: a few words or a simple sentence will justify his choice, depending on the thoroughness expected by the teacher. It is suggested that the teacher walks between the ranks of students, in class, to verify what everyone is writing, so that when the other part of the exercise begins, everyone dully followed the initial rule.

Thereafter, different modes of decision will be used to determine the sentences to be studied, since in a single session, all the various selections cannot all be worked upon. If one desires to proceed at random, sentences or names of the students will be put in a box and pull out randomly. The selected sentence will be put on the board. If a justification has been written, it will also go on the board. Otherwise, the student who will have selected the sentence will be invited to produce one, or to ask for help if he can't make it on his own. He will have the possibility to accept or to reject what will be suggested by his colleagues.

Once the sentence and the justification written down, a first discussion will ensue, within a predetermined time, regarding the choice and its justification. However, to avoid the discussion going in every direction, the student will always have to precise the nature of his intervention: is it to support or to criticize the choice, or is it to support or to criticize the justification. Any other parallel or secondary consideration, not immediately concerning the subject, will be rejected, unless a way to establish a link is being found. Let's not forget that the purpose here is not simply to have good ideas, but to build one's thought. To conclude this determined moment, the student whose proposition has been studied will

be allowed to say if he wants to modify or not anything that has been written so far. The final proposition can also be vetoed by the class, if desired.

Then a second proposition will be chosen to be both analyzed and compared with the previous one. A discussion will begin again, to deepen the content of the sentence, of the justification, the relation with the text, etc. It will be asked from the students to compare the respective validity of the two sentences in the face of the whole text, and a choice could be required. The choice might sometimes be used only for the purpose of instigating playful issues, but sometimes it can be opposed to the problematisation work. As always, here, the skills of the teacher will be solicited.

At the end of a session, three or four propositions will have been studied, which will suffice to deepen the text and extract its core issues. Nothing forbids one to pursue the work during a later session if need be. But it should not be forgotten that it is not so much the text that is at the center of the activity, but the ability of the students to formulate, analyze, problematize, etc. The exercise could end on a personal analysis of the text written by students.

## 5.4 Art work

For various reasons, a teacher can decide to work with other kind of supports than texts or narratives: for the sake of diversity, for personal

sensitivity, for an artistic class project, etc. The art work, or any simple object, can be used to initiate reflection. However, it is recommended to use at least two objects, since comparison generally makes analysis easier, although this is no absolute rule. As always, it is recommended to try multiple procedures and to periodically modify the rules.

To help the work process and to motivate the student's participation, he will be asked to choose one of the two art work that he prefers and to justify his preference. The initial impulse will be to say "Because I like it more", "Because it is prettier" and other such general commentaries lacking in substance. But quickly, seeing the repetition of such type of sentences, and because some colleagues will have given more relevant comments, the majority of the students will risk giving longer and more precise reflections. They will then try to develop esthetic appreciations, on forms, colors, harmony, etc., on the description of the content, and then on the meaning of the art work, its nature and intention. It should not be a surprise if some art works remain somewhat hermetic to the students, and the teacher will empirically learn to foresee what speaks to the students and what speaks less; a principle that is not less valid for texts. On this subject, he could try to analyze the art works himself before bringing them to class. In the same way, he could by time give some analysis example of his own, to initiate students to this kind of exercise, especially if they are not learned in this domain. However he must distinguish these moments of explanation from moments of discussion, although nothing prevents him from analyzing the art works that students will have worked on his own, in a second time.



Like for textual work or for a general question, it is important to take the various analyses one by one, so that everyone can take his time to understand them, to analyze them, to criticize them. Depending on the context, students will write down or not their choice and its justification. A first choice, justified, can be written on the board, followed by a debate. The author of the choice can, in guise of a conclusion, modify his analysis or not. We will then move on to another analysis, commented by the class. Various analyses can be compared.

Another kind of work can consist in the analysis of the criteria being used, so as to highlight and conceptualize them. The teacher can ask, in the end, what the author wanted to express through his work, to synthesize the overall work that has been done. Various propositions will be written on the board and be discussed, or chosen by a vote from the class. Critics could also be formulated regarding the realization of the work of art and its equation with the intension attributed to the artist.

## **5.5 Motivation of students**

### **(Autonomy and students who do not speak)**

After a certain amount of practice, some months for example, it is useful and interesting to suggest a student motivational activity, even in early school years. This activity can be done with the full class or in smaller groups. It is also possible, for smaller classes, to invite older students to animate discussions, a productive experience for everyone.

The interest of this modality is multiple. On one part, it allows to evaluate the assimilation of the tools and of the procedures by the students. Second, it stimulates the development of autonomy. Third, it facilitates speech, particularly for the students who are easily intimidated by authority and professorial competence. Fourth, the scattering in smaller groups makes work easier in difficult groups where work implicating the whole group tends to turn into chaos, particularly because it necessitates too much patience on the part of the students. However, these specific goals must be kept in mind, since the first reaction of the teacher, before the mumbling, awkwardness and hesitation of the designated responsible students, will be to intervene in order to rectify, to precise, to induce and to modify. This should not be forbidden but a minimal amount of time should be allowed for the students to experiment and structure their functioning. For this reason, as much as possible, it is often better to refrain from any intervention. It is clear that thoroughness and formal requirements won't be at the same level as with the teacher, but the exercise won't be less difficult and demanding for the students, for other reasons.

For the bigger classes, we can also set up a division of work, between the moderators for example, secretaries, questioners, or other functions, be it in the entire class or in groups. We always deem useful, in order to avoid the scattering of the discourse, to use the board, where will be articulated the main propositions which structure the discussion. But the role of the board, within smaller groups, can be replaced by a session secretary who will take notes on a sheet of paper, preferably visible for all.

Otherwise, it is also possible in a more informal manner, to solely work orally, in a first stage at least.

Maybe will it be necessary to define minimal procedures, so that moderators can better fit in their tasks. But the difficulty will likely lie on the acceptance, by all, of the responsible role assume by one of their peers. Temptation will be great to break the rules. So, in order for the group to function properly, it will be important to explain the pact of trust that binds everyone. Moderators will be selected alternatively, even if some are clearly better than others. This will help to avoid the feeling of arbitrariness and of injustice, always present among the group. This spinning carousel is as crucial in class group, where the pressure on the moderator, due to the number of students, is even greater, and the later might easily feel lost. There should be no qualm in having students taking on the role of moderator in turn, even if only for ten minutes. The experience of taking a group in charge is important. It helps the student to not be stuck on his own ideas.

## 5.6 The dispute

This exercise, more academic and classic, is an adaption on the traditional dispute which became popular in the Middle-Ages. On a given question, a few students will prepare a short text in guise of an answer. Maybe they will have had the possibility, if they are older, to conduct some research within documents provided or accessible to them. Maybe they will have had receive the instructions to defend two opposite thesis, some answering the

question positively, others negatively. Once the presentation is read in front of the class, everyone is invited to ask questions, to which the 'lecturers' will have to answer. A jury of three students could be set up to determine, each time, if yes, the question has been answered, or again the class can vote, learning overall to not confuse this requirement with the fact of 'agreeing' with the answer. This sequence can be relatively short, about ten minutes, a length of time determined by the teacher according to his appreciation of the session. Other students who have prepared an answer can then replace the previous ones.

Different conclusions can also be introduced: either synthesis or analysis of debates can be asked, or a simple appreciative comment, or the choice of an orator for the quality of his work, always justifying any choice.

## **5.7 Stating what we will speak about**

Often, when the student speaks, – a remark also valid for the adult – he does not really know where he is going nor what he is doing: he ignores the nature and function of his speech. Both before he pronounces his speech and often even after. The call to consciousness, knowing what we say, knowing what we do, contributes to the philosophical injunction. If it is possible to ask for a justification of the discourse a posteriori, – a work of argumentation – or to consider alternative perspectives, – a work of problematisation – or again to define terms, - a work of conceptualization – there are other ways to deepen the discourse. What we are trying to call for

here, knowing what we say, can be defined as a work on consciousness, or a meta-discussion.

The rule is simple: a subject is thrown, any student can say whatever he wants to, but before he says it, he must state what he is going to say. He must define what he will say, the function of his speech and the relation with what has already been said. The most simple and common samples that we can give are the following: “I will answer the question”, “I will ask a question”, “I will give an example”, “I will make an objection”, “I want to show a contradiction”, etc. However, if these sentences are simple to pronounce, in a manner that might be surprising, they are difficult to bring together, because it is difficult to both want to say something and to know the function of what we are going to say. Often, ideas are coming “on their own”, we do not voluntarily determine their apparition; this is what we commonly call, today, to rebound. Also, in our exercise, in order to work on thought, we must state what we will say, before we say it, or maybe after, with the help of others, if we can't identify the nature of our discourse on our own.

As for our other exercises, once the discourse is pronounced, a verification of what had been announced will be asked: “Is it really a question?”, “Was it really an example for the expressed idea?”, etc. Precisions can be asked for, by the teacher or by the class, to know precisely on what lies the objection between two propositions, for example, particularly when it is not precise enough, or when the proposition seems to not be corresponding. The same will happen when someone will pretend to

explain another idea: did he explain it; is it a very particular interpretation, or even a misinterpretation? Comments can be made and a debate instigated which can be concluded by a vote from the class, or through any other process.

One of the most important aspect of the exercise, from the point of view of the building of thought, is that all new idea must be linked to what already exists. It could be said: "This idea has nothing to do with the rest". Either the idea already has a relation with what has been said, a link that will have to be established before or after the enunciation, or it will be cancelled after its enunciation. But most of the time, unless being patently out of topic, the task will be to discover and to establish the link, generally present. Another strong temptation, to avoid the requirement of the exercise, is to mention another 'mysterious' category of thought: called 'other'. But in general, with the exception of some occasional surprises, we will generally fall back on the same categories: example, question, objection, answer, explanation, etc.

## 6.THE USE OF THE WRITTEN FORMAT

For various reasons of practical order, pedagogical or other, the oral generally stays the primary mode of the philosophical workshop, but this does not necessarily have to be the case. There are also various reasons why the written format might be used, and we will try here to name a few. We will discuss, one by one, the written format as a preparation to orality, like a pursuit of orality, like a written trace with the promise of continuity, or like a work in itself. But whatever it may be, the spirit of the discussion, as we have described it before, like the elaboration and the confrontation of a thought, always preside in the same way to the procedures that we describe. To us, this precision appears to be even more important when noting how a hiatus exists between an orality perceived as free and almost effortless, and a written format perceived as constraining and formal. For this reason, the former one is often valued less than the latter. To work on the written format in the context which we are describing helps both to de-dramatize the written and to encourage the student to seriously consider his own thought.

### 6.1 Oral preparation

It can be desirable to use the written format in order to prepare for the oral work. The most common reason is the unsurpassable difficulty of some students, who struggle to find ideas and words on the spot, as they produce their discourse, to express themselves spontaneously. It can then be useful, once the question raised and the rules given, to allow for a short

period of time where everyone can prepare according to his own rhythm, on a sheet of paper, his ideas, questions or answers, even if only a single sentence. This will also allow the teacher to go from table to table, to better explain the task at hand to those who might not have understood it well; to help in articulating a thought that is looking for itself; to ask a new articulation or a complement for a draft or an unfinished idea. Of course this could be done in the course of the discussion, but the advantage of the written format here is that everyone can do it for himself, simultaneously with the whole group. Thus, when the moment comes to put an idea forward on the subject discussed, no one is taken by surprise: every student as an idea ready.

This is valid at the beginning of the exercise just as it is in the course of the discussion. Suppose that a student raises a real problem, with a question or an objection, and that the teacher wishes that everyone takes the risk to discuss the problem. He can thus interrupt the oral work for a few minutes to allow everyone to meditate on the issue and try to clarify it by writing down two or three lines. Then, in order to re-launch the discussion, he will ask some students to read their comment aloud, maybe by choosing those who tend to talk less, or students who struggle more, or that are more shy, or those who did not talk yet on that day, in order to involve them in the process. Or, when it comes to suggest a new hypothesis to answer the general question, he can in the same way impose a moment of writing.

This irruption of the written format has the advantage of reengaging all of those who do not really participate to the discussion, either because



they could not follow or by lack of interest. As we said already, it is not obvious for all the students to find themselves in a discussion where around thirty other students express themselves theoretically. Moreover, in a class where this concentration difficulty is recurrent issue, together with the disciplinary problems that naturally come along, the written format can become an inevitable component of the work. For, it is sometimes easier to maintain a relative calm in the class with a written work than with a discussion, even if, of course, this calm can be fake and deceiving.

There is another modality of the written work: the preparation of small texts, miniature exposés, which will serve to launch the discussion, in the case where the latter is conceived as such. A full work session could be dedicated to this composition. In whatever way the work will later on be done, it might be interesting to ask all the students, or by forming smaller groups, to present to the class the fruit of a short written reflection. Either to confront one of these reflections or to compare it to one or some others, like we described it in the various oral practices. (See the thesis confrontation)

## 6.2 Follow up on discussion

In this perspective, the oral work has a “propedeutic” nature. It opens ways of thinking, elaborates hypothesis and initiates an analytical work which will conclude in a written production, to serve as the achievement of a thought process. The composition rules can be diverse. A first one consists in asking the students to summarize the whole of the discussion, to evaluate

the extent to which they have understood its issues. This forces them to rethink the whole of the discussion, to conceptualize its terms and to precise it's problematic further. For example, they must answer the initial question by using the work that has been done so far. In a more general way, this forces them to rethink the process and the elaboration of the reflection, something that will be beneficial in later sessions.

It is also possible to extend this kind of synthesis by asking the students to add a hypothesis of their own and to compare it with those that have developed orally. Or else, they can analyze the oral work on the level of its form and content. The articulation of rules is a sensitive matter. The point is to convey the students to a meta-reflection, something which is not always easy. The teacher will have to try several approaches, and determine empirically what works out well, adapting himself to the capacities of the students. To make this task easier, the simplest way is to ask the students if they liked the discussion and why, or to mention what they remembered. It can be a particular idea or another, but the student should not be repeating what has already been said: he must give an explanation of his own. The tendency will be strong either to repeat or to tell generalities like: "because it is good." There is no need to be surprised by this kind of answers or by the difficulties to get pass them. The simple fact of asking this from the student, so that he reflects on his appreciation of the workshop, is a work in itself. In certain case, as an exercise, students can be asked, once the board has been erased, if there is a specific idea that they remember and liked, or a moment of the debate that marked them. In spite of anything else, this helps to rethink the discussion and to

value the discourse of the students who will be quoted, something which is always motivating and fruitful for the class.

### 6.3 Philosophical notebook

The principal of the philosophical notebook is to serve as a guideline throughout the year, as it is done in other subjects. It helps the student to keep track, the teacher to follow individual work and even the parents interested in the work of their children. It can be conceived as a class notebook or as an individual one.

Content will vary according to the project. If it is a class notebook, it will contain discussion reports, established by the teacher or the students. Nothing forbids those who would like to open it to add comments on the daily debate. The teacher could write content elements in it, but also tools that have been used. Let's say that, for example, the notions of "contrary" or of "example" appeared, he can highlight them and even come back on them as references later on, in one way or another. On this point, the fact that students produced these concepts makes them more concrete and makes their appropriation easier.

If it is an individual notebook, possibilities are many. Either the students are all invited to review important elements of the daily discussion. Either they will write down their ideas, in particular those that they must compose in the short writing moments. Else again they will write their appreciation of the workshop, the ideas that interested them, the particular

observations on this or that strong moment of the discussion, or even important ideas that they feel have been omitted. In the event where discussions sometimes suffer from a certain scattering and that it is not easy to follow the progression of the students, this notebook will provide some coherence to the work, making it more visible and substantial, since the multiple sessions can be drawn closer and compared to one another.

## 6.4 The written workshop

Most of the workshops that we have described can be done in a written format, with appropriate modifications. There are many reasons why a teacher might prefer to proceed that way, regularly or from time to time, like we said already. On one side, because writing is an important mode of expression. Then, because it allows one to linger on a thought, to rework its articulation, something that is more suitable for some children. Third, for some classes that are more dissipated, it is a skillful mean to more easily bring about some focus. Fourth, it allows the competencies of the students in philosophical practice to be evaluated. But there is also another reason that is no less important: the teacher himself. For, teachers do not all feel comfortable in mentoring discussions. It requires various skills, some of which they might not feel personally confident with. Although the written format will never replace orality, work on the thought process can nevertheless be done in a written way. Nevertheless, as will be empirically observed, certain problems will be more difficult to approach in a written way, simply because the teacher cannot be with everyone at the same time.

In guise of an example of transposition, we will describe a possible adaptation of the “mutual questioning” in the written format.

Let’s take a general question of the same type as those used in the oral work. Ask each student to write down a written answer, brief, of a sentence or two. He can try a first draft in a scrapbook, but his answer will later on be written down clearly, in a readable manner, on a simple copy with his name on the top of the page. Thereafter, he will trade his copy with his neighbor. He reads the latter and asks him a written question while his neighbor does exactly the same. Then everyone takes back his copy and answers the question. Again, students exchange their copy with a different neighbor who will ask a question to which an answer will be given. (It would have been possible to renew the exchange with the initial neighbor in order to pursue and deepen the first couple of question and answer, and even to comment on the exchange.) A last exchange is done with a third neighbor. At this stage, each student will have three questions on his copy, accompanied by three of his own answers. Throughout all this time, the teacher will have walked along the ranks of students to observe what is everyone writing down, giving small advices or recommendations regarding the form and the clarity of the redaction. A process that we suggest consists in asking the students to raise their hands when they have a problem, or when they are done, to have a look. But at some point it won’t be possible to go verify everyone, and if almost everyone is over it is time to consider moving on to the next step. Nevertheless, if this first part of the work appears to be a bigger challenge, it is possible to stop there,

especially in the beginning of the year when children are not used to this type of practice.

The last part of the work is the most sensitive, the most arduous one, since, to be efficient, many kinds of rules must be tried out. In brief, the idea is to analyze what happened on the copy, a writing process that will already have taken about thirty to forty-five minutes. A first approach would be to ask each student to reflect on the modifications that they could bring to their initial idea, or a complement, a precision, taking into consideration the questions that have been asked. We can also ask them to comment on the usefulness of the questions that they have been asked, or to analyze their own difficulty in answering them. However, children – just like adults – like to say that they did not change their mind in any way, maybe because it is the easiest way to go. Thus, it can be more productive to ask a neighbor who did not take part in the discussion on a given copy to comment or analyze the work that has been done there. In other words, ask him to conclude on a copy other than his own. But, in the first few sessions, the teacher will benefit from taking two or three copies, which he will read out loud, to ask for comments from the whole class. Maybe, in some occasions, he will comment them himself, avoiding to touch upon the core.

An alternative to this task will be to ask to each student, after the first question and answer exchange has happened, to produce turn by turn two new hypotheses, substantially different from the previous ones, in guise of an answer to the principal question. For each of them he will receive a

question to which he will answer. This alternative leads more directly to a problematisation work. At the end, the student must analyze the whole of his various answers; even maybe choose one that he will justify. Another possibility: instead of question, the neighbor could be invited to give objections, to which an answer will similarly be given.

The last alternative that we suggest consists in producing three answers to the initial question on each copy, coming from three different students. Obviously, any student answering after another one must give an answer that is different from the previous one. If he says that he agrees with what is written, he will be asked to invent a new answer that he can imagine. For the rest, the process of questions and answers can be identical. At the end, a new student can analyze the work done or choose one of the hypotheses, again justifying his choice.

## Chapter IV

### Philosophy in pre-school

Apart from the specific problems raised by pre-school in general, already known to the teacher, we consider, in regard to our philosophical training, that pre-school contains three age groups with very different functioning. In a way that is more determining than in the following five years of primary school, it is clear that between the three sections that follow each other, in the French system of pre-school, we are not in the same figure cases: great differences appear from one year to the next. This is why our analysis will vary in the present section.

#### 1. Little Section (three years old)

From our experience in the 'Little Section', it has often been difficult to establish discussions with the whole class, even with a half class. Students do not feel directly concerned, they do not dare to answer, or they say whatever passes their mind, something that their neighbors will repeat in chorus. However, a more advance discussion exercise is achievable and will find its meaning in smaller groups of few students, obviously with some practical restrictions unavoidable with such exercise. A relatively argued discussion can be initiated, where students listen to each other and answer. However, and this is a study that we did not take enough time to conduct thus far, it is possible that only a minority, at this age, is able to



follow such kind of activity. But it is probably on this disparity, at the very root, that we should work. However, if we want to lead exercises through with bigger groups, there is one that somewhat works out well. It consists principally in choosing with the group a subject of debate: a word, the character of a movie or of a story, etc. What do you want to talk about? Children bring out propositions of their own, more or less argued, and it all ends in a vote.

To choose a subject, to determine that we want to talk about something, to be conscious of this choice and of the direction impulsively given to a discussion, to stay on the subject and not to repeat what others are saying in order to contribute something to the discussion, here is, in brief, around what revolves the requirement when dealing with young children (three years old). These are already consequent requirements, a challenge sometimes hard to face, but a challenge that goes to the heart of philosophizing: to contemplate an idea, to focus on it, to talk about it without wandering in thought, to recognize the presence or absence of a link between ideas, to make judgments... Work on the problematic of the “same and other” is here a crucial anchor.

The exercise last a short amount of time: at the beginning, ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, and later, half an hour. It matters not, especially in a first time, if not all students are involved: the requirement is set, the request is expressed, and everyone will produce an answer at his own rhythm. At the outset, this is a principle of the philosophical exercise valid for all age. “What do we want to talk about?”, ask the teacher. A first

student suggests an idea; then a second one, either by raising the hand, either on the principle of a systematic roundtable. Is the second idea new in relation to the previous one, or is it another one? If it is identical, it is rejected. To verify, we can ask for the author of the first answer to be identified, especially since this will train the children to singularize speech, to listen to everyone. If someone already told the same word: “who is it?” Is the person identified agreeing? Are others agreeing too? Who agrees? Who does not?

Sometimes, interesting problems arise. Example: a first student suggest “animal”; a second, “lion”. “Is it a new idea?” In the absolute, answers matter not, since in a way both are true. If the children were a bit older, the argument would make a difference, but at this age it is not yet discussed. What matters here is to see the problem, which the teacher will repeat on multiple occasions, under different forms if possible, so that the majority can grasp it. “Is a lion an animal?” “Is a lion new in relation to an animal?” “Is a lion different than an animal?” It should be decided through vote. The class must decide, with raised hands. This vote is an exercise in itself, since students will look at each other to vote, having little confidence in themselves, anxious about being alone and of not doing like the others, still being captive of a fusible and reassuring tendency. Some will be tempted to vote two times, for the yes and the no. In a first stage, the exercise will be repeated a few times until a majority of students learn to raise their hand a single time. Let go after a few unsuccessful attempts: children will understand later on.

If the exercise can continue, a list of multiple subjects will be established. Before any new proposition the teacher will recapitulate the list, so that everyone keeps it in mind. Then a vote will be held to choose a single topic. Here, the difficulty of the vote is greater, since it will be asked to vote for an element among four or five others, and not only between yes and no. Once the subject determined, if there is still time, student will be asked if they want to tell something on the subject. This time, for each proposition, the relation to the subject will be examined. Is there one or none? Here, the exercise consists in working on the obstacle of the “my dad is gone on a journey”: a sentence that the child has in mind but has nothing to do with the subject to be discussed. After each proposition, children will be asked, singularly, and then collectively through the vote that will be used as a mean of sanction, if the heard speech has any relation with the subject discussed, a subject that will repetitively be repeated, as a kind of leitmotiv, either by the teacher, or by asking the students to identify the subject of the discussion.

The important feature of this kind of exercise is not so much to go through each steps, something that might often be impossible, particularly in the beginnings, but to well proceed on each step, so that the students learn to listen, to focus and to express a judgment.

## 2. Middle Section (four years old)

In the ‘Middle Section’, the problem of the functioning of the entire group is already less important, nevertheless the half group (a dozen of students)

remains the best way, so that all can get involved. The exercise lasts for about thirty minutes. Basic rules fare better: to raise the finger before talking and to wait in turn, to answer questions in an appropriate manner, to suggest hypothesis and judgments, to remember the discourse of others and to answer it, etc. Even if a lot of work remains to be done before children learn to focus on the exercise, rather than on their immediate neighbor, or shut-down on themselves. What is more, certain sequences remain rather unproductive because the mood is not there, due to passivity or dissipation, a situation where it may seem difficult to raise the bar: there is no other solution than to be patient, periodically reiterating the exercise. The simple fact of stating the requirement and to get the students use to it is a work in itself. Also, a significant portion of the students might be still preventing themselves from talking or trying to answer questions. They might have to be occasionally taken aside, separate from those who already express themselves naturally. In any case, let's not forget that it is an exercise in reflection and not solely in oral expression, and that some students who do not dare expressing themselves, either out of timidity or for other reasons, benefit from it nevertheless.

The scheme described in the previous part concerning the little section can be used again, particularly the memory, verification and collective judgment processes. In any case, a noticeable difference is that it is possible to introduce the notion of question, a fundamental step in the process of learning. A question is more precise than a theme presented by an object. To go from a mere discussion on the word "eating" to ask "why do we eat" constitutes a significant step forward for the reflection. A question is more precise, more directed than the single term which

proceeds from the simple association of idea. Just as for the word, previously, the question will have to be periodically repeated to make sure that everyone keeps it in mind. Either the teacher will repeat it; either he will ask the students if they remember it. In the same way, when a student will suggest an answer to the question, he will be asked to repeat the question, to bring it closer to what brought about the question in the first place, so that the group relentlessly ponders to know if the answers effectively respond to the question and in order for the whole class to argue on the legitimacy of this relation.

The goal of the exercise here is to start from a question, formulated by the teacher, or by the students within the frame of another exercise, or else to combine both, something which is not impossible but arduous. And then to produce two or more possible answers – maximum four or five – to this question, to more or less problematize its content according to processes that insure that everyone follows the reflection as best as he can. Then, in guise of a conclusion, it will be important to verify that most students have in mind both the question and the few answers given, in order to get acquainted with this philosophical requirement that is the “problematization”, by appropriating the work done during the session.

For example, the teacher can turn on to the various students one after the other, particularly towards those who expressed themselves the most, or that did not express themselves at all, to ask them to recapitulate in one go the various elements of the conclusion. For example: to the question “why do we eat?”, it will be answered “because I am hungry”, “to

grow up”, “to not fall sick”, “to please mom”. It is to be noted that sometimes the use of the plural pronoun or of the indefinite in the formulation of the question can give the children some difficulties. But, in personalizing the exercise, by reformulating it in the singular, in the form of “why do you eat?” for example, or in reframing the question in a familiar context, like: “in the evening, at diner, what do you tell your mother if you are not eating?”, the children that uses to block on the question will finally manage to bring about an answer. This can be useful, even if it is important that the children be initiated to generality by successfully asking a question directed at everyone.

The last point on which we must insist in the ‘Middle Section’, in relation with the ‘Little Section’: to raise the finger before speaking. This is a formal rule which will nevertheless be applied with flexibility, according to the capacities of the group and of the individuals. This forces the children to listen, to temporalize their reactions, to be aware of themselves and of the processes of their thought, to not simply react to the speech of others without understanding its meaning and scope. To not be redundant, we refer here to the general principles of the philosophical discussion, developed earlier. But a permanent judgment will be produced by the teacher, particularly at this age, between favoring the formalization of the content since some fruitful ideas will arise in inappropriate manners, and it could still be useful to use them, particularly when the production of ideas is arduous.

