Philosophical Consultation: Principles and Difficulties

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Abstract:

The methods of philosophical consultation vary enormously according to the practitioners who conceive and apply them. In this paper, we discuss the conceptions and methods we have been carrying out for several years in this field, such as philosophical naturalism, the dual requirement, first steps, anagogy and discrimination, thinking the unthinkable, switching to the "second floor", and being philosophical. Our methodology is mainly inspired by the Socratic maieutic, where the philosopher questions his interlocutor, invites him to identify the stakes of his discourse, to conceptualize it by distinguishing key terms in order to implement them, to problematize it through a critical perspective, to universalize its implications. This practice has the specificity of inviting the subject to move away from a mere sensation to allow him a rational analysis of his speech and of himself, a sine qua non condition for deliberating on the cognitive and existential stakes

About the author

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which must be made explicit at first. The removal from oneself that this unnatural activity presupposes, for which it requires the assistance of a specialist, poses a certain number of difficulties, e.g., frustration, speech as a pretext, the issue of truth, pain and epidural. Finally, some additional exercises are very useful for the reflection process, such as establishing connections, real speech, order, universal and singular, and accepting the pathology.

1 Principles

Still little known internationally, philosophical consultation is an activity that is slowly taking off in Europe and America. The methods vary enormously according to the practitioners who conceive and apply them. In this text, we discuss the conceptions and methods used in the work we have been carrying out for several years in this field.

1.1   Philosophical naturalism

In recent years, a new wind seems to be blowing over philosophy. In its various forms, it has a constant claim to be able to extricate philosophy from its purely academic and scholastic framework, where the historical perspective remains the main vector. Diversely received and appreciated, this tendency embodies for some a necessary and vital oxygenation, for others a vulgar and banal betrayal, in keeping with a mediocre era. Among these few philosophical "novelties", the idea emerges that philosophy is not limited to erudition and speech, but that it is also a practice. Of course, this perspective is not really innovative, in that it represents a return to the original preoccupations, to the quest for wisdom that articulated the very term "philosophy"; although this dimension has been relatively obscured for several centuries by the "learned" facet of philosophy.

However, despite the "déjà vu" side of the matter, the profound cultural, psychological, sociological etc. changes that separate our times from, for example, Classical Greece, radically alter the data of the problem. The philosophia perennis has to be accountable to history, since its immortality can hardly be spared the finiteness of the societies that formulate its problems and issues. Thus, philosophical practice - like philosophical doctrines - must elaborate the articulations corresponding to its place and its time, according to the circumstances that generate this momentary matrix, even if in the end it seems hardly possible to avoid or exceed the limited number of major issues that, since dawn of time, have constituted the matrix of all philosophical-type thoughts, regardless of the external form that the articulations take.

The philosophical naturalism that we are discussing here is at the center of the debate, in that it criticizes the specificity of philosophy in historical and geographical terms. It presupposes that the emergence of philosophy is not a particular event, but that its living substance nestles in the heart of man and lines his soul, even if, like any science or knowledge, certain times and places seem more decisive, more explicit, more favorable, more crucial than others. As human beings we share a common world, a common nature, despite the infinity of representations that puts this unity under a heavy strain, despite the cultural and individual relativism that prevails, as postmodernism obliges, we should be able to rediscover, at least in an embryonic way, a certain number of intellectual archetypes constituting the framework of the history of thought. After all, since the strength of an idea rests on its operativity and universality, any central idea should be found in each of us. Isn't this, stated in other words and viewed from another angle, the very idea of Platonic reminiscence? Philosophical practice then becomes that activity that awakens each one of us to the world of ideas that inhabits us, just as artistic practice awakens each one of us to the world of forms that inhabits us, each one of us according to our possibilities, without all of us being Kant or Rembrandt.

