



# The Philosopher:

## Functions and pathologies

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*Preamble* In this project, we are using the qualifier “philosopher” through its different senses, in its different registers: as a function, academic or else, as a status, as an activity, as a personal inclination, etc. The term philosopher can be used to designate someone who speculates about the essence of things and writes books about it, someone who teaches the history of ideas, someone who has a PhD in philosophy, or someone who takes events of life with distance and serenity. It might be a function, a vocation, a title, a way of being.

Nevertheless, it seems to us that throughout those different meanings, in spite of certain notable differences, the concept of philosopher underlies a certain archetype: a positioning, a manner of thinking, a way of acting. This archetype implies a given existential, intellectual and psychological posture, with its advantages and inconvenients, its positive and negative features. Most often, the concept of philosopher is used merely in its formal aspect, in its classical denotation. In this work, we attempt to examine the philosopher

as a phenomenon, in his global and diverse functioning, his identity, his vision of the world and himself, his motivations, his internal dynamic, his fixations and inhibitions, his relational modalities, etc. Of course, some features oppose each other, some characteristics fit some philosophers more than others, but this trademark reveals the inner contradictions or paradoxes of such an elusive concept, as Plato has noted in his writing. And we can observe those radical differences in the numerous quarrels punctuating the history of philosophy regarding the very definition of what is a philosopher or philosophy, its nature and its functioning.

***Erudition*** Erudition refers to having a broad culture, and more specifically of possessing great academic knowledge. And in general, in order to be a professional philosopher, teacher or else, one has to get a diploma which indicates many readings and studying of philosophical texts, being familiar with numerous authors, concepts, schools of thought, history of ideas, etc.

Normally, this knowledge is providing food for thought, it is supposed to help develop a capacity of reason, broadening the intellectual horizon. But depending on the curriculum and the pedagogy of different countries or institutions, or depending on the teacher, the student has been more or less invited to learn and repeat, demonstrating knowledge and understanding, or indeed to articulate some personal thinking based on his familiarity with philosophical culture. The insistence on quoting, in opposition to writing, essays throughout the year and during the examination period is one of the indications of this difference of focus. It is the difference between formal learning and the appropriation of ideas.

One of the typical consequences of erudition is a feeling of certainty: one knows, and therefore tends to engender a rigid posture, which precisely tends to inhibit thinking, since the latter presupposes to produce new ideas and to take the risk of putting forward hypotheses, by definition uncertain and even audacious. A visible trace of this is the importance of footnotes in most dis-

sertations, where the references to authors become often more important and consequent than the actual development of reasoning and creative production of ideas. Sometimes, we even notice students or professors who have interesting insights, but out of some insecurity or desire to prove themselves to the internalized audience of the “community”, drown and dilute the main substance of their reflection in a sea of erudition.

One of the reasons of this insistence on knowledge is to grant to some authorities a value of “truth”, in opposition to “false” ideas, as if philosophy were a science, that could make us distinguish between a true and a false idea, instead of privileging the value and interest of a multiplicity of perspectives, characteristic of the philosophical art. Thus, in discussions, instead of viewing a given philosopher as providing an interesting standpoint, their contribution is presented as the forced “reference” point for all the others. This tends to produce some insecurity in the student’s mind, who is more concerned with stating the

“right idea” and not making mistakes, rather than engaging in a creative process.

For the philosopher, erudition can be a driving force, where knowledge makes him experience the measure of his limits and ignorance in his relationship to the world and to thinking, thus he is theoretically willing to learn more. But this “learning more” can as well turn into a greedy and insatiable drive to merely gather information, what can be called encyclopedic knowledge. He then wants more than anything else to display his command of the corpus. All students have met those professors who are primarily concerned with this exhibition of his scholarship, including some “obligatory” quotes in a foreign language, as a means to dazzle the audience, which often indeed reaches this desired effect. Often one notices in such an exercise a very unfocused and eclectic attitude, where the speaker jumps from one thing to the next in a very dilettante and inchoative manner, including some witty remarks, where one loses the thread supposedly guiding the presentation.

In opposition to this presupposition of erudition is the character of Socrates, for whom ignorance and his admission represented the attitude necessary for engaging in the philosophical process. But this thesis finds little echo in the history of philosophy. Although very often, ironically, a philosopher is expected to speculate about just about anything, without giving too much attention to his skills in the field in question.

*Metaphysical* Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that deals with the first principles of things, their nature and their cause. It includes studying abstract or transcendental concepts such as being, totality, nothingness, knowing, substance, conditions, identity, time, space, etc., all concepts to which the philosopher is very attracted. In general, the philosopher has a keenness for the absolute, for the ideal, for the infinite, for metaphysical thinking. He wants to play, to contemplate, but as well to possess those unlimited and radical ideas and concepts. This reminds us of the allegory of the cave, where a man es-

capacities the world of shadows and appearances and reaches the “real” world, the world of ideas, where shines the light of truth, showing everything in its essential and eternal reality. This world is so fascinating that the man would remain there forever if something did not drive him to come back to the cave of shadows, to his fellowmen.

The tendency of such a scheme is to put the accent on things in themselves, the noumenal dimension, instead of the multiplicity and the manifestation of reality, the phenomenal dimension. This attitude tends to search for the inner being of things, their eternity, their necessity, their ideality, their generality, their abstraction, rather than the concrete or experiential dimension, dealing with the contingency of things, their appearance, their factuality, their individuality. Even though some schools of thought, like phenomenology or pragmatism, claim to be concerned with the experiential dimension. The philosopher is often preoccupied by what things should be, the ideal, less appreciative of what

they are, a reality which he often laments about. For this reason, he is rather critical of “common people” who take things as they come, merely trying to survive and get by, just satisfying their immediate desires, a scheme considered as lacking idealism. He criticizes as well the reign of “opinions”, a lazy and complacent mental habit, precisely because it lacks the work necessary to search and discover truth and real substance. With his “high ideas”, he creates conceptual systems, or provides profound insights, a very theoretical contribution to collective thinking, although often unreachable for most. One can say that this desire for infinity, the ideal and the absolute is endemic to the human mind, to the power of our reason, with different degrees, but this desire is clearer and stronger in persons with a philosophical “fiber”. But of course the forcefulness of this tendency makes the philosopher somewhat blind, scornful or closed to the finite, concrete and imperfect reality. He is rather chained to his mental constructions, oblivious to the outside world. But his idealism can make him

an inspiration for the population at large, just like an artist is.

**Generalization** An important tool of philosophical work, of reason in general, is related to logic, in particular to deduction and induction. Logic is the process of using information we have in order to build some new understanding, about general principles, about a particular situation, or how to find the answer to a problem. Deduction means to combine general ideas, or general and particular ideas, in order to get a new idea. Induction is the gathering of a series of particular information in order to draw general principles. In both cases we deal with general principles, and the process of generalization is fundamental in philosophical activity. First of all because it embraces globality or the totality of entities, second because it is supposed to be more objective, since it depends less on the aleatory dimension of particular entities or situations. Contrary to common thinking - which tends to be much more a case by case thinking, rather individualistic, at-

tached to particular contexts and objects, therefore contingent - philosophical thinking prefers larger scale reflection, which has more to do with necessity. In fact, vulgar opinion often expresses qualms and criticism about generalization, considered illegitimate and foolhardy. We even encounter a prohibition of generalization, where the term itself has negative connotation. Generalization is accepted from the scientist, dealing with material objects and empirical phenomena, where calculations can be applied, but when it comes for example to human matters, like behavior, people or life itself, the very domain of the philosopher, then generalization is perceived as unhealthy and dangerous, unfounded. Even if psychology, sociology and other branches pretend to address those issues in a scientific manner. Philosophical generalization is largely speculative: there are no proofs, just mere arguments, conjectures that can be easily contradicted. From which comes the suspicion of subjectivity and the prohibition of general conclusions. Therefore the philosopher makes bold moves, concluding

to the reality of reality itself, on its material or ideal nature, on the goodness or evilness of the human, etc. Of course there is a part of subjectivity in this generalization, even though in theory rules of reason and logic are often applied. For example, when a philosopher speaks about love, he deals with it in a general way, a positioning that is often criticized by the layman, claiming that “it depends”, that each case is different and general principles can not be drawn. As well there is the impression that because of this generalization, philosophers are not interested in individuals’ behavior, looking down on this study, since they are rather interested mainly in the commonality of phenomena, on their general nature and causes.

***Complicated*** Philosophers are capable of analyzing “objects” (things, phenomenon, beings, concepts) from multiple perspectives and seeing the interconnection between different “objects”. Their intellect allows them to dissect those “objects” from various angles. Their mind is both

analytical and synthetic, logical and dialectical, an alternation which is far from simple and often hard to follow for the common person: it seems complicated and indeed it can be considered complicated. The fact philosophers are capable of precisely distinguishing the nature of diverse “objects” is because they can manipulate minute concepts, which often involves the use of sophisticated language and technical terms. While in daily life we usually do not distinguish concepts or ideas with this kind of precision, we remain much more indeterminate, we are content with vague approximations, a difference that makes philosophers appear rather complicated, abstruse and impenetrable. One easily describes this activity as being semantic, being pedantic or splitting hair, a vain, annoying, pretentious and useless endeavor. The habit philosophers entertain of objecting or problematizing any and every proposition, even when they seem obvious or related to common sense, in spite of the interest such an attitude can bear when it is appro-

priate, contributes to this perception of unnecessary complication.

On the other side, a common idea among philosophers, as well as among some other academics, states that complicated issues have to be dealt with in complicated language, though a standard which is not always necessary. In this perspective, simplification bears the stigma of simplistic, vulgarization is vulgar, the simple is often considered as the enemy, characterizing banal and common opinion. The principle is that the harder it is to understand someone, the more profound he must be. Nevertheless, over the last few years, a new tendency has developed, where philosophers have tried to simplify and vulgarize their thinking, in both the pedagogical context and in the publishing world, where some philosophy books have become bestsellers, such as *Sophie's World*. But this movement towards simplifying speech in order to spread philosophical knowledge among the general public has in general not been greeted well by academics. There is a tendency to loathe colleagues who make a

career out of writing popular books that non-professionals can understand: it is not dignified and proper, as if there were a sort of obligation to being complicated and enigmatic.

*Abstract* Regardless of what subjects philosophers are dealing with, be it physical or metaphysical, the means philosophers use for their work, in order to analyze, basically has to do with language, thought or concept, which by nature is abstract, in itself without any physical or concrete existence. To study and define the essence of a subject indeed means to get away from the particular details of it, and examine its necessary components, what is called an abstraction, since it extracts or removes from the concrete subject its most intrinsic nature or quality. Therefore the elements of philosophical work, the nature of this type of speech, do not immediately bear on material or visible objects, even though those objects can become food for thinking or can be used as demonstration. Furthermore, philosophers are known for thinking below the surface, beyond the

“real” world, which implies describing unseen or even unimaginable phenomena that we can only access in a conceptual manner. This concreteless nature of his tools and work makes the philosopher abstract, hard to grasp.

Abstraction is difficult for the common mind, which prefers to think of concrete and specific objects, which are more tangible and more useful. Furthermore, in a way, abstractions do not exist, they are a mere mental construction. “Fire does not burn” as Spinoza phrases it, since “fire” is only a word. A given table exists, we can put things on it and see it, but the concept of table has no reality except in the mind, unless one entertains a vision such as Plato’s where ideas are the primary reality. We cannot imagine “table” in opposition to “a given table” since “table” is shapeless, and when we attempt to define it, it resists such a closed exposition, since we can always find exceptions to any definition, as Socrates demonstrates permanently.

Abstraction can be a trap, a disconnection from worldly reality. Kant warns us against “concepts

without intuition, which are empty”: they are words that refer to nothing in the empirical world. And indeed, the philosopher can get caught in his own syntactic production, be swallowed in a type of “hyperconceptualization” spiral, a sort of verbal drunkenness where he does not challenge anymore the reality or even the consistency of his own speech.

***Misunderstanding*** There are different reasons why we can envision a misunderstanding between the philosopher and the layman, reasons why both of them can feel misunderstood. The constant interest of the philosopher to question things, to analyze the information he encounters and to problematize what is usually taken for granted can create a feeling of rejection from others, as they are bothered by his criticisms and his questions: they might feel fooled or belittled. The thoughtful and curious attitude of the philosopher can easily be misinterpreted in those cases as arrogant or consciously intimidating. The complexity and the abstraction of

his speech, previously expounded in this text, contribute to this misunderstanding of both his speech and his attitude.

The philosopher is operating with ideas that are obvious to him, he does not have either the ability or the desire to spell them out clearly, in such a way as to make them accessible to the public. So he speaks in a technical or abstruse language, since he addresses primarily the “specialists”, or in a cryptic one, because he does not deign to elaborate on what he thinks should de facto be clear. In such a way he creates the ground for misunderstanding in his interlocutors, be they laymen or other thinking specialists.

Another reason is that the philosopher is, more often than not, “squeezed” in his own point of view. He views things in such a way that they make sense to him, and is prone to present the way things present themselves in his inner self, with a strong conviction. Because he is fully committed to his point of view, he does not seriously entertain the idea that others might have other perspectives. If they disagree with him after he

has presented his case, it must be because they misunderstood him, he thinks. So he tends to overexplain, repeatedly and insistently, responding to objections from a condescending position: “You cannot seriously object to me, you just have not understood me, otherwise you would agree with me”.

Misunderstanding can as well be a choice. From the standpoint of the philosopher, it can be a preference since this would show the depth of his thought, the elitism of his work, not designed for the common mortal. He scorns colleagues who try “too much”, according to him, to be understood and pedagogical, and even worse to be popular, like those philosophers that produce books for everyone, who are accused of betraying the profession. But as well, one can view as a healthy challenge to the public the fact that understanding a given text or presentation implies efforts from the auditor or the reader. From the standpoint of the layman, his misunderstanding can willfully signify a “no nonsense” attitude, a down to earth positioning, where one has no time and

energy to waste with vain, mind-boggling preoccupations. Philosophizing is for many people a strange activity that should be left to strange and pretentious individuals.