### **3. Great Section (five years old)**

In the 'Great Section', it appears adequate to state that all students should be able to take part in the group discussion, even if a half class remains preferable. But will it not be the same at any age? Nevertheless, some students clearly start to stand out by the quality of their interventions. The idea of the "why?" and the principle of argumentation, indispensable for the exercise, are globally well integrated. Students generally understand their mutual arguments and remember more or less who said what. It is quite motivating to observe the functioning of a group of children of this age who, for about forty-five minutes, debate on given topic, listen and answer back all the while admitting that the other might be true. Many adults could benefit from such a show.

The main task during the session will be organized around a "why?". If there is a fundamental principle to inculcate, the foundation of the argumentation and especially of the deepening, it is the reflex of the "why?", since this founding element of thought and of the discourse gives substance to thought and discourse. If the notion of the "why?" remains difficult in the 'Little Section', it begins to be assimilated in the 'Middle Section', and should be easier in the 'Great Section'. The "why?" often meets as a unique answer the "because", a "because" isolated, deprived of any content, that is both a draft and an obstacle to the answer. Here the moderator of the discussion can occasionally ask, in the background, if "because" is a sufficient answer, so that all can get use to moving beyond this word, a refrain that will quickly recognize the children of the 'Great Section'. The justification of a choice or of a preference must come from a habit, a ritual, an automatism. If a child has difficulty to express the "why" of

his answer, the moderator can in a first time suggest an absurd reason to him, to provoke a more appropriate answer. For example, if the child liked a comic film without being able to explain why, he can be asked: “is it because it is sad and you cried?” This little provocation helps the child, gives him a frame to ease his thought, because this absurd answer provoke and de-dramatize, and nevertheless allows him to articulate his answer in his own words. In the case of great difficulties, the teacher can suggest a series of possible answers, amongst which the child can choose one, but this will be used in last recourse, solely like a lifesaver to avoid repetitive failure, since it somewhat falsifies the game.

Another trap where the “why” gets stuck, more subtle: “because I like”, “because it’s good” or other such propositions. There again, the class will be asked if the answer is enough and, as early as the ‘Middle Section’ there will be students who will be able to recognize the insufficiency of the answer, which will lead the student in question to express why he likes or why it’s good. For example, if the teacher chooses to start from a movie or from a story instead of from a general theme, he will ask the students what character they preferred. Some character will be chosen because he is kind, because he is mean, because no one is kind to him, because he is pretty, because he is strong because he is courageous, because he kills others, because he helps others, etc. The story can be liked or not because it is sad, because it is funny, because it is scary, because it is pretty, etc. So many answers that can later be compared and confronted...

Here is an example of some work to be done with a student who has difficulties with the “why” during a discussion on a dessert. He has



difficulties because he must imagine and theorized a situation in which he is not immediately present. He must thus be lead there through questions, by unfolding his thoughts with the help of little interrogations. Let's note here that the questioning must train the student to the hypothetical mode, used here, or to the negative form, a crucial element of the buildup and of the flexibility of the intellect.

"Why do you want dessert?"

-I do not know.

-Is it to play?

-Yes.

-Do you play with a dessert?

-No.

-So, do you want a dessert because you want to play?

-No.

-Why do you want a dessert?

-I do not know.

-Is it because you are thirsty?

-Yes.

-If I give you water, does it give you a dessert?

-No.

-Do you want a dessert because you are thirsty?

-No

-Why do you want a dessert?

-Because I am hungry.

The questioning forced the child to answer to what he was asked about, in going beyond the paralyzing “I do not know”. The kind of exchange described here can provoke resistance in some teachers that will find it artificial, manipulated, forced or other. They will prefer a discourse said to be “natural”, supposedly more original and closer to the child. This is a pedagogical choice that brings us back to the categorization of the kinds of class discussion. For us, the exercise is not an exercise in expression, but one of thought or of reflection, where the teacher does not have to disappear but to help the child to discover his own mental processes by putting them to the test. Certain recurring problems must be unveiled. Preferably, children will act directly one upon another, but since the purpose is to initiate them to the art of questioning, the teacher will often play a mediating function. For these reasons, we seem to sometimes favor the form to the content, which is not all false. But what is the worth of a student’s discourse that consists merely in repeating what he heard at home or in class, what could be pleasant for the teacher, who hears the echo of his own discourse. It is to be feared that this pleases us too much. How to make sure that the content of the discourse is fully assumed, in its content, its implications and its consequences, if not through questioning? How to show the limits of an idea, if not by testing it? In this way, philosophizing is nothing natural: it is an artificial process, although the relative ease with which children adopt it shows that it somewhat echoes a reality of their mind. If everyone could, without any problem, engage in philosophy, it would be known! But again, all depends on the meaning that we give to this term.

Thus, the temptation is great to take ideas as they come, as long as they are expressed, by favoring the emergence of ideas, caught in flight by the teacher, to favor listening, interrogation, concentration, awareness, the work on ideas more than the idea in itself. Where is the limit between the content and the form? Does not form have more content than it appears? If only from the point of view of critical thinking, the one that points out incoherence... We must generally sail without help on these questions. But in order for appropriation to happen, there must be some additional requirements, beyond the mere approximate articulation of an idea. When we state that the essence of the philosophical work articulates itself around the concept of linkage, as implied in the problematisation, the coherence or the logic, adherents of some pedagogical schools will object that these expectations are improper at such a tender age, and we will then allow ourselves to disagree, as we try to show through our work.

#### 4. Philosophical moments

In the course of the discussion, privileged situations will take place, moments of unfolding, moments of sudden awareness, moments of conversion, which constitutes the heart of the practice and which we call “philosophical moments”. It is in these moments that the speech or the mind are no longer simply speech and mind, since they represent the challenge of being, moments that are at the same time conceptual, liberating and constitutive of the singular self. They are generated by two kinds of situations. Either when the child meets an idea contrary to his own, an idea preferably argued which will create hesitation in him or which he

will accept to make his own after some hesitation or some more or less long and intense resistance. Either when the child hesitates to answer following a question which embarrasses him, because he is becoming aware of the problem raised by the question. It matters little then if he answers the question or not, as long as he is able to somewhat perceive the issues and consequences of his own speech, particularly when this raises a problem of internal contradiction in his discourse. Seeing him embarrassed, the teacher will ask him “do we have a problem?” or “do you see a problem?” He must learn to recognize a problem, to objectify it, to not necessarily perceive it as negative moment, something which in itself is a breakthrough and an important part of the resolution. There is no need then to say something simply to answer anything or to save the face, by producing “whatever”. The notion of ‘carabistouille’ (crap), a word that children find funny merely for its sound, but which is nonetheless evocative, is fruitful here. It qualifies an answer devoid of meaning, an incoherence, any speech of which the legitimacy is challenged. The constant threat of ‘carabistouille’ invites the child to judge his own discourse and those of others, while making the weight of this judgment lighter, since this funny word de-dramatizes the atmosphere by reminding all that this is just a game even if there are some latent tensions involved.

These moments thus defined are qualified as philosophical because they are the moments where the student becomes aware of a notion of true and false that is not determined or externally explained, but in an independent and autonomous manner. At this moment, the student is free to accept or to reject the argument, which is not being imposed, and he is

free to recognize the problem or the contradiction thus presented. He can recognize them or not: he can also refuse to recognize them, even if this kind of ill faith is less present amongst young children than amongst teenagers and adults; children still know how to play and have less to lose on the existential level. They know that they must learn, they trust, they do not pretend to know, or at least they do with less rigidity and insistence.

Recognizing these particular moments, crucial components of philosophizing, takes on multiple forms which the teacher must try his best to perceive. For example, the child can make a naughty smile because he sees the problem and do not want to admit it, or he can repeat what he said already in a funny manner, not looking very convinced. He can also start to swing on his chair, in a visible manner, displaying his anxiety and embarrassment. Perceiving the contradiction, the whole group might burst out into laughter. The child can also become very unhappy, stubbornly bucking, draft an angry move or stubbornly stick to his initial statements in a manner that obviously betrays his ill faith. Whatever it may be, it must be considered that there is in this attitude a form of recognition, openly admitted or not, a recognition that must be underlined so that everyone can benefit from it. We can ask a confirmation from the child, asking him: “we are having a problem here, no?” The teacher can lighten the situation by underlining its comical aspect: “is it not funny?” Or else, he can make the recognition easier by asking the child if he appreciated what has been said or if he likes this kind of question. But a problem permanently remains, towards which the teacher must be very careful: is it that the child does not want or that he cannot, for various reasons, accomplish the turnaround that

is being asked of him? The distinctive margin between these two functions, “wanting” and “being able to”, is sometimes very thin.

## EXAMPLES

In a discussion on the reality of a movie on television, a first child states that a pony is true because it is in the television and he saw it. Another retorts that if the pony was true, he would have broken the television because he is bigger. The first child is stunned by the argument and the teacher asks him what he thinks about it: the child concludes with a smile. The teacher asks him again if the pony in the television is a true pony, the child answers “no”.

In a discussion on a movie, a student says that he liked it because he finds it funny that the older sister hits the younger sister. The teacher asks:

- Do you have an older sister?
- Yes.
- Do you find it funny when she hits you?”

Silence. Big smile from the student.

All the class breaks in laughter.

If it is possible to both generate philosophical moments and to help the majority of the class to appreciate them, it is precisely because some formalism has been established in the discussion. On one side, this

formalism slows down the discussion. On the other side, it forces everyone to examine carefully his own speech and the one of others. Without it, most of the students, just like adults, will focus solely on their own speech, on the sincerity of their speech or on their desire to express it, without critically evaluating the form and content of these various discourses. We do not even listen to ourselves anymore, nor do we listen to others. At first, a great number of teachers will be surprised or even shocked to impose such formalism in pre-school. Nevertheless, those who tried it have generally been surprised by the capacities of the students to follow, by the tangible results produced by this general functioning of the class, and especially by the visible pleasure felt by many students at the idea of playing games with somewhat stricter rules, and this already in the first sessions. Of course, this functioning must not be maintained all day: it is only an exercise amongst others. However, the attitudes and skills acquired through this practice will necessarily impact on other activities, if only because children will have tasted the pleasure of rigor and will have been marked by the experience of exercising their own thinking capacity.

## Chapter V

### Tools and skills

In a general manner, and more specifically for the teacher who wants to lead some philosophical practices with children, the problem arises of the skills necessarily involved and of the tools that are either useful or necessary for this kind of teachings. Some practices, so to say, do not care – or not much – about this aspect. They mainly require what we can call ‘rules of good behavior’. To speak everyone in turn, to respect the other, to talk about the present subject, etc. They incite to dialogue, like we described it in our typology of discussions, without caring much about other issues than mutual exchange and conviviality. This kind of exercise probably has its relevance, consisting in creating a sharing environment where speech is liberated, which is a new and enriching experience for many children. However, as we stated it many times already, this is not enough to generate a philosophical thought. For this to happen, work on speech must be provoked, by the teacher in particular, who cannot disappear from the scene, as suggested by various practices. Indeed, some methods of discussion make reflection easier, by forcing speech to settle, by facilitating a self-decentralization, and by inviting reformulation and synthesis. But there is another step that we deem useful to reach, what we could call ‘philosophical culture’. Not that it is radically alien to other aspects of teaching, to teaching French for example, but because philosophy puts a particular emphasis on it, gives it a meaning or a greater



importance. This link is even more important since philosophy in primary school does not constitute a discipline in itself, but is subsidiary to the acquisition of skills principally linked to the practice of language and argumentation. Also, the skills and tools that we are invoking, while establishing the foundations of a philosophical culture that needs not be negated, are naturally incorporated in a basic education, as prescribed by the common texts in the domain. Work on language, on grammar, on orality, brings together many tools and skills which we are referring to. Our concern equally touches upon a certain kind of 'meta' tools, principally linked to conceptualization, which are also found in a number of pedagogical works.

Let's precise, nevertheless, that within the scheme of thought and of functioning that we are alluding to, the teacher, if he is the one who must stimulate the students to engage in philosophizing, should practice philosophy himself. This is an extremely sensitive point, since a certain tendency to go for the easiest, sometimes motivated by fear, tends to believe that it is possible to teach a practice without personally engaging in it. This kind of 'petitio principia' is illusory and unhealthy. It is as if a gymnastic teacher would refrain from any exercise. Thus, let's start from the principle that there are philosophical tools, that there are philosophical skills, and that they are unavoidable, especially if we believe that it is useful for the students to engage in philosophy. Just as it would not be possible to recreate a mathematical culture, it would not be possible to totally reinvent a philosophical culture, even if philosophizing doubtlessly gives a greater importance to the singular discourse than mathematics. Why should

philosophizing put philosophy in an inextricable situation? Between philosophy conceived as erudition and philosophy conceived as a simple discussion, remains a path to be drawn, a challenge to be faced. The path of a philosophical action which, while being grounded in natural reason, cannot reject the requirement of this very reason, and which, for the same reason, has no justification to not use the tools made available by collective historical reason. It is up to everyone to rediscover the constitutive objects of this reason and to give them meaning.

## 1. TOOLS AND INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

Within this part of our work, we will try to determine certain basic elements, philosophical objects, by describing both the tool and the skills involved. The order in which they are presented tries to follow an increasing degree of abstraction or of complexity, even if every tool mentioned contains in itself various degrees of abstraction or complexity. The terms used in class will not be necessarily those which we are indicating, and the explanations given to the students will be adapted by the teacher, maybe even introduced in various manners, so as to adjust to the level of the students and to discuss their specific difficulties.

### 1.1 Settling the mind

For many students, even for teachers, this action or non-action, is the most difficult one, and still it is the most crucial one to establish. To quiet the external commotion, and especially the interior one, the one of the mind

habituated to permanently jump from one object to another random and unrelated one, to rush on an uncalculated trajectory which will only prevent the mind to have control over itself, a trajectory which, in the end, hides the mind from the mind. Before anything else, our work consists in learning to fix ourselves unto an idea, only one, to contemplate it, meditate on it. When a question is asked on the board, we must learn to not immediately raise our hand, with a real or a fake answer, but to begin by looking carefully at the answer, to stay in front of it, without the immediate need to react. It is also possible to require that the hand be raised only when at least five possible different answers have been considered, or two, in order to move beyond the automatism of “a question begs an answer”, which often disregards the reflection and the production time which it requires.

To raise the hand to ask for the right to speak and to wait for one's own turn, to practice the roundtable, to pass the stick of speech, to lay down the hand once we speak: so many technics that teaches how to settle the mind, by temporalizing the act, by postponing the bringing about of the act, by establishing a process that instigates the relation of self to self and invites to a dialogue with oneself. To work on self can represent an enormous challenge for some students. It is a setting up stage on which it is important to constantly come back, without occulting it, regardless of its formal and ungrateful aspect. What is the use of speaking, what is the use of hearing words, if the mind is not present, if listening is absent? Things will have been said, indeed, but in vain: it is not enough to move to practice a sport, to do gymnastic. Why should we ask less from the mind than from the body? It is important to be strict with the respect of rules, to give words

and ideas the legitimate potency from which they would be deprived if silenced by loud commotion.

In this perspective, it matters to establish rules, to learn to permanently respect them, while knowing that it is not only a question of authority but a consequent and real way to learn how to produce ideas. To establish an attitude beneficial to the thought process, to set up an adequate posture, is not solely a question of will and acceptance, but an education on subjectivity which should not ignore its own difficulties.

## 1.2 Ignorance and simplicity

An important requirement of philosophizing can be linked with the 'more geometrico', or the geometrical mode, as Spinoza named it. This means that that which interests us is the form of the thought process, its structure. For this, it is not so much the mass of information and of content which preoccupies us, something which we could call the 'disorder of thought', even if, as adults, we are seduced by the pearls spoken by children. This disorder is too often that which expresses itself when we speak, this confusion which speaks even before the mind has been set in motion. The point is to stop unloading everything that comes to our mind, but to prioritize the architecture, to trace down a general frame, to go to the essence, to establish strong ideas. However, this simplicity cannot be accomplished without ignorance, without forgetting all these unimportant details which invades our mind and which rush to the door. Thus, we must cut down, remove the leaves so as to see the branches, to move the

branches away in order to see the trunk. For this reason, it will be important to periodically ask the student to produce a single sentence in order to answer, maybe even a single word. This is a difficult exercise which enforces a great selection, a work of the mind on itself. In the same way, when the student will be confronted to a thought that he disagrees with, he will have to forget what he believes in to examine the suggested sentence, to serenely examine its content, to evaluate its meaning independently from his own feelings. The same will be true for the teacher who will give the example. There again, this requires to quiet down the many opinions that are rushing out inside us, in order to bring about this common reason which, according to Descartes, is so well shared. This common reason allows us to think from a point of view different from our own experience. This process allows us to take some distance from our self in order to engage on the way of thought.

### **1.3 Idea and example**

As Plato invites us, this distinction is the first one to be established so as to allow the mind to operate: to catch the objects in their exclusive singularity is an undetermined process. To have a better apprehension of the world, we must lead our thought process from the concrete to the abstract, from the particular to the general, or to the universal. Observe how the child – or the adult – often tries to answer a general question by starting with an “it’s like when” or “for example”. To formulate a significant abstraction means invoking or inventing a category applicable to a variety of particular cases, categories which we could study the validity by checking it through other

possible cases. However, the thought process can also loose itself in abstraction, thus it will be useful to produce examples to examine the idea and to embody it. No intuition without a concept, neither any concept without intuition, enjoins Kant. The example can not only serve to illustrate the idea, but also to justify it, as a proof of its validity.

The distinction between the universal and the singular begins very early on in our practice: the simple fact of answering a question by an idea and not solely by an example is a first step in that direction. Not that the status of the singular must absolutely be “surpassed”, but a real singular should be reached, something which requires considering the universal reach of this singular. As we will see later on, the way to abstraction and the way back to the concrete involve a good number of consequences: to take distance, to test ideas, to initiate the scientific method, etc.

Moreover, in this context, the idea is the product of a judgment. It is not a unique word; it is a composition, with substantives, attributes, connectives, and above all, a verb. It is therefore important, when the student throws a unique word, to train him in structuring his thought by requiring the use of a verb, a form which helps the convocation to refine the unfolding of thought.

Nevertheless, in the course of a discussion or a specific work, students can be asked to systematically and simultaneously produce both an idea and an example, in order to have them work on the meaning of these two specific forms and their correspondence. If, for some students,

this correspondence is obvious, it is not the case for all. Else, for a given idea, they can be asked to produce an example, and vice versa.

## 1.4 Hypothesis

If the word initially appears abstract, it is possible, in a first phase, to use the word 'idea'. The relevance of the hypothesis is to reframe the philosophical discussion at the outset as being not a confrontation of opinions, of convictions or of certainties, but something which facilitates the production and the analysis of ideas. It instigates a certain distance that deepens the thought process by avoiding fixing it in rigid propositions. The simple fact of being able to simultaneously articulate conflictual propositions and to give them equal values, in a first stage at least, somewhat objectifies the suggested ideas. What is it possible to say?

This suspension of judgment, says Descartes, allows one to subsequently study the value of each idea in a deliberate manner. There again, this goes against a natural tendency, accentuated by the school, to state at the outset what is true and false, without examining the implications and consequences of a given hypothesis. To think of the unthinkable becomes one of the functions of the exercise, a playful dimension of the mind, acting for and by itself, which the child will learn to enjoy. This is an education of emotions, which will move from immediate conviction to a certain esthetic of the mind. Before asking if we agree or not, let's ask ourselves if it is or not a 'pretty idea', and then maybe we can refute the idea, but only after having considered it for a short while, with a minimum of attention and recognition. At the same time, this will teach us how to avoid

the trap of the “I do not think that way”, of the “yes, but...” or of the “this is not true”, all reflexes which bind the individual mind to its own formulations, in an exclusive manner. Through the same process, a genuine status is given to the other, more substantial than mere formal respect, which solely consists in leaving some talk time to the speaker, without truly considering the content of his words.

Reformulation is an interesting and fruitful exercise in this matter, which by slowing down the pace of the discussion, allows one to rethink about a foreign idea, by taking the time to somewhat check his listening, to deepen the understanding and to reflect further on what could be replied, if need be. Any suggested hypothesis deserves a reformulation by the simple fact that it is suggested and that it is a game.

Another interesting exercise to teach on the status of hypothesis: ask the students to produce two or three different answers to the same question. To suggest many possibilities is to oppose problematic to assertion, which exclusively brings forwards statement, says Kant. This gets the student out of the entrapment of the unique question by inviting him to problematize his own thought. To produce his various answers, he will have to come up with a wider vision, more creative, of his own reason.

## 1.5 Question and answer

These two forms of sentences, affirmative and interrogative, constitute a duo at the very heart of the philosophical discussion. This distinction is sometimes difficult to capture, particularly in small classes. It can be clarified by the distinction between ‘saying’ and ‘asking’. Beyond the



morphological problem of language, it refers back to two fundamental attitudes of the mind. For, if the question interrogates, all affirmation is de facto an answer to a question or another, even to many. The dilemma of the philosopher king in Plato is the one of any singular mind, which must both decide and problematize, alternating permanently between these two modes. It is the dialectic per excellence, since it is both an acceptance and a refusal of dialectic: the answer says what it says, self-centered, without bothering about its blind spots or imperfections, whereas the question calls on what it is not, decenters itself and postulates the preeminence of a somewhere else.

Naturally, to echo his needs, the mind states his desires and habits. It prefers answers, as questions inflict a certain pain on it: the pain of feeling that something is missing. There again it is an emotional education: to value a question as a question, for the opening that it brings, for the doubt and uncertainty that it generates. But the lack of habituation to questions is frequent, since in normal life questions have a mere utilitarian function, motivated mainly by emotional uncertainty and material needs.

Some kind of work, precise exercises, can be done in class – if it is not already done – which would consist in learning to recognize a question, by the terms that introduce it for example: why, how, who, what, when etc. Or, again, guessing the question to which answers this or that statement. Then, on the study of the relation between question and answer, we could ask what answer answers which question, or if this answer does answer that question.

## 1.6 Statement and objection

These two, statement and objection, are another unavoidable couple of the discussion and of the reflection, more classic, since it is found in the recurring 'agree-disagree'. The objection comes about much more naturally than the question. Training in questioning is more difficult. For, if the question asks us to be able to get into the proposition which it is questioning, the objection can easily ignore it. Indeed, how many objections are not genuine, simply meaning something else, or to saying something with different words. When looked at more closely, the two ideas amount to the same, or simply do not talk about the same thing. At the same time, if there is a real objection, the one who receives it is made to think about the negativity of his statement, a crucial moment of the dialectic process, as mentioned by Hegel. It is being able to think what our statement did not say, what it forgets, what it negates, what it does not know how to say, and what it says in a biased manner. To accept the objection, to hear it, to understand it, amounts to figuring out the limits of our thoughts, their determination. The objection, if it is perceived, allows us to rework on our initial statement, conceived of as simply a hypothesis, temporary and always inadequate, in the same manner as Spinoza, who tells us that all particular idea is always a lack of something. To think the statement and the objection simultaneously, is to think in stereoscopy, it is to problematize one's thought. For this, we must discern the nature of the objection, to determine its foundation. A work on opposites, on the dualities which structure our very being, as we are invited by Heraclitus to perform, the production of strong antinomies constitutive of the mind, often helps to

clarify the nature of the objection: it must be made visible by reducing it to the maximum, by positing two opposite terms or expressions which capture its essence.

As an exercise, the teacher can ask the students to produce one or various objections to some statements, following a series of questions for example. Even simpler, in front of two series of propositions, he can ask to link, two by two, propositions and objections, or with a series of supposed couples, he can ask of each of them if the supposed objection is genuine or not. In a second stage, more arduous, the remaining work, once the objection is expressed, will be to verify to what extent it is a real objection, by defining its object and by identifying and clarifying the locus and form of the contradiction. For the younger ones, it is possible to train with antonyms, to better grasp the contradictory potential of words, verbs and adjectives in particular, which often have an opposite.

## 1.7 Argument

The argument is what comes in support of a given statement, it gives a proof that sustains and justifies a claim. To argue amounts to enlighten the reasons which brought us to, or that will bring us to, such and such a conclusion. To ask the question of the argument, to request an argument, amounts to bringing out an idea from its apparent evidence, by exposing its foundations, going from the implicit to the explicit. Theoretically, the argument allows a thesis to be deepened, to be explained. It serves to verify its legitimacy, although rhetorical temptation might lead us to defend

our ideas at all cost, to use the argument in a reductive manner: to be right, as Schopenhauer would suspiciously believe. For this reason, even if the argument is in itself a condition of philosophizing, it is also a limit about which we must be mindful. Nevertheless, the fact of arguing, of seeking, of producing several arguments in a row, trains us to link ideas together, to work on the principle of causality, to understand our ideas, to elaborate our thought. From this, we can conclude that all suggested ideas must necessarily be accompanied by a minimal argument. Before the initial demand of the “why”, every proposition should contain a “because”, an automatism which it is essential to establish as soon as possible.

Of course, all arguments are not equal. It is not enough to merely say such magic words as “because” for what follows to be an argument. There are pseudo-arguments that merely reiterates in more or less subtle manners the initial proposition, starting with the famous “it is so because it is so”. Or again, the tricky “it’s good because I like it”. However, in these cases as in all others, especially in case of doubt, it is the remaining part of the argument which gives its value to the particular argument, which will become meaningful through a certain progression. It is the absence of this progression, or the absence of a deepening, which will indicate the inexistence or the poverty of the argument. The progression can be of a causal nature, demonstrative, but it can also be replaced by a thread of singular proofs, instead of by logical demonstration. In any case, any judgment on any proposition must be reevaluated continuously throughout the chain of arguments and counter-arguments.

To practice, except for the requirement of justifying all propositions with an argument throughout the discussion, and to question their validity and usefulness, exercises can be suggest which will require one or many arguments to be given to validate some given propositions, and also one or several arguments counter-arguments able to problematize the debated propositions. We can also give propositions and arguments and ask if yes or no they are related, if they ignore each other or if they are contradictory. More difficult even, it will be asked to analyze and explain these relations.

## 1.8 Rhetoric

Rhetoric is the art of speaking well. On one side, it is the learning of a technique, of argumentation, of tools and processes of persuasion. On another side, like every art, it comes from a feeling for esthetic, here linked with the pleasure of creation and of audition. If the first aspect still takes place with an utilitarian enterprise, the second comes out of pure intellectual delight. Philosophy is often suspicious of rhetoric, of the need to speak well, of the need to produce elegant speeches, and this is for two reasons: the danger of arguing for the sake of having the last word, risking the specious, a fascination for the esthetic of speech, dissociated from any genuine content. In fact, Socrates' interlocutors accused him of shredding their discourses, to the point where they became unrecognizable. However, this rhetoric is also found within philosophy, since it is an invitation to build the thought process through argumentation, because it invites us to love speech for itself, this 'clairière de l'être', as Heidegger said it. The child who unleashes his fragmented words, incapable to do complete sentences, is

conscious of his shortcomings, and for this reason he will often resort to injurious speech, or will strongly react to the words of others: he will not wish to repeat what he said, nor explain himself, since, in the end, even if he thus manifests his presence, he does not really want to be heard or to reconcile with his speech, to like to hear himself speaking, to work on his sentences, to give back its sonority to the discourse. How many students are quiet in class, even while they express themselves, who otherwise know how to be loud during recess? Obviously, the opposition, narcissism, also exists; the narcissism of a discourse who likes listening to itself and cares not about reason, intelligibility or about others: it is therefore time to invite the students to speak briefly, to learn the art of the unique sentence, synthetic or aphoristic.

