

TO PHILOSOPHIZE IS TO CEASE LIVING

“Those who apply themselves to philosophy in the proper way are doing no more nor less than to prepare themselves for the moment of dying and the state of death.”—
Plato

“The Tao Te King is so mysterious that one is willing to die soon after hearing it.”—
Confucius

*“To change my idea? Biologically, I cannot!”—*Carmen

If to philosophize is learning to die, learning how to die, it cannot be done except than by practicing dying. Thus our proposal is that to philosophize is actually dying, in order to acquire a real experience of death. So we will try in this text to show that to philosophize is to cease living, or in other words, how philosophy is opposed to life.

Two philosophies

“Philosophy is life”, is an expression we hear commonly among philosophy fans. But it seems to us that actually it is exactly the contrary. Although that is the way it goes for many commonplace expressions: they are good at putting reality topsy-turvy. Probably because of their intention: they hide reality in order for their author to feel better. And when we think about it for one moment, this might be one of the “popular” reasons for “philosophy”: a desire for a good conscience, a hope for the mind to feel easy and relaxed. A common conception of philosophy: philosophy makes you “cool”. Thus it seems useful to us, as often, to take the counterpoint of this principle, to effectuate the reversal of this reversal, if only to better examine the effect produced by the operation. And in this case, like in many others of same type, it works quite well, since it seems to us that for example the expression “To philosophize is to cease living” is a rather sensible and interesting expression. Probably, indeed, we have now another meaning of philosophy, opposed to the previous one: philosophy implies to overturn established ideas and induce uneasiness, at the risk of a bad conscience, a sort of psychological suffering and death. But of course we are conscious that we have here posed as opposites two very distinct classical conceptions of philosophy, that can be coined as the “vulgar” one and the “elitist” one. We are not trying to establish a hierarchy between them, since “vulgar” could become “popular”, and “elitist” could become “abstruse”. But subjectively, in defense of this “harsh” philosophy, let us claim that if philosophy was life, it would fill up football stadiums, supply supermarkets, we would find it in opinion polls, appear at prime time television, and probably established philosophers would look less dusty and speak to everyone. Although some of this somewhat may happen already over the last few years, for different reasons!

Let us examine different ways in which philosophy would be opposed to life. First, by taking up the classical refrain that “To philosophize is learning to die”. Plato, Cicero, Montaigne and many others

have affirmed, written and rewritten that preparation to death would indeed constitute the heart of philosophical activity, the philosophical experience par excellence. Of course we can oppose here some philosophers like Spinoza, with his concept of “conatus”: every living being tends to persevere existing, or his famous quote: “the free man thinks of nothing less than of death”. Or Nietzsche who claims life itself is at the core of real thinking, when he writes that the great reason is the body, the small reason is the mind. Or Sartre, who in the footsteps of the epicureans affirms that death is exterior to existence, since it is absence or cessation of life. But since by principle, especially on these matters, not a single proposition can obtain unanimous agreement among philosophers, we will not bother about the consensus: we will only examine the viability of our propositions. And in fact, we most likely will reconcile with our philosophers of “opposition” in the course of our peregrination. Already because in those different philosophers the concept of finitude is important, and it is precisely on this trajectory that we wish to invite the reader: examining the different stakes of thinking, undergoing and living the finitude: existential, epistemological, psychological...

The wise has no desires

One of the most common obstacles to philosophizing is desire, even though desire itself is found at the heart of the philosophical dynamic. For Plato, the perversion of philosophy is carried out in the reversal process of the erotic. When desire abandons its most legitimate object for a philosopher: truth, or beauty, in order to seek more immediate satisfactions, such as the pursuit of power and glory, accumulation of wealth or knowledge, lust, etc. It is not so much that he ceases all intellectual activity, but this vulgar purpose not being in the service of its natural vocation, its activity is perverted by earthly considerations. And if this philosopher, who has therefore become a sophist, obtains the agreement of the majority or becomes popular among his fellow citizens, it is only because the common of mortals does not know what a philosopher looks like. The layman gets impressed by mere appearance, by the simulacra of thinking, he is dumbfounded by the somersaults of he who for Plato is nothing but a buffoon or a juggler.