*Clear - Confused* Philosophers are people who take time to observe and analyze people and the world in a thorough manner, who can elaborate an idea or a structure of thoughts in a clear manner. A priori, they are agile and competent at establishing conceptual differences and producing definitions, thus they have a clear understanding and practice of the reality beyond the immediate appearance, below the surface of things, like they were equipped with an analytical X-ray technique. They can then clarify issues which appear muddled for most people, and as Michel Foucault wrote: “If science can make the invisible visible, the task of the philosopher is to make the visible visible.” Because of the sharpness of his thinking, and the distance he maintains towards entities and events, he can observe and describe better what everyone sees or experiences. Most of

us have a mere pre-reflective consciousness of the world: we feel phenomena, we have impressions, we have emotions, while the philosopher has developed a reflective consciousness: he conceptualizes, he names, he analyzes those experiences. When most people do not see things so clearly because their minds are clouded by their emotions, confused with their beliefs, or obscured by their appetites, the philosopher practices what the ancient Greeks called *epokhe*: the suspension of judgment, be it a subjective relation to what is perceived or thought, or the influence of a pre-established belief system. In theory, he is freer from presuppositions and prejudices. Although to be fully free remains merely a regulatory ideal, since such a “pure” perception is unattainable, perception and understanding cannot be untainted by the somewhat deformed “shape” of our mind.

On the other side, because philosophers are constantly investigating reality, because there are no boundaries or limits in their searching and questioning process, because they push their

speculations to the edge, they can get caught in their own undertaking and become hostage to their own mental production. Under the guise of thinking the unthinkable, of seeing and naming the imperceptible, they can get caught in their own insights and fabrications and produce a rather confused speech, to which they are rather complacent. They can fall in a type of hyperconceptualization, fabricating complicated schemes that seem to them brilliant and innovative, but which remain rather inaccessible to common sense, and even ununderstandable to other specialists. Paradoxically, their aspiration to extreme precision, their pretension to exhaustivity, their desire of being totally clear tends to engender confusion through excessive detailing, through an overabundance of subtleties. They perceive things that are so specific that they become tenuous and abstruse, they invent categories that many would call superfluous and vain, they claim access to a depth where confusion reigns, bewildering the auditor, that can sometimes be qualified as a mere mystification, con-

sciously and willfully, or not. Some philosophers enjoy wearing the cloak of profundity, relatively indifferent to clarity or the relation to common sense. Their pride at being special justifies the confusion of their speech, displayed as a sign of genius.

*Formalist* A philosopher generally tends to entertain no close and substantial connection to the “world”, to “life”, with its immediate experience and its content. He is not so interested in empirical matters, facts are not so much his concern, neither the messy stuff everyday life consists of. He usually dwells with generalities, with objects that can neatly be fitted into categories, and whatever can be neatly fitted into categories tends to be lifeless and abstract. As he prefers to deal with those “forms”, he is more preoccupied with what can be formalized, rather than with the concrete content, the singular occurrence, the diversity of the particular existence. Of course, as we saw before, those generalities and categories can be useful, and are necessary, but the problem

lies in the fact that those abstract constructions can take a life of their own, and even be “empty”, as Kant criticizes the conceptual schemes that omit the singular, or that totally exclude it.

Another manifestation of this formalism is expressed in the emphasis on quoting, without a real preoccupation for the understanding of the content. We observe more insistence on the exactitude of the wording, preferably in the original language, and on the identity of the author, rather than on the actual grasping of the content, on its appreciation. Recognizing the source is privileged above the utilization of the idea, on its operativity. In fact, most professors prefer the student who strictly obeys the established forms or presentation and writing of a dissertation, rather than the disorderly student who produces interesting or original insights. A typical example is the importance of historicism in the treatment of ideas: worrying about the chronology, about the historical context, about relation to authors of the time, a strong tendency criticized by some rare authors like Nietzsche. The im-

portance of the bibliography and the references in a dissertation shows this formal obsession. Even more superficially, some professors scold the students who do not establish their bibliography in the right order, who do not write it the proper way, or who don't use the right punctuation to separate the author, the editor, the time of the edition, etc. One can of course defend that structuring and form is an important component of clear thinking, but the problem lies in the predominance of form over real content. A trend has developed over the last years, speaking of the "scientificity" of philosophical work, where philosophy must apply the criteria of scientific work, forgetting that philosophy is more an art than a science.

Even more significantly, this formalism induces a suppression of the self and its spontaneous expression. The expected "philosophical behavior" is rather determined, in ways of speaking, tone of voice, type of speech, etc., pretending to erase any subjectivity, in order to manifest knowledge, reason, depth or wisdom. But this neglect

or mendacity tends to produce important side effects, such as an excessive subjectivity, hidden in a cloak of objectivity.

*Dogmatic* The philosopher understands the world via categories he has developed. He therefore wants to catalog every new phenomenon or idea in the system he has elaborated, he wants to integrate any new information in his already established world vision, which has to remain coherent and credible. Too often he does not worry if the demand requires a new category, if what he encounters poses problems to his previous scheme: he will naturally tend to make everything fit this scheme. He generally does not want to revise his positions: he already spent so much effort building up his system, arguing for it, defending it against criticisms from his colleagues who think differently. A strange phenomenon is that philosophy professors demand their students problematize their own theses, but they do not apply this demand to themselves, like if they had reached a point of no-return, beyond such

self-criticism. There seems to be a natural dogmatism that establishes itself unconsciously.

An observer of this pattern wrote that a young philosopher writes a thesis, and then spends the rest of his career defending it. Rare are the philosophers who like Wittgenstein produced some theory in the first part of their career and then put forward a totally different and even opposed theory. The common attitude can be called a “thetic” frame of mind, where one produces a theory about the order of things, promotes it and defends it against all opponents, rather than seeing philosophical work as a permanent investigation and reworking of one’s thinking. Often philosophers introduce their speech with the expression “On this topic my position is...”, indicating a clear declaration of war on whoever would dare oppose this “position”. It is not so much thinking in itself that is practiced and promoted, but some specific production of ideas, a result that needs to be protected and defended. From this standpoint, the ones who think differently are considered “wrong”, instead of accept-

ing that there are different ways of understanding and perceiving reality. The battle between anglo-saxon philosophy, more analytic, and continental philosophy, more existential or metaphysical, with the lack of understanding and appreciation of each side for the other is a good example of this thetic thinking.

Jean-Paul Sartre coined the expression *esprit de sérieux* (spirit of seriousness) in order to qualify such a standpoint. The idea is that one projects his subjective view on the world, categorically claiming its veracity, erecting his subjective perception into an objective standpoint, which does not accept any divergence. The philosopher has a claim on universal reason, his own singular reason becomes the incarnation of absolute Reason. Because of this, his mental schemes take priority over any new empirical evidence, just like over any argumentation going in a different direction, considered empty, false or inane. Therefore he easily enters into a quarrel with his colleagues, and dialogue between philosophers is difficult: it is often scornful and even violent.

*Rhetorical* Like the sophists we might encounter in Plato's dialogues, the philosopher seeks to have an effect on the public, be it erudites, students or laymen; he wants to convince his audience, to teach people, to display his erudition, he is ready to debate. This objective requires efforts to persuade, and in order to do so, to develop a good control of rhetorical tools, of categories and concepts, of argumentation, which is generally the case with people who have philosophical education. Although we should here introduce distinctions about the art of rhetorics, since some tensions and oppositions inhabit this practice. One of them is between the art of speaking well, eloquence, in opposition to the efficiency of speech, like in teaching for example. And some philosophers, in particular those who want to display their erudition or show their wit, practice more the art of seduction, trying to impress the public with their mastery of the verb. Another opposition is between argumentation as a way to manipulate and convince, in order to win a debate, and argumentation as a way to deepen

and clarify the discussion and engage in constructive thinking. Plato calls the first one eristics, the second one dialectics. We notice that different philosophers will be inclined on one side of those issues more than the other. As well, the three major components of rhetorics are traditionally considered to be reason, passion and ethics; and there again, the respective proportion of each aspect is modulated differently according to the personality, to the psychological and intellectual priorities of the speaker. But indeed the technical skills can be used by the philosopher to favor enhanced thinking, or just to manipulate, brow-beat, impress or bamboozle the interlocutor, or simply to reject any thinking other than his own. Although some intellectuals are not concerned at all with rhetorics, since dialogue is not their cup of tea, and they have no aspiration to debate or to teach. Therefore they make very little effort to polish their speech or writing, and for this reason numerous philosophers, lacking any sense of pedagogy, often epitomize some of the worst teaching.

However, if rhetoric is an art, formalized and susceptible to learning, we can also speak of a natural and instinctive rhetoric: that which is practiced by everyone, already by children, which includes many basic techniques to protect oneself, to manipulate, to justify oneself or to avoid the discussion. It is generally unconscious, often motivated by bad faith, it has recourse to various paralogisms, to ready-made expressions of rejection, a dynamic which can be characterized as “survival speech”. And the philosopher is not at all free from this primitive natural rhetoric, because his subjectivity and his emotions periodically outweigh his rationality, sometimes surprisingly so, in view of his intellectual and formal capacities. But he will not hesitate to hide this subjectivity behind a formal argumentation, a smoke-screen of which he will hardly be aware. The sophistication of his argumentation will allow him to convince himself of his righteousness and his rationality.

*Solipsistic* The philosopher likes to make long speeches, often intricate and convoluted. Dialogue, in the sense of an open exchange and comparison of ideas, is not his strength. He primarily speaks with himself. One proposition is justified by another, one idea leads to another, one reference brings up another, an infinite process that is perceived as an obligation of exhaustivity and rigor. The articulation or association of ideas further requires of course a long demonstration. A compulsive behavior that justifies a hegemonic occupation of the verbal space. If he would dialogue, he would have to interrupt his reasoning, a cessation that would devalue his thinking and betray the integrity of his intellectual contribution, so honorable, precious and irreplaceable. The philosopher tends to view himself as self-justified and self-sufficient. It must be said that since Descartes in particular, with his "I think therefore I am", justification is made for the thinker to declare himself the exclusive center of the world, hence the evidence of a solipsistic practice. The primacy of individual conscious-

ness as a guarantee of reality goes in the same direction.

Therefore some philosophy professors prohibit, explicitly or de facto, any questions or objections from their students, which they view as a lower order of speech and uninteresting; what they call opinion and they don't know how to work on it. Or they let students speak, but do not really answer them or deal with their issues: they just use those interventions to feed and prolong their own monologue. Unless they bluntly tell the student that what he speaks about is not the appropriate issue. Therefore his speech must be in one solid piece, shielding his author from any alterity or interactions. Of course daring an objection tends to be a taboo in this milieu, implicitly considered as a lack of respect. The attachment to his ideas makes the philosopher sensitive to any observation that he would take personally, as a disapproval or even as an aggression. Thus one should not be surprised to observe that even on an advanced level, like a PhD session, what is called a seminar, which is sup-

posed to signify that students and teacher discuss a particular topic, remains actually a sort of lecture or conference. This phenomenon is much stronger in certain cultures like Asia or Eastern Europe. The philosopher easily believes, like the religious leader, that he has a particular and privileged relation to Truth itself, or to Reason, a position which excludes anyone else from sharing access to this relation, be it out of the significance of his status, or out of his “genial” self. A prophetic behavior that can easily be perceived as or transform itself into an autistic attitude.

*Solitary* “Solitude” is part of the cliché image of the philosopher. The one who retreats with his thoughts and books, preferring them to the company of others. There is a certain degree of truth to this perception, although this is a trait common to many “savants”, not only to the philosopher. This tendency to isolation is justified by the fact the philosopher is engaged in a quest for something worthwhile to think about, to write about, and he should let his ideas marinate in si-

lence and isolation, in order to muse over them. At the same time, this trait should not be thought of as essential, since any philosophizing is actually embedded in a dialogue with others, be they present or absent, living or dead. One actually learns the attitudes and skills involved in philosophizing from others, and one applies them to others, either on others' texts or on their embodied speech, so philosophizing maintains necessarily a strong relation with alterity, a reality easily forgotten. Thus one could argue that relation to others is closer to the core of what makes a philosopher than solitude.

Solitude is a moment needed by the philosopher, be he professional or amateur. It signifies a calm space to let ideas rest, be internalized and be understood in a deeper way. It can be a moment for ideas to germinate, as it is a peaceful state, away from the noise and rush of the world, where thinking can be more focused and freer. The philosopher has a strong relation to solitude for two reasons. First, it is necessary for him: in order to go deeper into oneself, to

practice introspection so as to seek what is essential for his thinking and for the orientation of his life. To meditate, in order to plunge into one's thoughts, to retreat to the deepest part of the self. Second, the philosopher bothers "normal people" with his sagacious remarks, his intrusive questions, his strange preoccupations, as we know from Socrates, who made his interlocutors angry, there the need for a peaceful isolation. A philosophical dialogue is a form of challenge, unpleasant for people who do not have the habit of thinking. If the philosopher wishes to dialogue, he acts as a mirror, rendering visible in the interlocutor his contradictions, his banality, his superficiality, his bad faith. If he has integrity, through his affinity with parrhesia (being truthful), he is critical, he disturbs. Solitude is therefore the price to pay, unpopularity, but the philosopher is never lonely, since reason and great minds, past and present, always accompany him in his existence.

*Ambitious* All human beings have some aspiration for recognition, a need to be noticed or admired by others, stronger or more angst-ridden in some persons than in others. The philosopher is no exception to this yearning, he as well looks for some type of validation: he wants to be seen as knowledgeable, intelligent, wise or even genial. Unlike the businessman, who manages on his own to get results and who can be proud of them, the philosopher is dependent on other people's judgment to value his own worth. Unless he has a very strong attachment to his own work and is satisfied just with his mere intellectual activity, which remains a rare case, and unusual wisdom.