For the shy students, or those with language difficulties, the periodical moments of pause in a discussion, where a time is given to write, will be most beneficial. In the same way, to work on the reading or the enunciation of ideas, or of ideas from a studied text, while encouraging some theatrical atmosphere, and while learning to practice loud reading, contributes to reconciliation with speech.

## 1.9 Same and other

The 'same and other' is an antinomy which is the subject of a specific dialectic in Plato. It is important because it conveys us to compare all of what is related to being, which must necessarily have something in common to all there is, and necessarily something which distinguishes it

from all there is. Thus, in order to avoid turning the discussion into a mere exchange of opinions, heterogeneous and unrelated, the 'same and other' forces us to compare ideas amongst themselves. Is an idea simply repeating what the other said? Then she is devoid of interest and must not be even pronounced. Is an idea discussing the same subject as another one, or did we jump from one topic to another unrelated one? An idea which presents itself as an objection, is it really one, or does it talk of something else? In relation to a given question, are two answers suggesting the same thing? Beyond words, it is not easy to determine if an idea is new or if it is redundant, offering nothing more and paraphrasing the previous one. It is a judgment sometimes difficult to make, since the mind must reach beyond words, to reach the essential, to think more deeply about content and its relation to the context, a discussion or something else. This should be the first examination to be done when we receive an idea: to ask ourselves if it is a new idea, if it is close to another idea, a practice which makes thinking easier. It is a process which frees us from such obstacles as the feeling of quantity and of indetermination: all these ideas might be summed up in a few, or in one. All these examples might tell us the same thing. The content must then be clarified and classified, the issues determined, so as to structure thought.

In the course of a discussion, especially with little classes where the tendency is strong to repeat what the other said, any new ideas will have to be scrutinized through the 'same and other'. Thus synonyms can be learned, something which is not too easy to locate, and the opposite, polysemy, will also be learned, since the context gives many meaning to a

same word. Generally speaking, this means to learn to perceive the ideas behind the words, deceived and helped by the words. There again, the teacher can invent some exercises to concretely show how these relations function. However, a common pitfall of this practice of the 'same and other' is the temptation to answer "both". In the absolute, this answer is not wrong, if it is possible to ask how two entities can be the 'same' and 'other' we can also ask if they are more the same or more the other, a question which forces the student to argue his judgment, and will prevent a faint.

## 1.10 Problem

Early in the reflection process, it is important to present the concept of the 'problem', as a reversal of thought, so as to promote the idea of a life of the mind for its own sake, to expose its playful aspect, its reality. To find problems, as in a game where one must show what does not fit in. Recognizing or inventing problems on the basis of the postulate that all thought is necessarily imperfect. Problems of logic, problems of partiality, problems of syntax, problems of meaning, everything is good to problematize. This is what Socrates invites us to, as soon as someone opens his mouth: find the problem.

Step by step, the 'other' problems, those which we call 'real' thus become less dramatic. These problems which we would rather not admit, or which we negate: the incomprehension and the feeling of solitude and impotency which it generates. All difference lies between having a problem, without even knowing it, and stating a problem, because it is recognizable



and known. In these exchanges, it is not the opinion debate which matters, conviction against conviction, speeches of a spontaneous or reactive nature, but the reflected discussion, where time is taken to analyze, to deepen, to formulate, to argue: chess game, and not Ping-Pong. It is a valorization process which requires that some distance be taken, which settles the mind, because this mind transforms itself into an object for itself: it is no more the mysterious and ungraspable interiority of a subject, but a visible background articulated through words. For these reasons, the term 'problem' is important as a word, because it states, at the heart of the debate, a constant lack of something, a lack which must be identified. This is a requirement which forces us to keep our eyes open. This does not prevent us from trying to solve the problem, but before that, it is necessary to fully articulate it, to establish its issues, an exercise valid in itself and a condition for a resolution.

Throughout the discussion, the concept of 'problem' must be replaced by the one of 'agree-disagree'. 'To agree' is useless in itself, it is a mere approbation, unless an argument is given to enrich the initial idea. The same holds true for 'disagreeing', which often is nothing more than a subjective expression, another perspective. To ask if there is a 'problem' more than 'agree' or 'disagree', amounts to become an observer of critical thinking, instead of holding on to an opinion. The one who shows that there is a logical problem does not have the same status of thought than the one who simply gives another idea, even if one does not exclude the other. Obviously, these two positions are not always easy to distinguish, but there lies the work to be done. Thus, if in discussions the teacher must try to

bring about this distinction, he can also produce artificial exercises, or use exercises from manuals, to specifically work on formal issues: logic, coherence, syntax, meaning, etc.

## 1.11 Reformulating

Reformulating has many functions. It ensures that a genuine discussion is taking place and not a series of monologues. Indeed, by the fact of repeating what the other previously said, the student must rethink what was said; verify his memory and comprehension of it. On the cognitive or intellectual level, this helps him to work on his own intelligence of what was heard or read, be it something said by a text, by the teacher or by a colleague. On the psychological level, by giving full attention to the other, this act brings about a decentralization, a distance from oneself and from one's own opinions, an unavoidable process for the life of the mind, a condition for analysis and problematisation. On the social level, it produces linkage, since a genuine recognition is given to the neighbor: he is not anymore the one that was totally ignored, the one whose speech is easily rejected, the one to whom it is always answered "yes, but...", or a dead speech that has nothing to do with his own, without even caring to establish any kind of relation. This reformulation also implies a requirement for him whose speech has been reformulated: he must ask himself if he has been understood or not. For, sometimes, if the other repeats word by word what was said, which does not necessarily imply any comprehension, most of the time, some 'translation' or 'interpretation' has been done, if it is not the whole summary which is biased, or with external elements added. The

initial author, from whom agreement or not is being asked regarding the reformulation, must avoid two traps: the one of the 'all is well', which tries to avoid complications, and the one of the 'word by word', only satisfied with perfect memory. He must answer the question: "in general, have you been understood?" He must therefore answer "yes" or "no", without any other comment, to learn to decide. The only real question is "is the essential present?", leaving aside any temptation to argue in vain on anything else. A judgment must be given, which must go beyond words and grasp a thought through its expression, something which is not so easy.

The only practice which we recommend on reformulation is to establish it, during some sessions, as a quasi-automatism, a recurring demand: to answer the other or to call him, it must first be proven that what he said is known, be it a hypothesis, a question, an objection, or some comments. However, it is also possible at any time during the class to enquire about what has just been said, or again, risking a growing complexity, to sum up what has been discussed during the previous session, by the teacher or the students. This keeps everyone awake and allows the teacher to check to what extent everyone follows in class.

## 1.12 Judgment

In order to become a pedagogical tool, judgment must go beyond the common habit of our era: one should not judge. Associated with prejudice, with axiological dictate, if not to intellectual and psychological aggression, judgment is assigned to residence; its absence being considered as a

condition of thought. But, if Descartes invites us to suspend judgment, at least temporarily, Kant, on the contrary, invites us to work and use this crucial faculty, since it produces knowledge: if a fact is an object of knowledge, a judgment is one as well. It is a faculty that allows us to reflect on the finality of thought and objects. Moreover, judgment invites us to engage on a trajectory of thought. An engagement which is not devoid of preliminary reflections, nor is it irrevocable, even if some tension resides between these various natures of judgment: all engagement, especially if it has been reflected upon, tends to maintain itself and to resist to whatever opposes its content. Nevertheless, the attitude which we are favoring in discussion does not so much consists in refusing to engage in order to avoid the risk of close up that it implies, but to assume this risk, while trying to minimize it. Simultaneously, it amounts to judging and accepting the fallibility of this judgment, because a judgment generally happens by want of definite knowledge.

Also, we must argue, consider and listen to counter-arguments, evaluate the content and validity of these various ideas, debate serenely, and maybe review our positions if reason invites us in this direction. Therefrom is the significance of working first on problems, to consider their interest instead of starting from an agreement or disagreement to justify at all cost. In fact, pretending not to judge is like pretending to a fake extraterritoriality, or pretending to an objective and unchallengeable deduction. To judge is to be located both inside and outside. For the student who does not feel concerned by a given problem, – maybe has he no access to it – to ask him to begin with pronouncing a judgment amounts

to inviting him to become part and parcel of the process, an engagement without which thought cannot even pretend to the status of reflection, although this engagement might later on be surpassed as a simple dialectical moment.

On this moment, we recommend using binary modes: in a first time answering by yes or no, by same or different, by accepting or rejecting. Some will object to the reductionism of such a scheme, but imposing these alternatives, the use of the excluded tiers, obliges the reality of thought to be exposed. Using nuances, complementarity, often serves as a shortcut to thought: dialectic cannot avoid opposites, and, anyway, all of this is just an exercise.

It is in this way, those questions to which we can answer by a yes or a no are fruitful, since they encourage engagement, even if this decision must be justified by the production of an argument, or the obligation of a counter-argument, a necessary condition to all judgment worthy of that name. In a more general manner, to involve all students, the class will be configured as a permanent jury which, as a last instance, will have to vote on the value of a given judgment, especially if there is disagreement. This is a collective decision which only has a relative value, but it creates a certain drama around the exercise.

### 1.13 Qualifying

Plato states that qualification, meaning the attribution of qualities, is an intermediary between the name and the definition, the latter being an attempt to capture the essence of its object. For, if to qualify a thing is not necessarily sufficient to precisely define what it is, but solely to give it some attributes, it already sets the discourse on a subject in a process of categorization useful to grasp its being, by not remaining in a vague evocation or narration referring back solely to the description of a singular entity. To say that blue is a color, or that the prince who fought the dragon is courageous, is to make a judgment which produces concepts. Or, it is mobilizing a general category in which our particular case is included. There we find both the passage from the example to the abstract idea and the judgment. Another degree of qualification, when two hypotheses are compared: “the prince killed the dragon to marry the princess” and “the prince killed the dragon to save the young people”, we will distinguish between an act of love and an act of courage. Through these two qualities, the issue between two explanations of a same act is brought to light by distinguishing the nature of that act. Also, as much as possible, the teacher will convey children to ask for a deepening of the discourse by qualifying what he is saying, something which will motivate the students to spontaneously do it on their own later on.

An easy and productive exercise, following the reading of a story, consists in asking students to choose a character that is liked or not, to qualify him according to personal appreciation, a qualification which might be accompanied by a quotation.

## 1.14 Transcendentals and categories

Throughout the history of philosophy, which is also the history of the elaboration of our collective thought, of our culture and language, a number of crucial concepts and categories emerged which somewhat constitute the arcane and limits of our thought. For this reason, they are called 'transcendentals'. Some were, at various degrees, in a more or less implicit manner, assimilated to common expressions, which are now found in daily use, while others are the preserve of a scholarly vocabulary. A part of the philosophical work involves the use of these terms, to give them meaning, to clarify them, to reshape them, especially since by familiarizing students to their use, they will help to better grasp other concepts which will thus become easier to deal with. Our present concern is not that much to provide an exhaustive list of terms and precise definitions for every of these concepts, but to mention the most important ones – including the ones which have already been mentioned as tools – and especially to invite the teachers to be aware of these concepts, so that they can use them better. These concepts should at least intuitively speak to them, and the fact of using them brings further reflection on their content. The idea is to experience the concept before quoting it, so that the quotation can make sense.

### *Essence and appearance:*

To become aware that anything is both one and multiple, that it is what it is but that it is also what is perceived of it, its action on what is other than itself, which explains the differences in perspectives.

### *Good, beautiful and true:*

Classics of Plato, primary manifestations of being, these concepts become more important by the fact that they are found in common usage. They define the basic axiologies, the various value hierarchies which shape us in a more or less conscious manner.

### *Objective and subjective:*

Can what we say be partial and fragmentary, or can we pretend to objectivity and certainty. Here are also opposed the relative and the absolute, the whole and the part.

### *Me and others:*

What relationship do we entertain with the other? Does he prevent our freedom? Is the individual determined by society or is it the other way around?

### *Matter and mind:*

Is one more important than the other? Is the concrete more real than the abstract? For man, between nature and culture, what should be the priority?

### *Reason and emotions:*

A permanent tension in man, his thought and his acts: what he feels and what he thinks.



### *Psychological, moral and legal:*

What mainly determines human action? Our subjectivity, our personal or social moral values, or the rules of society, law?

### *Being, acting and thinking:*

How to define the human being? Through what he is, what he does or what he thinks?

What matters is, on one side, to recognize that the fundamental concepts are not unlimited in number; and, on the other side, to realize that they come out naturally as soon as we engage in reflection. The idea is to not be afraid by the philosophical vocabulary used and multiplied to the extreme by the specialists.

## **1.15 Narration and analysis**

To go from the narrative to the meta-narrative is a crucial step in intellectual learning, a step which will be reached at different age, depending on the children. To tell a story is a modality of thought, to explain its meaning, to extract its signification is another. For the children, it could be introduced as a passage from “what the story says” to “what it wants to say”. The *Fables de La Fontaine* are a good example, condensing in a few verses at the end of the story the moral that should be grasped. To analyze, is to bring out what is important, what should be concluded; to determine the signification is to go from the factual to the symbolic, from the particular to the universal. It is also to work on appropriation. It is for example to ask the student what

the story means for his own existence. It is also to go from the appearing unity of the factual to the multiplicity of interpretations.

The simple fact of questioning this interpretative dimension of the story, even if the student is unable to immediately extract its hidden meaning, has a value of its own. Schelling is opposed to Hegel, for whom only the concept is philosophical, by introducing the idea of 'secondary philosophy', the one of narration. Indeed, are not tales and myths incarnating an access to philosophizing on the historical level? A story always carries ideas, as inexpressible as they may be. This postulate radically transforms the vision of any hear story and, for this fact, life being a narration, a sequence of event, the child will learn to question the meaning of these events, instead of interpreting them as mere anecdotes, more or less interesting or pleasant.

What is this story telling us? What does it teach us? What is its moral? What is good, what is bad in what it is telling us? And every time, the student must not forget to justify his judgment with a specific quotation, a judgment from the story and not from himself. Maybe later on he could express his own critique of the axiology. The exercise of choosing a character –liked or not – and of justifying our choice is a fruitful intermediary for this specific skill, an exercise to be suggested to the younger ones or to those which find it difficult to follow the first rule.

## **1.16 Essential and accidental**

This antinomy, arbitrary at first look, coming from Plato and formalized by Aristotle, has not obviously been used as such. The most immediate transposition of it is the opposition between what is important and what is not, between what is interesting and what is not, between always and sometimes. This type of distinction enjoins the subject to select his ideas in advance, to structure them in a hierarchy, to rethink and evaluate the ideas suggested, so as to get out of the randomness in which thought can easily prolong itself. The essential, in Aristotle, is what is permanent, what always belongs to something; the accidental is what can belong to it or not, a distinction which can also express itself in terms of being and appearing. But later philosophy, introduced by Kant and phenomenology, shows us that these distinctions are not always so sharp, that there is a kind of continuity between being and appearing, that essence is not graspable or even that it does not exist. By asking the student to reflect on the degree of importance, of interest or of permanence of his idea, we are in fact asking him to deepen his thought by operating a selection through a comparison of ideas, his own and the ones of others. For if a plurality of comments can be made on this or that being, thing or question, it is also possible and desirable to ask ourselves what are the comments which are the most appropriate, the most relevant or the most enriching. Of course, as always, choices must be justified through arguments, since beyond answers it is the nature of criteria which give substance to the matter.

## 1.17 Defining

To define is a difficult exercise, which cannot be asked straight from the beginning, even if it is always there, in the background. For, to define is to look for a way to reach words through the essence of things and of beings. But, to define is also to lock in the meaning a rigid and restraining cover, as a dictionary, or the use of it, might do. For this reason, we will rarely begin with a question of the type “what is this?”, because to proceed by definitions is very abstract and does not immediately involve the student in an emotional relation with the discussion, an involvement which is necessary. It is better to start by questions which directly state a problem, where direct issues of opposition will appear, which would anyway come again in time during the process of definition, issues which will culminate in definitions. But these definitions will be problematized in advance, since they will result from one or various problems and not from a unique definition. Requests for definitions will appear quite naturally in the student, because when time comes to ask questions, besides the “why do you say this” which is the most common refuge question, the “what is this” is the kind of question which can be asked out of any words of a proposition without even thinking about it. However, without spending too much time on it, the definition needs not be excluded. It uses the nature of words, their gender, their specificity, their qualities, their circumstances, their functions, their utility and the other great categories which help to discern the essence of beings and of things, as many elements which give access to conceptualization and avoid confusion.

It is possible to lead a discussion based on a “what is this?”, knowing that it can be difficult to give appropriate answers. But through lateral

movements and the invocations of concrete examples, if the teacher regularly states its requirement, the class might be able to produce one or some general definitions, and the process of definition will come to constitute an individual exercise or a collective one.

## 1.18 Conceptualizing

To conceptualize amounts to identifying or producing a term, and to clarify it by deepening its meaning, by comparing it to other terms of a similar nature, by giving it attributes, or simply by defining it. To conceptualize a discourse consists in putting into perspective its 'keywords', a synonym to 'conceptualize' that speaks more to the students. Since a concept is not only a word, or an expression, but that on which rests an idea, or that around which revolves a proposition. It is at the same time the master key, the angular stone, the heart of a discourse.

The first stage of conceptualization consists in locating the term in question, to underline it, to free it from the word amalgamation that makes the sentence. The discourse must be unfolded, what appeared at first as a compact and distinct proposition must be analyzed. To intuitively detect a keyword of a sentence, in order to name it, at first without any argument in support, is a difficult exercise for many students, to the extent where their analytical ability is not yet developed, a difficulty which is crucial to identify and work on.

We can initially ask the students to simply underline the keyword, as it is in the text. After having identified that term, in a second time, to

continue on the analysis of the given proposition, ask what the sentence – or the text – tells about this term, the meaning that is given to it by the content of the sentence itself. For example, if we ask what is important to the child and he answers: “my parents, because they give me food”, according to this proposition his parents are defined as those who give food to their children. In a second time, it will be possible to ask ourselves what we know on this term, on ‘parents’, so as to compare it with what the sentence is saying and to examine its coherence, its shortcomings and issues. Maybe parents are also, for example, “those who love us” or else “those we love”. Progressively, the student learns to weight his own terms, to become aware of their usage, to read and listen more carefully to the speech of others, the one of a written text, of a teacher or of a colleague, and thus of his own.

## 1.19 Link

We already discussed the problem of the link under various angles: under the relation between example and ideas, between question and answer, affirmation and objection, hypothesis and argument, idea and reformulation, thing and quality, thing and definition, under the general angle of the problem, which is always an absent link, a bench link or a link of contradiction. It becomes clear that the requirement which constitutes what distinguishes the philosophical exercise, from others. Indeed, to express ourselves implies already such a requirement, and, in this way, philosophizing does not distinguish itself from the general problems of thought, at work in every school work: to go beyond the mere associative

process of the “and then...”, of the “this makes me think of...”, an inconsiderate lateral movement that causes our thought to flee. Let’s say that philosophy insists particularly on this principle of the link, link between words and ideas – somewhat like mathematics are doing with numbers and geometrical forms – with the specificity of making conscious what would otherwise remain intuitive, to make explicit what would remain implicit. In other words, the link, or the study of the forms of language and thought, is the substance of philosophizing, as Leibniz would say. It is a form which, like mathematics, is matter, a reality in itself.

Thus, students must be invited, not only to reproduce propositions and questions, but also to reproduce analyses having for their objects links between various propositions, links within propositions. The thought process is elaborated by lining up sentences, by analyzing their succession and verifying its validity, in a more or less intuitive or formal manner, something which takes us back to logic, of which the object is the study of the conditions of the validity of the links. But, it is not appropriate, in primary school, for different reasons, to undertake exhaustive theoretical developments in this matter. It is nonetheless necessary to bring about a reflection on this topic, simply by taking some time to rethink what has been said. Here, the teacher will make use of his personal culture, as it grew throughout his studies and his professional experience, to invite the children to somewhat formalize their thought. Indeed he might wander a bit, but this wandering corresponds anyway with the reality of reflection. Only an abstract and already elaborated theory can escape this, artificially. But here, it is a practice, an exercise, an art, with all of what this contains of

uncertainty, a dimension which must be accepted and appreciated as a space for interrogation.

To work on the link, the only recommendation would be that, through a discussion, never accept new propositions without examining their relation with the previous ones, explaining these relations and evaluating their validity. If some types of relations appear to be really difficult, the teacher can suggest some problems designed by him as an exercise.

## 1.20 Transversality

The teacher who undertakes this kind of practice quickly notices the consequences on the functioning of the class. The students, constantly solicited, asked to analyze, to produce, to judge, do not passively receive the material taught in class anymore. Their achieved listening permanently takes risk in various comments, and ever more relevant ones. This functioning of the class, somewhat renewed, becomes the daily red line, for the students but also for the teacher, which takes some time to establish relations between the various learnings. The structure of thought, the relation to others, the way in which we approach reasoning, are some angles by which philosophical work influences any other specific subject.

In mathematics, the students are encouraged to anticipate, to be conscious of the process instead of holding on to a particular technic. The geometrical mode, through arguments and proofs, works on the architecture of thought, the increasing use on logical connectors, has very



immediate consequences in mathematics, in French, in sciences, etc. Verb conjugation is not the same anymore once we learn to ask ourselves why we say this or that thing, in this particular way, instead of in another. Reasoning is a posture before being a technic. Using an abstraction is a habit which can be consciously obtained, instead of randomly, intuitively. The fact that processes of thought become the object of discussion, of reflection, modifies the game. The practices of formulating hypotheses, the elaboration of judgments, the learning of interpretation, have obvious consequences on reading capacities: students do not interpret a text in a strict linear way anymore, sentence by sentence, or as a simple narrative whole, but they develop a broader view, a power of comparison, of analysis, and of synthesis: they go further in their reading. To work directly on the form of propositions, of examples, of texts, to confront polysemy, helps to problematize a scientific situation. Moreover, some children who speak little during philosophical workshops sometimes display surprising skills gained in the course of apparently different exercises having nonetheless the same requirements.

The main task of the teacher on this level is to be careful, for if transposition is made easier, it will often be unforeseeable. Sometimes, he will establish links by himself, if he is not starting from a given discussion to introduce a lesson, or he will use it to evaluate the degree of comprehension, but in general, it will be the students who will uncover transposition mechanisms, identify parallelisms, incongruous from time to time.

## 1.21 Logic

As we discussed it, a link to take into consideration is logic. The difficulty of this mode of analysis is that it asks us to move away from the core to penetrate into the universe of the form. The general principle is the one of the “if this, than that”. The problem is not to know if we agree with “this” or disagree with “that”, but to determine if the statement of “this” brings about the statement of “that”. To be initiated to the problem of cause and effects, a generating principle of ideas often transgressed by students, in particular by inversion, when the effect is taken as a cause, when the antecedent is taken for the consequent, or when a simple chronological order is taken for a causal chain. This amounts to identifying a contradiction, the out of topic, the rupture of meaning, the erroneous use of syntactic connectors – this of the “but” for example, the contradictory dimension of which is often obscured. The logical argument must thus be distinguished from the opinion argument.

The difficulty is that students will not always succeed in formally identifying the given problem, but they might intuitively do it, an intuition which will have to be cultivated, to become concrete, to articulate itself. During this time, others, clearly slower, will remain at the level of the “agree-disagree”, without perceiving what is expected of them. It is doubtlessly on these problems of distinction between core and form that differences will be most visible, thus those who can see their problems must learn to express in their own words what they are seeing, verifying

that their listeners understand them. Argumentation, as a mean to deepen and to grasp universal problems, here takes all its meaning.

On these issues of logic, the teacher can create some small precise exercises, even if many works exist on the question already. For example, to take various examples of couples like 'cause and effect' and to ask which one the cause is and which one is the effect. The advantage of the exercises created by the teacher is that they will be shaped to focus on the particular difficulties that appeared during sessions, and the link can then be established, to facilitate appropriation by the student.

## 1.22 Dialectic

The reader might have noticed in the description of our practices a temptation to reproduce in class the classical Hegelian scheme, simplified: thesis, antithesis and synthesis. The principle by which we invite students to suggest a first idea in answer to a general question and to formulate questions or objections to these answers, forces the authors of the initial answers to consider the problems implied in their hypotheses, and incites them to produce new ideas able to respond to the expressed comments. Indeed, to solve an issue, it is necessary to rearticulate his thought by producing new concepts. However, we have an issue with the Hegelian perspective that is linked with Plato, for whom the third moment of dialectic is not a necessity. If, in Hegel, thought must actualize itself concretely through discourse, from the angle of the concept, since the idea cannot remain at its potentiality status, it is not so in Plato. For the latter, the

scientific scheme, effective and problem solving, absolute form of the discourse in Hegel, is somewhat relativize, probably as a legacy of the Socratic tradition. Indeed, the contemplative dimensions, the foundational myth, the poetic intuition, the delirium of love, offer a genuine status to thought. The shortcoming of thought, its insufficiency, is conceived as being inherent to its desire, a desire in without which no thought is possible anymore: it goes in the same way for dynamic and substance. Said otherwise, to perceive the problem as a problem, without necessarily reaching a solution, is an activity in itself, of esthetical dimension. Have-we produced a problem? Is it a pretty problem? Here is the type of questions which we are encouraging during the exercise, instead of rushing to answers, which should nonetheless not be excluded. What is important is to perceive beyond any discourse, to feel thought's call to air, which forever carries us further away, to foresee and appreciate the void of singular though, the emptiness of all particular being, starting with what is our own.

To work on that, as soon as there is a contradiction, dissention, incomprehension, instead of simply passing by, to pretend that nothing happened, to absolutely want to solve the problem or to decide immediately on the spot, the teacher will insist on clarifying the problem, on analyzing, on amplifying, so that everyone benefit from and develop the habit of loving the problem in itself, as a genuine moment of thought, pleasant and productive in itself.

## 2. TOOLS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILLS

## 2.1 Settling the mind

We already discussed this question in the intellectual part of this chapter, but it appears useful to discuss it anew under the existential and psychological angle. For one of the main difficulty of our students, in particular in some geographical zones, difficulty made visible through this type of exercise, is that a good number of these children live in a kind of constant “zapping”. Be it at home, on the street or in the schoolyard, the rhythm is the same as in a video clip, a nervousness which in most cases continues in class. This is noticeable through the great difficulty, or the impossibility, to stay still, to sit on a chair, to not touch objects, to not annoy or push the neighbor, to speak without thinking, to raise the hand without having anything to say.

For these reasons, a good portion of the work, especially at an initial stage, at the beginning of each session, focuses on establishing the proper set up. It is all about making sure that students become conscious of and take hold of themselves, calming down, focusing; making sure that they take on a calm posture without which the exercise would be impossible, where spoken discourses would be meaningless. For the sake of giving priority to speech, to have people talk and produce ideas, the teacher can sometimes short-circuit this set up, because it looks unpleasant, having disciplinary and formal overtones. This creates an illusion of participation, which gives rise only to fleeting ideas of an associative nature, merely drafted, and not even listened to. Indeed it is possible to abuse of

formalism and of an impossible rigor, and in this matter nothing can substitute the good judgment of the teacher, the knowledge that he has of his class concerning the limits up to which he can hope to push his students. But there is a way to function which, unconsciously, will alternate the moments of letting go and the strikes of anger, while we suggest to 'settle the mind' as an exercise in itself, which is not to be considered as a waste of time but as a work as legitimate and interesting as others. To learn to contain and to master ourselves is by itself an important learning.