1.2 The dual requirement

Two specific and common prejudices must be set aside in order to better understand the approach we are dealing with here. The first prejudice is the belief that philosophy, and therefore philosophical discussion, is reserved for a learned elite; the same would apply to philosophical consultation. The second prejudice - a consequence of the first and its natural complement - consists in thinking that since

philosophy is indeed reserved to a learned elite, philosophical consultation cannot be philosophical since it is open to all. If there is a discussion with the ordinary person, it cannot be philosophical, since none of the conditions or requirements of the philosophizing will be present. Although strangely enough, most of those who maintain such a prejudice have difficulty in determining what philosophizing is.

Nevertheless, these two prejudices express a single fracture. It remains for us to demonstrate simultaneously that philosophical practice is open to all and that it implies a certain requirement that distinguishes it from mere discussion. Moreover, we will have to differentiate our activity from the psychological or psychoanalytical practice with which it will be inevitably amalgamated.

1.3 First steps

"Why are you here?" This inaugural question imposes itself as the first and most natural one, the one we must ask continuously to anyone if not ourselves, whatever the place, whatever the meaning of such a question. It is moreover regrettable that teachers in charge of an introductory philosophy course never begin their school year with this kind of naive question. Through this simple exercise, the student, who has been used to the school routine for years, would immediately grasp what is at stake in this strange discipline that questions even the most obvious evidences; the difficulty to really answer such a question as well as the wide range of possible answers would quickly make the apparent banality of the question disappear. Of course, this means not being content with one of those sketchy answers that one drops reluctantly in order to avoid thinking.

Many first responses in the consultations are like: "Because I don't know much about philosophy"; "Because I'm interested in philosophy and would like to know more"; or "Because I would like to know what the philosopher - or philosophy-says about... ". Sometimes there is a more direct issue: "Because I have a problem with... "; "Because I'm wondering if... " and so on. The questioning must continue without delay, in order to reveal the unacknowledged presuppositions of these attempted answers, not to say non-answers. This process will not fail to bring out certain ideas of the subject, this individual engaged in the process of philosophical questioning, about philosophy or any other topic, involving him in a position necessary for this practice, i. e. in a conceptual determination. Not because it is necessary to look for a kind of traumatic "background" of one's thought, contrary to psychoanalysis, but because the idea is to take a risk on a hypothesis in order to work on it, without

attributing any intangible or fundamental value to it.

Both commitment and distancing are needed here. This distancing is important, for two reasons, both of which are relevant to the foundations of our work. The first is that truth does not necessarily proceed through sincerity or subjective conviction, and can even be radically opposed to it; an opposition based on the principle that desire or fear, the driving forces of existence, often impede reason. From this point of view, it does not matter whether or not the subject subscribes to the idea he is proposing. "I'm not quite sure what I'm saying"; "I may be wrong, but... " we often hear. But just what would one want to be sure of ? Isn't this uncertainty precisely what will allow us to test our idea, whereas certainty would inhibit such a process? The second reason, which is close to the first, is that distance is necessary for a thoughtful and well-considered work, an indispensable condition for the conceptualization that we want to induce. Two conditions that should in no way prevent the subject from venturing on precise ideas; on the contrary, he will do so more freely. The scientist will more easily discuss ideas on which he does not inextricably engage his ego, yet allowing that one idea pleases him or suits him more than others.

"Why are you here? " is also asking, "What is the issue that's driving you? "What's your burning issue?" In other words, it means stating what necessarily motivates the meeting, even if this motivation is not clear or unconscious at first. It is therefore a question of identification. Once the hypothesis has been expressed and somewhat developed, directly or through questions, the questioner will propose a reformulation of what he has heard. Periodically, the subject will express a certain initial rejection - or reserved approval - of the proposed reformulation: "That's not what I said", or "That's not what I meant". He will therefore be asked to analyze what he does not like about the reformulation or to rectify his own discourse. However, before doing so, he will have to specify whether the reformulation has betrayed the discourse by changing the nature of its content - which must be declared possible, since the questioner is not perfect - or whether what he hears displeases him, which often means that the speech has betrayed him by disclosing in the open what he did not dare to see and admit in his own thoughts. Here we can see the enormous philosophical stakes involved in a dialogue with the other: to the extent that we accept the difficult exercise of "weighing" words, the listener becomes a merciless mirror that sends us back to ourselves. The emergence of the echo is always a risk of which the scope is

unknown to us. The objectification of our inner self, guaranteed by our words, is a painful strain upon our being.