Here he might have in mind Socrates, whom the oracle designated as the wisest of all men, or Hegel, Kant and Nietzsche, who belong to the pantheon of philosophy, eternal and unforgettable figures of the trade. But that is precisely where it hurts for the philosopher. Throughout his educational process, he has painfully studied the production of brilliant minds who have left their trace in history. He often had a hard time to grasp

their thinking, and even after many years of familiarity with some authors, he still encounters pain and difficulty to grapple with the content of their works. And when he thinks he understands and expresses his understanding, there is always some other specialist who denounces him as mistaken or as a fraud, a habit that is common with professionals of philosophy. He can console himself by thinking about Nietzsche, who became famous only posthumously, as this genius had insightfully foreseen. Thus he tries to be original, he writes and hopes to publish, otherwise he perishes, as is standardly repeated in the American milieu. But he has to go through the ordeal of many refusals. He finally might get some success and see his work printed, but very rarely does one obtain the full expected satisfaction in this domain, since he always wants more. Furthermore, most of what is published in the field fills up the shelves of university libraries as a main function. Thus the philosopher is frustrated with his most legitimate ambitions, which makes him

bitter, echoing his structural feeling of nothingness.

The other means for recognition is the academic track, through obtaining tenure, especially in a prestigious university, or some widely recognized chair. And depending on the system of a given country, he has to pass many examinations or postulates to numerous faculties, preparing dossiers and passing interviews, a long and winding road, full of thorns and obstacles, unless he is particularly gifted or erudite, unless he has the right connections. Just like for publishing, he most likely will encounter many denials before getting some reward, that is if he ever obtains the reward. Most times he must settle for some consolation prize, a situation that deeply affects his sense of pride and dignity. The quest of statute, necessary to his self-worth, be it celebrity or academic position, is most likely painful, both in the process and in the results.

*Nothingness* As the philosopher thinks of the laws of necessity ruling the universe, as he searches

the essence of all things, as he tries to account for human existence and significance, he has to face immense and ungraspable realities such as natural determination, causal principles and purposes, social conditioning, almightiness of God, meaning or existential absurdity, etc. Hence, he periodically has to deal with and confront the limits of his mind and being, the nothingness of the human and personal condition. Therefore the philosophizing subject may naturally undergo a vertiginous feeling of nothingness.

Already, the simple fact of engaging in philosophical activity, the motivation some persons experience, sometimes at a very early age, is not a trivial matter. Why would someone undertake such a questioning, start reflecting about metaphysical issues, try to grasp the reason for things to be, or attempt to understand why entities behave and act in a certain way, if not because there is a certain sense of the fictitious nature of empirical reality, because one suspects the illusory nature of our perceptions and our understanding. The quest for a grounded certitude, the thirst

for the absolute, cannot hide and in fact reveals the profound sense of void that inhabits the soul of the philosophically minded person. This perception of void comes as a cause, but as well as a consequence. For the more the philosophical person searches the universe, reason, truth or any other transcendent concepts, the more he is confronted with the vanity and the minuteness of his own self, the limits of his own capacities, the quasi ridicule of his own existence and endeavors.

The very act of philosophizing clearly manifests a certain despair. Instead of enjoying life as it comes, or pursuing some practical activity, benefiting himself or society, the way normal people live, instead of concerning himself with the usual objectives of human beings, the philosopher commits his life to issues that isolate himself from his fellowmen, a separation, an alienation, that can amplify or intensify his sense of worthlessness. Society in general does not need philosophers the way it needs doctors or engineers. Philosophy departments in universities do

not attract the majority of students, and many practitioners of other fields look down on the philosophers with condescendance, convinced of their inanity. This occurs in spite of an occasional and formal recognition of their brilliance, the ambiguous acknowledgment of their braininess, a widespread prejudice which necessarily affects the poor philosopher. Thus he tries to compensate through the intensity of his work, through the self-indulging glorification of his genius and originality, through seeking some kind of status. But fundamentally he suspects there is a problem in his identity, and he eagerly tries to find ways to prove his own worth and justify his own activity. In countries where philosophy is an obligatory course for the majority of students, this subject has a bad reputation for its difficulty and for its meaninglessness, besides for a minority of students whom such a topic inspires. As well, there are recurrent administrative discussions about the necessity or utility of this teaching, and over the last few years different countries have abandoned or lessened the study of philosophy in the

official curriculum. Of course, here and there some rare philosophers have managed to obtain some social recognition, but they represent the exception, an exception which makes the average philosopher feel even more his own emptiness. Therefore, behind the cloak of erudition, formalism, smartness or complication, rare are the philosophers who do not entertain a rather poor self-conception.

*Narcissistic* The philosopher is rather narcissistic. There are different facets to this narcissism. First, an obsession with oneself, with one's mind and thinking, one's work, one's accomplishment, success and career. Second, an obsession with philosophy, which for him is the greatest of all activities, the summit of intellectual prowess, in which he participates, he incarnates. Any other field is viewed as secondary, merely technical, superficial or subjective, not in touch with the absolute. Although here and there some philosophers glorify science, poetry or art as a privileged form of expression or thinking. Third, he grants

himself an extramundane position, almost divine, from which he can look down at the world, as if he were not part of this world, a world which he has the power, competency and legitimacy to describe, analyze and criticize. Fourth, he entertains a high estimate of his own ideas, he undergoes a passion with what he thinks, generally overvalued compared to what others think. Fifth, he is quite biased about himself. Even when he is not understood, when his ideas are confused or incoherent, he believes others are the problem, which he explains through their incapacity, their superficiality or prejudices. Sixth, he tends to fabricate his own world, losing himself in his own ideas, world vision or system, enfolding himself in his own mental secretion. Seventh, he is haunted by his own relation to nothingness, by his intimate relation to absurdity and void, facing his personal worthlessness. Although this dimension can easily be negated and remain relatively unconscious, since too often the philosopher refuses to take his own self as an object of rigorous reflection. Eighth, he considers that is above any

criticism, an attitude that makes him rather fragile and susceptible, since this makes him sensitive to any negative remark Ninth, he belongs to a special elite club of geniuses, a broader version of himself to which he strongly identifies, which is the reason he compulsively wants to quote those great minds as a way to glorify himself. Tenth, there is a strong tendency toward corporatism, an attitude which aims at systematically defending the image and the vested interest of a professional category, quite nervously so. A priori philosophers are needed by society, they are important and they are right, against all the “others”, be it different special groups or society in general, who are considered anyhow suspicious and “anti-philosopher”.

*Envy* As we have described earlier, the philosopher is torn between a sense of emptiness and worthlessness on one side, and a strong ambition, a desire to be recognized on the other side, in order to compensate for his pain. The difficulty of this aspiration provokes in him a permanent drive

to compare himself to others, with a residual jealousy, a permanent envy, fed by a chronic feeling of being unjustly treated. Philosophers are trained to practice critical thinking, but this drive easily turns into a compulsive criticism: nothing is good enough for him, the world is unfair, in particular toward his own person. This bitterness, this compulsive criticism, combined with his dogmatism and his egocentrism, tends to make him look down and treat contemptuously the work of most colleagues. And of course, if this work obtains some approval or recognition, this proves once more the unfairness of the world, since the “other” is chosen, in spite of the “mediocrity” of his work.

In France, we observe a strange phenomenon in high school philosophy classrooms. There is a widespread prejudice among teachers against published anthology textbooks. Thus each one prefers to photocopy his own choices of selected texts from authors that he distributes to the students. This procedure has exactly the same nature and function as an anthology, but weirdly

enough it is considered different, more authentic, without any real argument to defend such a practice. The reality of it is that these handouts, those texts, are “mine”, “I “ chose them, therefore it is evidently better. Of course, the day this teacher has the opportunity to produce a manual, he most likely will be happy to receive this honor and will not refuse, unless he is too worried about the criticisms of his colleagues, including for collaborating with those “corrupted” publishers who are just merchants. The fact a book would sell well is in itself a proof that this work is bad, a rationale which is a pure product of envy. Thus, the idea that it would be useful and more practical for the students to have such a complete anthology does not cross their mind. Their handouts are better! As well, when we observe dialogues of philosophers on social networks, the tone is often quite aggressive, and of course the worst insult is to tell another colleague that he is not a real philosopher. Actually, unlike science work for example, the evaluation of a philosophical work, like art in general, depends largely on

a subjective perception, a situation that makes their author quite nervous. A subjectivity that is abused by many expert readers, who tend to be quite harsh with each other. But such a generalized pettiness does not seem to preoccupy those great minds, rather unconcerned with any effective collaboration and substantial dialogue. Each one tends to stay in his corner to concoct his little cuisine. Only their corporatist attitude, “us against them”, provides a certain feeling of community, quite formal.

***Corruption*** Corruption designates the practice of dishonest or illegal behavior, especially of people in authority, with the purpose of gaining some personal advantage. It is often thought of as a defect of politicians and businessmen, but philosophers have their share of such a vice. We can observe different facets of this corruption. First, cliquism, the tendency to form cliques, to make small groups that share ideology, features, affiliations or particular interests, a visible phenomenon especially in universities. The principle

is to favor “our” people when it comes to funding, posts, publications, honors, etc. It is not so much the quality of the work that matters, but the fact of belonging to the group. The extension of the “plotting” of those cliques, the intense pressure they yield, is sometimes surprising. Second, propitiation, the tendency to abase oneself and please the authorities in order to obtain some practical advantages, get some promotion or favor a career plan. This applies already to PhD students who modify their work in a spurious way in order to comply with the expectations of their supervisor, or who accept to “serve” their supervisor. This propitiation can apply as well to the excessive effort of pleasing the students in order to avoid problems and to get favorable reports presented to the administration. Third, the issue of owning and stealing ideas, which takes place in two different ways. To protect one’s ideas, to not share them because they might be stolen before they are published, a vision of thinking that is quite reductionist, miserly and sordid. The preoccupation is not one of reason, but one of pos-

session. One is not concerned with dialogue, but recognition. On the reverse, some persons indeed “steal” ideas in a vulgar way, without acknowledging the origin of those ideas, as a substitute for developing their own ideas. Fourth, bad faith, through the denial of material and financial preoccupations. Philosophers often like to act as if they had no preoccupation with such issues, they even hide or deny their quest for wealth or success, when it is very much at the center of their worry, like most people. The forced image of a noble and gratuitous intellectual activity makes them deny by omission this reality, pretending to be above those trivial matters, when they often act and behave with this goal in mind. Fifth, hiding their subjectivity behind a cloak of reason. When a philosopher does not like something, someone, some ideas, he criticizes them or denounces them with apparently objective argumentation, a skill he has learned throughout his training and practice, when the fundamental motivation for his rejection rests upon a pure dislike or personal disagreement. Sixth, moralizing,

quite a popular bent among philosophers, when they want to reach some goal for themselves, pretending to represent the “good” when they simply want to satisfy some appetite. Lastly, hypocrisy, when they do not apply to themselves what they advocate or expect from others. For example, any professor invites his students to the practice of self-criticism, but rare are the professionals who do it themselves. Or they do it superficially, a popular trick in the English world, by making little self-derogatory jokes in their speech, a typical sign of avoiding self-criticism.

One last ironic comment about the philosopher and corruption is that his moralistic tendency makes him notice, comment and criticize corruption in society. It becomes an object of his research, but he is blind to his own corruption. This paradox finds its explanation in the development of academic philosophy, where the practice of the art has become a mere issue of knowledge, totally separated from the antique idea of wisdom, self-education and self-knowledge. The thinking subject ignores or denies himself, pretending to

some extramundane and protected vantage point from which he can “objectively” look at the world. An important form of corruption, a bit like a ruler who imposes the law on the citizens but considers that he is above this law.

*Arrogance* The philosopher seems pretentious to other people. He is somehow alien in his being, as he does not fit in with others, his preoccupations are not common ones, he does not take joy in usual hobbies, he refuses or feels awkward with social niceties. He does not allow opinions or emotions to be expressed unquestioned. He finds the requirements of daily tasks and usual life chores to be unpleasant distractions from his important work. He speaks a different language, in a way that frustrates those around him. He plays his own game; others must play by his rules if they want his acknowledgment. Those features make him appear arrogant, and he might be arrogant, since he naturally tends to think that his way of being is superior to those of other people.

He often feels he must prove himself as a thinker, as a superior being, and since he has developed an agility in this domain, he challenges others in their own thinking. He thinks about the questions and ideas most people spend their life avoiding, he can take on a prophetic tone and function. Either his auditors play his game and enjoy the thinking, or they shrug him off as an egotistical smartass who takes pleasure in confusing anyone and everyone, someone who just wants to show off, a judgment that might be totally founded. Thus he gets frustrated and admonishes the skeptics and the non-believers, who constitute the vast majority, for not thinking. He negates common sense, or ignores it. The obvious is for him a banality, so he criticizes his fellowmen for their beliefs, their customs, their activities and their concerns.

The encounter with a philosopher is a difficult challenge for the non-initiated person. If he is anxious or entertains a bad self-conception, he automatically feels threatened and perceives his interlocutor as a self-conceited and scornful per-

son. If he is rather curious or intrigued, he will engage in the dialogue, peacefully, not fearing some misunderstanding, not apprehensive about his own intellectual shortcomings, and he might find the exchange amusing, interesting, thought provoking, even if difficult. He might as well notice the difficulties of the philosopher to be clear and focused, or realize indeed his pretentiousness and arrogance, which he could understand as a kind of anxiety and despair on the part of the specialist. But the latter case is rarer, since most human beings fear looking foolish, being unconsciously worried and fearful about their own limits. Therefore they will easily view any intellectual person as threatening, as inconsiderate. Thus, rejoicing of his own power by default, the philosopher is an easy prey for smugness and disdain. Such little sadistic pleasure compensates for his sense of emptiness, and nourishes the haughtiness that consoles him from his own limits and lack of recognition. Besides the fact that his convoluted thinking and his lack of in-

terest for others actually inhibits any healthy dialogue with anyone, be they expert or layman.