One of the crucial tools for this work is to slow the discussion down in order to avoid tit for tat and Ping-Pong games. It is one of the main responsibilities of the teacher. It is made possible already by requiring brief silence periods between each answer or before each new step, a silence which will give space and time to rethink and to evaluate what has been accomplished; a silence to properly aim at what is to come, to produce an idea which is not a mere reaction. Thereafter, the pace of the process is also reduced by systematically asking for a recapitulation of what has just happened, to say again what has just been done, to repeat the main question before asking something new, if only to reframe what is going to be said; also by making sure that each student is being properly listened to when he is speaking, because he is articulating his thought and must speak loud, and also because others must listen to him. It is also important sometimes to underline and value what has just been said, so that the student's words do not go unnoticed.

## 2.2 Distantiation

As we have mentioned already, one of the first characteristics of non-reflected thought is its immediacy. It is a reactive and instantaneous speech, where convictions and emotions win over reason. The rules of the game are an invitation to listen to others, to give arguments, to evaluate an idea already expressed before expressing a new one, to compare various propositions. These rules have numerous consequences for the participant. One of the main one is to set some distance between the one who talks and what he says, between being and speaking. If to think is first of all to enter in dialogue with ourselves, a kind of doubling must necessarily take place. Not that our being must forcibly be cracked in two, but we must become conscious of the contradictory functioning of our thought. If, for example, we instinctively want to defend our ideas teeth and nails, not wanting to let go of what we said, another volition can intervene, contradicting the previous one, a volition which loves truth, coherence, and which wants reason to win over. But, for this volition which is more concerned with universality to express itself, it is necessary that some transformations take place in relation to the usual functioning of our thought process. To admit that an idea is always only a hypothesis to be studied, to concede that we have no reason to state what we are stating, to accept without losing face that the other might be right since our idea does not withstand scrutiny, to challenge our own ideas, to admit that we made a mistake, all these are attitudes that can't be imposed by themselves. For this, we must learn to appreciate a problem for what it offers to our intellect without caring about protecting our image. This attempt at reaching beyond our self brings about a letting go that can be learned and practiced, a letting

go which much be the object of a kind of education which is seldom found in standard schools. There, the true and the false, the good and the bad, are generally over-determined, axiologies are rigid, and what is stated is often the object of a judgment against which there is no recourse. We must therefore not be surprised by the emergence of relativism, a mean of defense privileged by those who feel too small to fight; unless they are already pervaded by rage and resentment...

Going slowly is the first condition to establish distantiation. It gives some time for reflection instead of immediately falling for the first instinctive mental reflex that comes. To state and restate the problem, to rethink it, this gives us time to accomplish the work that needs to be done on our self. Also, the rules of the game are crucial. They contribute to the state of mind. To constantly relate ideas to one another, to simultaneously think of various propositions, by reformulating, comparing and analyzing, invites our thought to anchor on new perspectives: it builds up confidence in our thought's own means, its own reason. To a large extent, it is out of weakness that we feel the need to defend by all means our ideas against foreign ones, perceiving them as a threat.

### **2.3 De-centration**

This skill directly comes out of the two previous ones. When the thought process is settled, it can assume some distance from itself and therefrom it can anchor on something else, on someone else. It can bind to what is not its own, even to the void and the unknown. It works in the same way for



truth, for reason, or simply for whoever is in front of us. To momentarily center on the other is to accept getting away from familiarity, which signifies leaning to extract oneself from our own intellectual habits. If to engage in philosophizing amounts to extract ourselves from the realm of opinions, from the other, the interlocutor, mirror and echo of our speech, is an excellent mean of training in this extraction, even if we don't initially trust him, even if his ideas inspire us less than others, or exactly because we usually give primacy to our own ideas, since we feel more comfortable there, or at least believe so. To decenter is to enter into a critical reading of our ideas, and for those who tell us that it is impossible to get out of ourselves, let's say that it is being both inside and outside. It is obviously difficult, but necessary. Without this, how could we deliberate? How could we have a judgment on ourselves and others? How could we really think? From which perspective could we think, evaluate our own ideas, so to say? To learn to decenter is to free ourselves from ourselves and therefore gaining access to universality, to the requirement of truth and reason, which regardless of the apparent restriction, an initial frustration or negativity, or in fact because of it, revalue the individual by helping him to reach an altogether new dimension of being.

To practice this decentralization, a certain amount of tools can be useful which have already been mentioned: reformulation, comparison of ideas, analysis, and problematisation. Everything which requires a student to think on what does not come from him, without being satisfied with "yes, but...", or "I do not agree" or other such immediate reactions. To question the other, without saying or suggesting what we are thinking ourselves, is an excellent exercise for both the student and the teacher. But if it is too

difficult, in particular for the younger ones, one can initially stick to reformulation, which requires a minimum of attention and comprehension towards other student. For children who find it difficult to receive criticism on their own ideas, an interesting technic is to ask them to find objections to their own ideas, inviting them to use the counter-step.

## 2.4 Working on subjectivity

To decenter, as we indicated already, by taking a distance from ourselves, by confronting ourselves, allows us to anchor our thoughts and being more deeply, and to forge our identity. Although we invite the student to conceptualize, our exercise does not negate or ignore subjectivity: it is unavoidable to test it, to educate it, to elaborate it. From the beginning we ask the students to express themselves on this or that subject. This is an exercise which stimulates the student to express his mind immediately on a given question. Thus, here, our primary matter is not some kind of authorized or sanctified truth emanating from form some authority, but what fabricates, invents or elaborates the student. The purpose is not to glorify this unachieved fabrication, as if to express ourselves was enough for everything to be achieved. For these opinions or thoughts, more or less articulated or clear, are but the beginning of the work to be done, as we explained already. It works in the same way for the identity of the student, which in a first time might go back to a simple subjectivity, the echo of a misunderstanding, of an impossibility, of a simple feeling; a difficulty that will be expressed by parts of words, by simple repetitions of what has already been heard, by vague memories of what the teacher had said or by

other distant speech, sometimes incoherent. Through this kind of work on thought and speech, and the relation that we entertain with them, self-awareness, greater mastery of its intellectual and psychological functioning, and the development of personality, will be deployed and amplified. “Feelings are confused thoughts”, wrote Leibniz. Thus, the clarification process of thought brings about a return to itself of subjectivity, from the side of reason and consciousness.

To train ourselves on duration, to reflect through the other, to accept difficulty, to recognize mistakes, all of this forms a wider learning which extends the spatio-temporal horizon of the student. It enjoins him to undertake some work on himself which will be useful to his maturation process. The student therefore carries a judgment which is not solely attached to particular interests, but which tends towards universality.

It is thus essential, while establishing intellectual issues, to de-dramatize the discussion, so that the student finds space and freedom of thought, which requires not fearing either being slow, or making mistakes. It is mainly a state of mind to establish in class, where everyone can feel confident to think. Be it humor, softness, patience or other virtues, the teacher will have recourse to his most natural skills, to encourage risk and confidence.

## 2.5 Appropriation of knowledge

The primary matter of the discussion coming from students, the used and produced knowledge, are all coming from the class. With the exception of the status of the student which is therefrom transformed, since the student becomes author and authority, - a shift which is not meaningless – the relation to knowledge is also affected. If ideas as well as the process of analysis and transformation of these ideas come from the students, knowledge belongs to them since it is theirs. On one part, this experience demystifies both thought and knowledge, since students have a direct and autonomous access to it, encouraged by the philosophical exercise. On the other part, the validity of knowledge not being sanctioned by the teacher but by the group, this forces everyone to become more responsible. At the beginning of this practice, this will be problematic for the students. Both for the ‘good students’, those who beg for the permanent approbation of the adult in a distinctive ‘schoolish’ way, lost in all these ideas which they must organize on their own; and for the ‘mediocre’ ones, who got used to the authority of the teacher which they rejected as a kind of external and artificial reality. Dual confrontation, the fact of having to produce ideas, to argue over them and to justify them so that colleagues can reflect on them, or even to win over the adhesion of colleagues, the permanent requirement of a judgment forged on the validity of emerging thoughts, all of this dramatically changes the state of things.

The whole of the exercise, accomplishment of the moment, is the work of all the students. It is not a heterogeneous whole, but a unique group, for even if singular students can recognize themselves in some ideas, everyone could have also shown their incoherence, deepen it or

present it in another light. If knowledge is born from everyone, if it can come from students and not only from books, or from the brain of the teacher, it can thus be accessible to all: it is no more the preserve of a few. Thus the child becomes a teacher. This new awareness necessarily affects the general functioning of the class. The difficulty for the teacher is to retain his natural temptation to validate or reject the expressions of the students. "I can't let this go through!" The teacher must train himself to play the game of collective reason, while still being able to come later on in class on sometimes which he would like to clarify or correct. He can also innocently underline a particular moment of the discussion, to see if anyone can identify a particular issue. But if he is patient, he will be surprised from time to time, when a student will give meaning to what at first appeared meaningless.

## 2.6 Autonomy

The necessity to initiate a process of 'singularization' of thought is particularly visible in pre-school classes, or in Class One, where there is a strong tendency to repeat: repeating what the teacher or other students said. For this reason, one of the first rules to establish is forbidding repetition, requiring every idea to be new, unless it is explicitly required to repeat or reformulate what has been said. To break away from this 'fusional' tendency, from this individuation, is a real learning. To think on one's own, to formulate our own ideas and to express them to the group is a genuine learning process. If some students already have a familial experience in this domain, it is not the case for all. Some will take some

time before understanding what is asked from them. For if they feel concerned by some practical questions, the idea of the life of the spirit does not speak to them, and this is one reason why, out of misunderstanding, they repeat what they have heard or just whatever comes to their mind. The first step, or the first obstacle, to an autonomous mind is to get use to the discussion. Thereafter, one should learn to not fear sanction anymore, or error or ridicule, by taking responsibility for what we have to say and daring to say it. Regular school, on this point, has a tendency, unconsciously maybe, to encourage a discourse pleasing the teacher, a discourse that permanently seeks approbation. This is an exercise in which 'good' students thrive. For this reason, it is important that the adult avoids commenting during class discussions, that he refrains from reacting and that he does not complete the students' sentences before them.

Later on, a problem that can happen, after the 'fusional' one, is reaction. The "I do not agree", spontaneous and automatic, even if the justifications given later on do not contradict what has just been said. It is a kind of "I am here", an anxiety that must be surpassed, which comes from heteronomy since it is an essentially reactive kind of act. Genuine critical thinking cannot be of a compulsive nature. If it is crucial to remove the weight of an exterior and arbitrary axiology, it is just as important to learn to examine ideas with composure. This is particularly true when a child reaches teen age, a period where reactive tendencies are strong, particularly when the exterior world seems ungraspable and threatening.

Some proceeding rules are facilitating the emergence of autonomy. But in a first time, the student must be encouraged to dare knowing, as admonishes the “Aude sapere” of Kant, to dare to think, by giving time to everyone for the elaboration of thought, by protecting the speaking time. For the older students, particularly the most shy, the written format can help: it is possible to save some time for everyone to prepare his speech by a short written text. In any case, to become autonomous, authenticity must be cultivated: to say what we want to say, without hesitation, apologies or fastidious introductory remarks. It becomes necessary to not fear the look of the teacher or of the colleagues anymore. In any case, if this look can't be ignored, the student must learn to not let his self be determined by his fear of others.

## 2.7 Mourning the “I wanted to say”

One of the difficulties of our exercises, particularly identifiable in the reformulation work, is the “I wanted to say”. “What I want to say”, “what I wanted to say”, are statements which are necessarily followed by a “you did not understand me”, or a systematic “you can't understand me”. Reformulation operates as a mirror: it sends the author back to what he said. As in a mirror, distantiation or even distortion is producing an objectification which makes the content of thought more visible. For some, this process is unbearable. They experience this technic as a confiscation of their thought, or an intrusion into their intimacy, since their speech does not belong to them anymore. They will reject any reformulation through the formulas just mentioned. Their constant recourse to the “I wanted to say” is

therefore the expression of chronic dissatisfaction, anxiety over imperfection, linked with the Damoclesian sword of the perfect idea, the right idea, the true answer, the good answer. The “I wanted to say” becomes a refuge for the almightiness feeling of thought and speech. This phenomenon is so acute in some students that they will hesitate before expressing themselves, since “I have so many things to say”. The anxiety over choice, over not finding the proper words, over not knowing what to say, are symptoms of this handicap which need to be worked upon. This is a primary condition to the mere possibility of genuine exchange. Unleashing our hits, as it is said in tennis, to say what we want to, without caring too much about others, taking responsibility for what we say without caring for what we could have said or add, to listen to what we say, are learnings which allow us to work on our auto-censorship, a reflex deeply imbedded in some students.

For this, it is important to permanently de-dramatize the discussion, be it through humor, softness, and sometimes by calling upon the imagination instead of the truth. To produce any idea, and not the true idea, the good one or the absolute one, are as many canons weighting on the mind of the students, of the ‘good’ students in particular. This gives a distance between one self and one’s ideas, because ideas can always be modified in a second time. To think together, to discuss, is like making a draft and not a perfect copy; learning to take risks by formulating hypotheses. For this, a good exercise is to ask students to answer a question in a simple sentence in a very limited period of time: one or two minutes. Thereafter, ask the students who could not do it what was the



difficulty, and later ask the others to share their views on this. In general, these problems tend to quickly disappear.

## 2.8 The esthetic of the problem

The problem is a concept which, by definition, carries a negative connotation in the common language. It is defined as a resistance, an obstacle in the middle of the way. It represents a lack of transparency; it defies comprehension while requiring a resolution. A problem which does not resist is not a problem. Due to its contradictory nature which is derived from the opposition between its opacity and its requirement, the problem is a source of pain. And like many painful situations, the natural tendency is to cover the reality of the problem, particularly as a child. From this begins a vicious circle: the more problematic the problem is the more it is covered and the more it is covered, the more it is problematic. Thus we see students for who the problem is such that it is out of question to face its nature. There is only pain, which is often expressed by a closure on one's self or by a more or less controlled aggressive charge against the teacher or the institution, if not against colleagues or the student himself.

Confronted by this situation, our strategy is a 'rehabilitation of the problem'. We must give back its positive status to the problem: this is the reason why the teacher suggests possible problems to the student, when the problem is perceived as a privileged tool for learning, in mathematics for example. If it is the case, greater importance is given to the problem: it deserves our interest and we must give it enough time. There is no reason

to avoid it and move past it, simply to go forward, by ignoring the difficulties it raised or by giving a cheap already made answer. A problem worthy of this name deserves some time of latency, a period to mature which will make it useful to grow, because it offers those who grasp it the possibility to accomplish genuine work on their self.

But if this is obvious for a problem stated in advance, the one coming out of the 'book', it is not so for a 'real' problem: the one which is there, immediately present, in the mind of the student. This problem which affects his whole learning process, which he has sometimes been carrying over many years without any attempt to solve it, simply because it has never been valued as a problem. This problem is often evacuated, since it "prevents moving forward", it "slows down" the pedagogical process instead of being appreciated for what it is, the very key and substance of the pedagogical process.

To perform this reversal, the teacher must use various strategies, including the one which we call the 'esthetic of the problem'. It consists in a permanent quest for 'pretty problems', that are thus qualified as soon as they are encountered, precisely because they are a challenge to the mind, like a painting which puzzles us or a movie that captures our attention. Any resistance, all opposition, all obstacle to thought, instead of being perceived as a lack of something, an insufficiency, or as the manifestation of some incompetence, will be considered as the products of a perspicacious mind, simply because they have been perceived, identified and articulated. Before even articulating the problem as a challenge to be

overcome, its mere identification will be valued, a principle named as 'problematizing' in philosophy, which gives value and materiality to philosophical work. To bring to light the problem is the main and essential activity of the mind: is it not in this respect that great thinkers are recognized? Of course, this presupposes that the 'transmissive' paradigm, relatively hegemonic in traditional pedagogy, be somewhat shaken or at least put in parentheses for the duration of reflection, the time of a breathing.

## 2.9 Emergence of consciousness

The subject who does not know how to look at itself as an object of reflection, who does not know how to double itself, for whom the world can be reduced to feelings and immediate concerns, has no access to thought. The act of thinking, as indicated by the term, requires some exteriority, since it is a thought which comes back to itself. In this way, it requires an interlocutor, an intermediary, some entity to echo back. In a first time, this interlocutor is limited to those nearby, to concrete individuals who, by reacting, send us back an image of our self, as many encounters to reflect upon, which invite us to consider a reality that we had so far failed to see. This amounts to an emergence of consciousness, consciousness of self and of the world. This faculty is both cognitive and psychological, for if consciousness allows us to know, it is also the foundation of an attitude, of a way of being, of a look on the external that is reflected on the self. But this consciousness comes out of feelings just as much as from thought. Rousseau tells us that moral consciousness, to consider others in our

thoughts and actions, is primarily a feeling. But this feeling, as with any other ones, can be educated. And the same holds true for openness towards the world and others. For if consciousness initially awakens to itself and its immediate neighbor, it is slowly initiated into generality: it is the condition of access to abstraction and universality. Plato describes how we first come to know a pretty thing, and then beauty in itself. A conscious and deliberate judgment can thus be formed, which fully assumes itself, in its implications and consequences; a judgment which, through the developments of consciousness, can be mainly established on what is foreign to itself, instead of on the immediacy of its own singularity, pulled out from the evidence of its own being. But this existential evidence resists, it imposes its needs and desires: the development of consciousness itself is genuine work.

To listen to the other, to understand him, to verify this comprehension, to imagine other hypotheses than our own, to take the time to think, to imagine the unthinkable, to grasp the issues between various perspectives, are as many requirements which bring about consciousness. Thus, all of what happens in the course of a session, as banal or incongruous as the incident might be, is part of the exercise, including, and especially, the dysfunctional elements. Always start with the problems and difficulties raised or manifested by the students, else by the teacher, the latter being part and parcel of the exercise. To become aware is precisely to ignore nothing. Nothing can dominate over this urgency, often forgotten out of some inefficiency; probably because of its unspeakable aspect, being not very concrete and hard to evaluate.

## 3.TOOLS AND SOCIAL SKILLS

### 3.1 The status of the other

Often, in common discussions, the other only serves to show off, as an auditor, someone who takes our place; sometimes he even represents a threat. For everyone, to discuss is mainly to say, for oneself, what we have to say, while hoping that the other will soon end his turn, especially if we do not agree with him. Who never saw these children with their hand suspended in the air, sometimes for quite a long period, a very uncomfortable position, while their colleagues are talking? Can they really be listening? Will they be listened to in their turn? Listening, without even mentioning the problem of comprehension, is even more difficult... Thus, for practical and symbolical reasons, it is necessary that all signs of attention be requested and made visible.

Beyond the mere cognitive issue, this listening simultaneously reflects and determines the nature of social behaviors. In real terms, in class, every individual is relatively isolated, the other and the group represents no factor adding extra value to the self. To give a status to the other is also to give one to our self, by mere reflexivity. For this reason, reformulation is a meaningful tool. When we have students for whom writing a sentence is an important and complex task, students who are rarely listened to in their surroundings, to be reformulated by a colleague, to be able to judge if yes or no “we have been understood”, is an event in itself. The anxious student, not at ease with himself, will find great pain in the entertainment of such relations, which require one to decenter and to take the neighbor into consideration. But this can be worked upon, with patience and slowly, bringing real results on the emotional and cognitive levels. As well as not to rush to express disagreement, but to learn to abide for a moment with the proposition of the neighbor, to reformulate it in our own words, to accept the reformulation of our own words, to question foreign speech from the inside without sharing our own ideas, or asking for help when we feel cornered by a question or an objection, are all processes which build up confidence in one self and others.

### 3.2 Relation to the group

So many fashionable words, as respect and tolerance, brandished here and there, mean nothing if they are not accompanied by measures which protect and value the individual. Most of the time, they are forbidding lists,

posted here and there in the school, supposed to relieve functioning shortcomings. These are rules which students know by heart, starting with those who do not apply them. Philosophical discussion works directly on the relation to the group by implementing collective functioning rules, as would be the case for a sport practice or game. These rules become conditions for the success of an exercise instead of being strict forbidding rules of moral or judicial overtones. The utilitarian and ludic dimensions of the exercise take over the ethical one, weighting down its heavy and arbitrary dimension, something which offers another access to the problem of functioning in society.

For many students, the group as group is an abstract entity, unknown, even threatening, it mirrors the relation between the individual and the city. Already, the fact of learning to express oneself in front of the class, not by showing off one's knowledge or understanding, but by reflecting with the help of all intellectual faculties for the purpose of producing ideas, an expression followed by various feedbacks from colleagues which one will learn to accept, is a great way to involve one's being in the learning process, as well as in the relation to the group. There onward the individual learns to act on the collectivity in a conscious manner, respectfully, rationally and calmly, to learn that such an attitude invites back a similar behavior from others. Emulation then takes over the threatening feeling, fear, invective, ignorance, competition or conflict. Not by miracle, but throughout a regular practice. The group is demystified, its opacity brightens, and everyone gradually gains confidence in his own potential role, in his capacity to act on all students and on the teacher. The

group is not an entity to be suffered anymore, which limits our individuality, but a collective on which we can act.

To work on this aspect of things, it is important to create processes that allow the class to express itself as a whole. The principle of voting, as in the city, is a skillful mean. Thus, in a debate, when a given question divides the group, a vote should be called. It is not like if this vote had any absolute value in regard to truth or righteousness – it is indeed important to periodically remind everyone of this fact to avoid confusion – but it is a convenient way to check to what extent a given thought or some developed arguments have been convincing. At first, this sanction can be challenging for some students, not used to this new reality: they only know the sanction of the teacher, more comforting. But after a while, the relation to group becomes more banal: this is part and parcels of the rules of the game. It is now out of question to talk simply to express oneself, but to address others, their comprehension or misunderstanding, or even to analyze the problems that come to review one's copy or functioning, on the spot or later on.

### 3.3 Responsibility

As we mentioned already, it appears impossible to become responsible in front of a group when relation with others is reduced to a limiting view of the other, when relation with others is not considered as possibly constitutive of the self. Within a group, particularly if it is limited in size, as in a class, responsibility implies reflexivity: to answer for the other implies answering for ourselves, and vice versa. Since proximity is greater, everyone



entertains closer relationship with their neighbor, a fusional factor exacerbated by permanent contact throughout the year, or even throughout many years. The volatility of a class, reacting vividly in a quasi-instantaneous way to any internal or external solicitations, to any modification of the context, an experience known to all teachers, is one of the most stunning proofs of this fact. Paradoxically, maybe, to become responsible already implies an awareness of one's own singularity, to untangle from the group and to assume this singularization, even if it is unpopular. Collective pressure is sometimes terrible, by times even more than the teacher can imagine. Thereafter, this singularization must perceive its own capacity for action and determination on the group. One cannot be responsible if he is impotent: in such case, one can only isolate himself.

The process of philosophical discussion thus implies, from one part, to individualize speech, by protecting it with various functional rules, like not interrupting any speech, listening, reformulating, as many processes that give the specific individual his proper space by asking others to momentarily de-center. On the other part, this individual speech must be valued, by working upon it, by analyzing, by keeping it as an important idea, always susceptible, in its various instances, to inflect the course of the collective reflection and to lead the discussion forward. The simple juxtaposition of opinions, which drowns all speeches under the multitude of everyone's words, does not allow this. Thus the student becomes a producer of ideas, not simply a child that expresses himself: he becomes a teacher. His status is transformed, which implies a real and substantial responsibility, not an artificial one, nominal or arbitrary. Everyone becomes

responsible for the good functioning of the class. On this point, it is possible to give different functions to different students: questioner, secretary, moderator, referee, etc. This can be done either with the entire class or in small groups. Difficult classes can function better in smaller groups, where it is easier to find one's place. The request for help, when a child is cornered and admits it, which is a learning in itself, is also a good tool to make everyone responsible.

### 3.4 Learning the rules

In themselves, rules are never popular at first, their use never obvious and immediate, even if they are common sense. Particularly in school, where for the child rules seem to multiply in indefinite and arbitrary manners. There reigns the feeling of constantly being subjected to the sanctions and restrictions of a discretionary power, even if it is not the explicit function of that power. Even class councils seem to exist only in order to use the children to confirm and impose rules predetermined by adults. The ill-intentioned God of Descartes is not a mere fantasy. If this feeling naturally prevails in class, as in the city, the philosophical discussion seems to open new perspectives again to work on this issue. Indeed, as in the philosophical process, everything can be subjected to problematisation, all realities reside in the validity of their arguments, everything can be the object of a discussion, and it goes that way for the relation to rules and the variety of behaviors. This uncertain aspect of the procedure, the impression that everything can be discussed, that no gain is irrevocable, that nothing is determined, might bother the teacher, who perhaps considers that

constantly coming back to functioning issues is a waste of time, that it prevents moving forward. Yet, difficulties in learning rules are no less important than those on mathematical techniques or grammar rules. Functioning must indeed become an object of reflection, to remove it from its arbitrariness, to give it back its free will dimension, and to work on the experimental mode. The temptation of the anarchist anomy must be avoided, just as the one of rigid arbitrariness: both are not conducive to reflection.

For this, rules must be suggested and modified, new ones tried out, relevant suggestions in this regard encouraged. Students must be invited to moderate discussions where the plurality of the various dynamisms is tested, where moderations are evaluated, to determine their defects and qualities. As long as this brings about a more acute awareness of oneself and of the group, inciting analysis, judgments and arguments, the exercise is useful, unless there is an excess of permanent debate on debate, which would prevent a session to be lead till the end. Just as it is necessary to take our time to examine a hypothesis before moving on to another, it is necessary to take some time to play a game according to rules till the end in order to evaluate it. Without this, we function in immediacy and compulsion. The plurality of methods of philosophical discussions and changes in practice can be useful.

### 3.5 Thinking together

If thinking by oneself can be learned, the same is true for thinking together, which creates a certain amount of problems specific to thought. The

Cartesian 'cogito' (I think), through which we exist because we think individually, using the first person of the singular, the "I think therefore I am", can here be a handicap since we are trying collectivize the process of thought. The manifested natural tendency is rather to think without the other, to think despite the other, to think against the other, etc. One can observe the natural abuse, in class or elsewhere, of the "yes, but..." and the "I do not agree with" which imply that one is right and the other is wrong. The principle of a research community, of the American philosopher Matthew Lipman, is a rather useful concept for this aspect of the work. It consists in setting up the class as a group of scientists who will be collaborating over a certain amount of time on a specific task. To facilitate the emergence of collective truths, to make use of the other in thinking, besides the purely intellectual aspect of the exercise, which we discussed already, implies a transformation of social relations. This is particularly striking in classes where the relations are tensed and heavy, tensions generally linked to existential and psychological issues. The first postulate from which communal thinking can be established is to accept the limited nature of every singular thought, its necessarily partial aspect, partial and contradictory. From then on, the student has no more trademark to defend, he can admit his ignorance, his difficulties, admit that he is cornered, ask for help, accept that his ideas are being challenged, etc. He is ready to accept the ideas of others if they appear to be efficient, and at the same time he is able to recognize collective truths, like the rules by which we are able to function as a group, or hypotheses which seem better able to grasp a given problem, even if it comes from someone else. This confrontation with another becomes a challenge, like in martial arts, and no longer a

threat: the true and the just do not imply concurrence but collaboration, rooted in a confidence pact, even if only temporarily.