When what was initially expressed does not seem reformulable, out of confusion or lack of clarity, the philosopher may without hesitation ask the subject to repeat what he has already said or try to express it differently. If the explanation is too long, or becomes a pretext for an uncontrolled, associative type of speech, the questioner will have no hesitation in interrupting: "I do not understand what you are saying", "I do not understand the meaning of the words you are saying", or he will ask "Do you think that what you are saying is clear". He can then propose the following exercise: "Tell me in one sentence what you feel is essential to your point"; "If you only had one sentence to say to me about it, what would it be? " The subject will not fail to express his difficulty with the exercise, all the more so as he has just shown his disability to formulate a clear and concise speech. But it is precisely in the observation of this difficulty that the awareness linked to philosophizing begins.

1.4　Anagogy and discrimination

Once the initial hypothesis has been somewhat clarified, on the nature of the problem that brings the subject to the discussion, or on another topic that pre-occupies him, it is now a matter of launching the process of anagogical ascent described in the works of Plato. The essential elements are what we will call on the one hand "origin" and on the other hand "discrimination". Plato also calls this "purification" of thought. We will begin by asking the subject to account for his hypothesis by prescribing him to justify his choice. Either by means of origin: "Why such a formulation?" or "What is the point of such an idea?" Or by means of discrimination through the concept: "What is the most important term of all those used? Or: "What is the key word in your sentence? " This part of the interview is carried out by a combination of these two means.

The subject will often try to escape this stage of the discussion by taking refuge in circumstantial relativism or undifferentiated multiplicity. "It depends... There are many reasons... All words or ideas are important... " The fact of choosing, of forcing the "vectorization" of thought, first of all enables to identify the anchorings, the "choruses", the conceptual anchors, the constants, the presuppositions, and then to put them to the test. For after several stages of going back to the unit, identifying the origin through discrimination, a sort of pattern appears, making visible the foundations and central articulations of a thought. At

the same time, through the hierarchization assumed by the subject, a dramatization of terms and concepts takes place, which takes the words out of their undifferentiated totality, out of the "mass" effect that erases singularities. By separating ideas from each other, the subject becomes aware of the conceptual operators by which he discriminates. But the point here is to resist all the classic alibis of confusion, such as "complexity", "nuance", and other justifications of infinite and indeterminate discourse.

Of course, the philosopher has an essential role here, which consists in forcing the choice, as well as underlining what has just been said, so that these choices and their implications do not go unnoticed. He may even insist by asking the subject whether he fully assumes the choices he has just expressed, whether he recognizes himself in these determinations. However, he should avoid commenting on these choices in the first instance, even if he may ask some additional questions if he sees problems or inconsistencies in what has just been articulated. The whole point is to lead the subject to freely evaluate, by himself, the implications of his own positions, to grasp what his thought conceals and thus to work on the thought itself. This process slowly removes the illusion of feelings of obviousness and false neutrality, which is necessary to develop a critical perspective, that of opinion in general and of one's own.

1.5 Thinking the unthinkable

Once a particular anchor, problem or concept has been identified, the time has come to counter it. This is the exercise we will call "thinking the unthinkable". Regardless of the particular anchor or theme that the subject has identified as central to his reflection, we will ask him to formulate and develop the opposite hypothesis: "If you had a criticism to make against your hypothesis, what would it be?", "What is the most consistent objection that you know or can imagine to the thesis that is dear to your heart? ", "What are the limits of your idea? ", "What criticism could be leveled against such an idea?" Be it love, freedom, happiness, the body, death, or any other concept that constitutes the foundation or the privileged reference of the subject, in most cases he will feel unable at first to make such an intellectual turnaround. Thinking such an "impossibility" will have the effect of plunging him into the abyss. Sometimes it will be the cry of the heart: "But I don't want to! "or "It is impossible! " For he will have the impression or the conviction that he has uttered a kind of invariant, an inescapable, which will sometimes be expressed in the form of "But everyone thinks like that".