*Anger* Most human beings feel some type of imperfection, some discrepancy between their immediate reality and their expectations, be it a desire, a will, or a need. Therefore, we are dissatisfied, at different degrees, with different intensities, a common source of anger. And as we have already seen, the philosopher has numerous reasons to complain about the order of the world. But there are primarily for him two types of reasons. First of all, he permanently compares the state of things with some ideal or absolute perspective, a hiatus that provides his judgment with innumerable causes of criticism or even loathing of reality. Second, his feeling of nothingness remains anguishing and painful, in spite of the compensation through his intellectual work, because such a feeling is intense and persistent, especially when it is not conscious. And furthermore because he rarely obtains all the expected recognition from his peers and from the public at large,

be it in fame, reputation, academic position, financial reward, etc. This combination, although it feeds his appetite for denunciation and provides fodder and motivation for his intellectual work, can as well stir his irritation, his disappointment and therefore his anger about reality, this sad state of things.

Indeed, anger is not the main characteristic one would evoke about the philosopher. Nevertheless, he feels it much more often than what he allows to be seen. Anger is an emotion a priori violent, but not necessarily with a physical and external manifestation. It can be internally intense, yet hidden and kept silent. Calm words, and even silence, can be violent. Moral indignation is as well a classical scheme in this domain, coated with a nice intellectual varnish. But generally, philosophers are angry, or resentful, although most likely in a controlled way, since philosophical education trains one to rather ignore and suppress his emotion, to deny his own feelings, hidden under a cloak of formalism and rationality. Their anger expresses itself rather with conde-

scendence, irony, sarcasm, disdain, cynicism and coldness, diverse attitudes that allow him to pretend being calm, distant and collected, looking wise, as philosophers are supposed to be. Therefore hiding his dissatisfaction and resentment by exerting some type of intellectual and psychological power.

*Obsessive* Tenacity is an important aspect of philosophical work. One takes up a concept, an idea, a question, a problem, or whatever theme that is considered important and interesting, and then intensely works on it. To define this object, to analyze it, to problematize it, to find different readings of it in the history of ideas, to identify the diversity of its description, to discover debates and fights about it, all of this and more, is the task of the philosopher. In order to produce acceptable work, one has to pursue a rigorous path, otherwise it would be considered partial, incomplete, reductionist and superficial. Indeed, such perseverance and steadiness can constitute the guarantee of quality for the writing

that should be published, for the lecture that should be presented. But at the same time, it engenders a certain heaviness in the intellectual attitude of the philosopher, in his existential posture, in his relations towards others, to the world and to himself. Nothing is given, nothing is simple, everything is “more complex than this”. An attitude that can induce a deeper thinking, but an attitude that can be rather inappropriate in certain circumstances, in a certain context, in life. Nothing is granted, admittedly, but there are moments where an apple is just an apple, and not the object of an intense and elaborate essay. But such an “illumination of the obvious”, as Zhuangzi calls it, is far from evident for the philosopher, who persists in “splitting hairs”, to quote the common adage. One has to find the deep or true meaning, identify the intention, the eagerness to understand and to explain is often beyond reasonable measure. The universal implications of a given judgment have to be cautiously examined, and one can perceive a needy dimension to such an orientation, to such a compulsive behavior.

Overthinking, which is actually a form of worry, fear of mistake, fear of incompleteness, a desire for totality and exhaustivity, encumbers clear and free thinking. Some philosophers, such as Ockham or Wittgenstein, have criticized this desire to say it all, the pretension to cover all the angles, by advocating concision and simplicity. But in general, philosophers cannot let go that easily, they have a claim to the absolute, to perfection, without admitting this very obsession. Therefore omitting any detail would be an unforgivable sin against the profession, against their image as a true philosopher.

*Joyful and Sad* The philosopher experiences joy in a way which seems to him more vivid than any other. He blooms inwardly, in relationship to himself but without being monotonous since through his meditations he discovers in his mind "the universe and the gods". A joy which has its unequal moments but also its constancy, because the philosopher experiences the eternity of philosophizing, its freedom, which nothing or no one

can inhibit. Plus he has numerous friends, those beautiful texts, on which he can rely at any moment, an eternal dialogue. The elation of thinking is his most precious possession, as a philosopher and as a human being. As well, the philosopher experiences sadness in a way which seems to him more vivid than to others. He contemplates permanently human finitude: death, pain, imperfection, ignorance, etc. He does not take his mind off this sadness, which is a working tool as well as a dimension of himself. He has to endure this anguish in order to perceive and understand the existential phenomenon. He has to keep in mind the limits of each thing and all, which is a condition for apprehending their essence, their specific nature. Joy and sadness are compasses for the philosopher as for the human being in general, as Spinoza argued. Although too often humans forget or negate the pleasure they can draw from their philosophical dimension. Through the joy he experiences, through his meditative attention to unpleasant or painful experiences, the philosopher can improve or transform his appre-

ciation of those phenomena. This improvement does not eliminate sadness but reveals the durability of joy, even though this philosophical joy often bears a melancholic undertone. Certain ideas or investigations about daily life touch the depth of people's existential issues, which often causes pain and uneasiness. At the same time, philosophizing brings some lightness and joy by inviting each and everyone to take some distance with one's self and sorrows, discovering in the life of the mind the enjoyment of life.

Nevertheless, this capacity of joy is often not so visible in philosophy professionals. Their attitude is rather stuffy and affected, they often are posers, trying to wear a professorial and deep look, a posture that manifests the shallowness of their existence, their own misery. Often they have forgotten why in their youth they entered the realm of philosophy. They were looking for truth, trying to grasp the absolute. It was a long time ago, in the meantime they have become sad grammarians, laboriously plowing some details from the history of ideas, sadly calculating their

chances to reach a good position. “I canonized laughter, superior men, therefore learn to laugh!”, wrote Nietzsche.

The philosopher is a man whose main activity lies in thinking: he therefore is not expected to show signs of joy or sadness. As a wise person he is expected to go beyond feelings, which does not prevent him from reflecting on sadness and joy as essential manifestations of humanity. When we examine the history of philosophy, sadness, pessimism, even cynicism clearly dominate the cliché of the philosopher: we can remember Schopenhauer who described human life as oscillating between boredom and frustration. For him, “Life is a business which does not cover its costs”, as the sum of sufferings largely supersedes the sum of joys.

The philosopher wastes his earthly life speculating on empty abstractions, which makes him unfit for pragmatic living, an added source of unhappiness. Then, being much more demanding than his fellowmen when it comes to pleasure, he is not satisfied with usual entertainments that

rather appeal to basic instincts: sex, food, drinking, gambling, etc. Of course hedonism is also a philosophical way of life, where pleasure is primary, but this inclination remains the one of a minority: officially, philosophers rather negate most immediate and popular pleasures, especially connected to the body. Among other reasons, unhappiness for the philosopher is a complex of inferiority: most professionals of philosophy will never reach the level of the great geniuses they study. Then, as teachers, they will permanently face misunderstanding, disinterest or scorn from their students, since the majority will manifest little enthusiasm for this subject matter. Numerous philosophy teachers find themselves impotent when it comes to transmitting their passion for thinking to youngsters who view this course as being a waste of time or a debilitating activity for losers. They become frustrated and blasé about their ability to form the youth's critical thinking, which was supposed to be their "raison d'être". As well, philosophers agitate ideas but do not have any real influence on

the world, no real power. They enjoy debating, confronting ideas, but get little recognition from their own colleagues or from other people. But they can still enjoy reading their favorite authors and having a “conversation” with them, feeling less lonely and abandoned. When he invests in writing, the philosopher takes pleasure in inventing new concepts, articulating his own ideas, a rather joyful practice. Joy and sadness are part of his daily life.

***Ridiculous*** The philosopher resembles Thalès, a famous ancient Greek predecessor, who engaged in staring at the heavens while walking, and thus fell into a well. The lowly servant observing the scene found the situation quite funny and burst out laughing. Such a smart person with a high level of knowledge and understanding, susceptible to forgetting simple things like walking and checking where to put his feet. A sort of paradox, since philosophizing implies naming things, defining them, analyzing them, while being incapable of perceiving and experiencing their con-

crete existence. This discrepancy endows the philosopher with a certain fragility, who in his reflections displays intellectual strength, but in earthly and everyday life exhibits his powerlessness and awkwardness. Any simple judgment or decision, any obvious action, become the matter of a complex dilemma. His refusal of common evidence, his incapacity to take things as they are, his resistance to trusting appearances, hinder any practical activity. Thus he can easily become the object of jokes and mean judgments.

Socrates, father of western philosophy, was known for his ugliness, for his odd behavior. Plato, inspired by his character, describes in the Allegory of the Cave how the man who has seen the light cannot play the normal social game in the realm of shadows: he is blinded. The others first laugh at him, then end up desiring to kill him. In this case, the ridicule is the trademark of the enlightened person whose behavior, preoccupations and occupations seem absurd to the common person. We have as well the anecdote about Immanuel Kant, always taking the

same walk at the same time, every day, in an obsessional fashion. “To laugh at philosophy is to really philosophize”, wrote Blaise Pascal. In China, Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi laughs at the sophists of his time, endlessly debating meaningless and specious issues, each school of thought trying to outsmart the other in the complexity of their argumentation. And Nicolas Cusanus, in the Renaissance, defends the naive philosopher, the idiot, as the true philosopher, in opposition to the classical erudite aristotelian. The “spirit of seriousness”, as Sartre calls it, which prohibits any open and rigorous intellectual work. It seems that the issue of the ridicule is strongly attached to the persona of the philosophers, for both legitimate and spurious reasons. “Simple and modest is the work of philosophy! Do not make me look solemn.”, wrote Marcus Aurelius. But in general, the philosopher cannot stop playing the role of a philosopher, at his own expense.

***Precious*** The behavior of the philosopher is often precious, in its formalism, its excessive man-

nerism, contrived and peculiar. It is affected, it lacks authenticity. Already, there is a certain philosophical tone, a mixture of blasé, since he has seen it all, mild irritation, tired of hearing the inanities of his fellowmen, and depth, since he dwells in the arcane of truth and unconditionality. When he speaks, he has to look inspired, his thoughts come from far away, from the beyond. Every word is well calculated and calibrated, there should be no room for improvisation and whim, his image as a genius is at stake. He should avoid the banal and the familiar, his words should be well chosen, as impressive and rare as possible; he does not hesitate to produce some unheard of neologism. Whenever we speak with him, he lets us know through his speech, with his bodily and facial expressions, that there is so much to say that he will not tell you all of it: the task is too wide, time is lacking, and you might not be able to follow the whole process and understand all of the ramifications and subtleties of his thinking. He expresses a certain impatience, since he remains conscious of the difficulties of

an exhaustive exposition of the issues at stake. And he feels so lonely in the heights of his ethereal considerations. Thus he will address his auditors with a gaze full of commiseration: he has pity for the common mortals who have not access to those lofty horizons, and probably will never have. With his colleagues, he will take on a different attitude. On one side, they belong to the same world, they stomp the same grounds, therefore there can be an appearance of comradeship and complicity, although rather distant and formal. At the same time, he feels somewhat threatened by them, since they are in competition with each other. In private discussions he might even criticize them severely, since their work cannot compare with his. There he will adopt a mundane persona, displaying some wit, exchanging smart and insignificant comments. Their conversation must denote that they belong to the same club, that they are affiliated with the same “masonic lodge”. When they write to each other, they start with “Dear colleague”, a meaningless and ritualistic expression that expresses well the oblig-

atory mannerism of the profession. Judges wear a uniform in the tribunal to display their majesty and their grandeur, philosophers must produce the equivalent effect with their words, with their preciousness.

***Rigid*** A philosopher thinks about the essence of things, about the necessity of phenomena. He postulates that he knows things as they are, and the world as it has to be. We perceive a strong degree of certitude in his intellectual scheme. Therefore, when someone brings him something new that bears a relation to his work, the philosopher tends to have a conservative and stubborn reaction: “it doesn’t fit my system so it cannot work”, “it cannot be like this”, “it doesn’t belong to the nature of things”. Although this reaction may sound very reasonable because the person apparently remains rational, produces arguments to support his stance and justifies it with erudition, it can also reveal the philosopher’s apprehension of innovation: a new element may threaten his system, show its weaknesses, contradictions

or blind spots, which would make the philosopher lose power and authority. The strange phenomenon is that the professor tells his students, for example in the writing of their dissertation, to examine alternative possibilities, to problematize their position, to practice self-criticism, among other means through the examination of different authors. But it seems that once he has gained a status, once he has acquired some intellectual authority, this plasticity is abandoned, any distance toward his own intellectual production is absent. Knowledge replaces thinking, the former with its connotation of certitude, the second bearing more a hypothetical dimension. One can be quite surprised at the closedness of the mind that some established intellectuals can exhibit, even when faced with rather powerful argumentation. Although this is not an exclusivity of philosophy, but a widespread phenomenon in academia in general. Knowledge signifies power and status, and one is not about to easily relinquish the precious acquisition obtained through arduous and lengthy labor. The preoccupation

with truth, rigor or honesty seems quite devalued when it comes to personal possession or gain. As well, one easily falls in love with one's own mental construction, falling in the trap of the mother tiger, ready to defend at all costs her baby against any predator. It is not rare to hear a specialist declare: "Most of what you have been taught about X is hogwash", "Nobody until now has really understood philosopher Y", or again "Everything written about Z is nonsense", and of course he will be pleased to enlighten his audience with his profound and innovative insights. The principle of a diversity of interpretations is visibly not his cup of tea.