Again, this does not come naturally: various artificial procedures must be set up, which can cultivate such behaviors, rules which will be assimilated and which will become natural as the practice develops. Reformulation, admitting difficulties, mutual questioning, are some among the many that we have already described.

## Chapter VI

### Various Objections

Regulated debate, as a pedagogical moment, as a learning mode of oral expression, of argumentation and of the building of thought in primary school, is a part of the official curriculum since 2002. It is within this frame that can be inserted the philosophical discussion practice. However, this innovation is far from being implemented by a majority of teachers. It could be argued that it goes like this for every innovation and that such a slow pace, or resistance, is to be expected as being in the natural order of things. Especially since most of the concerned teachers are not trained for this type of practices and that, even if some are naturally involved in group discussions in class, out of personal motives, it is not obvious for all. To lead a debate is not so obvious, especially in our French culture where we discuss a lot but where we do not know how to dialog or debate. In fact, this brings out the question of the coherence of official pedagogical innovations, where form is not – or not much – taken care of; but this is not of our concern for the moment. Let's rather examine a certain number of arguments recurrently stated by those who, at the very least, are not enthusiastic about this kind of practice.

## 1. NOT PHILOSOPHERS

The first objections of teachers, the most formal ones, concern the specific qualifications of the moderator who introduces the exercise. These qualifications are stated as different from the ones of the teachers: “We are not philosophers”. Teachers explain this difference in capacities by a formation problem: “we have been trained for this”. Or they refer to a lag in skills: “The philosopher is used to go through the end of things, to dig ever deeper.” “I will not go deeper: this is the danger of our job.” “It is your second nature to answer questions with questions. This gymnastic is yours. It is not the case for everyone.” “You will find meaning everywhere, I don’t know if I can do it.” Others will prefer having recourse to arguments relating to objective factors (time, priorities) instead of stating their incompetence outright: this avoids having to confront oneself. For the one who admits: “I don’t know what to do”, by stating his own insufficiency, implicitly accepts to reflect and to discuss the issue. If we stick on stating the material impossibility of the exercise, no further discussion is possible. But it is true, as we have mentioned already, that the term ‘philosopher’ has heavy connotations, and this abusive and glorifying notoriety of philosophy ironically serves here, consciously or not, as an alibi not to engage in philosophy.

## 2. NO TIME

Second in importance, the question of time comes in. “The program is already loaded and we have no time to add yet another activity.” “We

already have many activities to carry on.” This sentence seems to summarize the essential part of the difficulty: the fact that the student takes his time to articulate and express his mind is conceived as an activity in itself, and not as a pedagogical mode, relatively essential, as another type of relation to knowledge. This means that the principle of encouraging an oral feedback from the class, be it to verify its comprehension degree, to make the student more participative or responsible, to facilitate mutual teaching amongst peers, to invite the student to a greater maturity, or to solve the hiatus between thought and knowledge, so as to facilitate the appropriation of the material taught in class, is not perceived as an integral part of the matrix of the teacher’s work. On one side there is the ‘real’ class, the one where the teacher explains and talks, and on the other side there is a kind of annex and almost non-existent activity, where speech belongs to the student. The latter is therefore negatively connoted; it’s a waste of time since it’s not a time for learning but an interruption in the process, a suspension, or even a kind of parasite on the ‘real’ class, the official learning process. Doubtlessly this vision comes from a very French tradition, the one of the ‘lesson’, where knowledge is most of all a theoretical affair, a magisterial and unidirectional composition, instead of a practical one. And if pedagogy evolved on this point, in the scientific domain amongst others, common teachings still remain too theoretical. This traditional set up involves a short term methodology rather than a long one: it gives answers instead of inviting students to find them, as in Plato’s distinction.



There is a kind of teachers for whom the philosophical discussion is a relatively unthinkable activity. We call him the 'hyperactive'. For him, every hour matters, written down in a very precise manner in a packed calendar, where nothing must be forgotten, where nothing must be upset: he wants to be effective! He is always tense since, of course, he always finds something to add to meticulously fill in his 'task book', and thus he is always anxious and nervous, thus it is out of question to take some time to breathe and lose a precious opportunity that could be better used: to learn something 'useful'. Full of good intentions, this teacher saturates the mental space of the class, globally but also in the course of each session, since it is necessary to see and know everything. Thus, his criticism is directed against the slow motion of the exercises that we suggest. "Sometimes it does not move forward, it's too slow." He does not perceive the exercise in its practical dimension; he considers the exchange solely on the angle of formal knowledge, knowing or not knowing, instead of as a reflective activity, with its tottering, its mistakes and deficiencies.

### 3. SPONTANEITY

In a paradoxical manner, which is nonetheless coherent, the same teacher who uses the argument of time tends to subsequently use the one of spontaneity. He will tell you that, at some point, a great discussion happened in class, spontaneously, following some memorable event in class or in society. And, for this reason, he would not like to 'placate' a discussion, something which appears artificial to him. He thus goes from a very objective argument to a totally subjective one, the latter clearly

showing the distinction that he entertains between knowledge given by the teacher, which is real and substantial, and the thought of the student, clearly more random. Indeed, never could mathematics or grammar be considered as 'artificial' or 'placated', since they are necessary, but the thought process of the student, yes. As if the student could not think of mathematics and grammar and discuss it, as if the thought of oneself and of the world could not be treated as rigorously as mathematics or grammar, as if the expression of the student had legitimacy only when expressed in the context of an art exhibition or following some dramatic incident. Therefore, let's not be surprised to witness how a strictly formal and external view of knowledge and mind leads our children, with the catastrophic consequences that it has on students in difficulty, who conceive of life in school as somewhat similar to the one on Mars.

On one side we have academic formalism and on the other we find 'spontaneism'. It is very common amongst 'traditional' teachers to conceive of debate as an activity that is purely subjective, as educated as it can be, and not as a building up of the thought process, the latter, in their mind, being only singular and arbitrary, unless it has been 'authorized' and 'legitimated' a priori. Again, they might concede to spend some rare instances of their precious time for the sake of exchanges. These will be privileged moments which they will appreciate the better, all moved by the sincere and distracting nature of the exercise, without later on working in anyway on the raw material thus produced, which they conceive as untouchable for spontaneity's sake. In the end, such teachers will provide their authoritative advises as a good, conclusive and definitive speech. It is

as if the life of the mind was not primarily the genesis of thought and consequent acquaintance with its requirements, as if the thought process could not be trained through any form of practice. It is to be noted that most of the teachers who propagate such a 'natural' scheme of education will ironically, in the course of the discussion, rush to 'rectify' the various propositions of students which appear false or unacceptable in their eyes, and this with the best intentions in the world.

#### 4. DECENTRATION

A real argument, but used strangely, is the one which states that students have difficulty to listen, that they are rather egocentric, something which is, in the majority of cases, a somewhat unchallengeable observation, even if it is in no case a valid objection. It appears to us that this state of things is rather a problem that needs to be addressed. For, this observation refers back to the same lack of concentration which prevents the student from listening to the teacher, but also to the conception which the child entertains about himself: he is not a producer of knowledge; his speech is not 'authorized', it is not valid since it has no source of learning. We observe this phenomenon in some 'good' students, for whom nothing has any value besides the discourse of the teacher, their own thought being totally devalued. Any exercise which invites him to risk his own thinking will be a real challenge for him. In the same way: we do not consider what can be learned from the other. Thus, this difficulty deserves to be worked upon, especially since it has major consequences. The treatment of a problem does not have to be evacuated, unless we believe that it is accessory, that

we do not have the means to face it or that it is in essence impossible to tackle. But, the difficulty of students to listen to themselves, as a double problem of concentration and of identity, appears to be nesting at the heart of the work done in primary school, a problem which can be solved through practice and not by miracle or naturally. How many students arrive in Terminal without daring to think or to produce an argument of their own, because they are convinced about their lack of legitimacy?

## 5. CHANGING HAT

Another kind of argument refers to the rupture, to the contradiction between the regular work of the teacher and this type of exercise, to the change in the relations between the teacher and the student. “Normally I must wear my policeman hat and now I must ask them what they think about this and that.” “It appears difficult to me to do what you are doing, because they do not behave in the same way with you and with me. You insist, and with you they do not dare to complain.” “The teacher must build a discipline which requires daily work.” To accept that the students freely express what they think on sensitive subjects is perceived as an assault, at least potentially, on that discipline. The workshop requires a reversal considered dangerous or useless by the teacher, or else something that he does not feel ready to implement. After these few introductory remarks, once the teacher admits not knowing how to lead such a discussion in class, the discourse becomes more real: we are no more in the realm of the alibi, but in reality.

Indeed, it is not easy to lead a regulated debate which does not remain as an inchoative series of opinions poorly reflected. How to produce such a mindset? How to engage in a real confrontation of ideas? How to ensure a real face to face encounter with others and with ourselves? How to conclude? What are we looking for in such a debate? These are as many legitimate and not easy questions which cannot be answered swiftly. Such a functioning implies a change of hat, where the teacher must operate in a hollow mode and not in a full one. He is there to question and not anymore to answer questions or to preach the good news. He must be attached to the process and not to the results anymore. He must be able to foresee the multiplicity of thought, its ubiquity: to learn to problematize. He must not be afraid to enter the mind of the student, which requires a good amount of patience and availability. It becomes necessary to rethink one's own knowledge. Many are the requirements regarding his way of being and his thought, requirements which the teacher might not be ready to assume.

## 6. TOO SMALL

Among the many other arguments which we will encounter, there is another one which is revealing: the students are too young, "they are too small". But this attitude is unfortunately the same which motivates teachers in Terminal to say that their students do not think and that there is no use to waste time in allowing them to speak. This state of mind propagates in a more or less conscious manner a kind of myth of thought, or of reason, a kind of 'deus absconditus', a transcendence armed and shielded in front of which we can only kneel and lower our heads. In over glorifying thought, or rather

knowledge, we do not think anymore, or in any case we do not invite anyone to think about anything anymore. The mind, in this legendary and glorious vision, remains some ethereal substance, mysterious and ungraspable, of a quasi-religious nature: a kind of grace that we have received or not, a random blessing similar to a gift or to genius. The fact that reason, like any muscle of the body, can be worked upon by specific exercises, in a gymnastic constitutive of the self, is simply ignored. On one side there are those who think, and on the other side those who do not, which are only allowed to admire from a distance the “athletes” of the grey matter.

For all ages there is an exercise of reason, there are exercises of reason, which is useful to practice by adapting them to the reality of the level and context of the student, in order to set in motion such a reason, in order to become aware of certain fundamental mental processes which would otherwise never become explicit, except for a certain natural elite where the familial context provides the necessary support for such kinds of needs. It is stunning to observe in class, during this kind of exercises as in others, how some students are bored: they do not ‘see’. Important disparities clearly appear regarding the relation to the life of the spirit, regarding the characterized deficiencies of some students or of a whole class. This can make the exercise very ungrateful if the difficulty is not remedied through pedagogical tools. As we mentioned, these difficulties can be encountered by ‘good’ students, skillful in repeating the words of the teacher, but paralyze when it comes to risking their own thoughts. This should remind us that in school subjects where one must ‘learn’, psittacism

is pleasant, faint is satisfying, or at least reassuring, and it is maybe easier to add material in class than to learn how to work on the thought process. In any case, if there is a difficulty, the living exercise of thought will uncover these difficulties, as structural as they may be. This uncovering of the mental state of students appears to be, in our eyes, a requirement of first necessity.

## 7. DESTABILIZATION

This leads us to discuss another recurrent critic: this kind of exercise is dangerous. It destabilizes children, on the cognitive and identity level. This critic is even more important since it refers back to a deeper problem, a more or less conscious postulate that particularly governs French society: “Let’s live happy, let’s live hidden!” “Let’s not be noticed!” At the outset, it is a question of protection, of confidence, of protection, an anxiety that is linked with some pedagogical theses which aim to behave with students as good mothers with their children, spoon feeding them, a tendency which might be exacerbated by the growing feminization of the teachers’ body. And if other theses, on the contrary, tend to defend the idea of risk taking by inviting the student to confront a complex and unexpected situation, the implementation of these situations is not sufficiently established in the course of the teacher’s formation: it is a mere petition of principles. Nevertheless, what is so destabilizing: to talk in front of others, to be expose to our peers? The group constitutes a kind of threat; alterity is a source of limitation and of worries. Implicitly, the other does not interest us, and we do not interest him; the relation with the collective necessarily

connotes a source of worries, of tension and of rejection. To singularize our self, to take the risk to express a personal thought is from the outset perceived as a source of pain, as a danger. However, if school is to be conceived as place of collective learning, is it not where the child must learn to reconcile himself with the group, its foreignness and its plurality, and should he not for this reason learn to be interested in others, and consequently to trust the other? It is therefore important to learn how to de-center, to relativize the hegemony of the unique relation that links every student to the teacher, by establishing transversal relations. It is not in college where this kind of reversal can be established, since teenage makes the difficulty even greater, an exacerbation which will turn against the teacher, which is even more perceived as an arbitrary authority: fear brings about strange reactions. Later on, in Terminal, with the Bachelor, the students now entering into the utilitarian phase of existence will still not have learned how to express themselves in public. The problem remains obvious even in university. The few words that we will hear will be restricted to repeating lessons learned by heart or to subjective outburst more or less controlled.

Mutual education, a kind of reversal of the student's identity, accrued autonomy, legit and legitimized in front of the established order, in front of established order, to risk thinking instead of learning to vomit back: here is the challenge. But how to bring about such a reversal in class when the teacher himself never experienced such a liberation? When fear of the other and lack of self-confidence dominate? How can such an upheaval be understood? Is the teacher not totally sincere in stating that it is too painful



for the student? How is one who fears the group ever able to teach confidence in the group? Even if words are there, even if efforts are made, the egocentrism of his way of being will betray him, particularly through his monopoly over the discourse or his exclusive possession of knowledge.

## 8. IT'S DIFFICULT FOR THEM

Another kind of argument regards the difficulty children are having with the exercise. "Some children do not like this exercise. As soon as it is announced in class they begin to complain." There will always be some children who will refuse to take part in the discussion. Moreover, the exercise is sometimes labor intensive, when a group is occasionally more apathetic, or more dissipated, moods and focus being very random, particularly in pre-school. "There is no progression in the discussion." There is a temptation for the teacher to have recourse to shortcut, the direct way where he explains 'ex cathedra' and provides the answer himself. Be it because he feels that children know the answer but don't say it or because he thinks that it is impossible for them to answer. The embarrassment of the student sometimes embarrasses the teacher as well, who from time to time will feel the need to intervene: "It was too painful. I wanted to help my student." "If it was me, I would risk giving out the solution." A doubt is present here: the traumatizing aspect of the exercise. This is the same doubt which will convince the teacher to avoid some more dramatic or existential tales, to favor the 'nicer' ones, even if the former ones give more food for thought.

## 9. THE TRAP OF KNOWLEDGE

Thus, the teacher-student couple which we have just described is rooted in such an apprehension, favoring the conventional discourse and the regular paths, insists on taking no risk with the material being taught. The written text becomes king, speech is barely a mean for expression, the colloquium is forbidden, interpretation is reduced to a strict minimum, dogma rules, no problematisation is possible, and creativity is banned, including amongst the good students, those who have learned the system and who know how to reproduce and perpetuate it: in particular the future teachers, those who know how to adapt. When knowledge dominated over thought, astonishment becomes improbable. The mind has become unavailable; it is closing down on predetermined schemes, on its own anxieties. It is astonishing to observe, as early as in the 'Little Section', some students who, in front of philosophical discussions, react by expressing a really school-oriented fear: "we are not learning anything", "we are not working", "we are losing our time", rare cases which still show how early this conditioning begins.

This criticism, as bitter as it may be, should not be taken as some kind of a radical condemnation of the teacher's functioning. We will take as proof these dynamic teachers, full of good intentions, always ready to jump into new projects, which make a great work, maybe even too much, involving their students in various perspectives, but who fail to perceive the limits of this pedagogical activism which saturates the class. Maybe are they confusing 'doing' and 'acting'? The nature of their lack of interest for

philosophical enquiry in class is not the same as the 'routine' oriented teacher, which is satisfied with his brand of transmissive minimalism, as efficient as this transmission of knowledge and procedures might be.

The angle of our work is specific. It does not pretend to cover the totality of the pedagogical space, but it is fundamental, in our eyes, to give in school a genuine status to thought as a thought process, by introducing the children to the pleasure of this thought, without any other expectation than itself, just as sport introduces them to the joys of the body, with all the psychological consequences which this mysterious faculty might have on the individual. If this taste is not developed in primary school, when will it be, in college, later on, or never? Teachers in secondary school are often too busy with the program of their respective disciplines to care for transversality or the notion of something being free. As for those who think that this faculty can develop "on its own", "fortuitously", if it is indeed the worst case scenario or reality in class, let's say that this reality cannot be in itself a regulating ideal.

## 10. NOT IN SHAPE

Another objection which we hear consists in saying, in various ways, that this exercise is only possible when children are in shape. Said otherwise, the exercise is considered difficult, more than others, since this kind of arguments would not be used to explain why not to engage in reading or in mathematics. But instead of waiting for some kind of a quasi-utopian graceful state of the class, a kind of indeterminate "later on", or to consider

the regulated discussion as a very particular exercise, why not take it as a practice which puts the students “in shape”, by sending them back to their own mental processes. And if these difficulties appear, they constitute the reality of the students: they must not worry us; on the contrary we can appreciate this uncovering as a mean to better approach the problem, as unpleasant as its immediate perception might be. Maybe we have to learn how to love this new awareness of problems, learning how to articulate it, instead of acting as if it did not exist, to leave it as a taboo, to be solved mysteriously. But again, the teacher himself must love or learn to love this uncovering.

“I tried one or two times to lead this kind of exercise, but I did not succeed”, will naively say the teacher, full of good intentions but quickly discouraged, without noticing that this is precisely this difficulty which interests us. Why did he get stuck in the opinion debate? Why did he not succeed in moving the debate forward? Why does he have an impression of emptiness when he does not propagate a determined content validated a priori, validated by authoritative works or by acquired knowledge? Was he able to see what was going on? When we begin such activities, it is recommended to invite a witness, a colleague if possible, who will be in a better position to see what is happening and what not, since this kind of teaching is, let’s admit it, somewhat a source of anxiety. It is so much so that we do not know how to appreciate the simple exercise of thinking for its own sake. All these anxieties, normally buried behind the good consciousness provided by the program, suddenly come out. Students who do not follow, students who are not motivated, students who are not

concentrated, as many realities which are in fact routine, now point their accusing fingers at this moment of freedom. Doubt besieges us: who are you to pretend to be able to make them think? Do you know how to think or are you stuck when time comes to show your evidences?

## 11. AND TRUTH IN ALL OF THIS

Another objection regards the concept of truth: what do we do about the concepts of true and false? This objection falls back on the first one: the one on “the change of hat”. Because the teacher can feel that he is being fooled by the apparent relativism that is taking place in such discussions: what to do with false answers which come back throughout the discussion, by mimetic or psittacism, frequent among the youngest? The overflow of imagination or the desire to play the fool can easily take over memory and the claim to veracity. Thus it is when in a discussion about a movie or a story a child tells some passages or imports a random character which have nothing to do with the subject of the discussion, and when others, amused, are continuing in that direction. It is precisely there where the moderator must play his role, and through his multiple questions invite the students to distinguish imagination from reasoning, memory and the desire to play. It is there that the issue of the exercise is to be found, and not in the production of a good answer. But this awareness passes through the articulation of the error, an error which must not be feared as it carries meaning. On one part the error is productive since it manifests the difficulties the child is facing and shows his functioning, which allows the teacher to better evaluate the situation. On the other side, it leaves room

for the autonomy of the student, a consideration too often forgotten, with future dramatic consequences. It should be witnessed just how many college students do not question their relation with the material being taught anymore, having forever fixed the subjective aspect of learning. Thereafter, when we discuss subjects where truth can be imposed a priori, who will be the guardian of the right and the true in this chaos of emerging speeches? The individual? The group? The teacher? “Nothing goes anymore!” as the croupier says when the little ball rolls. Who will be the judge and on what criteria? The danger of relativism, the anxiety of error, all these are as many ghosts who suddenly show their noses. To wander with the students, without any other safeguard than the various access to reason possessed by everyone, with more or less of this particular sensitivity which constitutes the philosophical fiber, compensated by the important warranty offered by the confrontation of perspectives. And if we were wrong? Catastrophe! This is the weight of the “true”, a schoolish moral, heavy to the extreme, which glues itself on the feeling of doing things right. But what can we lose? Already, it is only an exercise amongst others, even if it affects the general functioning of the class. Moreover, why do we not try to bet on collective reason, by imposing for this purpose some rules which force a deepening of the discussion? Without taking this bet, what is the purpose of teaching at all?

It is primarily this attitude which is questioned, this changing of hat which without letting go of all requirements, on the contrary, is terribly liberating. It is for this reason that such a reversal is somewhat frightening. True, it may be destabilizing, but is it not this, to educate: to remove

ourselves – teacher and students – from the heavy weight of opinions, of evidences, of oneself, of the platitude of a world where all has already been played out?

As wrote Leibniz, knowing how to worry, all is there. And to win the bet of thought is to accept to worry: knowing how to let go of the fears, crispation and obsessions which while pretexting to comfort us are taking over our soul, causing resentment, regret and bad consciousness. We have all known, hopefully, this teacher which marked our school years, which moved us. What did he have, this teacher, which made him so particular? Is he not the one who, one day, beyond the school walls, the note books, the class manuals and the schedules had us think? And this vivid substance, on that day, which moved us as we discovered it, maybe we can call it truth.

## 12. MORAL DILEMMA

A last objection, linked to the previous one: the one of the principles to inculcate, the dilemma of the imposed moral. What to do when judgment or an idea which in our eyes is unacceptable is clearly supported by the majority of students? This problem is made even more important by the fact that the first years of school are the moment and the location where the foundations of education and of life in society are laid down. What to do when an opinion on a given subject, opposed to the principles which the teacher tries to inculcate, is taking over?

For example, let's take the case of a discussion on the fact of reporting the bad behaviors of others. After some contradictory opinions the children, at least temporarily, seem to rally behind the idea of not reporting such behaviors. The teacher comments: "I really wanted to jump. If you had not been there I would have done it. Do you realize the consequences in the schoolyard, with all of what happens there!" the problem here is to know if this moral must be imposed or if it must be grounded in reason, knowing the random aspect of the latter. Indeed, some principles or rules might not be open to discussion. But the danger of the double discourse should not be hidden: the discourse of the class, destined to please authorities, artificially superposed on the one the outside discourse, more sincere but impossible to admit. This common hiatus creates many problems, both on the intellectual and social level. It is an easy solution which favors immediacy against long term education; if only because relation to authority is presented as a fake and deceitful one. It is therefore important to work thoroughly on a 'genuine' speech, the one of authenticity. Even then, this kind of workshop does not exclude the teacher's speech. On one part because he works on the questioning, which is not devoid of importance. On the other side, nothing forbids in a second time to come back on the discussion and to go deeper and knowingly into the arguments suggested by the students.

### 13. RESISTANCE

It is difficult to distinguish the difficulties of the exercise from the critics of the exercise, for obvious reasons. After numerous interventions in primary



school classes, punctually or regularly, two observations can be made. First, a good number of teachers are not very interested in this kind of practice, at least not enough to wish to observe or to understand its functioning, at least punctually. This is so for the various reasons that we just mentioned. Then, another noteworthy portion of the teachers, having seen the workshops, do not want to commit to the exercise. It is not that they do not consider it useful, constructive or necessary, but simply because they do not feel up to the task, something which many admit more or less naturally. However, we have noticed that if a limited number of teachers risk the adventure through a regular workshop, others acquire at various degrees the required qualities to lead such practices, such as questioning, or the mere fact of not completing the sentences of the students by pretexting that they know what the students wanted to say.

But for those who integrated the philosophical workshop in their daily ritual, even if only once a week, the consequences on the functioning of the class become visible after a few months. The most striking aspects are the respect for speech, the one of the students and of the teacher, be it the care and effort invested in the articulation of an oral or a written discourse, or in listening to the rules or again in the capacity to reformulate ideas. It is also worth mentioning the evolution in the relations between students, undeniably linked with the transformation of the conception which students have of themselves, with the reconfiguration of their role within the class and with the paradigm shifts in the learning process. Regarding the general difficulty of adopting such a pedagogical reversal, it would be naive to be surprised by it, as it is the same for any deep change. And it is not obvious

that any decree on the part of the institution, even if it can be considered or desired, can realistically tackle the core issues underlying the passive or active resistance to the emergence of philosophy in primary schools. Some countries, like Norway, Australia or Brazil have officially launched such a program. Let's see what will happen!

#### 1. THE PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS.

For the high demands of such exercises teachers must ask questions concerning the life experience of students. Already, the lovers of 'free dialog' feel that the discourse is being constrained, because the child cannot simply talk of whatever he wants to. The fact that some students won't say much, the initial difficulties in entering the process, the refusal of a given speech or the opinion sanctioned by the group, will reflect in their eyes the traumatizing character of a discussion thus regulated. For others, the objection will concern the uncertainty of the enterprise: since the teacher does not validate the various discourses, these exchanges will be seen as generating trouble and anxiety.

Our first answer will be to state that the 'classical' teacher also creates similar problems, maybe less visible or not immediately perceptible. Even more since habits and tradition tend to legitimize practices upon which there is no reflection anymore, or much less. Indeed, when the sole kind of authorized discussion in a class consists for the teacher to ask students questions to which answers are expected and sanctioned by him, this does not stimulate speech, and certainly not critical thinking. It is not a question here of articulating one's thought, but to vomit approximately an

established content and procedures repeated over and over. And if acceptance or rejection by the teacher can have its usefulness, since in our mind it is out of question to eliminate the requirement of 'true and false', this kind of functioning remains reductionist, barely stimulating the student to think: it encourages a constant need for approbation from the established authority, with its heavy consequences on the loss of autonomy, for the mind as for the individual. On this topic, let's mention that a category of students who have difficulties with philosophical discussion is the one of the 'good' students, troubled by the absence of a closed frame of reference, by the open aspect of the process, by the absence of 'official' sanction. These 'good students' which have very well assimilated the closed frame and find themselves at ease within it are evidently the ones who will suffer from the fears expressed by the teacher. Even though, maybe paradoxically, the 'mediocre' ones, those who are sitting in the back of the class, those who are used to be left out, finding in there a kind of stability and identity, can also very well be troubled by the changes brought to the rules of the game, which awakens in them doubts which they worked hard to quiet.

Our second answer regards the consequent advantage of children, in front of adults, in this kind of exercise: they still know how to play and they have less to lose. Having had the chance, over many years, to moderate workshops with adults, as well as with children, the result is stunning: even though they obviously have more conceptual difficulties, children accept more easily to adopt the spirit of the philosophical workshop. The fact of not knowing and of admitting it, of risking hypotheses, of admitting error, of

abandoning an initial idea or modifying it, appears to be a lot less problematic for children, particularly when these adults are teachers, for various reasons. One of the main reasons is probably the heavy status of error, typical of the traditional educative spirit, as we mentioned already.