This moment of tension though provoked, serves above all to raise awareness of the subject's psychological and conceptual conditioning. By inviting him to think the unthinkable, we invite him to analyze, compare and above all to deliberate, rather than taking for granted and irrefutable this or that hypothesis of intellectual and existential functioning. He then realizes the rigidities that shape his thinking unknowingly. "But then we can no longer believe in anything!" he exclaims. No, we can, but at least during an exercise, for a very short hour, we will wonder if the opposite hypothesis, if the opposite "belief" does not hold just as well. Strangely enough, to the great surprise of the subject, once he has ventured into this reverse hypothesis, he will find that it makes much more sense than he thought a priori and that, in any case, it sheds interesting light on his initial hypothesis, the nature and limits of which he manages to better understand. This experience makes us see and touch the liberating dimension of thought, insofar as it allows us to question the ideas that we unconsciously cling to, to distance ourselves from ourselves, to analyze our thought patterns, both in form and substance, and to conceptualize our own existential issues.

1.6   Switching to the "Second floor"

By way of conclusion, the subject will be asked to summarize the important parts of the discussion in order to review and summarize the highlights or the significant ones. This will be done in the form of a feedback on the whole exercise. "What happened here?" This last part of the interview is also called 'moving to the Second floor": a conceptual analysis in opposition to the experience of the 'ground floor'. From this elevated perspective, the challenge is to act, to analyze the course of the exercise, to assess the stakes, to emerge from the hubbub of action and the thread of the narrative, to capture the essential elements of the consultation, the points of inflection of the dialogue. The subject engages in a meta-discourse about the groping of his thought. This moment is crucial because it is the locus of the sudden awareness of this double functioning (inside/outside) of the human spirit, intrinsically linked to the philosophical practice. It allows for the emergence of the infinite perspective which gives the subject access to a dia-lectical vision of his own being, to the autonomy of his thought.

1.7   Is it philosophical?

What are we trying to accomplish through these exercises? How are they philosophical? How is philosophical consultation different from psychoanalytic

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

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

Thus, our exercise consists firstly in identifying in the subject, through his opinions, the unacknowledged presuppositions from which he operates. This allows to define and to dig the starting point(s). Secondly, to take the opposite side of these presuppositions, in order to transform indisputable postulates into simple hypotheses. Thirdly, to articulate the problems thus generated through identified and formulated concepts. In this last step – or earlier if utility is felt earlier – the interrogator may use 'classical' problems, attributable to an author, in order to enhance or to better identify issues that arise during the course of the

interview.

It is doubtful, of course, whether a single individual could recreate the whole history of philosophy by himself, just like that of mathematics or language. In addition, why should we ignore the past? We will always be dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants. But should we not risk the gymnastics, just watching and admiring the athletes, on the pretext that we are short on legs, or even disabled? Should we just go to the Louvre and never put our hands into clay, on the pretext that our mental functions do not have the agility of those inspired beings? Would it be a matter of disrespect to the 'great ones' if we were to imitate them? Would it not be honoring them, at least as much as by admiring and quoting them? In the end, have they not for the most part enjoined us to think for ourselves?