Life has a lot to do with desire, for life is composed of needs, and the pursuit of what ever object will satisfy those needs, and the anguish at not obtaining the objects that would satisfy the needs, and the pain that comes even when the needs are satisfied, through fear and worry. For it seems that life has an enormous capacity to create new needs and therefore new pains, in particular for man, whose scope of existence is much wider than any other species: he can even envisage the infinite, an exciting vision indeed, but as well one who can produce an endless list of unsatisfied desires, sometimes if not often simply because they are impossible. If most species are contented with the particular needs of their own species—the hen does not want to go underwater, the elephant does not want to fly—the human species knows no boundary to his pretensions, wills, ambitions, and therefore no boundary to his pains. One could hear argued that man satisfies more desires than any other species and therefore could feel more contented, but it seems that his imagination and lust far surpass his own capacities to be satisfied.

Even though philosophy has throughout history and geography threaded many paths, and proposed many different schemes, there is still a certain coherency in the different manners philosophers have used to solve the excessive capacity of man to make himself unhappy. We will call this common ground “reconciliation with oneself”. Be it with the epicurean “carpe diem”, which invites one to appreciate the present moment, with the idealist pure pleasure of thinking and reasoning, with the perspective of an extramundane world or reality that moderates, restrains or annihilates common desires, as we find in many religions as well, with the commitment to simply accepting reality, in spite of its harshness or due to it, with the love of transcendent concepts such as truth, good or beauty, who in themselves sublimate all pains and satisfy the soul, with the projection of one’s self in the

future, with the enjoyment of pure action, physical or mental, freed from any expectation of reward, thus philosophers have attempted to provide men with many recipes to have what could be called a “better life”. Evidently, one will jump here and cry out : “You see, philosophy is life! You just said it yourself: philosophy helps us live a better life!”. But our critique forgets here something fundamental. Let us ask him the following questions. Why did those philosophers have so little following? Why were those philosophies so hard to follow? Were not philosophies offering propositions opposed to the common conception of life? For even the mass based religions have to realize that the messages they deliver, even though when recognized as the divine words, encounter very difficult times to be obeyed and followed to the letter.

Let us try to examine why philosophers are not so easily followed, to say the least. As a general answer to this question, we can propose the following hypothesis. Philosophers ask us to give up what is dearest to our heart, or rather to our guts. In what way do they ask this? Once again, the most general way to characterize their demand is to say they ask us to give up the obvious or the immediate in favor of something else which is rather distant, rather impalpable, rather imperceptible, and difficult to account for. Be it the median way, wisdom, autonomy, perfection, reality, love, consciousness, absolute, otherness, essence, they can all be mere words to pursue, compared to food, pleasure, dancing, working for a living, reproducing, appearance, popularity, etc. Even living in the present moment, which might seem something easy to do, since we don’t have to worry about anything else, is actually a very ascetic and demanding task, since man spends lots of his energy regretting a wonderful past, even mourning about it, or being anxious about the future and its unpredictability. Thus living the present moment can last for a very short while, but within a short delay other dimensions of time, including the desire for eternity, will knock at the door. So it is with love, that seems so popular: when we look closer at its manifestation, we identify all kinds of sordid calculations, resentments, jealousies, possessions and other gross and humanly perversions of the pure concept.

We get an interesting view of the problem as well when we look at the life of philosophers: the great genius Leibniz with no one at his burial, Kant living all his life alone with his servant, Wittgenstein giving up his inheritance and living like a pauper, Nietzsche going crazy, Socrates killed by his fellow citizens, Bruno burnt at the stake, although some, we must admit, got fame, glory and wealth, like Hume or Aristotle.

But let us now examine some other aspects of our claim that to philosophize is to cease living.

Stopping the narration

Life is a sequence, a series of events. When someone tells his life, to his friends or by writing an autobiography, he tells a story: this happened, then this happened, and finally this happened, thus ending the narration. And in general human beings enjoy telling each other their “life story”, sometimes because important things happened, but most often giving an account of the most trivial and uninteresting details, just to be able to hold a conversation with neighbors, and exist a little bit more. The same thing goes for hearing the “life story” of other persons, the gossiping about the neighbors or about celebrities, an insatiable drive for voyeurism. Another way in which life is a narration is the way we conceive our activities, often ran by an agenda, which establishes what we should do on such a day and at such time, a laundry list of activities such as getting up, working, shopping, miscellaneous appointments, daily chores, and the indispensable television programs schedule, all of which rhythms many a family life. And how much do we worry about all the things we haven’t done, that we should do and probably will never do, that have to inscribe themselves anyhow in the infinite list that compose our existence, as if time was the main or only parameter. That is one of the reasons why it is so easy to feel eternal or to forget our own finitude: our desires

resist and strongly conspire against such a limit. If I had the time! Existence is thus a large list of events and deeds, and a much larger list of hopes, expectations and fear of events and deeds.