Obviously, at the beginning of the practice, students can be quite surprised by the state of mind and the rules of functioning which govern the activity, but there is always a certain amount of them which quickly gets the idea. And, as for all exercises, others will get it slowly. The quickest, as we mentioned, are those who are not shy to express their idea, who do not care about quoting established knowledge, but who, in time, will become confident and will take risk at various degrees. Especially since some exercises, the written ones for example, will force them to take risk and sometimes will make their task easier; a face to face with a copy can sometimes be seen as a less risky context. The second kind of difficulties, more problematic, touches students who have difficulties following a discussion, to structure their thought, and who are mainly drawn to impulsive acts, or again those who just capitulated and stay quiet. If the former ones will suffer from being regularly sanctioned by the class, the second ones, more passive, will do all they can to be forgotten and will wait for time to pass. But how is this different from the usual ways of the class, where the loud and the quiet ones constantly play their games. Maybe these stereotypical roles just appear to be made more obvious by the discussion. It remains to be seen if this uncovering can be helpful, if it is better not to insist or if on the contrary it is preferable to become aware of these habits. It is probably because of this difference that teachers will find

the exercise painful for some children. Should students who have motion challenges practice sport, or should the difficulty be avoided, this is the question.

Generally speaking, the exercise is well accepted by the students. Reactions such as: “I feel better after the discussion”, “I like it when we reflect like this”, or again “it’s good because everyone can share his ideas” are quite common. Negative comments tend to be of the kind “it’s too long”, or “we always talk about the same things”, coming from students who find it hard to get in the exercise. This exercise, presented as a game, in order to de-dramatize the role of speech and to reduce to a maximum the intrusion of the ego in the discourses, some students will even say that they prefer this to mathematics or to other more classical activities, “because with philo, we do not have to work”.

Nevertheless, what frequently comes out, including with children in difficulty, is the perception of the valorizing aspect of the exercise, because it does not only rely solely on knowledge, but more directly on intellectual operations, on the very intelligence of the student. And even those who might feel anxious in regard to this task feel valued by the mere fact of being considered as a thinking being, as an individual capable of producing ideas, and not simply as a student in difficulty having trouble to understand what is required of him. For if, obviously, exercises are adapted to the level of each class, something constant remains: it is all about producing ideas and confronting them to the ones of others. It is a very natural act for a

human being, if circumstances allow and stimulate such kind of requirement.

## 2. THE PARENTS

Parents express various feelings towards this project. In general it is not a difficulty since they look at such an initiative in a positive manner. But some of them cannot really appreciate the idea since they have the idea that a child is just a child, and therefore that he is too small to be involved in this kind of exercise. Others will be openly suspicious, especially when this suspicion is motivated by religious motives: will someone bring doubt in the mind of my child? Another kind of worry refers to something more personal: linked with the fear of what the child might say, since he will have to talk on 'intimate' issues: what will he tell about his family, his parents? Other parents, rather enthusiastic, are on the other hand rather demanding in regards to feedbacks on the behavior of their child during these discussions. Especially since some see in these exercises a possibility to evaluate the functioning of their child, something which for more or less legitimate reasons they feel is lacking.

Regarding the effects reported by the parents, it is quite revealing. Some students talked about the workshop at home, others not. But in any case, it seems that the establishment of a systematic questioning is an important gain. Many parents mention a clear increase in the use of the "why?" in the discourse of their child, and a desire for discussion. "Now, every time we go to the cinema, I have comments at the end." "At the table, from time to time, he raises his finger and says that it is his turn to talk." "I

told the teacher that since he is doing this workshop, he wants to reason on all kinds of things.” To balance the analysis, let’s say that these comments come from parents whose child actively engaged in the workshop. To be more rigorous, we should have done a more consequent analysis, something which has not been possible until now for various reasons but which would be desirable.

In any case, for pedagogical reasons, relational or philosophical ones, it is recommended to organize a specific meeting with the interested parents, either to explain the nature of the exercise, either, which is even better, to show them a video recording of the class in action. Something which is more difficult to organize and which can be problematic, would be to invite parents to come in small group to attend a discussion in class. On one part, these initiatives will demystify the practice and comfort those who need it, something which remains true for most of school activities. On the other hand it will show the parents, in a tangible manner, the worries and intellectual needs of their children, often ignored or underestimated. How many parents express their astonishment in seeing their little one discussing quietly and intelligently on deep existential subjects, intellectual issues, social ones, etc. Speech, which until then appeared to be the exclusive vehicle of utilitarian relations suddenly takes on a more consequent scale and substance. Some parents, seeing the recordings, will sometimes say that they are “discovering their child”.

Within the frame of a wider school project, it is also possible, if circumstances allow, to invite the parents to take part in a session for



adults, a workshop for 'philosopher parents', organized especially for them. This can take the form of a diner, where everyone brings something to eat, so as to make the initiative friendlier and less dramatic. If the majority of the parents do not attend such meetings, the effect on the whole of the group will be perceivable, be it in regard to the level of trust towards the teachers, by the simple fact of the invitation.

### 3. TOO EARLY OR TOO LATE

It is clear that this kind of pedagogical functioning implies a radically different teacher and student attitude. Before even knowing if this kind of exercise is useful or not, it is true that we can wonder if the teacher is generally able to accomplish the proposed reversal in his own class. This is a real problem, from the lowest levels, as in kindergarten or pre-school. Generally, in a traditional manner, when the teacher uses questioning as a working tool, it is clear for the students that the purpose is to bring about a 'good answer', the consequence of this being that any wrong answer will be sanctioned in a way or another. How to suddenly set up an open situation? Is it even desirable? Are we not taking the risk to fall in the so common trap of relativism? And also, this function of the moderator, does it really correspond to the task of the teacher? Is he trained for this? Can we naturally move on from a hollow position to a full one? Do we systematically need to call an external intermediary for this? Are the required pedagogical skills too specific? These are questions on which, beyond our own convictions, everyone will decide as he pleases.

Regarding the student, can we always ask children to make choices, and especially to be responsible for them, by asking for reasons, for explanations, a more precise language, by insisting heavily on some words used, by going into the details of these answers, by analyzing the meaning and structure of what everyone says? Should we ask from a child, as early as three or four years old, to wait for his time to talk, with the frustration that it implies, risking that he does not even remember what he has to say? Are we not risking, with these formal requirements, to inhibit the speech of all of those who already have difficulties expressing themselves. Is it not a bit early to 'force' the children to develop their speech instead of simply expressing themselves, through a more intuitive discourse? Is it not premature to work on consciousness and rationality, especially in pre-school? Moreover, are we not going too far by asking the children to take into account the discourse of their peers, to understand it, to evaluate the validity of their discourse, to approve or to sanction its value, at least formally? Is it not excessive? Is this not achieved on the back of other more fundamental and crucial learnings? This is a worthy debate.

What will we answer? From the youngest age, great disparities are noticeable between the students, on the level of their capacity to engage in discussions, to express themselves, to answer questions, to imagine hypotheses, to establish links of meaning, etc. These disparities are even more striking in pre-school than later on in Terminal for example, where a partial selection of students already happened. For if there are students for whom discussing with an adult, to reflect and to express his own ideas are almost natural actions, there are others for whom it is a real challenge. Be it

for psychological reasons, self-confidence or identity issues, intellectual, conceptual or imaginative reasons, it is sometimes impossible to engage in dialog. Some children seem to have no idea about what is expected of them when we speak to them without any specific goal, of the utilitarian kind, with expected answers. The joy of words, of ideas, to pleasure to think, all of this is alien to them. Why would they then learn anything? Should not intervention take place in the early years, as soon as possible?

The official texts, in France, since some time, seem to take this reality into consideration, and to recommend a weekly discussion in primary classes. But it also seems that these instructions are somewhat problematic. For a good number of teachers, to discuss is not to teach, and they are not wrong to believe so. The problem is that, on one part, not every discussion has a pedagogical value. Else, the schoolyard could replace work in the classroom, for the biggest joy of most of the students. On this level, demagogy has us in sight. But just as moving and running are not a gymnastic exercise in themselves, because specific requirements are to be set in order to educate the body, it is not enough to speak to learn to think, even if the free and playful dimension is not to be excluded. But our experience during the formation of teachers teaches us that the practice of debate is not an acquired pedagogical skill for most, and maybe this is due to some cultural obstacles. Are not discussions between teachers often difficult, or impossible? Could the issues we are dealing with lead us much further than we expected at first?

Nevertheless, official pedagogical texts, without discussing the subject of philosophy in pre-school or primary school, are in favor of open situations where students are invited to express themselves. However, to go beyond France, let's note that Belgium, Australia or Brazil all tend to systematize philosophy in primary school. But what prevents these instructions from being implemented? Probably nothing else than our own habits, our own conceptions rooted in a traditional set up, in a given pedagogical structure.

We should not ignore that the functioning is not neutral, since questioning is at the heart of our enterprise: it is necessarily conflictual. Plato recalls that Socrates, the insatiable questioner, was executed under the pretext that he was perverting youth by introducing new gods. This is understandable, to the extent where all society bases and organizes itself on a good part of arbitrariness, an arbitrariness which provokes, in the individual, a refusal to reconsider his self: he has too much to lose. To question is to challenge; to question is to provoke. In truth, the accusation against Socrates is about something else, something that we discover along the lines of the text, even if the one invoked at the process is not all meaningless. Socrates somewhat forces his interlocutors to say what they do not want to: he robs them of their admitted opinions, forces them to say what they are saying without saying it. Afterwards, he reduces their discourse to ashes, to get hold of their deeper meaning which hides in its fine articulations: he robs them of their "nice discourses", to extract their simpler substance. And to close the file, what to say to someone who proceeds in that way, if not that he must necessarily hold a grudge against

us, to attack in such a way this speech which is the expression of our person. Thus, when we ask a teacher to undertake this kind of practice, is it not to expect from him an involvement that is exaggerated, an excessive ascetic practice, if not an annoying one? Him who works so hard to build a discourse, a skill which makes him worthy of being listened to by his students, why should he now quiet this discourse, to do as if there was none, and pretend a fake ignorance? Why would he leave students wandering and hesitating when he is the official answer giver? Why should he inflict on himself the constant pain of rethinking what has already being thought? And especially, if speech is free, is he not risking going on mined paths? What will he answer? Will he be able to be satisfied with simple questions, without caring about the conclusion, or will he be satisfied with arduous answers given by students?

Obviously, as we mentioned many times over throughout this work, our educational bet somewhat reverses, if it does not radically transform, the principles of pedagogy based on transmission. The teacher as we see him, an ignorant teacher, pretends to teach what he ignores, what he does not know how to do, something which makes him proud and, a fortiori, of which he feels no shame. Teaching what we ignore is a wonderful adventure, full of risks and reversals. And for those who are worry about age, the issue of this enterprise is not more philosophical than pedagogical. The fundamental question is the following: when, where and at what age must we begin to think by ourselves, to speak for ourselves, to dare speaking to others? At what age is it too early? At what age is it too late?

## **ANNEX I**

### **Practical memento**

## **1. USEFUL FOR QUESTIONS IN THE COURSE OF A DISCUSSION**

### **1.1 What does this signifies?**

This is a request to clarify an idea, to explain a hypothesis further. When we see the emergence of a concept, this is a way to sustain it, to give it substance by developing its meaning.

### **1.2 Do we have a problem? Where is the problem? What is the problem?**

When we see the emergence of a problematic, this is a mean to make it obvious, to make it visible, so that children become aware of it and learn to appreciate the problem for what it is. Any contradiction, paradox, or important distinction should benefit from such remarks so as to draw attention from everyone on the issue. The question can also be accompanied by a reformulation request “who could explain the problem?”, or a reformulation suggested by the teacher, so as to

de-dramatize the issues and ensure that everyone understood its scope.

### **1.3 Where is it said? Where is it written? Who said this?**

This question is relevant when the discourse is supposed to be related to what already exists, with what was already stated. Either because the student wants to echo an idea, either because he wants to contradict a proposition, interprets a text, etc. He must identify what authorizes him to 'state' what he says: the link with the body of the dialog, the take on reality.

### **1.4 How do you know? Where do you take this idea from?**

This is a request for proofs, for justifications, which brings about a more objective discourse. By stating its reason and its origin, thought acquires meaning, which helps to problematize it since it moves out of its immediate evidence, and its suppositions are thus revealed. These questions are even more important when non-explicit consequent presuppositions appear in a discourse without being clearly stated.

### **1.5 Have-we solved the issue?**

This allows restitution, a conceptualization, and synthetization of the proposition destined to be solving a given problem, making sure that everyone understands. It closes a part of the discussion and allows the beginning of a new one.

### **1.6 What does it mean? Who could repeat (reformulate) what has been said?**

This kind of questions calls for a deepening, for an explanation to a question or an idea, for a meditation on its meaning or absurdity. It slows down the discussion and gives it enough space to avoid rushing for 'agreements' and 'disagreements' which are reactions instead of reflections. This helps to learn how to examine the content quietly, to analyze it in order to evaluate it.

### **1.7 Who has a comment to give on what just happened? Who can describe what just happened?**

This question helps the students to move towards a meta-reflection level. It offers a review by focusing the mind on questions of method, on synthesis, on identifying problems, on summarizing what has been said, what remains of it or what is missing.

### **1.8 Who does not agree? Is it always true? Who sees a problem?**



This helps the students to position themselves in front of a singular proposition. It is more efficient than the “who agrees?”, which tends to remain on what has been produced already. A disagreement more directly requires a justification, since a new perspective must be established. It is especially useful to problematize a discussion by asking if there are instances, situations and circumstances where the given thesis is not applicable.

### **1.9 Raise the hand, those who do not agree!**

This question allows one to survey the class, by asking the opinion of all on a given hypothesis. It also helps to note who follows, to force everyone to take position and to prepare for the next step.

### **1.10 What has he taught you? What have you learned?**

This is a recapitulation of a moment of discussion which validates the previous intervention and collectively ponders on the importance of what has just been said, synthesizing a specific speech. Accessorily, this interpellation mobilizes a new the attention of students. This can also be asked at the end of a session, to evaluate the individual appropriation of the exercise.

### **1.11 Did he ask you a question? Did he answer you?**

This question forces the children to analyze the nature of a speech just heard, by defining its form, and from there, its conformity to a given expectation: for example, it helps to oppose a declaration and a question, an idea to an example. But most of all, this kind of question leads to a meta-level, by identifying the nature of a discourse and the articulation of the various links between the various discourses.

### **1.12 Tell us an idea which you remember.**

This is a tool destined to make a review: it allows testing the listening quality of the one singled out. Accessorily, it also gives the possibility to address someone who has not been listening or a loud contestant.

### **1.13 What will I ask you now? What could we ask ourselves?**

This is a suggestion for the child to identify repetitions, regularities, functioning principles, and to anticipate reflection processes.

### **1.14 What do you want to do? For what purpose do you want to talk?**

This forces the student to determine his intention, to become aware of his purpose, to channel his thought before speaking. This is

important particularly for students who raise their hands too quickly, who want to speak without following the discussion or who do not work on their thought enough.

### **1.15 What is the important? What is the key word? What is the concept?**

This kind of question helps the student to conceptualize, either by identifying the important term of a sentence, either by giving the term himself. This can clarify at the same time the meaning of a sentence, to catch the essential of it, and to get use to distinguishing the role of different terms of a sentence.

### **1.16 What is the difference between these two words? What is the difference between these two ideas? These two words – or ideas – are they equivalent?**

This kind of question forces the student to evaluate the relation between one or many ideas – or concepts – inviting him to compare, to work through the relations instead of remaining on the grasping of an idea or isolated concept. This brings about a transposition effort, since one must examine if through different terms various propositions can be hold as identical. One must determine is the modifications are accessory or essential, which requires the articulation of a judgment sometimes difficult to do.

### 1.17 Did you like it? Was it interesting?

This kind of question helps the student to not passively suffer the activity but to become aware of his personal experience. Of course, one must explain what was pleasant or not, interesting or not, by producing an analysis which is interesting for himself, and for the rest of the class and the teacher. This allows for the expression of one's subjectivity and to test it.

## 2. RULES OF THE GAME OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSION

- 2.1 Raise the hand to speak, to learn to differentiate between the desire and the act, and be attentive to others.
- 2.2 Do not rush. It is not the first one to raise his hand who will speak. Raising the hand does not serve to show that we exist.
- 2.3 Do not raise the hand when someone talks, so as not to be centered on one's self and listen better.
- 2.4 Keep the question in mind, and be able to repeat it before answering the question.

- 2.5 Being able to reformulate the speech of a colleague, particularly if we want to express disagreement.
- 2.6 Verify if an idea is clear before accepting it, if not, it is not an idea.
- 2.7 Verify if an idea is new before accepting it, so as not to repeat uselessly and not to do like 'Dupont and Dupont' (The twin police officers in Tintin).
- 2.8 Verify if an answer fits the question before accepting it, without what the subject of the discussion is drifting.
- 2.9 Verify if the proposed objection contradicts well the initial proposition and that it is not simply "another idea", without what the subject of the discussion is drifting.
- 2.10 If we suggest a new idea, it is important to establish the relation between this new idea and the previous.
- 2.11 Every suggested idea must be supported by arguments.
- 2.12 Every given idea must be problematize.
- 2.13 Every difference of perspective must be identified and debated. After the debate, it can be put to vote if there is a need to decide of the validity of an idea or to choose between two or many ideas.

- 2.14 What is said must be carefully listened to, and not what we want to say, would like to say or could have said: only spoken words are valid.
- 2.15 We will help someone solely if he asks for it or if he explicitly accepts the proposal of the group.
- 2.16 A hypothesis must be accepted if there is no other one, unless it is proven that it is meaningless.

### 3 RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE TEACHER

- 3.1 It is better to not fear losing time; otherwise the teacher will have the impression of accomplishing nothing.
- 3.2 It is better not to expect too much from the students, else the teacher will be disappointed.
- 3.3 It is better not to expect specific answers; else the teacher will not be able to listen properly.
- 3.4 It is better to prefer the unexpected over the expected; else the teacher won't be able to teach.

- 3.5 It is better to trust common reason; else the teacher will impose his ready-made answers.
- 3.6 It is better not to fear the void; it is there that the mind operates.

## ANNEX II

### Having access to ignorance

One of the main difficulties of the philosophical work in class is for the teacher – and the student – to have access to ignorance. In order to calm the worried reader, used to fight against this ignorance now erected in a pedagogical posture, we will distinguish between the ‘natural’ ignorance and the ‘acquired’ one. This philosophical and pedagogical attitude finds its roots in Plato, amongst others, in Cues, Descartes, and Nietzsche as well as amidst various Oriental streams of thought. Be it to re-establish the naivety of the outlook, to suspend one’s judgment, to quiet one’s ‘little’ reason, as informed as it might be, as true as it might be, to access a ‘learned ignorance’. We will see therein a very specific requirement of the philosophical practice, an ascetic posture of the mind which often remains a strange principle, chocking or inaccessible; particularly because it refers back to an attitude, a modality of being, as much as to specific kind of knowledge. Within our common pedagogical schemes, if the way of being is not excluded from common requirements, it is generally conceived as a matter of discipline, exterior to knowledge, instead of as its motor. Our Occidental modernity succeeded in splitting in two principles which otherwise would come in pair: wisdom and knowledge, education and teaching.

Let’s imagine as an exercise a question to which students will have to answer, the class producing various hypotheses which will have to be examined and compared, from which a thought process will have to be



build. The tendency of the teacher – and of the student – for cultural and traditional reasons, will be to judge the answer on the nature of its content, on its intention, an answer which he will examine based on his own answer, which he will judge to be good or bad according to the degree of conformity to his own expectations. But the present requirement does not follow such a functioning, neither such an evaluation. What matters here is principally to follow an internal criticism. First, by analyzing the proposition itself: “is the answer clear? Is it well articulated? Is it coherent?” Second, in its relation to the question: “Does it answer the given question? Is it a possible answer? Is the relation of meaning present or manifest?” Third, in its justification: “Does it contain an argument, a proof? Is the answer more or less consolidated? Is it analyzed, made explicit? Does it foresee conditions or consequences? Is the idea acknowledging its genesis, its reason to be? Forth, when many propositions are enumerated, they must be compared: “can we grasp its implied suppositions? Do we know how to articulate the problematic that comes out of it?”

We will note that through the process thus described, we have so far completely avoid an external criticism, which would consist in refusing such and such a proposition on the basis of another proposition, considered as good, just or true: the ideal answer. But in any case, the pedagogical requirement is not less, from the student’s part, and from the teacher’s one, than if the purpose was to determine if the answer conforms or not with the specific expectations of content. We even believe that that the requirement is higher, and to the very least that it is just as consequent and this in order

to comfort those who worry about the happy relativism devoid of issues in which could end such an exercise.

However, to clarify the methodological difference, its difficulties and issues, we will here invoke a crucial conceptual distinction, between thought and knowledge. If thought generates knowledge, if it expresses a process, knowledge is generally a given, often the product of a transmission, a set of information, of data, of processes, which are characterized by their determined and identified nature. For this, evaluating knowledge is easier than evaluating a thought, to judge the validity of an end product is easier than to judge the validity of a process. Nevertheless, let's try for now to discern a minimal amount of possible difficulties.

The first difficulty is one of attitude: the problem of patience or of availability. If we expect a finished product, it is easier to verify the expectations. The mentality of the QCM is here operatory, and efficient, in the short run at least. To evaluate a process, one must on the contrary be patient, examine the various stages, live through the various mistakes and drawbacks, analyze the meanders of the mind of the student, to perceive its inflections; one must wait for the knots to be untied and for the confusion to be clarified. But the amount of students, the temporal limitations, the programmatic mass, do not favor such a process. The teacher who falls for such traps is therefore only trying to cope for the most hurried one, without taking in charge the consequences of such a minimalistic choice.

If the first difficulty comes from the fear of the void of the student, the second one is the fear of mistakes. Can we leave the children wander without immediately rectifying their discourse, without rushing to give them the good discourse? This is a moral obligation that the teacher takes on himself, which scares so much the archetypal director who has forever been living inside him. Without taking the risk which is established on the pact of collective reason, without believing that the student might rectify himself, or that others could do it, if there is such a need for rectification, without understanding that it is the practice, the process, which interests us here, and not the result, even if one is not foreign to the other.

The third obstacle, fear of uncertainty, is found within the difficulty of suspending one's judgment, a cognitive obstacle on the part of the teacher as well as the students. To think differently, to think the unthinkable, to envision the simultaneity of the plurality, the one of concepts and presuppositions, to establish the ubiquity of the dialectic mind, to accept this fruitful tension, producer of new hypotheses, without trying to lessen it with shy and doctrinal postures or the comfort of common places. To problematize is not to build up some abstract and fake questions, it is to foresee the fragility of any particular position and to live the uncertainty of judgment at its best, the 'placing into abyss' of thought and being.

The last point which we want to raise is the fear of the infinite. Indeed, the desire to lead the process to the end prevents us from appreciating the thought for what it is, art for art. For it is our purpose to awaken and to nourish the esthetic feeling amongst the students and the teacher, by

appreciating the problems as problems, construction as construction. But education to this feeling requires one to be free from ambient utilitarianism, to leave space for the esthetic judgment so essential to reason. What an ingenious objection! What a beautiful problem! Contemplating without zapping nervously, initiating students to the void of the spirit, to the pleasure of ideas, but again it is first required for the teacher to allow himself such pleasures, without fear of wandering, of being mistaken, of wasting his time or of other similar thoughts which prevent free thinking. To joyfully make mistakes, to be stuck without shame, to imagine the meaning instead of defining it a priori or believing that it has been so since all eternity; to observe the links or the openings, to work on the fine lines of the construction, to perceive the logic and its ruptures, to produce architecture... To engage in philosophy is an art linked with painting, dancing and constructive geometry, and it is not a repetitive assertion or some kind of moralism. And like for any art, the purpose is not so much to learn the rules but to rebuild the technic to defy its constraints. In the human, reason only wants to express itself, but if this reason must learn, it must also learn to extract itself from itself and to spontaneously know how to forget what it knows in order to allow itself to think.

## **ANNEX III**

### **The importance of antinomies**

#### **1. ENGAGE IN PHILOSOPHY THROUGH ANTINOMIES**

What qualifies a discussion as philosophical? Are they not the same characteristics which authorize a dissertation to be labeled as philosophical? And as every philosophy teacher knows it, even if we tend to forget it, it is not enough to consider that a text or a conversation are produced in a philosophical class to consider them as philosophical, the context alone cannot guarantee a philosophical content. The most brilliant of philosophical teacher will not suffice, by his simple presence or contact, to guarantee the substantiality or the quality of the intellectual production of the students. Thus, whatever is the location, a series of ill-shaped opinions, a list of drafts, a collection of unsubstantial statements, barely developed, which unconsciously jump back to forth, do not make up a philosophical whole, be it orally or in written format.

#### **2. AN OVERCHARGE QUALITATIVE**

Everyone will use his own criteria to determine the philosophical value or content of a statement or of an exchange. These determinations will be of an intuitive nature or formalized, explicit or

implicit, random or justified. But before making a hypothesis on this topic, a first warning must be given. The term 'philosophical' is heavily charged. For a first reason: it seems that this term can mean anything. Probably because the term is used in various acceptations, going from the daily discourse, general, without content, on the affairs of men and of the world, to the elaboration of learned doctrines, the more or less appropriate display of erudition, or again the production of rare abstractions. Faced with this rather hazy situation, everyone tries to promote the value of his own position, denouncing and scolding any other particular or general perspectives, the most adventurous philosophical zealots do not hesitate to use invectives or even to have recourse to excommunication.

This being said, nothing forbids anyone to try to establish what defines and constitutes the path of the content of philosophy. But, beforehand, to avoid cognitively and emotionally overcharging this task, it is important to remember the truism: philosophy does not have a monopoly on intellectual and pedagogical interest. In other words, a practice, a teaching or some knowledge, even when considered as non-philosophical, can very well have another great interest. This is to explain that by qualifying an exercise as non-philosophical, before claiming far and wide that the merchandise was deceitful, and to denounce this abuse of confidence, we should ask ourselves in what is this activity useful. Even if we nourish the greatest love and respect for philosophy, we can believe that there is a philosophical life underneath and beyond philosophy. And if, for a given perspective,

the term can be judge to be improperly used, too loosely or indeterminately, we won't feel compelled to cast anathema for that much. Moreover, by accepting the problematisation of the term and the conceptual plurality, we will give a bigger change to the philosophical exercise than if we take on the rigid and cold role of a guardian of the temple. And this without letting go of rigor, on the contrary, since the important will be to engage in a meaningful and fruitful debate, forcing us to rethink the foundation of the discipline.

### 3. PHILOSOPHY AND USEFULNESS

To substantiate our discourse and make it more graspable, let's take an example which we hold dear: the discussion, call it dialog, debate or something else. Be it in a school framework, formalized or not, the discussion can or cannot be philosophical. Is it enough for this discussion to be on the great themes of life, like love, death or though, to be philosophical? In the particular perspective of the present article, we will answer negatively. However, in the first place, as we said, it does not matter, absolutely speaking, if this discussion is considered philosophical or not. Is excluded from philosophy that in which there is absence or excess of erudition, absence or excess of democracy, absence or excess of abstraction, acceptation or refusal of a given doctrine. We will exclude the romanticism of the teacher who must minimize his role, or virtually disappear, as much as the clericalism of the unavoidable teacher, so confident about his science. In these postures dwells an element of dogma and honor

which cannot fit our purpose: we have no copyright, no official stamp or any particular space to defend.