2 Difficulties

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

2.1 Frustrations

Beyond the general interest in the exercise of thought that prompts a person to come and consult a philosopher, a negative feeling in the subject regularly prevails, at least momentarily, which is most frequently voiced, during philosophical consultations as well as during group reflection workshops, as an expression of frustration. Firstly, the frustration of the interruption: since the philosophical interview is not the place for unwinding or conviviality, a misunderstood and long speech, irrelevant or too offbeat, or one that ignores the interlocutor, must

be interrupted. If it does not feed directly into the dialogue and ignores the questions, it is not used for the interview and has no place in the context of such an exercise. Second, the frustration of harshness: it is more a matter of analysing the words than of pronouncing them, and anything we say can be used "against us". Thirdly, the frustration of slowness: it is no longer a question of provoking accumulations and jostling of words, we must not fear silence, nor stop on a given word, in order to fully apprehend the substance of the speech, in the double meaning of the word apprehend: capture and fear. Fourthly, the frustration of betrayal, again in the double meaning of the term: betrayal of our own word that reveals what we did not want to say or know, and betrayal of our word that does not say what we wanted to say. Fifthly, the frustration of being: not being what we want to be, not being what we think we are, seeing ourselves dispossessed of the illusory truths that we have been maintaining, consciously or not, sometimes for a very long time, phantasizing about ourselves, our existence and our intellect.

This multiple, sometimes painful frustration is not always clearly expressed by the subject. If he is somewhat emotional, susceptible or disinclined to analysis, he will not be able to bear to be framed at all: he will not fail to denounce censorship or oppression. "You're preventing me from speaking", "I'm not finished... ", he will protest, while long, unused silences, unoccupied by speech, periodically punctuate the dialogue, symptomatic of a speech that is struggling to find itself. Or again: "You want me to say what you want", although for each question the subject can answer what suits him, simply at the risk of generating new questions. Embarrassing questions, especially if the answer is not consistent with the question. Certainly, a certain number of questions are closed, determined, in order to force the interlocutor to commit, to clarify, a requirement which will be perceived by a worried mind as an attempt at manipulation.

Initially, frustration is often expressed as a pure emotion, as a reproach, as resentment, however, by becoming verbalized, it allows the subject who expresses it to become an object for itself; it allows the subject who expresses it to become aware of himself as an external figure. From this observation, he becomes able to reflect, to analyze his being by putting it to the test, to better understand his intellectual functioning, and he can then intervene on himself, as much on his being as on his thinking. Of course, the passage through certain

moments with a psychological tone is difficult to avoid, without however dwelling on it, because the idea is to pass quickly to the subsequent cognitive stage, by means of the critical perspective, by trying to define a problem and the stakes.

Our working hypothesis consists precisely in identifying certain elements of subjectivity, bits and pieces that could be called opinions, intellectual opinions and emotional opinions, in order to counterbalance them and experience an "alternate" thought. Without this, how can one learn to voluntarily and consciously break free from conditioning and predetermination? How to emerge from pathology and pure feeling? Moreover, it may happen that the subject does not have the capacity to do this work or even the possibility of considering it, due to a lack of distancing, a lack of autonomy, insecurity or because of strong anxiety of any kind, in which case we may not be able to work with him. Just as the practice of a sport requires minimal physical abilities, the practice of philosophy, with its difficulties and demands, requires minimal psychological abilities, below which we cannot work.

The exercise must be practiced under minimum conditions of serenity, with the various preconditions necessary for this serenity. Too much fragility or susceptibility would prevent the process from taking place. In the way our work is defined, the causality of a lack in this area is not our responsibility, but that of a psychologist or psychiatrist. If we confine ourselves to our function, we cannot get to the root of the problem, we can only observe and draw consequences. If the subject does not seem to us capable of practicing the exercise even though he feels the need to reflect on himself, we will encourage him to go rather towards consultations of psychological type, or even other types of philosophical practices, more "flowing". To conclude, as far as we are concerned, as long as it remains limited, the psychological passage has no reason to be avoided, since subjectivity should not play the role of a scarecrow, even if a certain philosophical, more academic approach considers this individual reality as an obstruction to philosophizing. The formal and timid philosopher fears that by messing with it, the distance necessary for philosophical activity will be lost, while we take the option of making it emerge. For this subjectivity speaks just as much, the being reveals itself in it, even if in a less conscious and reasonable way.