*Dissenting* Almost by definition, or by principle, the philosopher is a dissenter. An important part of his function is to act as an intellectual and social critic, he is supposed to question established opinions and beliefs, to challenge the obvious. The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard explains fundamental intellectual contributions as producing epistemological rup-

tures, a shift of paradigm, a discontinuity in the way of thinking. And Socrates inaugurated philosophical practice as a system of refutation, a principle of vigorous and persistent questioning intended to challenge experts, common opinion and established ideas, in order for thinking to progress and formulate new hypotheses. Many philosophers have thus produced revolutionary theories, sometimes shocking for their own society, to the dismay of more conventional intellectuals, for example the famous Kantian Copernican Revolution. Just like Nicolaus Copernicus turned astronomy of his time topsy-turvy by hypothesizing that the earth moved around the sun instead of the other way around, Kant turned epistemology inside-out by theorizing that objective reality depends on the mind, instead of the other way around. Some philosophers, more rare, like the Greek Cynics, radicalized even more such a criticism, refusing to enter into any debates or argumentation, merely by engaging in diverse provocations. For example, Diogenes, founder of this school, was running around the streets of

Athens carrying a lamp in broad daylight, claiming to be looking for an honest man, as a way to harshly criticize his fellowmen. Philosophers criticize society, but they as well criticize each other. The very dynamic of philosophy, as we see in its history, is one of criticism and dissension, whereby any philosopher who accomplished a work worth remembering criticized his predecessors, or contemporaries, with some new theory or perspective, in spite of the debt he could as well acknowledge towards his colleagues.

In theory a philosopher relates in a critical way to speech, he is defined by his ability to not take things for granted, that is to naively accept them or consider them true just because they are enunciated, in particular when emitted by “experts”. Although the reverse is as well possible: the glorification of “authorities”. But for the observer, this permanent criticism can look like nitpicking, and it can be nitpicking. And one can easily fall into the trap of permanent fastidious or pedantic contention, just showing off one’s smartness. Between philosophers, it can engender a sort of

endless quarrel between individuals and schools, each one convinced of its rightness and merits, in opposition to the other one, mistaken and going astray. It can indeed be motivated by a commitment to “truth”, or look like it, but it is often a mere stickiness, a fascination for one’s own production, for one’s own self. And one can periodically observe how a philosopher or people with such pretension will systematically criticize and take the counterpoint of what others say, or question them untimely and compulsively, without taking the time to examine the merits of what they heard, without granting any minimal consideration to their counterpart, his precipitation and obsessive reaction prohibiting any real and peaceful dialogue.

*Equanimous* A traditional emotional concept linked to philosophical activity, dating from the Greeks, is ataraxia, a peace of mind, free of disturbance from the world, free from internal troubles, which can be translated as imperturbability, equanimity or tranquility, a liberation from

distress and worry. For some schools, like Epicureanism or Stoicism, it is a crucial purpose of philosophizing, but more generally, it is an important condition for this activity: without peace of mind, without stability, one cannot engage in conscious and rigorous work. Therefore the philosopher is supposed to remain distant and detached in order to look for a clearer and deeper understanding, ever trying to shed his own fixed ideas, negative emotions and particular preferences. The Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi explains that all beings are in the Dao, the principle of all principles, that makes things function the way they function, except the human being, full of intentions and excesses that make him unstable and worried. Therefore one has to reach the Dao through a peaceful and constant endeavor, a challenge to himself. Indian philosophy promotes the samadhi, a state of meditative consciousness in which the experiencing subject becomes one with the observing object, abandoning his emotional, reductionist and partial subjectivity. Therefore equanimity implies to be less

emotional and rather rational, to have distance with everyone, everything and even oneself, to remain clear and sharp.

But this practice of work on the self, this engagement in the askesis of wisdom, has been quite forgotten by most contemporary philosophy professionals. Their activity has become primarily formal and encyclopedic, the work on the thinking subject has been relinquished, little or no attention is granted to oneself as an object of reflection and experience. Therefore producing some recognized writing, jockeying for positions and winning the race, looking smart and impressive, has become the main part of the activity, a preoccupation that brings its lot of anxieties and worries, far from working one one's peace of mind. Therefore one should not be surprised at the difficulty or absence of an authentic, tranquil and serene dialogue between philosophers, or between philosophers and laymen. The "know thyself" of Socrates has been long forgotten, and if one attempts to address the "person" itself, its way of being and behaving, it will be considered

respectless and inconsiderate. One has to protect his angst ridden mind rather than taking up the challenge that offers the acquisition of equanimity.

Another obstacle for equanimity is the desire to control, an immoderate desire to know, with the anxiety such an expectation can elicit. Since the philosopher dabbles in the absolute and the infinite, he easily develops a sense of omnipotence, but at the same time he is conscious of being limited. Furthermore he realizes that the power he claims is not really efficient, since it remains merely theoretical, and controlling very little. He will therefore develop a form of anxiety connected to his desire of understanding everything, his lust to know everything, a burning itch that can only leave him frustrated and anguished.

***Insatisfaction and satisfaction*** Leibniz proposes the concept of unruhe (restlessness, worry) as essential to the human being, an important affect, the moving principle of the mind. A contradictory structure of negativity and positivity, of privation

and pulsion, of lack and drive, which plays a crucial function in the thinking process. He takes up the analogy of the pendulum of the clock, in its eternal come and go, a figure of need and accomplishment that allows it to realize its function. The worry of the narrow consciousness trying to go beyond itself, in order to reach universality or the absolute, the desire of self-awareness, the will of reason, the regulatory ideal of ethical considerations, the spiritual dimension of self-care, as a permanent and ever unfinished fulfillment of the being.

This description presents us with the paradoxical phenomenon of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the mind dedicated to thinking. On one side, in his eternal quest for truth, the mind can never be satisfied, unlike those who are concerned with obtaining definite material or concrete gratifications, who can experience contentment or feel smug about it. Therefore the philosopher can suffer the pangs and agony engendered by the experience of finitude, the painful sense of limit, the radical incompleteness of the self.

At the same time, the common person can never be truly satisfied with his gains or pleasures, because he will always want more, and each “reward” will necessarily be accompanied with a suspicion of insufficiency and superficiality that his untrained mind is not ready to deal with. He will try to not think about it, he will invest himself totally with his next pursuit, but periodically he will meet his fate: a fundamental and powerless dissatisfaction, the profound disappointment and bitterness that inevitably accompanies it. And at some point this common person might even become incapable of pursuing further his endless search for immediate gratification, what is called depression or despair. When the philosopher, permanently, consciously and deliberately facing and scrutinizing the unfathomable depth of the infinite, accustomed to this vertiginous *mise en abyme* of his puny self. His mind being constantly trained and strained to face the unspeakable and the unthinkable, feels at home in this indetermination, in spite of the angst and apprehension it generates. He rejoices while contemplating the

unknown, enjoying the activity of reason, viewing each obstacle as a beautiful problem, the way one would contemplate a surprising painting in the museum gallery. Unlike the common man who perceives the least problem as an impediment to his elation. The whole issue turns around one's relationship to reality, either as an opportunity to reason and meditate, as spiritual satisfaction and joy for the soul, or as a source of annoyance, disappointment and perturbation since we cannot foresee it and control it. The case of the academic philosopher is a bit of a conflicting relation between the pleasure of thinking which initially motivated him to enter this profession, and the desire of personal gratifications, generally social success, a muddled issue which often is not so clear for him.

***Detached*** To judge whether something or someone is “connected”, we usually observe his response, his reaction to sollicitations. Philosophers are rather interested in the thinking, meditating upon what is behind the phenomenon, its

nature, conditions and causes, but not immediately concerned to act upon it. So when something happens, their action or response tends to be delayed, absent or simply imperceptible: they are aloof. While they observe and think, this inner dynamic remains invisible by others. Thus they are perceived as disconnected by common sense. Reflection or meditation makes the philosopher detached from the physical world. It can be described as an immersion, a term which implies to be deeply plunged into a milieu and isolated from the rest. Disconnecting does not mean to repel, but to remain uninfluenced, to be non-reactive, although it could become repulsion. An example is the anecdote of Socrates, standing outside to think about an idea, immobile, from afternoon until the next morning, not stirred by the surroundings.

The philosopher is generally remote from the layman, for different reasons already evoked: complication, abstraction, etc. One can say he lives in his ivory tower. Even when he wants to deal with practical issues or engage in a dialogue

with the non-initiated, his speech and behavior tends to be awkward, disconnected or incomprehensible, if not seemingly inane since he refuses to apply common sense. On one side, this behavior is understandable, since he does not take seriously numerous common preoccupations, and he takes seriously uncommon preoccupations. One can say he is offbeat, at odds with society. He easily takes radical positions that seem inappropriate or blundersome to the common person.

Because of this, his behavior is perceived as, or displaying a lack of interest in other people. He is not empathetic to the normal daily worries and life dramas most people suffer from, he shows rare sympathy to people and little interest in their conversation, he has a hard time with small talk, those issues that compose the substance for a majority of usual discussions, considered “normal”. Therefore people conclude that it is difficult or impossible to speak to him, they will avoid him. Besides the fact that speaking with a philosopher can easily make one feel stupid or ignorant, since it naturally wakes up one’s anxi-

ety of insufficiency with his “smart”, sarcastic or snide remarks, with his strange language. He may ask questions that make his interlocutor uncomfortable or try to prove his superiority and behave arrogantly, but he may as well only display a certain distance from common preoccupations and worldly affairs, ignoring or ridiculing the emotions that accompany those common pursuits. He may then try to prove he is above common existence, or he may in fact remain above or foreign to it, interested in more lofty matters. That is the difference between an affected superiority, calculated and contrived, and a genuine otherness, although both might make the interlocutor feel inferior. To be a philosopher can be a posturing, with its dimension of hypocrisy and hiding, an imposture, or it can represent a true vocation, where one pursues rigorous and passionate intellectual ventures. In a sense, the philosopher is cold, through his constant use of reason and his equanimous self, or he might just be trying to look cool. He is not hung up on petty things, or pretends not to be. He is an enigma for others,

or wants to look enigmatic. Is he a fountain of wisdom, an idiot or just pretentious?

This aloofness can take the form of contempt. The philosopher usually thinks that his ideas are good, he can easily see himself as superior, or deeper than the common mortals. He tends to despise what is not philosophical, what is not smart or subtle enough. People, even his colleagues, are too banal, too ignorant, too limited or even stupid. That can make him rather distant, when he is annoyed by banalities or usual discussions, judging them uninteresting or superficial. That distance can easily be perceived as a form of despise, out of disinterest or scorn.

*Autistic* In a general way, Isolation is a condition of life for the philosopher because he needs to spend time with himself, involved in an inner dialogue. In this sense he can already be considered autistic, since he is de facto cut off from society. The world is present to him only through his personal representation, as a production of his own mind. And he lives within his produc-

tion. Enclosed within his bubble or ivory tower, the philosopher may be out of step with the others. Light when others are serious, serious when others are light, astonished by the obvious and confident in abstraction, he thinks and lives apart from the ordinary human. He is not so interested in social activities. Often deprived of basic psychological abilities, he says what he thinks without considering the reception and the effects of his speech, convinced of his own rightness. He has no time, interest or energy to reflect upon the situation of the other. The radicalism of his reasoning can arbitrarily make him either a rejected or a favored interlocutor, primarily the former. For example he speaks of painful issues such as death as totally detached from the actual experience of it, without any empathy. Of course, this grants him some freedom from emotions and personal attachment, but this can as well lead to a form of decoupling from material or experiential reality. When the philosopher makes a hypothesis, it often becomes a postulate, he commits himself to it without any wish to problema-

tize it, therefore prohibiting any real dialogue. In general philosophers are individualistic, not collaborative. One just wants to pursue his train of thought, one becomes obsessive, wearing out others. His comprehensive and idealistic grasp of the world might make him forget the specificity of the individuality, so he appears or is insensitive, typical marks of autism.

Often the philosopher does not understand why his listener is ignorant or incapable of a fine understanding, or he does not accept this fact. His ideas seem obvious to himself, his reasoning seems to him so logical. So there is a discrepancy between his mind and someone else's. He is in his own bubble, he is a world unto itself. The other is vaguely present, as a presence in fine print, or as a stimulus that can be more or less annoying, boring or painful. Even if he may be a captivating orator, pronouncing beautiful, genial words and theories, it is done without a real consideration for the other, without being really interested in the perception and understanding of the auditor or reader. He expects to be admired,

but is not concerned with the mental processes of the interlocutor. That is why most philosophers, instead of improvisation and dialogue, which imply more to adapt to the interlocutors, prefer to read a paper prepared in advance. Besides the fact that they ignore their audience and have no clue about their perception and understanding, they omit the fact that a paper is made to be read, and listening to such a reading is both fastidious and difficult, because of the monotonous tone and the formalism of the content. But that does not preoccupy him: he just wants to display his brilliance and erudition.

In order to philosophize one needs to have only his mind and be self-sufficient. What happens in external reality, experiences, information and relations, everything that can be defined as an external source would be considered secondary. Thinking is the only one necessity, a form of autarkic existence, alien to the world, to otherness. The philosopher can feel rather satisfied with this intimate relation to himself, of this autarchy. The absence of others might leave him indiffer-

ent. Others might just remain an object for observation, research and reflection. People are not a fundamental or emotional necessity, merely a practical one. One could therefore say that on one hand he is a prisoner of himself, condemned to monologue, but on the other hand he is a free person, free from external constraint. This state of things can just as well engender satisfaction, for the absence of external trouble, and dissatisfaction, for a certain loneliness and boredom.

*Fearful* Hegel wrote that the fear of mistake is the first mistake. A remark that applies well to the philosopher. Mistake brings criticism, mistake brings ridicule, both of which frighten the expert in thinking. Therefore when writing or speaking, he will be very cautious, making sure all the angles are covered, not risking himself to spontaneity. The historical enemy of the philosopher is opinion, which is precisely the expression of impulsive thoughts, that lack the work, the rigor and the depth of true ideas. Thus he wants to make sure of not falling into this trap, and no risks

should therefore be taken. In a way, that is the trademark of a dignified thinker, but on the other side this brings excess weight and restraints to the thinking process and its expression. This generates a strong desire or need for security, for certitude, for pronouncing unquestionable statements. Ideas are not taken in their performative dimension, as stones thrown in the water in order to see the effect they have. One has to produce a definitive and unsurpassable theory, fully equipped with argumentation and support of established authorities, that will protect one from opprobrium.