Do we see any use for such an exercise? This is the first relevant question to ask. It is true that in our society, as everywhere and always, the one who wishes to ask great existential questions feels a particular difficulty in meeting careful and honest interlocutors. In general, the human being prefers to avoid this kind of questions, too busy to work on 'useful' occupations, little interested in taking his time to contemplate some issues up front. Thus, the simple fact of settling down and of calmly asking ourselves such questions, or to strongly confront worldviews, appears to us as being good and useful, especially since from this kind of exchange deep intuitions and courageous arguments can emerge. But is it to engage in philosophy to rebuild the world?

In a second time, as we can periodically observe that those who engage in such discussions are often satisfied to remain on banalities, without caring about rigor or about getting deeper, we refuse to qualify as philosophical, from the outset, such an exercise, as nice as it may be. This judgment has limited consequences and is in no way a catastrophe. And if some people absolutely want to use this term to ensure a status to their needs, we will not hold any grudge against them: this is part of the game, Miss Philosophy has seen others, and she won't die from it. The 'death' of philosophy is a dramatic concept which is completely foreign to us, as it only serves



to express the xenophobia of some who pretend they can frame philosophy in such a way that they become the sole – or almost – promoters, defenders, heirs, or possessors of philosophy. And, whatever the case, regardless of the many attempts to delineate or exclude, and even because of them, a debate will unfold, which will try again and again to restate the problem so as to never let go of their beneficial and necessary tension for the full exercise of thought. In fact, we can always ask ourselves if the fact of an exercise being philosophical or not always constitutes a relevant and interesting question.

#### 4. ARCHITECTURE OF THOUGHTS

Once the warning given, let's try to suggest a frame to engage in philosophy. We will have minimized, let's hope, the flux of misplaced and allergic reactions, from the side of the 'aristocrats' as well as from the 'democrats'. But now, in order to engage in philosophy, let's learn to take risks! We will therefore suggest, not so much as a definitive and limiting frame than an operative and dynamic structure, the principle of antinomy. Indeed, be it within Oriental philosophy, at the heart of great myths from the four corners of the globe, in the reflection on daily life or within the history of classical Occidental philosophy as it emerged in Greece, antinomies appear to give rhythm to thought. Beginning with good and evil, the true and the false, the just and the unjust; these antinomies articulate tension points around and from which are enunciated great principles. These

antinomies help to extract thought from the inchoative magma of opinions and ideas. Strangely, contrary to what we might believe, through these categorizing and simplifying formalisms, thought goes from opacity and thickness of the agglomeration of ideas to an architecture favoring transparency and self-consciousness. Just like gothic architecture which, by artificially installing external counterforts in precise locations, produced lighter and more elegant perspectives, more structured and less passive than its Roman predecessor.

Thus our postulate states that thought is not an accumulation or a random agglomeration of opinions relatively foreign to one another, ignoring and contradicting each other, but it is geometry, with its echo and incoherencies; architecture with its angular stones and its keystone; music, with its harmonies, peppered with incidentals. Even if this is not always conscious, - and happily else it would have too much to do - each intellectual functioning, singular or collective, produces a certain amount of concepts and of conceptual polarities which serve as much as possible to organize the life of the spirit, regardless of the immensity and plurality of its solicitations, perceptions, sensations, intuitions or established opinions. Pleasure and pain, me and others, being and seeming, represent as many polarities which no one could avoid without going crazy. It is only at a price of an immense work on our self, psychological and intellectual, that some great wisdom or revolutionary scheme can pretend, as a proposed ideal or a divine revelation, to avoid such evidences. If thought mainly operates in a reactive way, to please itself or a

neighbor, it nevertheless operates within categories, of codified forms and specific axes, even unconsciously.

## 5. A NAIVE READING

If some of these antinomies, particularly those which we encounter in life, generally of a practical, empirical, perceptible and moral nature, astonish us for their banality, others are more obscure. But in both cases, these antinomies must be uncovered and clarified; the most common ones often suffer from abusive prejudices, while the rarest ones tend to act as scarecrows which we do not dare to freely and peacefully approach. Nevertheless, for practical reasons, we will start from the hypothesis that any important or foundational antinomy, as all fruitful concepts, will necessarily have to refer back to a common intuition, which could more or less be grasped by a common mind. In other words, risking here to offend sensitive souls, we state that all antinomies, every fundamental concept is somewhat banal and obvious, at least in its general understanding.

Thus we recommend to the reader who is not familiar with the official philosophical lexicon to not rush on a dictionary every time he meets such a term. It is better to let intuition talk: it will know how to make words speak, be it in themselves, or through the sentences which envelop and produce them. Of course, neologisms or other barbarism grossly shaped will by times resist any apprehension, and it is not our purpose to prohibit the use of a philosophical dictionary,

but we want to encourage the reader to have recourse to such works only when a first reading, preliminary and naive will have been attempted. Let's be weary of learned work which, like prefaces, bottom page notes and various appendixes, which sometimes constitute the major part of a work, strangle the original work and thicken its reading instead of making it easier. This is a classical error in philosophy, which particularly affects the 'good' student having some rudimentary notions of philosophical culture: impressed by his masters, which themselves might have done too much to impress their students, he pretends to do things 'well', dedicate himself and get bugged in details instead of freely and slowly reading what is offered to him, without caring too much about mistakes and omissions of fine nuances. Let's invite the reader to a raw reading, traced in thick lines, which while risking temporary mistakes, will learn in time how to identify the shortcomings and contradictions on his way, without looking at every step to verify what everyone said or invented on the subject. This is a trap of erudition, which only after a long and patient process is able to free itself from its heaviness and from itself, to discover that 'simplicism' is not necessarily a defect, on the contrary.

## 6. BEING AND SEEMING

Let's take a particular case: being and seeming. Many specialists in the matter will wish to show us through various subtleties how the Kantian 'numen and phenomenon' is far more sophisticated, more

subtle and more learned than the general antinomy as we have simply formulated it, but it seems that, besides the one who pretends to write a doctoral thesis on the question destined to impress his peers or to obtain a diploma, these sophistications, nuances and subtleties, are devoid of any interest; unless it has some substance other than a purely lexical or occasional one. We were able, on one occasion or another, to observe the performance of some quintessence abstractor which might impress us at first, but which finally strikes us by his vanity and by the ridicule of his demeanor. How many theses, to pretend to novelty and originality, are undertaking minute speculations never heard of before if not solely for the sheer disproportion between their lack of substance and the volume of their redaction.

All human being will necessarily experience a lag between being and seeming; if not only because he has been deceived by his peer, because he would have taken bladders for lanterns, because the carp takes on the appearance of the rabbit, or simply because his vision is defective. How many disagreements have for foundation this simple difference, between being and seeming, or between various appearances determined by various perspectives? And it is precisely the identification of these various perspectives or of these particular relations to the thing in itself which sums up the articulation of philosophical issues. This is the anagogical principle of Plato, which asks us to retake a particular idea at its source, in its origin, in the worldview which generates it, so as to grasp in its cause the foundational reality of this very idea. It is in this way that the

antinomies which we are presenting seem to closely capture the philosophical enterprise.

At this point, we will be objected that, philosophical discussions, be they with children, adolescents or with non-initiated adults, will rather try to answer questions on the meaning of life, on the difficulty of human relations or on moral obligations, something which, so it seems, leaves us very far away from the abstract antinomies which we are suggesting. But we will answer this by saying that philosophizing does not simply happen in mere exchanges of opinions and arguments, since it requires the accomplishment of an analysis and a reflection work on what in itself is only the raw matter of philosophy. The philosophical requirement consists in deepening and articulating the issue of these various perspectives further, differences which very naturally, when brought forward, will produce classical antimonies which we tried to calculate.

Thus, the task of the teacher, as the one of his students, will amount to remain on the various ideas suggested, to contemplate them before infinitely producing further ones, in order to extract the deeper meaning and clarify their differences. It is therefore out of question anymore to be satisfied with “I disagree” or “I have another idea”, since the purpose will be to relate these various ideas, which otherwise will ever remain only opinions. Indeed, the production of arguments has, as an extra-value, the fact of attributing a reason to an opinion, already getting away of sincerity as a unique justification,

but it is still relevant to compare these reasons, to clarify their content, to update them, so to say to conceptualize them and to acknowledge the multiplicity of perspectives, to problematize. Judgment will be made, discourses qualified, so as to become aware and to deepen one's thought, and the one of others. Otherwise the exercise will have as only interest, even though it's not to be neglected, to offer an exchange of ideas and a place for expression, but it is not sure if, when devoid of the comparison and the qualification of ideas component, it can still pretend to the status of a philosophical exercise. It goes in the same way for a dissertation in philosophical class, the only difference is that, once framed by a definite program, with notions and authors, we can expect to see some references and codified notions appearing, which is not necessarily the case in a written text or in a philosophical discussion outside of an established or consecrated philosophical program.

In guise of a conclusion to our preface on antinomies, let's look at a particular case. Suppose that we are visiting the workshop of a painter and that we wish to manifest our appreciation of his work. Amongst others, two possibilities of expression are possible here: "your painting is very nice" or "I like your painting a lot". For a reason or another related to sensitivity, to more or less conscious personal choice, everyone will choose for this or that formula. Nevertheless, for the painter, if he is not preoccupied with philosophy and, for practical purpose or for convenience, he is solely interested in your satisfaction and admiration, it does not matter what is the nature of the terms

used. It is the same for the author of such words if he only wanted to share what was on his heart.

But what interests us philosophically here is to establish the issues implied in such a choice. Issues that can be articulated solely if we consider first what other means of expression are available, and if we take the time to deliberate on their choice. What matters is thus to conceptualize, to problematize and to deepen in order to engage in philosophy. Thus, in the first case, when we talk about beauty, we transmit a more objective and universal worldview, where what is transcendental can be acknowledged, whereas in the second case, where it is about pleasure, we are in the subjective and the particular, and reality is established on the singular. In this way, that which could be a single sentence simply expressing some appreciation can, for the philosopher, signify a whole worldview. But again, it is useful to develop skills, to train our judgment and to know the issues so as to recognize them. It is in that way that the fact of categorizing classical antinomies appears to us as being a useful enterprise to facilitate the philosophical practice.

## 7. SOME ANTINOMIES

We will end this text by quoting, for the sake of providing examples, three samples from our series of antinomies, as well as the global list of all of those which we consider important and recurrent.



### **a. One and multiple**

A first and foundational problematic: all entity is both one and multiple. Thus the individual is one, he has a single identity which distinguishes him from other individuals; but he is also many: the different parts which constitute him, his conception of himself, his location, his story, his relations, his function, etc. It goes in a similar way not only for all beings, but also for things and for words, of whom the identity can change according to circumstances. Thus, the apple on an apple tree, in a trench, on the display of a merchant, or in a plate is not the same apple. Thus, a word, according to the sentence in which it appears, can vary in meaning. Thus, any kind of body is made of parts. But multiplicity is a trap, just like unity. Indeed, through casual multiplicity, circumstantial or other, through the whole and the totality, must be hiding a form or another of unity, as hypothetical, problematic and indefinable as it may be, without which the entity is not one anymore but is a pure multitude, the term is not a term anymore since it refers back to no whole, no unity. Without any invariance, without community, without some form of unity, a thing is not one anymore, but many. But without multiplicity, without community, without parts or various attributes, a thing is ungraspable and inexistent. Thus we must try to grasp the unity through the multiplicity, just as the multiplicity through unity.

### **b. Being and seeming**

This problematic often develops on the back of the other. It is so because being, or essence, can easily be conceived as the foundational unity of an entity, an interiority of which the external appearance would only be the partial and partisan manifestation. In this perspective, reality or the truth of things and of the world would be more or less accessible, even inaccessible. Appearance, on its part, as an intermediary between two entities, between an entity and what surrounds it, can be conceived as that which veils the essence, or again, paradoxically, as that which constitutes its expression, its trace or imprint. The appearance can also be considered as the sole reality, by stating that it is the only one which can act on the external in any efficient way: it is relation and vivid substance. The idea of an external reality without an external expression nor any reach on the world would have no factual interest, being devoid of any substance.

However, the requirement raised by the concept of being is amongst others the one of an invariant, an enunciation which postulates some particular and specific characteristics susceptible of being eternally attributed to the entity in question, to the thing in itself, whatever its metamorphosis are and the diversity of its relations. This invariant thus represents a link between the different states possible, beyond the various accidents produced by contingency, a link incarnating the very substance of the entity.

### c. Nature and culture

Nature is opposed to culture like the initiated is opposed to the acquired. Is the human being what he is by definition, a priori, or is he established through historical choices, consciously or unconsciously? Culture is mainly, if not essentially humane. Is it in conflict with nature or is it simply a more sophisticated expression of it? Is the human being part of the evolutionary process of the earth or is he some kind of discontinuity, an accident, or even a natural catastrophe? Is reason, consciousness, or the spirit coming out of life, or are they revealing another reality, transcending material or living reality?

Nature is opposed to culture as to any artifice. It represents any reality of the world which does not owe its existence to the invention and work of humans. In a broader sense it incarnates the world in its totality, as far as we discover determinism in it, an order, or at least some coherence, and it is opposed to freedom, for nature expresses what, for some being, escapes his freewill. On the contrary, culture refers back to what is made by man in his historical and social frame. It is constituted through a whole set of rules or of norms collectively instituted by a society, a people or the whole humanity. In an even more singular manner, it is the process of intellectual formation responsible for judgment and taste which specifies the individual and his identity.

## 8. LIST OF ANTINOMIES AND TRIPTYCH

One and many – being and seeming – essence and existence – same and other – me and other – continuous and discrete – whole and part – abstract and concrete – body and spirit – nature and culture – reason and passion – temporal and eternal – finite and infinite – objective and subjective – absolute and relative – freedom and determinism - active and passive – actual and virtual – matter and form – quantity and quality – narration and discourse – analysis and synthesis – logic and dialectic – reason, sensible and intuition – statement, proof and problematic – possible, probable and necessary – induction, deduction and hypothesis – opinion, idea and truth – singularity, totality and transcendence – good, beautiful and true – being, doing and thinking – anthropology, epistemology and metaphysic

## ANNEX IV

### Critical look on the Lipman method

Article originally published in dans *Diotime - l'Agora* (n°21) revue internationale de didactique de la philosophie,

<http://www.crdp-montpellier.fr/ressources/agora/>

Since twenty-five years, Matthew Lipman, an American philosopher and pedagogue, has been working on philosophical practice with children. He elaborated a curriculum and a methodology now in use in many countries, or which at least inspired many teachers. This practice interests us since it is one of the very few pedagogy built on philosophy for children. It is thus possible to learn from the way teachers which are not formed in general philosophy have been using it. In this context, in 2003, we decided to take part in one of the international conferences of the movement initiated by Lipman: the ICPIC (International Council of Philosophical Inquiry with children), which was held in Varna in Bulgaria.

The present article does not pretend to suggest a complete and detailed analysis of what happened at this conference, neither is it a deep study of the Lipman method, but it is only to engage in a reflection on the practice of philosophy with children or on the philosophical pedagogy in general, reflections generated by the activities and the events observed at Varna. Also, we will pay more attention to reflections and debates raised at the conference than to the conference itself. We hope that the people

involved who might recognized themselves in our comments will understand that we do not want to spend too much time telling the specific details of the various events.

It appears to us that the de-contextualization of our narration can easily invite to meditation. Afterwards, this text remains a very partial and subjective perception of a situation involving many other people, activities and various discussions. It does not try to be exhaustive. Our only preoccupation is to uncover some problematic issues related with the philosophical activity with children.

## 1. PHILOSOPHY AND RELATIVISM

The first night of the conference, I went to see a group of students which had been involved in a philosophical activity during their school year, in order to determine what they had remembered of this specific activity. I asked them if they had liked what they did and their answer was positive, which is not surprising, since they had agreed to use some of their vacation days to come to this conference and to actively take part in it. I asked them what they had preferred in the activity; they answered that what is amazing in philosophy, is that there is no 'true' and no 'false' and that everyone can say what he wants. As friendly and visibly enthusiastic as these students were, their answer somewhat surprised me, or disappointed me. I often heard this kind of declaration during first sessions in philosophy classes; they come from a perspective which I quickly try to challenge. Of course, this kind of attitude is necessarily to

be expected, and for two main reasons. The first one is that this banal relativism is a form of opinion which is widespread. The second is that these students, which have been to school for many years, and where, year after year they have been hammered what was the truth, a truth which they must learn to vomit back to succeed in their student career, if they are not too well formatted, will jump at the first opportunity given to them to free themselves of this schoolish and boring frame, especially when they are teenagers. On the other side, while pretending to reject the arbitrary dogmatism of adults, parents or teachers, they will reintroduce this same arbitrariness by a kind of naive subjectivity, not less superficial and dogmatic than the ideology they aim at challenging. The “it is so because it is so” of the adult is replaced with the “it is so because it is so” of the child.

Plato tells us that we must take full responsibility for our discourse through various modalities of speech and of thought; analyzing, proving, justifying, problematizing, etc. Because if the act of thinking certainly consists in giving birth, and if some ideas are beautiful babies, others are truly ugly monsters, so he says, and the art of philosophy is not limited to the fact of producing ideas, but it also requires to dissect them, to verify, to put in value and to hierarchically organize ideas. Ideas, anyone can produce them, on anything, but the art of producing beautiful ideas and to learn to recognize them is another business. Putting paint on a white canvas is one thing, but to paint is another.

The comments of these students stayed in my mind during the whole conference, as an object of meditation. Could such a perspective represent only a first step, necessary and unavoidable in the process of learning philosophy? Is it only a particular tendency of these students, a reductive summary of what they had assimilated of the philosophical practice? It is so easy to translate the momentary suspension of judgment, recommended by Descartes or Hegel, by a simple and flat relativism. Or is it, in reality, the basic cultural matrix transmitted by the hegemonic school of thought in these places?

Is philosophizing reduced to a simple brainstorming, a discussion spreading in all directions, or was there in the spirits and pedagogical practices of those present there an additional requirement to try to reach more precise objectives on the educational level? During these few days, the majority of discussions and observations described, which are used as data for the present article, were related to the study and analysis of what is the obvious dominant conception in this environment concerning philosophical needs and requirements. Nevertheless, - an amusing observation - if during the main discussions or in workshops no criticism was openly formulated regarding the mediation set up, when I would articulate my doubts in private, I was regularly told about 'true' workshops, or some mythical 'new step' or of more 'accomplished' students; I was nevertheless asking myself why I could not perceive anything of the sort, why no one talked about it in public, and especially why the mediators themselves were not doing anything on this topic within the practices happening on site. Unless, there again, following the



model of the psychoanalysts, the research community is a very slow process, which can only make sense if it is observed on a very long period.

## 2. WORKSHOPS

However, an interesting aspect of the Varna conference was the presence of young students who were taking part in the workshops, so that anyone could see how work was being done. This is an important positive point, because in the world of philosophy we tend to favor abstract discourse and ‘chatter’ over real demonstrations. Especially if pedagogical worries always seem to be, for philosophers, a secondary question, purely technical, in brief, a waste of time. The only inconvenient, the backside of the medal, is that practically no time is given to analyze and practice. In fact, when workshops would stop and adults could express themselves, they were more prone to share their views on the theme discussed than to comment the functioning or the procedure put forward in the exercise. This reaction showed a very interesting reflex. We will come back to it later.

First of all, let’s review the “Lipmanian basic workshop” as we saw it there, which can maybe be different from what it is elsewhere, from what it could or should be, a regulatory ideal which we cannot consider here. After having come together in a circle, the students are reading a brief extract from Lipman or from another author, everyone in turn reading a sentence. Once the exercise is over, the moderator

asks if there are questions raised by the text. The students raise their hands to suggest a question, thus producing a list. These questions are classified and one question amongst them all is chosen through vote. Afterwards, a discussion takes place where everyone answers as he wants or comments what he heard from his colleagues, the moderator chooses the speakers in chronological order, as hands are raised. From this basic functioning, we will analyze some possibly problematic points.

### 3. THE TEXT AS PRETEXT

The initial text is not really taken into consideration. It is conventionally named a 'stimulus', in other words it is considered somewhat as an initial tool serving only to provoke a discussion. If this is the case, why use such a text, visibly written by a philosopher, very structured, if it is to treat it in such a light way? Why not then starting directly from the discourses of the students, and do away with the text? For the reader, the text should be a locus for self-confrontation, else it serves no purpose. But if we start from the principle of using Lipman's text, what do we do than of all these philosophical questions, of all these concepts watermarked within history itself, which pretend to work at the reconstruction of a philosophical culture adapted to children and which should offer a model and tools for dialogical research? It is true that elements of philosophical culture do not appear in a systematic and clearly decoded manner, since the text presents itself under a narrative and

dialogued form, even if it is of a very didactic nature: it says even more than it shows. Two main arguments can be raised to support the existence and the pedagogical relevance of such a text. The first is that learning to engage in philosophy is learning to read. Not only to read books and texts, but also to read the world, one self, the other or all that comes to us. In fact, one of the main problems students of all ages are having with reading is precisely what is encouraged in this form of procedures: the given text is not taken seriously and with rigor by the reader. It is for this reason that authors, be they renowned authors, the neighbor or even we, often remain misunderstood. We project whatever we want on the text, neglecting its content, forgetting what matters, declaring from the outset that this or that is possible or interesting, and we continue without shame to say whatever we want to, by a simple process of associative thought. How many times the philosophy professor realizes that the misunderstanding of the text is solely due to an insufficient reading of it, because an authentic confrontation did not take place, because there has not been any meeting with the 'other': any genuine consideration of alterity is absent.

The defense argument against our criticism is that the teacher does not want to reproduce the very classical way of text analysis. We answer that, within the classical scheme, it is generally the teacher who produces the analysis and not the student. And even if it is the student who does it, the teacher rushes to declare an analysis as good and another one as bad. Thus, in the case of the 'research

community', we believe that the student could be invited to mention where such a question is being raised in the text, to look for how and in which passage the text answered another question. If not, any question can be asked which could have nothing to do with the initial text, thus showing a radical misunderstanding of the text and declaring it useless, a phenomenon we have observed before. For, if the text is 'abandoned', what is the process that guarantees some coherence in the production of questions? Is not one of the main aspects of philosophical thought to follow a subject, to focus on it, and to establish links? The same thing can be said concerning answers to the chosen question: why, for a moment, should we not ask ourselves what conceptual elements the text gives us to discuss the chosen question? This does not forbid us to, in a second time, introduce a critical perspective, by finding questions which are not in the text, by analyzing the presuppositions or the formulations of the text, a requirement which would ensure some connections with the text. Often, crucial ideas have already been raised in the text, but the student ignores them, or he does not realize that the text already answers some particular questions or criticism. On this point, Hegel happens to be useful; he distinguishes the internal criticism from the external one. The internal criticism is the internal analysis of a given text, looking for its presuppositions, its blind spots, its errors and inconsistencies. External criticism is the refutation of a text through the use of conceptual tools which are foreign to it, suggesting an alternative reading of the text and confronting it to the content of the text: confrontation of a hypothesis with another one. In the first case,

we try to deconstruct the architecture, to short-circuit a text from the inside; in the second case, new concepts are brought from the outside to counter the foundation of the text's elaboration.

Even if we stick to the established procedure which consists in producing questions and to choose one, why not suggest as a rule to always produce an argument to justify this choice. Even if the argument in itself is not a sufficient characteristic of philosophizing, it opens the door to the identification of ideas and to the buildup of thought. Let's conclude on the topic of the random and superficial treatment of the text which we witnessed. That such a "freedom, without any real confrontation with the ideas of the author, seems to encourage a kind of intellectual negligence, a lack of respect for the written discourse and for the "other" in general. And the literary form which could offer a new kind of intellectual challenge, compared with traditional philosophical texts, too easily becomes the refuge of a superficial reading, unless this defect is countered by some present and active pedagogical authority.

#### 4. LIST OF OPINIONS

This phenomenon of intellectual negligence and of lack of respect for the 'other' becomes visible in another important aspect of the work: the absence of connection between discourses. One of the historical battles of philosophy, good or bad, as formulated by Plato, is the one of opinion. In the end, what is opinion in this perspective: a simple

sentence taken as evidence, unjustified, unaware of itself, isolated and incapable of assuming what it is stating or what it is being opposed to? Of course, this must be taken with some precautions, since one of the ways of learning philosophy, particularly in the oriental tradition, is to throw a single sentence or an aphorism which the master won't explain and on which the student will have to reflect. And who knows where the master is hiding! The spirit blows wherever it wants to, as he wants to. But in the Western tradition, where we are accustomed to hear answers, explanations and proofs, the principle of the game is that ideas should be developed by their author, either from his own initiative, or by answering to objections and questions addressed to him.

For this end, to support statements, ideas must follow logical rules, be proven by developing a seeming of coherence, or use examples to be analyzed, etc. The result is that the link becomes the main concern of the philosophical effort. The substantial link, says Leibniz, because in unity lays substance, both to think and to be. Of course, this defines the opinion as a disconnected idea or sentence, devoid of any link, or having only an illegitimate or inconsistent link. If a philosophical discussion is built and articulated around this link, a simple discussion becomes a mere list of ideas, not necessarily false or bad, but they are only opinions since an insufficient work has been done on their content.

The simple fact of raising the hand and to wait for your turn before talking is already an important step in a philosophical discussion since, in that way, others are somewhat being considered. But this could simply be a formal trick, a banal politeness: I wait for my turn to say what I want to, because I mainly want to express myself; maybe what I have to say has no link at all with the subject being discussed, maybe I will reorient the discussion towards a very secondary question, maybe I don't even listen to or don't understand what is going on. In reality, during such discussions, to see how students behave, with their hands raised while their colleagues speak, sometimes without even looking at them, only waiting respectfully for the other to finish, certainly shows a problem. No important question or objection has been raised, which would force an author to dig deeper in his own thought. The substantial arguments which arise from time to time to counteract an idea are not treated carefully since they just go unnoticed, drowned in the opinion flow where even a lady cat would find it hard to recognize her kitten. Here, the role of the teacher should be to stop the discussion, to immobilize it for a short moment, taking the opportunity to provoke a more intense moment of philosophical reflection.

Here are three examples of such possible situations, of such missed opportunities, to justify or criticism. The teacher should here ask if anyone wants to discuss this proposition, through questions, analysis or an objection, before moving on to another idea. In other words, he should incite the participants to take their time to deepen

an idea further so as to grasp its limits. The author of this idea should find the opportunity to develop or to review his initial idea. In the second case, when an efficient counter-argument or a counter-example has been suggested. There again, before moving on to something else, the teacher should stop the flow of the discussion in order to identify – at least – the problem which just appeared. At first, this should be done by asking everyone to suspend his judgment – thus following the Cartesian methodological injunction – in such a way as to problematize and conceptualize the discussion. After having grasped the problem, students can then be invited to express their judgment, and to distinguish the true from the false of their particular point of view, by producing arguments to justify their judgment. Before coming to the general discussion, through a brief conclusion, we will ask the two authors of the initial problem if they changed their mind or if they want to reformulate their ideas. Third example: the teacher can intervene by asking a precise question to the group; this question should be considered immediately, a priori because it is visibly at the heart of the discussion. This issue will have to be finger pointed to make sure that the subject matter becomes conscious and operating. This will also allow refocusing the discussion, in the case where a certain tendency – or various tendencies – very far from the main subject, has been followed for too long. On this precise point, we should note that some manuals suggested by Lipman's method have already thought of a certain number of questions to be used for this purpose, even if their concrete use is deficient and their application modalities are rather



vague. All kinds of interventions have a unique goal: to redress the discussion, to focus it so that real philosophical work can be accomplished, in opposition to a mere brainstorming, which can be very useful but which has other kinds of pedagogical functions.