2.2　Speech as a pretext

One of the aspects of our practice that is problematic in this regard is the re-lationship to speech that we're trying to install. Indeed, on the one hand, we are

asking it to make the word sacred, since we allow ourselves to carefully weigh, together, the slightest term used, since we allow ourselves to dig from within, together, the expressions used and the arguments put forward, to the point of sometimes making them unrecognizable to their author, which will occasionally lead him to cry out in scandal at seeing his word so manipulated. On the other hand, we ask him to desacralize the word, since the whole exercise is made up of words, no matter how sincere or true what is said: the point is simply to play with ideas, without necessarily adhering to what is said. We are only interested in coherence, in the echoes that the words send back to each other, in the mental silhouette that slowly and imperceptibly emerges. We simultaneously ask the subject to play a simple game, which implies a distancing from what is conceived as real, and at the same time we ask him to play with words with the greatest seriousness, with the greatest application, with more effort than he usually puts into constructing his discourse and analyzing it.

2.3   The issue of truth

Here, the truth advances in a masked way. It is no longer the truth of intention, it is no longer sincerity and conviction, it is the requirement of thought. This requirement which forces the subject to make choices, to assume the contradictions brought to light by working on the messy nature of speech, to observe what is happening, even if it means making radical shifts, even if it means moving brutally, even if it means refusing to see and to decide, even if it means remaining silent in the face of the many cracks which suggest the most serious abysses, the fractures of the self, the gulfs of being. No other quality is necessary here for the questioner and, little by little, for the subject, other than that of a policeman, a detective who tracks down the slightest failings in speech and behavior, who demands an account of every act, every place and every moment.

Of course, we can be wrong in the direction the discussion is taking, which remains the prerogative of the questioner, the undeniable power that he holds and must assume, including his undeniable lack of total neutrality despite his efforts to do so. And the subject can also "make a mistake" in the analysis and ideas he puts forward, influenced by the questions he is asked, blindly moved by the convictions he wishes to defend, guided by biases he has already opted for and on which he might well be incapable of deliberating: "over-interpretations", "misinterpretations" or "under-interpretations" flourish. These errors, apparent errors, or purported errors do not matter. What matters for the subject is to

remain alert, to observe, to analyze and to become conscious; his response mode, his treatment of the problem, his way of reacting, his ideas that emerge, his relationship to himself and to the exercise, everything here must become a pretext for analysis and conceptualization.

In other words, making a mistake here no longer makes much sense. It is above all a question of playing the game, practicing gymnastics, implementing thought. The only things that count are seeing and not seeing, consciousness and unconsciousness. There are no more "good and bad" answers, but there is "seeing the answers", and if there is deception, it is only in the lack of fidelity of the word to itself, not in the relation to some distant and pre-inscribed truth on a starry sky background or in some subconscious depths. Nevertheless, this fidelity is a truth that is undoubtedly more terrible and implacable than the other: disobedience is no longer possible, with all the legitimacy of such disobedience. There can only be blindness.

2.4   Pain and epidural

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

Secondly, humour, laughter, linked to the playful dimension of the exercise. They induce a kind of "letting go" that allows the individual to free himself, to escape from his existential drama and to painlessly observe the derisory nature of certain positions to which he sometimes clings with a touch of ridicule, if not in the most flagrant contradiction with himself. Laughter releases tensions that would otherwise completely inhibit the subject in this very corrosive practice.

Thirdly, duplication, which allows the subject to come out of himself, to consider himself as a third person. When the analysis of one's own discourse goes through a perilous moment, when judgment comes up against issues that

are too heavy to bear, it is useful and interesting to transpose the case studied to a third person, by inviting the subject to view a film, to imagine a fiction, to hear his story in the form of a fable. "Suppose you read a story that tells that... ", "Suppose you meet someone, and all you know about them is that... ". This simple narrative effect allows the subject to forget or relativize his intentions, desires, wills, illusions and disillusions, and to deal only with the word as it arises in the course of the discussion, letting it make its own revelations without permanently erasing it with heavy suspicions or patent accusations of inadequacy and betrayal.