Diploma, scholarly achievement, reputation, are some of the guarantees that make the philosopher feel safer. Quoting authors is a must, in order to justify what is said, in order to prove one's erudition, in order to impress the interlocutor, and in fear of a risky nakedness. Making long speeches, convoluted and puzzling, or writing big books, participate in this sense of security. The fear of being misunderstood, of being misjudged, incite the author to an unstoppable logorrhea,

echoing the sense of worthlessness or nothingness that haunts the philosopher.

*Clever* The philosopher is clever, more than most people. First of all he studied philosophy because he naturally enjoyed the work of the mind, then he practiced the art of thinking through studying great authors and producing studies. He developed different intellectual skills such as argumentation, conceptualization, interpretation, analysis, problematization, etc. Other intellectual professions imply as well a certain liveliness of mind, but this intellection is always connected to a particular domain. When philosophy covers any field of study, any topic of reflection, including human daily activity, a multifaceted practice that provides the philosopher with a definite advantage, if he is not too autistic. One can remark this particular feature of a philosopher: a more agile, original, broader and profound way of expressing himself. And he always has something to add, some point to criticize, some witty or smart remark to make, which

can either enrich the dialogue, deviate it, or force it into some superfluous discussion on semantics, erudition or other formal issues. And of course, like with all forms of skills or powers, there is always a temptation to abuse it, and like any other the philosopher does not fail to fall in this trap. Therefore he uses his competencies to feed his self-righteousness, to prove his position with utter bad faith, to browbeat his interlocutor by impressing him with his erudition, a cleverness that dazzles and takes aback his opponent. Endowed with a strong locutory capacity, he emits long winded addresses, harangues or diatribes, that saturate the space and leave the dialogue partner speechless. Through permanent criticizing, arguing and questioning, he suffocates the poor victim through his powerful eloquence and alert sense of repartee. As well, his smartness is useful to produce avoidance strategies, to dodge difficult or bothersome issues. A conclusive historical observation can be made here, about a Greek ancestor of the philosopher: the sophist, before Plato coined them with a rather negative image.

The root of the word comes from the adjective *sophos*, meaning wise or clever. But it carries a double connotation, as it sometimes suggests an admirable wisdom, and sometimes the sort of cleverness that can be devious and frightening. But he must also engage in dark calculations and maneuvers in order to protect his situation and ensure his social and material success, a great source of concern, a constant preoccupation that of course he must conceal, otherwise his image would be blemished.

***Passive*** The philosopher tends to be passive in his relation to the world; he describes, contemplates, analyzes, criticizes, but tends not to get involved in some concrete action. A famous quote of Karl Marx denounces this state of things: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.” The emergence of american pragmatism is as well a reaction to the purely theoretical and speculative nature of philosophy, claiming that it is meaning-

less unless it becomes useful for human practical activity and makes our life better.

Indeed the philosopher tends to be a spectator. He observes, contemplates, comments and theorizes, and as he wishes, implicates himself or shies away from what he witnesses, he connects or not to it. A spectator does not meddle with the actors, he keeps out. As a spectator, the philosopher is in a position of distance with the world in which he lives; the epoché, a suspension of judgment, is a good example of this withdrawal. He can experience the world, he can intensely question it, conceptualize it, criticize it, but he is not an actor, in the sense that he is neither responsible for this reality, nor decision-maker, nor creator of goods and wealth, nor entrepreneur. Of course, philosophical work is able to influence society, but on the sole condition that some actors appropriate this work and put it into action, engendering social transformations. One can claim that there is a power of ideas, but those ideas do not directly transform society, there needs to be

some intermediary that embodies it into a specific action.

*Impotent* We could add that the passivity of the philosopher easily turns into impotence. Let's examine the different reasons for his powerlessness, some of them recalling concepts examined previously. The philosopher does not operate in concrete or material reality but in abstraction. The fact of dealing with general or abstract concepts does not allow him to act, to directly influence society, unless he starts proposing some applications of his ideas. He enjoys pure speculation, contemplating the ideal or the absolute, realities which are not tangible, which are pure potentiality, never actualized or materialized. He problematizes and criticizes constantly, permanently envisaging multiple perspectives, an intellectual attitude which inhibits decision making, taking a stand and concrete action. The philosopher often deals with questions that cannot be answered, he works on eternally posing and re-describing problems. He is easily plunged into

indetermination; the philosophical treatment of an issue can never be really finished. He easily feels indifference towards concrete issues, he just enjoys thinking, and in this sense is not concerned with helping people and building society. Common life seems below him: he either is indifferent to common preoccupations or looks down on them. He is awkward with people, either too complicated, or too asocial, so human relations are usually hard for him. In the same dynamic, he is often rejected by others, as too deep, too abstruse, too weird, he does not fit “normal” society, he is an outcast. He might consider other people dignified, not on his level, he is frustrated with them and humanity overall, so he can be scornful and bitter, complaining about people, being condescending about them, feeling he cannot change them.

Some philosophers have been at the root of social and intellectual transformations, since ideas can as well wield power and have an effect upon the world. This is the case in politics, with authors like Jean-Jacques Rousseau influence on

the French Revolution and Karl Marx with communism, or in epistemology, like Hegel or Kant, who had concrete effects on society through scientific transformations. But those are rather rare cases and it is generally indirect, because some other persons or groups pick up on their ideas and put them into action or concretize them. Philosophers like Plato or Confucius who tried to deal directly with politics generally failed miserably, although in the long term their ideas might have had some influence.

The philosopher has a question for everything and wants to understand everything, an infinite and very ambitious task. He entertains phantasms of omnipotence. In fact, his project is impossible, and as he tries to understand why we cannot understand everything, he encounters his limits and therefore experiences a sense of profound impotence. If he managed to realize his project, he would be like a god, he would be God. And if periodically he unconsciously indulges in such an immoderate belief, reality always manages to bring him down from his heavenly habitat,

a hard lesson, as Icarus learned. Thus he generally suffers from a feeling of his own impotence, but he can console himself by analyzing human finitude, a philosophical way of describing human powerlessness.

A philosopher is someone who gets excited by ideas, his or other's. Initially, he spends a lot of time first understanding and learning other philosopher's ideas as it is part of his formal education. He would like to produce ideas as well, like those geniuses did, since that is the criterion for being a true philosopher, a quite impossible challenge for most. Thus the majority of those philosophers, if they pursue the activity, will most likely "only" become teachers of philosophy. And then, as they expose to their students the beautiful ideas they discovered in their readings, they are confronted with a group of young persons who for the majority have to attend this class, have no clue about why they attend it, who too often have neither taste nor educational background to enjoy those ideas or to be involved in a rigorous thinking activity. Since

the reasoning activity, thinking by oneself, is not a skill that traditional schooling promotes and develops. Thus, at best those students are bored and passive, at worst they ignore or sabotage the lesson, a situation that philosophical training does not prepare for. Most philosophy teachers realize the huge gap separating what they know and like and what they can actually teach and share with their students. So they are daily confronted with their impotency to convey their own love of ideas to students who are primarily concerned with getting a good grade or a diploma, who are indifferent or dread the boring and abstruse discourse on pure ideas.

In general, philosophy teachers would not dare call themselves philosophers because for them to be a philosopher means to find new concepts and develop one's own philosophy. And when they compare themselves with "great philosophers", they are overwhelmed by their own insignificance and banality, their powerlessness. So they remain on the commentary level, in order to maintain a semblance of originality and main-

tain an intellectual proximity with their beloved great philosophers. Although this quest for originality can make them even more abstruse and keep them further from their students.

The condition of being a philosopher, the complexity and slowness of reflection, his difficulty to communicate, his isolation, make him weak and inefficient. Philosophy teachers are often among the worst pedagogues. The dismissal of vulgar opinion, the ignorance and rejection of common sense, the elitism of his intellectual position, erects a barrier between him and his students, where both parties nevertheless hold their share of the responsibility. But the philosopher pays a heavier psychological price in this discrepancy.

The philosophical attitude has consequences as well in daily life. The overwhelming feeling of intellectual awe, the immensity of reality, the fact of never reaching any definite conclusions, facing permanent doubt and ignorance, the need to always understand more and better, engenders a state of impotence. The mental state of the

philosopher renders difficult his dealings with the concrete world, where one is supposed to accept the obvious as a reality. But he rather stays critical and aloof. By complicating and intellectualizing issues, he remains indecisive. He then suffers from a certain inertia. His incapacity to act in the world, since he is lost in the sphere of ideas, makes him appear as what is commonly called a “loser”.

Another more perverse way to sublimate this sense of impotence, rather common for philosophers, is through exercising “micropowers” as French philosopher Michel Foucault called them. This phenomenon takes place when someone is deprived of real power and uses his reduced authority upon the environment in a sadistic or unpleasant way. This often takes the form of a passive-aggressive behavior, such as the imposition of a strict formalism, reproachful, smug or sarcastic.

***Misfit*** The philosopher is a misfit, he remains marginal in his relations to society. He is too

critical, too idealistic, too radical, too strange to relate to common people and be integrated into the mainstream. The case of Socrates, condemned to death for corrupting the youth and blasphemy towards the gods of the city, is a historical case that well captures this issue. His peculiarity seems extravagant to most, he is usually quite lonely. His lack of respect towards social norms and moral codes, his criticism of tradition and authorities, prohibit standard relations that constitute the substrate of society. As well, the way he speaks, his intellectual interests do not particularly represent a source of excitement for others. He is rather not fun, being too serious, he neither fits usual conversational ambiances nor customary practical considerations. This makes him a bit of a black sheep for society, either ignored or despised.

The philosopher does not fit most social conventions, he finds them arbitrary: he needs good reasons to do and say things, when most people are fine with routine and repetition. He questions and criticizes, an attitude which makes oth-

ers uncomfortable. Therefore people see him as weird, ridiculous or even threatening, judging his thinking activity as useless, counterproductive or a waste of time. He often undermines the most precious widespread values, such as wealth, social success, or fame, spreading suspicion on diverse “sacred” obligations. He is suspected of subversion by people in positions of power, be it intellectual or political. He even questions common sense, he refuses to accept the standard obvious beliefs. Many philosophers lived as outcasts: Diogenes, Socrates, Giordano Bruno, Spinoza, etc. However a few more mundane philosophers encountered some recognition in their lifetime, like Bentham, Descartes or Sartre. The case of philosophy teachers, who in recent times are involved in official state and educational structures, presents the paradox of an “integrated misfit”. There the philosopher is formally recognized, but his behavior and his reputation still sets him apart from other teachers and subjects. His activity is by many considered either useless or uninteresting. A majority of coun-

tries have decided not to incorporate philosophy in their curriculum, and the countries where it is present permanently reevaluate such a practice.

*Cynical* Philosophers tend to entertain a rather skeptical and even cynical posture, in the different senses of the term. They often do not believe that something good will come out of human interactions, or even that there is any importance to those interactions. They presuppose that people do things only for their own sake, in order to help themselves rather than for moral or honest reasons, rather than for the benefit of the collective. This can apply for themselves as well, so they do not care if what they say or do might hurt other people, as long as they find some advantage or pleasure for themselves. Therefore the philosopher often speaks without taking into account the feelings or susceptibilities of others, he does not hesitate to problematize common interests and values, be they ethical, practical, social or psychological. He speaks and even acts against established conventions in a way that can

be perceived as lacking respect and consideration. Common ethical principles guiding society are therefore meaningless and derided, a scorn that applies as well to common sense, usual reasoning habits. In this sense, the philosophical cynic concurs with the vulgar cynic, by considering himself above others, above usual conventions, and doing as he pleases without any doubt, deprived of any sense of guilt or shame, since he feels secured by his own reason.

The cynic shows pleasure and even excessive pleasure, sometimes sadistically, to think differently or in contradiction to others; he ridicules them or rebukes them. His radicality, inflexible and provocative, makes people look immoral, inane or absurd. He refuses any collective pact, since he does not take anything for granted. He always asks for proof, which moreover is never satisfactory for him, even for the most basic principles that in a way do not need proof, since there is a tacit collective agreement or convention, or in fact possibly cannot be proven. He does not feel and manifest the “normal” trust one

would expect towards the laws and social principles, or basic positive values such as benevolence, progress, faith in the future, etc. In fact the cynic, as we see in its origin as a philosophical school, has such a high and unreachable ideal for human beings that any reality will never satisfy him: he will always see baseness in usual human behavior.

Whatever people tell him, he acts blasé, pessimistic or suspicious. He enjoys the contemplation and description of human flaws and shortcomings, whereas a generous and sympathetic attitude, or social codes, would imply to develop and encourage a more optimistic and pleasant perspective. Others fear him precisely because they are afraid he will contaminate them with his “delusional” sentences and his tendency to see problems in everything and everyone. For example he sees egocentric interest in actions that others would judge as altruistic or charitable. Of course he is unbearable for do-gooders, wishful thinkers, naive souls, and people who want to remain positive for the good of society and their

well-being. As a conclusion, we should say that a cynical person is not a leader, he is not someone people would like to follow or believe, because there is a human need to have faith in something, in values or principles, in order to give sense to our life and to be able to pursue existential objectives.

***Perennity*** Perennity qualifies situations or states that last for a long time, that keeps occurring or seem to indefinitely continue, be it general ideas, guiding principles, problems and difficulties.