## 5. CONCEPTUAL WORK

Plato invites the philosopher to engage on the anagogical way: to return to the source towards unity and origins. This is exactly the opposite of moving forward and producing many and various ideas. It is a reflexive form, through which thought can rethink itself, becoming an object for itself, the thinking subject becoming an object of the reflection process, the heart of the dialectic method. Through this journey, the following results should more or less come about: first, being able to identify the presuppositions of a given discourse. Second, identify the intention of a given discourse. Third, identify the problems implicitly raised by this discourse: to problematize it. Fourth, to conceptualize the content of the discourse, either with the terms specifically mentioned in the discourse, or by producing new ones. For this reason, first level discussion must be suspended, so as to analyze what has been done, thus interrupting the flow of new hypotheses or opinions to enter in a meta-reflection.

The problem is that this process is natural to the human spirit: it implies a kind of lag or of discontinuity. If this hiatus was completely natural, all these difficulties to teach philosophy would disappear. To

engage in philosophy is an artificial process, since most discussions essentially tend to promote free speech, where sincerity, narration of stories or of events, passionate declarations, faithful expression, and schemes of associative thought are taking over any other kind of more structured thought. The question for us is to know how and up to what point the teacher, who pretends to initiate a philosophical process in a workshop and who assumes its responsibility, really makes sure that this artificial process takes place. Traditionally, in a magisterial class, the teacher does this work on by himself, and the student must simply listen. His basic assumption is that if the students speak, they will not engage in philosophy, they will state simple and banal opinions, and this fear in him is not groundless. Indeed, in a 'free' discussion, even if some emerging ideas can be interesting, this does not guarantee the deepening which a more systematic analysis can bring about. But in both cases, the magisterial class and the 'free' discussion, things happen as if the student was to learn how to engage in philosophy by magic: no specific exercise is planned, with restrictions and given rules inviting or forcing the student to engage in philosophy, so as to lead him to confront the evidence and the immediacy of his opinions and to work on the production of ideas. But, in the workshops, as we could observe them, as sympathetic as it can be to see students taking pleasure in discussing a given topic and to make effort in formulating their opinions, we have come to regret that the teacher would not lead his students to think more deeply. The best of what we saw in this direction came from a teacher who took the initiative to question

a student when he would suggest a hypothesis, although this questioning remained superficial; he should have pursue this task either by asking other students to question the first one, or by asking this one how his answers to the questions modified his initial thought, if he could identify any arguable presupposition in his discourse, if he noticed a problem or if he produced any important concept.

The main idea is that the students must be both inside and outside the discussion. They must be both participants and moderator. But for this to happen, the task of the moderator must be clarified and reinvigorated: it is not enough to frame the steps of the exercise and to distribute the speech time; one must also invite all the parties to fulfill different philosophical functions; they must produce questions, formulate hypotheses, interrogate presuppositions, give counter-arguments, find the contradictions, analyze ideas, produce concepts, problematize statements, identify the issues, etc. But if the teacher does not show the way, if he does not give the key, students will not know how to proceed: we do not randomly engage in philosophy. If the teacher does not force the students in a way or another to move the anchor of their thought and of their discourse, by inviting them on the meta-level, they will be too stuck in their own convictions to do it, as most human beings. Unless the bet of such minimalistic procedures is to count on a kind of soft process, unconscious, random and intuitive, which by itself should lead to philosophy and guarantee such a philosophical engagement? But can we unconsciously engage in philosophy or is it an oxymoron? And

why should we do this unconsciously if we can do it by becoming ever more present to our thought?

Some practical objections can be raised here: first, the problem of the number of students in a class and the time limitation: these restrictions do not allow each student to go through such a thought examination process. Second, when a student works on his scheme of thought, assumes his ideas, will others not let go of their attention, become disinterested or bored? We can briefly give three levels of answer to these objections. The first level is that in this kind of activity, the student is supposed to learn to decenter from himself, be able to focus on someone else, fundamental characteristics to learn to become adults. Also, it is constantly asked from the student to be both inside and outside of his self, to be both participant and moderator. This implies on one part that he does not get stuck in an exchange of opinions, that he tries to conceptualize and problematize the whole discussion, and at the same time that he challenges his colleagues, through questions and analyzes, and that he works on his own thought and discourse. In this way, he is theoretically always interested, unless he is having difficulties to get out of the pure “me, what I want to say...” And also, this exercise is not theoretically an exercise of speech, of oral expression, but an exercise in thought. The students who do not speak much do not benefit less than others from this global work, if they pay attention and listen. The question is not so much that everyone expresses himself, even if it is not excluded, but that the whole class can experience philosophical

moments, of quasi-esthetic intellectual emotions, which raise and transform the mind.

Another objection concerns the group dynamic, where some practitioners especially appreciate the students who always have something to say, by participating 'actively'. But we can consider that artificially creating moments where no one speaks, when everyone is surprised by the content of a particular problem which he contemplates internally, and where the group abides in silence, is a rather productive and desirable situation. Of course, this kind of expectations, linked with astonishment, being rather demanding, does not facilitate the discourse, but it probably facilitates thought. Maybe the 'natural' learning abilities of the human mind need 'artificial' means to truly become themselves.

## 6. TO THINK THE UNTHINKABLE

If we take the concept of 'research community' in its general acceptation, and not in its exclusive interpretation connoted by 'Lipman', we can state the principle that the other, our companion and mirror image, can and often does think differently than we do. As an imperfect being, we have prejudices; we are always partial, in the sense where we focus only on a very minute part of reality, and partial to the extent where we perceive the being and the world through a particular prism, reductive and subjective. Also, the role of the other is to momentarily allow us to escape, so as to become

conscious of another reality. Thus such a meeting of the other is sufficiently beneficial in itself without having to ask for more from the other, else than being other, and all we have to be is what we normally are. The community thus becomes synonymous with open-mindedness and 'better thinking'. But there are two ways through which this community can be in contradiction with such a progress. The first one, a very natural reflex, is to defend our own position at all cost, to prove to others that we are right, which are therefrom perceived as a threat to our ideas. All mental energy is then mobilized to produce arguments, risking being rhetorical, to defend every step of what we have said, even risking a slight or obvious ill-faith. This is the principle of court pleading, of debate for debate, of the argumentative discussion.

Of course, to produce arguments is a useful activity, which forces us to go deeper in our mind, but at the same time this is not enough to ensure a philosophical reflection, on the contrary. First, because we get attached to a given opinion, from which we can't escape. Second, because we won't question our own presuppositions. Third, because we won't sufficiently enter the mind of others. Fourth, because we won't problematize our own position. Fifth, because this will call upon the satisfaction of the ego more than the search for truth. In fact, the one who does the best in this kind of set-up is probably the one who has the most to lose, because he is nourishing his feeling of almightiness.

The second aspect, by which community can disturb philosophical work, is the peer pressure of the group on the individual to make him accept the thought of the majority. This is not necessarily happening in a gross way, but simply by neglecting or by too quickly rejecting a new idea, a provoking or revolutionary hypothesis. Anyone who ever mediated discussions has faced such situations where the most brilliant or fruitful intuition went completely unnoticed, maybe even the mediator himself, who realized later on what he missed, misunderstood or too quickly abandoned. The practical consequence is that if no sufficient is mobilized to examine each and every singular idea, the opinion of the majority will quiet all possibility for singularity to emerge. Let's recall here the sentence of the Tao: "when everyone thinks that this is the good: this is the bad. When everyone thinks that this is the beautiful: this is the bad." The tendency that we previously identified in the individual, to remain with his opinion and to prevent his thought from adventuring out in some other matrix of thought, is again strengthen when this opinion receives general approbation.

To counter such a behavior, or as a safeguard, we suggest to name the principle of the philosophical exercise: "thinking the unthinkable. This signifies that we do not want to think, argue, or mainly defend what we are thinking, but first of all what we are not thinking. What we are not thinking, what we cannot think, this is what interests us, what concerns us. How can we extract ourselves from our own opinions, if not by undergoing this impossible journey?

Philosophical activity becomes an experience of thought, and not the expression of personal convictions. But such a concept implies an important disturbance in the idea of experience, especially for a philosophical scheme which pretends to adhere strictly to some empirical reality, practical or physical. For example, the notion of 'reasonable belief' or of 'common sense', dear to the pragmatics, is radically disagreeing with such an idea. For, in the experience of thought, the idea is to try 'strange things', something like the bet of Riemann or of Lobatchevsky to try a new geometry by refusing what was so far the fundamental postulate of Euclid. We find in the 'experience of thought' a strong dimension of playfulness and of arbitrariness, which is negated by "commonsense", which seems reasonable. This refers to what Kant, in opposition to the assertoric and the apodictic, calls the problematic. The first modality is a statement, a proposition which states what is; the second establishes or proves; but the third envisions the pure possibility, as 'strange' as it might be, to the extreme sometimes, of even the impossible. This simple possibility, since Plato, has a real status, closely linked to the specificity of philosophy. To problematize a proposition, is to dig deeper within it in order to identify its limits, its defects, its deficiencies, since, in the identification of this finiteness, is nested in the truth of this proposition, a truth conditioned by a kind of 'beyond', according to Gödel's principle: it is only from the exterior that we can grasp a given reality, and not from the inside where it appears as infinite.



Also, to return to practice, “thinking the unthinkable” signifies that at any time, when someone formulates a hypothesis, before moving on to another idea, the first step is necessarily to try, through various technical procedures, to discover the degree of absurdity of a given proposition. And in these procedures, the role of the author of the idea does not consist in ‘defending’ his baby, since he must be involved as much as anyone else, if not even more, to find the defects and limits of his intellectual construction, in order to modify or to completely refashion his initial proposition. But there again, human beings do not get involved in this kind of processes by themselves: it is learned, with someone who gives the example by consciously and scrupulously confronting the kind of ‘habitual’ behavior: initially it will probably be the teacher, then the students who are slowly being initiated in the principle of mutual education.

## 7. ESCAPING CONFRONTATION

As we signaled earlier, we have been stunned by the fact that after every workshop, practically no time was allowed to discuss its functioning, or if there was some, participants were not really interested in undertaking this kind of debate. Beyond our perplexity, when practitioners meet, they should naturally discuss their practice and compare them, or if they don’t do it, what could explain such a phenomenon? Why are there no issues emerging between participants, on major themes, be they pedagogical or philosophical? We have two hypotheses on this subject. The first is the principle of

authority, at least the intellectual kind, which seems to affect the Lipman movement. The second is the principle of community, which results from a mix between pragmatic philosophy, American ideology and political correctness which all have an impact on the intellectual behavior of this movement. Before moving on, since we seem to be making some relatively categorical judgments, we would like to somewhat relativize our position by stating that this is not more catastrophic than most of the phenomena characterizing various intellectual circles. All organized institution will necessarily carry as a trademark the ambivalence of its accomplishments and defects. Accomplishment and defect are generally more amplified and visible in a collectivity than in an individual.

Let's start with the principle of authority, which is probably the lesser cause. Our first observation is the fact that a scheme that is as simple as the 'official workshop': read the story, ask questions, link questions, chose a question and debate it, had not been replaced, modified or contested by a multitude of 'recipes' or of procedures. We have, on occasion, assisted to some innovative modifications, but this appeared to be a minority. After over twenty-five years of activity, why would a scheme that simple not undergo some transformations? For the students, even for the teacher, so as to feel trapped in an ultimate procedure, eternal and, in fact, boring... On the occasion of such an international conference, we could have expected the presentation of some radically different procedures. But even if we have noticed some contributions which added a slight personal touch to the basic

scheme, this did not fundamentally change the initial structure. Now, we must recognize that even if the stories of Matthey Lipman are always on the hit parade, a certain amount of other stories are also being used, as the ones of Ann Sharp and of other teachers which have created their own stories. But exactly, it is strange to see that in this aspect of things, some liberties have been taken, but not on the procedures themselves. In fact, some pedagogues easily present their story as an object of discussion, but the practice itself is not the object of any discussion. From another aspect, ironically we can ask ourselves if it is not better to stay loyal to the traditional text of the movement, because we are not certain if these 'new texts' can measure up to the 'foundational texts' in term of philosophical content. Probably this problem of philosophical content is not at the heart of the matter, but we will come back to the problem later.

Let's now discuss the principle of 'community', a key concept of the practice in question, as indicated in the Lipmanian concept of 'research community'. Musical metaphors are regularly used to justify and explain its principle, in particular the one of 'harmony'. This seems to be a legitimate answer, sane and interesting, to the Hobbesian or Darwinian identity which is often enforced in intellectual circles, where the intelligence of people is evaluated by his capacity to crush his interlocutor, considered as an adversary. The principle which we are observing during discussions and in the general behavior of the movement is that ideas are supposed to add to one another, to cumulate and complete each other, and in this way to help

the development of thought of everyone. Thus everyone contributes to the general harmony. And if, by times, during a workshop, someone expresses a disagreement with someone else, he can say it but everything moves on, regardless, as if nothing happened. It seems that the process never stays on a particular problem being raised, at least to identify it, if not to solve it. In this sense, it is true that all confrontations are avoided, because any confrontation implies some perseverance on the level of opposition. And even if someone was to persist, since the majority of the participants raised numerous other points meanwhile, and since the person to which the opposition is addressed cannot immediately respond, the question is dropped and issues are fixed. In our view, the teacher should play the function of an 'underliner', charged with uncovering the emerging problematic, but this is not exactly what is happening.

Consequently, particular ideas are drowned in the whole, something which, for this reason, looks more like a brainstorm than a real construction of thought, even if the two are not necessarily unrelated, of course. But there is a point on which we see a real opposition between the two attitudes. To examine ideas, to distinguish them, to take some time to identify their determination and to penetrate their voidness, induces a sense of limitation, of fragility, or even of pathology of beings and of ideas. And if a free discussion solves some teaching problems, it is also fed with personal and social prejudices, since they state and support the unquestionable value of our little being and, consequently, of the ideas it produces.

Paradoxically, this vision of the collective easily leads to a non-interest in others: I only wait for my turn to speak. In reality, if we do not have a genuine interest and a solid attachment for the singular, how can we pretend to have any interest in the collective?

This contradiction reminds us of the green American suburbs, where all houses look similar, all surrounded by grass, where nothing shocking appears, except the lack of difference. Everyone does what he wants at home, even more since these houses surrounded by great green spaces are far from one another and that very little contacts happen between neighbors. However there is a real pressure to act properly, in conformity, at least externally. We do not pretend that there could be perfect scheme of good neighboring, but let's simply say that the inconvenient on the concept of 'community' is that singularity tends to necessarily fade away. But true singularity, in opposition to individualism, concerns and transforms generality: it is the real foundation of universality, its privileged access, as Socrates, Kierkegaard and others have tried to show.

On the pedagogical level, this 'communal' perspective goes hand in hand with the anti-authoritarian excesses of the politically correct which we have seen rising in the last few years. The idea that a given student, or the teacher, presents himself as someone who, for various reasons, can enlighten the discussion in a more luminous way is considered a threat. Every entity emerging in such a radical manner will have to be removed, as a threat to the community, this

last concept presupposing egalitarianism and the absence of hierarchy, in conformity with the liberal ideological precepts. The fact that a particular problem raised by the confrontation between two students would be more productive than all the rest of a discussion is not welcome, at least in the factual reality of the workshop. Moreover, the whole of the students will decide on its own to be bound to the treatment of this problem: participants remain chiefly preoccupied with what they want to say, which for them is always more this or more that. Because of this situation, deep philosophical moments go unnoticed: are students really listening? Remember that within Plato's dialogues, the important moments always appear at the crossroad, in unexpected ways, and that it is very easy to miss them. We probably know that in a discussion which lasts for a while, we will only find few moments, very rare, which give a real meaning to the philosophical discussion. These conceptual breakthroughs are the few rare words for which a global discussion will be worth holding. Unless we think that the essential point of the exercise consists in allowing everyone to express himself. Which reminds us of this fashionable term, 'complementarity', which we find in numerous mouths as a mean to avoid thinking further: by flattening or by fleeing the issues of the opposition, by fixing the conceptual distinctions.

## 8. PRAGMATISM

Our last hypothesis to explain the situation lies on the pragmatic matrix in which this work is taking part. The truth, in this philosophical context,

emerges under the collective cover, it first of all preoccupies itself with efficiency and practical questions, and for these reasons, because it must adapt to a world in movement and to social transformations, it is of a constructivist nature more than a pre-established transcendental order. A regulating principle more than a determining principle, as Kant would say. To clarify our purpose, let's briefly describe two other conceptions of truth, to present an epistemological background to our analysis and to show the reductive potential of the pragmatic perspective. The first 'other' conception of truth, which we just mentioned, is what we could call the truth of 'reason'. Reason is here perceived as a transcendental power, beyond space and time, something which the human mind can only slightly pretend to unveil, in fragments, through some occasional intuitions. It is of a theoretical order before being of a practical order, since physical reality manifests in this sense only as a pale image of the spiritual reality. The second 'other' conception of truth is 'subjective' truth. Here, truth is anchored in the singular, even if this singularity can lead towards universality, in a deep manner. The first form of that truth would be authenticity, for example the character of a person who is 'genuine'. And this person must be accountable to itself first, before the community, before reason, even if these various parameters must not be excluded.

The consequences of a pragmatic choice are, obviously, that the practical, collective and efficient side of the activity remains the main preoccupations, due to a concern for objectivity linked to a 'reality' based on the fact of being a common one, or of being given in an immediate and empirical manner. The fact that someone practices the 'research

community' and consequently belongs to the 'community' constitutes the anchor and the reference point. How he does is not the point: the nature and the mode of the relation are not problematized. As a consequence, everyone does what he wants on his own. In reality, this practice can be reduced to something very minimal, – as it is often the case – a minimalism which, from our point of view, has a rather insufficient relation with a philosophical practice, the community determines a kind of smallest common denominator. But no one gets offended by it, no one challenges the phenomena, since the 'harmony' of the community remains the primary objective, and the fact that everyone is involved in such a practice only in a nominal manner remains the primary concern, or even the exclusive one of the pedagogue.

The 'non-confrontational' aspect consequently remains a constitutive and fundamental part of the attitude, both in the exercise itself and in the relation between the practitioners. Also, instead of confronting someone on the equivalence of his practice, on its conformity with the ideal of philosophy itself, everyone prefers to stick to what he is doing, to let the other do what he must, to let him express himself as he wants to, without even engaging in a comparison with the work of a colleague: in fact, criticism is banned. Whatever everyone thinks of the other and of his practice, it must remain private: this kind of analysis, at best, remains his personal preoccupation. The accumulation of individual contributions will guarantee, by miracle, that philosophy happens. Any main theoretical discussion on an individual practice will be considered unproductive, since it would imply judging individual practitioners and potentially creating



conflict. One of the consequences of this attitude, by its lack of critical perspective, is that the teacher becomes a mere discussion moderator, who does not involve himself in a confrontation or in philosophical work, by the natural process of leveling from the lowest standard. But can we avoid engaging in philosophy on our own while pretending that our students really do?

Of course, such a system can function, in its own manner, as any other system. It will benefit from its own genius and will suffer of its own inconvenient. As we said, this will avoid quarrels so widespread among the habitual relations in the academic world. This will avoid numerous inquisitions and denunciations typical of intellectual life. In this way, this will facilitate personal involvement in the practice itself, since requirements have become so minimal. And we could obviously postulate that each practitioner, student or teacher, will progress at his own rhythm, the only criteria being that he undertakes the activity in a nominal manner: the important, is the explicit reference to the expression 'research community'. But at the same time, we can still ask ourselves about the value of each contribution for the pedagogical and philosophical betterment of the class. Even if we can conclude on this topic that within a school environment where the magisterial class still has a hegemonic status, the simple decision to introduce a discussion in class is in itself a noteworthy and productive amelioration, even if the content itself can be mediocre.

## 9. THEORY AND PRACTICE

Nothing is more banal than rupture or divergence between theory and practice. A habitual shortcoming, since pedagogical practitioners have a more empirical approach, based on the reality of their class, limited by their own capacities, their limitations and the time allowed, whereas theoreticians, free from these constraints, can in turn, by a recurrent phenomenon of theoretical idealization, fall in the trap of formal constructions, disconnected from reality: the reality of plurality and alterity. In the particular case of the 'research community', the specificity of the problem is double. First, the initiator and creator of the program is not a practitioner himself, in the sense of a professional constantly and regularly involved in the practice, an observation which is relatively identical with many other leading figures of the movement. Second, the program has a philosophical nature, but most practitioners have no philosophical culture. To such a degree that we can legitimately ask ourselves to what extent is the activity itself of a philosophical nature, and here comes the important question to know if it is possible at all to be a 'generalist' of education boasting about being able to lead a philosophical practice without having any advanced formation in the domain, as it would be expected of any other discipline.

The program itself, as it is conceived, is based on two didactical elements: the stories and the manual. Even if the stories have an implicit philosophical content, the manual, more developed, introduces concepts and problematics expressed more clearly, particularly in the form of various exercises. But we can very well stick to the sole use of the story, a situation which appears to happen more often. For example, since the

text itself does not have to be carefully studied, for reasons which we already mentioned, the actual explicit philosophical content of the material can be totally occulted, in favor of a simplified procedure which leads towards a 'free discussion' more than towards anything else. But if the teacher studies the manual and the story carefully, and makes sure that the students benefit from it, a real philosophical work can take place, even if everyone hopes, for various reasons, to change this or that. However, nothing in the discussion on the practice itself is suggested or encouraged to dig into the context deeper, into the practical skills and the philosophical culture, at least during the various situations which we have witnessed.

The principle of beginning with a story and of conceptualizing later on is an innovative and productive exercise. Even if the stories are of a strongly didactic nature, we can however ask ourselves why a literary classic extracts, popular tales or traditional myths, would not do the same. They contain as much philosophy, and their metaphorical nature has the advantage to offer the possibility of multiple reading levels, since they have some depth and contain numerous ambiguities, they are of a poetic nature and call upon fundamental archetypes of human existence, experience and knowledge. Moreover, the stories presented by Matthew Lipman and his team can be criticized as being very American, from the fact that they are supposed to be used by children of all countries. Otherwise, if someone pretends to rebuild a precise philosophical program for school, the principle of didactic texts

conceived for every age group can be understood well, something which, in itself, justifies the works in question.

For the manual, we can be curious about its relevance. If the teacher has a philosophical culture, he has no need of the manual to conceptualize the story. If he has no such culture, he won't really be able to accomplish this task in an adequate manner, since he will act too mechanically and artificially to use these readymade questions, supposed to be used in due time and in an appropriate manner. Especially since these concepts and these questions, named 'leading ideas' in the official procedure, are supposed to be introduced in a discussion in class, without imposing any content. It is clear that some skills are required, which go beyond simply knowing the list of questions and concepts given. It is one thing to suggest ideas and to explain them, another to manipulate them by introducing them subtly in a discussion in an appropriate manner, by establishing connections with what has been said, so that these contributions appear in the discussion as a kind of 'deus ex machina'. In fact, we know by experience that for teachers trained in philosophy, there is nothing more difficult than to mobilize 'classical' ideas, identified during the program, in order to clarify the student's discourses. First, because the connections are often not obvious and require developing a real availability and some flexibility. Second, because the teacher is strongly tempted to fall in the trap of the magisterial class, while we are simply asking him to point out by slight allusions, in the form of questions for example. Let's also mention the fact that many manuals, particularly those of Matthew Lipman, are

suffering from some heaviness, making them indigestible and inefficient. But after all, we can maintain the principle that there is no pedagogic method which can be realized without artistic skills, without the innovative potential and creative skills of the teacher.

And as we said already, the most common result is that teachers rather take refuge in a position of withdrawal, the one of a minimalistic perspective, letting the students simply discuss freely, with little requirements either on the skill or on the content level. Unfortunately, it is where a more precise and deeper work would certainly be necessary in relation to the actual practice itself. This implies that the modalities of the teacher's formation be reconsidered.

## 10. WHY NOT...

How to conclude this superficial analysis, if not by the fact the Lipmanian movement is imbued with a main quality: it exists. And after all, not only does it exist, but it develops in many countries, contributing greatly to pedagogy. Because it is definitively in this particular field that, de facto, the activity is happening. There is certainly a philosophical touch in this, but the attempt to rebuild philosophy as a school program for children seems rather short. As we said, the intention might be there, but the actual practice does not take place according to the wishes of the founders. Thus, what does remain? Let's examine this question through the various perspectives of philosophy. First, philosophy as a domain is touched upon, since

many existential and epistemological questions are discussed. Second, philosophy as an attitude is relatively present, since a certain state of mind is established, free and sympathetic, where outside of any censorship and of all axiological imposition, diverse hypotheses can be expressed and analyzed, even if this analysis often lacks the critical dimension and must be reduced to the congruous portion. But the capacity and the philosophical competencies are not encouraged enough: they can be developed further, but the deployment of these skills depends on the natural inclinations and particular dispositions of the teacher. In this aspect, the procedure, as open as it might be, – and probably because of that – lacks in rigor and requires some innovations that could upgrade their application. Third, philosophy as culture is present in texts, but since the written material is under-exploited for various reasons, substantiality mainly depends on the culture acquired by the teacher and his capacity to exploit it and make it useful.

From what we understood, a majority of “Lipmanian” practitioners are mainly specialized in pedagogy, and in the majority of countries, the study of philosophy with children generally happens in the departments of pedagogy. Of course, this situation is due to the general mindset in the departments of philosophy, animated by strong formal and academic tendencies, which moves back from anything which is not of a ‘classical’ nature. Discussion itself is a revolutionary exercise there, an activity which does not meet much success in these places: in the mind of many teachers, discussions with students are nothing more than the expression of simple

opinions, and discussions between specialists are so polluted by ego confrontations that they are often impossible. At best, these exchanges are reduced to a polished ritual, minimal, erudite, administrative and formal. Because of this, it is possible to consider that the Lipmanian project compromises its own philosophical integrity only to stay alive: without it, where could it find its place? Thus, the mix with sociology and psychology which seems to be a current temptation, could definitively establish the practice in a purely psychological domain, with slight philosophical connotations: the growing interest which we have noticed, with the 'democratic' concern, also risks to lead the practice in a very different direction, since it is not a given that philosophy and democracy make a happy and lasting wedding, even if democracy needs philosophy and vice versa. On this subject, we will refer back to the opposition between the politic and the philosophic in Plato.

Philosophy with children reminds us of 'critical thinking', the pedagogical nebula very developed in the United-States, a vast and undetermined activity, which oscillates without remorse between the banal and the essential. But this indetermination, regardless of the risk it implies, might also offer the kind of space necessary for creative and innovative work, by suggesting fields not yet saturated by a too precise or loaded demand. Maybe the creative qualities on which they rely, as much as they can be perceived as an inconvenient, can identically be perceived as an advantage, in their non-institutional aspect. Maybe are we meeting there a challenge to

human reason and intelligence? In the end, is it really important to know if the 'philosophical' qualitative is deserved or not? As long as reflection still finds its place in the nature of such an exercise, nourishing a growing qualitative dynamic, the questioning can in itself, and in time, confirm the philosophical nature of the exercise.