Fourth, conceptualization, abstraction. By universalizing what tends to be perceived exclusively as a dilemma or a purely personal issue, by problematizing it, by dialectizing it, the pain is alleviated progressively as intellectual activity gets underway. Philosophical activity itself is a sophrology, a "consolation", as envisioned by Ancients such as Boethius, Seneca, Epicurus, Montaigne, or more recently Sartre, Foucault and Wittgenstein, a balm that allows us to better consider the suffering intrinsically linked to human existence, ours in particular.

3 Exercises

3.1　Establishing connections

Some additional exercises are very useful in the reflection process. For example the link exercise. It allows the discourse to come out of its "flow of consciousness" side, which functions purely by free associations, abandoning to the darkness of the unconscious the articulations and joints of thought. The link is a concept which is all the more fundamental in that it has a profound relationship with the being, since it connects its different facets, its different registers. "Substantial link", Leibniz tells us. "What is the link between what you say here and what you say there?". Apart from the contradictions that will be highlighted by this questioning, so will the breaks and jumps which indicate knots, blind spots, whose conscious articulation enables us, through discourse, to work closely with the mind of the subject. This exercise is one of the forms of the "anagogical" approach, allowing us to go back to unity, to identify the roots, to update the point of emergence of the subject's thought, even if it means subsequently criticizing this unity, even if it means modifying these roots. It allows us to establish a kind

of conceptual map defining a pattern of thought.

3.2 Real speech

Another exercise is that of "real speech". It is practiced when a contradiction has been detected, insofar as the subject accepts to attribute the qualifier "contradictory" to his thought, which is not always the case: some subjects refuse to consider it and deny on principle the mere possibility of a contradiction in their speech. By asking which is the real speech - even if it was pronounced with equal sincerity at staggered moments - the subject is invited to justify two different positions of his own, to evaluate their respective value, to compare their relative merits, to deliberate in order to finally decide in favor of the primacy of one of the two perspectives, a decision that will lead him to become aware of his own functioning, of the fracture that animates him.

It is not absolutely essential to make a decision, but it is advisable to encourage the subject to take the risk, because it is very rare if not almost impossible to encounter a real absence of preference between two distinct visions, with the epistemological consequences that derive from this. The notions of "complementarity" or "simple difference" frequently used in everyday language, although they have their share of truth, often serve to erase the real issues, somewhat conflicting and tragic, of any singular thought. The subject may also try to explain why the discourse is not the "real thing". Often it will correspond to moral or intellectual expectations that he believes to see in society, or to a desire of his own that he considers illegitimate; a discourse in this sense very revealing of a perception of the world and a relationship to authority or reason.

3.3 Order

Another exercise, that of "order". When the subject is asked to give reasons, explanations, or examples of any of his words, he will be requested to assume the order in which he enumerated them. Especially the first item in the list, which will be related to the subsequent items. Using the idea that the first element is the most obvious, the clearest, the surest and therefore the most important in his mind, he will be asked to assume this choice, usually unconscious. Often the subject will rebel to this exercise, refusing to assume the choice in question, denying this progeny born against his will. In accepting to assume this exercise, he will have to account for the presuppositions contained in such and such a choice - whether he adheres to it explicitly, implicitly or not at all. At worst, as with most consultation exercises, this will accustom him to decode any proposal

put forward, in order to grasp its epistemological content and glimpse the concepts conveyed, even if he would dissociate himself from the idea.

The subject may also be asked to first come up with an indeterminate list of ideas, examples or interpretations, a kind of brainstorming, and then to choose only one of these entities, to commit to a single, preferable, more significant or more appropriate hypothesis. This requires the subject to differentiate, classify, prioritize and so on. For we observe how, in thinking, "lists" or multiplicities are used to cover all angles in order to protect oneself, strangely mixing various registers or categories, a confusion through which the subject allows himself not to think and not to know himself. Hence the importance of asking him to establish an axiology.