Plato claimed that a major difference between the philosopher and the statesman is the issue of time, in particular what he calls *kairos*: the opportune moment. The philosopher ignores time, since he does not have to make decisions and act upon the world, a perspective that is contained in the traditional latin expression of *philosophia perennis* (eternal philosophy). The issues he deals with, such as human freedom, the quest for a good life or happiness, the meaning of life, how we know what we know, the reliabil-

ity of reason and other subjects, will forever be examined without ever reaching some final conclusion. Unlike science where there is a sort of linear progress based on the efficiency of theories and their verification in the material world, no such development exists in philosophy. Or as Hegel expressed it, there is only a progress in the sense of multiplying perspectives, just like in art, where in each new thinker, new school of thought, new perspective broadens the horizon and gives us a more complete understanding of reality, bringing us closer to “truth”. But no particular theory can claim superiority over others, except in a dogmatic and subjective fashion. Thus the philosopher, bathing in this intellectual atmosphere, can rely on a very ancient scheme, adopt any theory, without any consideration for the recency or antiquity of the chosen proposition or system, even though each has his preferences. As well, a philosopher is not expected to be efficient, or to modify the order of the world: his work is examined in its constancy, in its coherence, in its development, as an entity in itself, in-

dependently of any chronology or inscription in time. Timelessness is, in a way, of the essence in his work and attitude. Any change would almost be suspicious. Although some rare philosophers radically changed during the course of their life works, most of them remain on the same course. Of course, this can imply a certain rigidity or dogmatism, revealing a certain difficulty to adapt to transformations in his life and in society, therefore ignoring any context and what surrounds him. But this absence of time and action, this ignorance of circumstances and context, can as well provide the serenity of steadiness and permanence, a soothing state for the soul, allowing reason to tranquilly accomplish its task.

***Authoritarian*** The philosopher tends to think of and present himself as an authority, as the one who knows and can judge the essence and adequacy of things, actions and beings. Since philosophical activity encompasses all human activities and intellectual fields, deals with everything, nothing being foreign to it, its practitioners can

pretend to wield a vast power, providing them with a sense of omnipotence, establishing the philosopher as an authority, a judge on wordly and extramundane matters. We should remember that before the historical autonomization or separations of sciences, philosophy comprised and represented any type of non-technical knowledge, all higher order-thinking skills. A loaded past that can account for the implicit or explicit supremacy of philosophy. Thus the philosopher determines the state of things, their nature, their names, their causes and explanation. He is the judge of social and individual existence, he knows how humans are and how they should be. He digs to and accesses the root of phenomena, the intimacy of beings and entities, their essence. His thinking skills and profound insights, his rigor and perspicacity, his eloquence and conceptual brilliance produce strong impressions on others and surrounds the philosopher with charisma or reverence, endowing him with authority. Some easily abuse this authoritative aura, which reinforces in some auditors the idea that the philoso-

pher “knows”, when others, as a reaction, on the contrary reject the relevance and usefulness of his discourse. But independently of the reception of his speech, the philosopher, a keen observer of human absurdity and inanity, except his own, will maintain his magisterial and overbearing attitude, often sententiously commenting on and criticizing his fellow humans, trying to convince them, or impose on them what he sees as the just, the right and the good. Moreover, the philosopher easily slips into the role of a watchdog in order to defend an ideological scheme or another, with a certain ferocity, as has been observed on numerous occasions in the past, in various contexts. But no doubt philosophy has in itself, as a modality of thought, this dogmatic power, presumptuous and intransigent, inherent to its nature and its form.

***Schizophrenic*** The philosopher is two faced. Reason is a priori his goddess, his life, his inspiration, his passion, and his finality. Even when philosophers are critical of reason, they still use it as

the main tool for exposing their theory. Thus among humans they are the ones most in touch with divine, perfect thinking. But, even if he forgets it when he is involved in his thinking activity, the philosopher is still human, fallible, insatiable, moved by emotions and needs. He lives for thinking, and he formally or intellectually understands the value and role of emotions and appetites for informing his thinking, or their negative effects on thinking, but he neglects the reality and importance of his own subjectivity. Thus when he himself undergoes the phenomenon, he becomes like the irrational and wild Mr. Hyde, in opposition to the rational and benevolent Dr. Jekyll, since there is no connection or interrelation between those two facets. There is a hiatus in his being, a fracture that amplifies both opposite aspects of his self.

The German philosopher Friedrich Schiller proposes an interesting approach to this problem. He identifies two basic instincts or drives in the human being. On one side the “sensuous” drive, the immediate desires where our existence is in-

scribed in matter, time and content, where we expect some change, in the form of satisfaction. On the other side, a “formal” drive, brought about by reason, a quest for the eternal and absolute: the forms or ideas, remaining outside of time and matter, where we encounter radical concepts such as freedom, truth, the good and the unity of all. The real becomes necessity, and vice versa. Both of these drives are in competition, and can predominate alternatively, in different proportions according to the personality, although a permanent tension remains. Most people operate within this fracture, determined by it. Schiller then proposes a third instinct: the “play” drive, conjoining these contradictions, combining finite and infinite, freedom and time, sense and reason, life and form. Its object is the “living form”, where in the contemplation and experience of beauty, man actually becomes human. The play drive mediates the demands of the sensual and the formal drives, it reconciles ideas and content, becoming and absolute, identity and change. In order to do this, he must learn passivity, to exercise his sense

drive and become receptive of the world, and he must learn activity, to free his reason, to distance himself as much as possible from the receptive, and live this twofold experience simultaneously: to feel himself matter and come to know himself as mind. Therefore, by maximizing the constraint of the absolute and the contingency of the material, the play drive negates and subsumes the demands of both other drives. It sets man free both physically and morally, providing him with a complete intuition of his human nature.

Short of this double experience, man is unable to live fully enlightened, fully determined by an active and conscious choice, fully philosopher. He is acutely aware of his finitude, as he thinks about the infinite every day, yet he experiences his finitude even more often. He feels at one moment a thinker, the next as someone's child, as someone's victim, as someone's opponent. So his self is in one moment inflated and the next splattered. Indeed he wants to fly with the greats he has studied for years, but his wings are made

of wax and he becomes aware of it time and again. No mortal can be pure reason, and he easily falls back on his primitive pettiness, unless he becomes conscious of his own schizophrenia and makes it an object of his reflection. That is the idea of Socrates: “Know thyself, you will know the gods and the universe”.

*Astonishment* Astonishment is a mixture of emotional and cognitive experience, since it is a feeling of great surprise that makes one wonder and speculate. It can be described as a state of illumination, perplexity or puzzlement, allowing the mind to come out of the shadows concerning one’s own existence, the surrounding world and all occurring phenomena. It provides a significant access to discovery, understanding and wisdom, since it engenders crucial questions about the nature of reality. The phenomenon of astonishment can be considered produced by a natural tendency of the soul, or as the effect provoked by an observation of the world, by being caring and attentive. Therefore, it is considered in the tradi-

tion as a crucial element of the philosophical dynamic and a fundamental and necessary attitude of the philosopher or the scientist.

Nevertheless different features of the philosopher inhibit this necessary attitude of perplexity. First, erudition, since the accumulation of knowledge impedes the ability of being astonished, which implies a naive and "ignorant" perspective on things. Of course, the paradox is that astonishment in principle conditions knowledge, a knowledge that in return can blunt astonishment. Renaissance philosopher Nicolas Cusanus here proposes the concept of "learned ignorance" as an attitude the philosopher can develop in order to avoid this mental rigidity. It consists in maintaining a naive attitude towards the world and ourselves by suspending our acquired knowledge and presuppositions. Second, certainty, since through his work, by developing theories and defending them, the philosopher ends up building up certitudes which stiffens the mind, making it less accessible to surprise and amazement. He becomes dogmatic, an attitude

that excludes the possibility of surprise. Third, pride, since the philosopher, delighted with his own work, can become conceited and consider any “outside” idea or phenomenon, not coming from him or his heroes, as uninteresting, insignificant or useless, therefore not allowing himself to be amazed. Fourth, blasé, since the philosopher, after years of study of “important” matters, enjoys the impression of having seen it all. He has nothing else to learn or discover, there is no more thirst for the unknown, as Goethe describes in the story of Dr. Faustus, who had read all the books there were to read, therefore undergoing melancholy and frustration. Fifth, acedia, a lack of energy, a lack of care and curiosity, a form of apathy produced by the ceaseless scrutiny of great ideas, a common disease for contemplative monks. A sort of intellectual fatigue, caused by an excess of mental occupation, a lack of practical and self-challenging practices, where desire is extinguished.

*Serious - Ironic* The time of philosophy is not so much the present or the future, it is either the past, and even more eternity, or timelessness, the beyond, transcending time, the very condition of time. In this setting, the obligatory tone is one of seriousness, not of joy or excitement. Philosophers are austere people, heavy with solemnity and gravity, their speech is believed to be loaded with consequence, it is often grim and humorless. And when once in a while a risk is taken to a certain lightness, the smile or laughter is forced, a simple wave on the surface, a ripple lost on an ocean of seriousness. The smile is often grimacing. There is too much to say, important things, bearing on the arcane dimension of truth, on the beautiful or the good, on the origin of all, on the mysteries of the human soul. How can one take things lightly! To be a philosopher is by definition to be heavy. The man of gravity, the resentful man, the pessimistic man, does not know how to enjoy. Laughter reminds us of joy, it is its emissary and its spokesperson, it indicates pleasure, but the philosopher tends to-

ward a stoic, anti-hedonistic attitude. As well, if the lack of humor in the philosopher is linked to the seriousness of his task and the supposed requirement of heaviness; he is very imbued with a concern for appearance and reputation, the professorial posture.

But periodically emerges another tone of philosophy, appearing very early with the figure of Socrates: irony. Socratic irony is for the philosopher to feign ignorance in order to expose the weakness of another person's position and make him aware of it. It is a "naive" posture, from which comes an authentic questioning, making the other person think, an indirect way of teaching, and not a mere mocking that would ridicule someone for his mistakes. This irony is particularly useful with pretentious persons who claim to know, and are prone to debate and quarrel, since it addresses softly and indirectly their flaws. It expresses the desire to dialogue with the other, independently of his rigidity or his pride, and therefore it is endowed with generosity and trust, for the other and for the self. This particular

form of humor involves a claim or admission of ignorance, which disguises a skeptical and disengaged attitude towards certain dogmas or common opinions lacking a basis in reason or logic. Socrates's series of naive questions reveal point by point the vanity or illogicality of the examined propositions, shaking the postulates of its author, by probing his initial assumptions and his paradigms.

Rare are the philosophers who adopt this posture, since maieutics was largely abandoned as a dialogue or teaching posture, and was even periodically denounced as laborious, useless, and leading nowhere. The jester like attitude of the philosopher is rather not appreciated in the serious world of the philosopher. As a consequence, irony is easily replaced by sarcasm when one examines in particular the exchanges between philosophers, in particular the ones alive, those with whom one competes, those who wake up the latent anger inhabiting the chronically disappointed philosopher. Irony is light, sarcasm is heavy. Irony wants to provoke thinking, sarcasm

wants to punish or hurt. Irony is an invitation, sarcasm is a condemnation. Irony is joyful, sarcasm is sour. Irony is free, sarcasm is rigid. Irony is gratuitous, sarcasm is frustrated. Irony is potent, sarcasm is powerless. Irony is open, sarcasm is resentful. Irony is playful, sarcasm is serious. Irony is generous, sarcasm is greedy. Irony is sharing, sarcasm is egocentric. Irony is naive, sarcasm is pretentious. Irony is subtle, sarcasm is crude. In all these specificities of sarcasm, we can perceive the seriousness, the dogmatism, the anger, the impotence, the autism, etc., all types of pathologies we have identified as characterizing the philosopher.

***Victimhood*** In general, the philosopher feels misunderstood, ignored or despised. This perception is not without foundation. Already, numerous historical philosophers have suffered a painful and unjust fate, starting with the death penalty of the quasi-christic figure of Socrates, the father figure. But as well Giordano Bruno, the renaissance philosopher who was burned at

the stake for heresy, or Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, the last of the universal geniuses, whose burial was basically unattended. Then, in daily life, as we have described, the philosopher is not welcome among his fellow humans. Even the amateur philosopher who tries to engage in some reflection about important issues finds himself quickly left out of social relations and usual discussions. Lastly, the egocentric tendency of people engaged in philosophical matters inhibits any open, sympathetic dialogue: mutual recognition between peers is merely formal, but not real, since each one is engaged in a singular and rather isolated process. Thus one easily feels lonely and mistreated.

Because of these features, and his lack of trust toward others, a certain paranoia easily sets in, and the poor philosopher can naturally take himself for a victim. Victim of pettiness, victim of jealousy, victim of greed, victim of universal stupidity, he can always identify some cabal conspiring to deprive him of a deserved recognition. A conspiracy that can easily involve the totality of the hu-

man species, an assessment that makes him even more angry and cynical, making him feel even more impotent. The inventive philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer is a good case of this pattern, pessimistic, depressed, and of course self-loathing, he suffered from numerous paranoia leading him to radical political beliefs. He never married, incapable of establishing what might be considered a normal relationship with a woman, but he was ready to exploit maids and other women in lesser roles who could gratify his baser will. Or the famous Jean-Jacques Rousseau, so historically influential, who in spite of a certain social success was convinced that the whole society was plotting against him. He treated people terribly, even those who showed him any kindness for many years. He dealt with the people closest to him as if their sole reason for existence was to serve him and stroke his massive ego, what today would be called a sociopath. He was full of contradictions. He loved children but abandoned his own to social welfare. He believed that intellectual hatreds were the worst but engaged in endless fights. A

despiser of privilege and wealth, he always relied on the rich and the great for support.

This common victimhood is connected to something that can be called the “genius syndrome”, a pathology that affects most people involved in philosophy, be they exceptionally real geniuses or more commonly would-be geniuses. To view oneself as an unequalled mind, as the center of the world, and for this reason to be rejected by the hordes of “others”, set against the “genius”, out to get him, precisely because geniuses cannot be understood and can only be feared and hated.