3.4   Universal and singular

Globally, what do we ask of the subject who wishes to question himself, to philosophize from and about his existence and thought? He has to learn to read himself, that is to say, to learn to transpose his thoughts and learn to transpose himself through himself; a duplication and alienation that require the loss of self through a passage to infinity, through a leap into pure possibility. Rubbing the singularity of one's personal discourse against the universality of one's own reason. The challenge of such an exercise is that it will always be a matter of erasing something, of forgetting, of momentarily blinding the body or the mind, the reason or will, desire or morals, pride or inertia. In order to do so, the accessory discourse, the discourse of circumstance, or of appearance must be silenced: either the word assumes its responsibility, its implications or its content, or it must learn to keep silent. A word that is not prepared to assume its own essence, in all its fullness, a word that is not willing to become conscious of itself, no longer has any reason to come to light, in this game where only the conscious has the right to be heard, theoretically and tentatively at least. Obviously, some will not wish to play the game, considered too painful, the word being here too burdened with stakes.

By forcing the subject to select his speech, by sending back to him through the tool of reformulation the image he deploys, we will be installing a procedure where the speech becomes as revealing as possible; this is what happens through the process of universalization of the particular idea. Of course it is possible and sometimes useful to follow paths already mapped out, for example by quoting authors, but it is then the rule to bear the content as if it were exclusively our own.

Sometimes authors can be used to legitimize a fearful position or to banalize a painful one. In fact, what we are trying to do is to find in each singular discourse, however clumsy it may be, the major issues, stamped and codified by illustrious predecessors. How they are articulated by each one, in turn, absolute and relative, monism and dualism, body and soul, analytical and poetic, finite and infinite, etc.? At the cost of the feeling of betrayal, because we can hardly bear to see our word treated in this way, even by ourselves. A feeling of pain and dispossession, like the one who would see his body being operated on even though all physical pain would have been annihilated.

Sometimes, sensing the consequences of an interrogation, the subject will try by all means to avoid answering. If the interrogator perseveres through the back door, a sort of answer will probably emerge, but only when the issue has disappeared behind the horizon, so much so that the subject, reassured by this disappearance, will no longer be able to establish a link with the initial issue. If the questioner recapitulates the steps in order to re-establish the line of reasoning of the discussion, the subject will then be able to accept or not accept to see, as the case may be. A crucial moment, although the refusal to see may sometimes be only verbal: the path inevitably leaves some imprint in the subject's mind. Through a mechanism of pure defense, the latter will sometimes try to verbally undermine any work of clarification or explanation. But he will not be less affected in his later reflections.

3.5　Accepting the pathology

As a conclusion on the difficulties of philosophical consultation, let us say that the main difficulty lies in the acceptance of the idea of pathology, taken in the philosophical sense, and even to establish a cognitive and emotional diagnosis, to examine the functioning and obstacles of rationality. In fact, any singular existential posture, a choice that is made more or less consciously over the years, for many reasons ignores a certain number of patterns and ideas. To affirm, to assert oneself, is to deny something, since all existence is a kind of negation of the being, whole sections of the possible are thus engulfed in the blind spots of thought.

In their extreme generality, these pathologies are not infinite in number, the categories are quite defined, although their specific articulations vary enormously. But for those who suffer from them, it is difficult to conceive that the ideas on which they focus their existence are reduced to the simple, almost predictable consequences of a chronic weakness or absence in their capacity for

reflection and deliberation. However, isn't the "thinking for oneself" advocated by many philosophers an art that can be worked on and acquired, rather than an innate, given talent that would no longer have to be examined again? It is simply a question of accepting that human existence is in itself a problem, burdened by dysfunctions that are nevertheless its substance and dynamics.