***Perspectivism*** An important advantage of philosophical practice and erudition is to develop the habit of looking at any issue or theme from different perspectives. Through studying the numerous authors, by examining different historical periods, comparing different schools of thought, the competent philosopher acquires a broader panorama of thinking possibilities. Through his studying, his writing, his teaching, he develops a

capacity to examine a problem from different angles. In this sense, he is in theory less inclined to be determined by his beliefs, by his own opinions or by common opinion, by his subjectivity. A certain plasticity of the mind is required from him, in order to accomplish his task. An attitude that allows him to not fixate his mind, which protects him from prejudice and rigidity, and makes him more receptive to any singular or new idea, which he can evaluate from a more objective and fair standpoint. As well, he is less susceptible to adopt ready made or popular trends, since he examines them with the frame of kaleidoscopic panorama, analyzing critically, instead of readily joining the bandwagon.

One specific competency that favors such an attitude is the art of dialectics, which consists of evaluating an idea from opposite standpoints, based on the presupposition that those contrary hypotheses are both legitimate and can be argued for in a substantial way. It can as well be the exercise of evaluating a given idea through different registers, for example moral, ethical and prac-

tical, or general and particular, abstract and concrete, etc. Or again transvaluation, which implies to shift the description of a given phenomenon or principle alternatively with positive and negative connotations. This mental gymnastics guarantees that the thinking process goes on, and that the mind does not get bogged down in a fixed perspective. Although this attitude is criticized from a common standpoint as leading nowhere, since it is infinite and never conclusive, never allowing the conviction or the certainty that conditions decision making and action.

But in opposition to such a vantage point, the philosopher is easily tempted by a more thetic perspective, defending a given thesis, a given intellectual matrix, by taking determinate sides in the debate of ideas. Since there is a strong and almost inevitable temptation to settle the matter and determine what is the right, the good or the true. From there the numerous quarrels between individuals and schools, although one can claim that the energy deployed and the work engaged in defending a given idea and countering oppo-

nents is part of the dialectical process, the very accomplishment of philosophy itself, as Hegel defends it. On the other hand, one can also defend theism by opposing it to a sophisticated relativism that consists in an exercise of pure rhetoric, by defending any idea without any axiological consideration such as truth or morality. Precisely what Plato rebelled against, since the dialectic he was defending was a quest for virtue and truth. But the dividing line between the excesses of dogmatism and those of undifferentiated relativism does indeed pose a permanent problem.

***Acedia*** *Acedia*, in its ancient Greek origin, meant neglect, inertia, carelessness, and has been variously defined as a state of apathy or torpor, the fact of not caring or not feeling concerned by one's position or his condition in the world. The first Christian monks used the term to define a state of mental inertia, a lack of care for one's spiritual life. By dint of prayer, the monks become apathetic, let themselves go, overwhelmed by oppressive anguish. They are subject to var-

ious emotions such as worry, disgust, boredom, accompanied by certain states such as idleness, drowsiness or instability, which lead them to neglect their duties towards themselves and towards God, hence its status of capital sin. Then, acedia entered the secular world, in a society that values work as a source of material and spiritual progress. It becomes a state of the soul which leads to mental rumination, lack of enthusiasm, effort and action, a withdrawal into oneself; it proceeds from sadness, it is melancholy, laziness and therefore depression. Acedia therefore means a lack of energy on the religious, moral, intellectual, spiritual or psychological levels. Although one could already suspect, as Luther did, that a life of pure contemplation is already a sign of sloth, and the phenomenon of acedia is a natural outcome of such a life choice, choice of non-life or non-choice of life. One cannot ignore or despise eternally the finite and the material without paying the price for it.

A few words should be added here about the concept of melancholy. In its original usage, pri-

marily originated in the hippocratic theory as the predominance of black bile, it indicated a certain way of being, along with the three other humours: choleric, phlegmatic and sanguine. Those have to be balanced in order for the body and soul to be healthy, but often one temperament prevails over the other, which determines the personality of a subject, although if the humour is excessive it tends to indicate a pathology. Melancholy is associated with the fall season, it therefore indicates a certain gloom, but it is the characteristic of spiritual beings and intellectual geniuses, who often undergo a form of pensive sadness, the most natural tonality of reflection. Thus it allows one to peacefully experience mourning and finitude, surpassing oneself or finding meaning in life, since it is a passage in times of crisis which does not necessarily lead to a negative result. Although today it is often reduced to a mental trouble, as a feeling of incapacity, a lack of desire or disgust for life, in other words depression. This ambiguity of melancholy can explain why the spiritual being is always on the brink, per-

manently facing finiteness, torn between an actual and successful experience of transcendence and an impotent falling back on his own limits, undergoing a sense of impossibility in reaching or accomplishing this desired transcendence. Being an idealist, the melancholic individual is constantly threatened with disappointment, with the world and with himself, thus becoming fascinated with death and decay.

In our times, where the principle of the “positive” tends to dominate, where rules the injunction to “positivize”, and the pragmatic principle of “There are no problems, there are only solutions”, anything that would be tainted with sadness should be banned, perceived negatively. So it is with melancholy, which seems dark, passive, and powerless. Nevertheless, we can distinguish melancholy from depression, due to the fact that it is not necessarily apathetic, since it can arouse fertile contemplation, provoke reflection, spark numerous questions. It therefore does not exclude an active dimension of the mind, quite the contrary. Freud himself was critical of this state,

which he describes as a reaction to a strong disappointment or to a psychic injury, where the subject neurotically identifies with the lost object, which he does not know how to mourn. He therefore sees it as a form of repression. In order to maintain a healthy, free and active relationship with the lost object, the subject must accept the negative dimension of being, even entertain a peaceful relationship to nothingness. Otherwise, this melancholy becomes indeed listless. Therein lies the stake for the psyche, where reason, free and powerful, must be reconciled with the finitude of being.

Let us now see for the philosopher. The latter, generally dedicated to the cult of knowledge and thought, engages in research and reflection. He is cut off from the ordinary and sensitive world which constitutes the basis of human existence. He gradually slips into a life of recluse, in which he devotes himself body and soul to his intellectual and spiritual activity, mainly by writing. Even though he teaches, he maintains a special relationship with himself, because the “others” are

not up to his level. And with time he is affected by the dissatisfaction of a definitive knowledge, disappointed in his search for a truth or a reason erected in a Holy Grail.

He easily ignores the need to remain open to his fellowmen, which would ensure the confrontation of his ideas and the questioning and criticism of his intellectual activity, a dialogue guaranteeing the liveliness of his intellectual life. The others are either competitors with whom he easily clashes or ignores, or an uninitiated public whom he despises. Thus the source of astonishment and challenge dries up, giving way to an organized and categorized flow of knowledge, so much so that it somewhat loses its meaning. His thinking is formalized, his initial taste for truth is transformed into a grammarian mind. He loses the readiness for questioning and discovery, he becomes anchored in the stacking of established, referenced and indexed knowledge, and therefore easily falls into the boredom of a theoretical and absolutized philosophy. He easily becomes blasé, disinterested, even cynical and mis-

anthropic. Often, he is not recognized by ordinary people or by most of his colleagues, his identity and social expectations are disappointed, and slowly he becomes like the monk who has lost the taste for prayers and dialogue with his God. Often, we thus meet “official” philosophers for whom philosophy has become a mere job, just like any other, fulfilling external constraints in order to financially survive, without much spirit. And when they retire, or in their free time, they become just as banal as anyone else, falling back on enjoying small happinesses or a chronic bitterness. The spring is broken, if it ever functioned, shutting down the will to live. they lethargically float, neither actively living nor caring about ideas. The only vivacious thing left is pride, probably, remnant of faded glory, a soul steeped in resentment. That is the reason why he as well easily reverts to anger, often in a rather unexpected way, with a surprising intensity.

Goethe has described this archetype well through his character of Dr. Faust, who has read everything, who knows “everything”, who feels

the inanity, helplessness and uselessness of his knowledge, and who in order to save himself from his miserable state, of his boredom and depression, is ready to sell his soul to the devil. Quite avid, he would like to have universal and absolute knowledge, and unlock the secret of life and the Universe, but he cannot, he is too bookish for that. By this pact, he is promised to find satisfaction, through unlimited knowledge and pleasures of the flesh. Faust's fundamental problem is the forgetfulness of the spirit, the absence of all spirituality, in his frantic quest for knowledge and the power that knowledge is supposed to bestow. In various ways, broadly defined, spirituality is the subjective experience of a sacred, religious or secular dimension, the search for fundamental existential values and meanings, personal growth, the quest for an ultimate or sacred meaning, an experience of transcendence, or an encounter with one's own inner dimension. In Antiquity, in various traditions or among particular thinkers, philosophical activity covers both erudition and the manipulation of ideas, as well

as this psychological dimension of being, through the peril of exercise and self-challenge. But academic philosophy has long since abandoned this type of work on the self, one of the plausible causes of acedia. By dint of wanting to fabricate itself, of wanting to protect itself, of wanting to sell itself, out of a fear of vertigo, the being ends up becoming quite sclerotic.

To this sad state of affairs is added the state and feeling of loneliness, which freezes him in a dull anguish linked to his own existence. Here we find a contradiction between the declared desubjectivization of a quest for ultimate knowledge or pure reason, and the forced return to a subjectivity that has been wrongly denied or ignored. The philosopher is very often subject to emotions of which he has little awareness, both because they are not what he is looking for and because they are inhibited and avoided for ideological reasons. However, these emotions that impose themselves over time and the vagaries of life remind him of his own existence, of his weaknesses, of his own finitude, which paradox-

ically makes him both powerless and even more eager to pursue his quest for the absolute in order to escape them. No doubt this is also why he avoids his colleagues, who remind him too well of the sensitive, worried and dissatisfied nature of the human being despite the intellectual veneer; they are too much like him to be pleasant, interesting and non-threatening. He is easily disgusted by others, just as he can be disgusted with himself. He has nausea, as Jean-Paul Sartre describes it. The fear of existence, the permanent abyss of thought, the desire for an impossible certainty places him in an unbearable vertiginous tension that ends up confusing him. The “other” is his hell, because he expects recognition from him while despising and fearing him. He is condemned to exist while wishing to escape the limits imposed on him. The excessive centering on his own thoughts prevents the philosopher from structuring himself mentally, psychologically or socially. He turns in a loop and loses his regulatory ideal which is reason and the thirst for understanding, because he has transformed

his work into an effort to accumulate knowledge and in search of social status, having drained the joy he once found in philosophy. Just like the monk who despairs of the silence of God, the philosopher despairs of the silence of the spirit. Either he gives up, or he becomes a functionary of thought, deprived of any astonishment, mechanically stuck in a routine to survive and maybe gain some success. He proofreads students or colleagues, he corrects, he punishes, thus exercising some shadow of power. Somehow he has lost his reason, which leaves him overwhelmed, bloodless, frustrated and resentful. A state of mind that often prevents persons with philosophical training from engaging in a creative writing process, a continuous reflective project, and fruitful dialogues with peers.

***Reason*** Reason is considered to be a faculty proper to the human mind, the implementation of which enables it to create criteria of truth and error, to analyze phenomena and ideas, to make decisions and to achieve given objectives. It is

based on the ability of humans to receive, understand and evaluate accessible information by using their intelligence, perceptions and memory, while setting aside their prejudices, feelings, emotions or impulses. Although reason can as well influence or educate our subjectivity, a situation that we encounter for example with intuition. This faculty has three primary uses: gathering knowledge, establishing ethical or moral behavior, developing techniques and tools. Reason can be understood in two different ways: as the application of regulating principles for knowledge or action, for example logic, or as a drive or power to invent and order such principles, more creative. The word reason comes from the Latin ratio, which primarily refers to “measuring” and “calculation”, and from there “reasoning”, “explaining” and “comparing”. In Greek, the term for reason, logos, refers simultaneously to an ontological principle, to the human faculty of reason and to speech.

For the philosopher, reason is both a means for examining and producing thinking, and an ob-

ject of reflection, a matter to study and theorize about. It is supposed to determine the nature of his work, and in general to transgress the principles of reason or more specifically coherence is considered rather suspicious. Because of this, important works have been produced on the specific topic of logic, heavily formalized, to the extent it has engendered the development of “analytic philosophy”, endowed with mathematical or scientific pretensions. The latter is rather hegemonic in the english world, in contrast to other philosophical traditions, primarily what is known as continental philosophy, for example existentialism, dialectics, metaphysics or phenomenology. For some authors of this tradition, dialectics can be considered to supersede or subsume logic.

Reason can become a problem with philosophers when they forget or deny that nothing guarantees that what we think according to the rules of reason is a priori in conformity with reality itself. Reality can to a certain extent escape, an integral, exhaustive or adequate description by the

rational approach, for different reasons. The first one is that reason as we describe and understand it is never absolute, since it is always a limited, warped, partial and biased personal application of reason, a reality that one easily forgets when one wants to defend his own particular reasoning. We more easily see, right or wrong, the reasoning problems in other's intellectual production. Second, a thinking system can never be totally founded on pure rationality: it is always mixed with elements of belief, presuppositions, ideological preferences and even wishful thinking, a reality easily omitted by philosophers, even though they notice that they contradict each other's theories. Third, empirical evidence, the data provided by the world, often counters our mental representations, no matter how coherent they are, as is shown in the history of science. A problem amplified by the fact that our observation capacities are themselves limited and warped. Fourth, numerous mental phenomena transcend our rational thinking, be they of ontological, transcendental or psychological in nature, such as intu-

itions, dreams, past experiences or revelations, which cannot fully be accounted for, affecting or even determining our rational and conscious processes. Fifth, our subjectivity plays a major role in the orientation and formalization of our thinking process, an influence that many philosophers prefer to ignore, contrary to the socratic recommendation of knowing ourselves as a condition for a true knowledge of the world. Modern philosophical activity has rather rejected the traditional wisdom component of the practice, to become a mere knowledge of the “outside world”, and not a work on oneself. Sixth, philosophers easily fall into the trap of the feeling of omnipotence, a sort of drunkenness with one one’s own mind and limited reason. They omit the idea of Plato that wisdom is the knowledge of what we know and of what we do not know. They easily negate the reality or interest of anything that does not fit their personal reasoning, considered vain or senseless.