Then, how does philosophy oppose the idea of a narration? Although there again some philosophers will in the modern period defend such a phenomenological vision of existence and promote the narration, one of the great revolutions of philosophy, as it appeared in the classical Greek upheaval which some consider—rightly or wrongly—as the birth of philosophy, was to move from the mythos to the logos. Until then, everything, be it the creation of the world, the existence of man, natural phenomena, moral and intellectual problems, were explained in the form of stories that we, modern and “enlightened” minds, would call myths. If we did not take into account the quality factor, we could call them very well television shows. And since some of those most fantastic myths needed actors, all kinds of creatures were invoked and convoked to perpetrate the actions accounting for the different cosmic or unexplained phenomena. Thus poets, as they were called, like Hesiod or Homer for the Greeks, Virgil or Ovid for the Romans, insightfully composed inspiring tales that gave coherence and explanations to the world. Cosmogonies, theogonies, epics, all kind of stories were concocted that would be used to educate the population, giving them the idea that there was sense in the universe, that daily events had something to account for them. And of course, to bring this home, our most minute human happenings should echo those great “historical” feats, so we could have as well our daily small myths, intertwined with cosmic ones in some kind of causal relation. Therefore, the universe as a whole and all the parts composing it had meaning, significance, laws and principles, all in the form of a “story”. This would allow as well a reassuring proportion of predictability to console us from the hardships of life, even by way of an explanation all we had was the temper tantrum or the love story of some wild god. And small stories would reflect great stories, but everything was stories. This was the case not only in Greece and Rome, but in Egypt, in China, in India, to mention only some of the most famous and long lasting cultures, since those myths were actually founders of civilization. And as we see still today in many countries, like for example in Africa, those stories have a very important educational function, since patterns emerge, what some call archetypes, that allow us to perceive the events affecting us not just as particular occurrences, but as the manifestations or recalls of something more fundamental.

The emergence of the logos, that took place not only in Greece—it is just the most famous such upheaval—but as well in some other cultures, is basically the transformation of a “story telling” culture to an “explanation” culture, which some call “rationality”, or “abstraction”. The idea was to substitute stories with reasons and rules, procedures and methods. It implies that one can get away from concrete situations, particular or universal, to replace them with ideas, which have for specificity to be a-temporal and a-spatial. Those ideas would then be organized and formalized to create systems, that could be used to produce new knowledge, and general principles, that would be used to examine critically thoughts and even facts. Logic is an example of pushing to its limits such an intellectual functioning. Mathematics and astronomy are in many early cultures the most visible and primary forms of such endeavors, sometimes medicine and physics as well. Those new sciences would allow an understanding of the present and the past, and predict the future. Knowledge would not be based only on empirical data, but on abstractions and intellectual constructions. Laws would emerge, that were not only descriptive, explaining what we perceive, but as well prescriptive, telling us what we should do.

The reason we used brackets for the terms explanation, rationality and abstraction, is that in a certain way, the mythos culture was already attempting to do this, just in a different way. In fact, in Africa today is raging a debate to determine if there is—was—or not an African philosophy, to determine if the story telling of the “griots”, the traditional bard, can be considered or not as philosophy. The western oriented African intellectuals claim that this is not philosophy principally because there is no conceptual system and critical apparatus, and therefore the philosophical content is

not explicated. The other camp, which are called the ethno-philosophers, claim that these stories do question, analyze and problematize, in particular human existence, on existential, social and moral questions. We must here remind as well how Shelling, a German romantic philosopher, counter-poised to the idea of the traditional Aristotelian “first philosophy”: metaphysics, a “second philosophy”, which is the narration, the story telling, although this second philosophy is chronologically the first one. For it is true that societies are founded on great myths, that embody the essence, the nature, the reason of being, the goal, the specificity of this given society. That is why literature, in the form of theater, poetry or else, is such an important institution, along side philosophy, to explain who we are, what the world is. And Shelling will not be the only philosopher criticizing the abandonment of the narration as a crucial form of philosophy. More recently, the very idea of “philosophy of systems” or the one of “method” has been under great attack even by philosophers.

Thus, along the great myths, there are the numerous tales, ancient or recent, that contribute to create the identity of the ones that tell them and the ones that receive them. This includes the stories that run in families, the myth that each one makes for himself. Don't we all have those stories about ourselves, that we have told so many times, changed and embellished along the numerous occasions of telling them, those stories that others repeat like us, those stories that our entourage are sometimes tired of hearing, but we keep telling them because those stories are what we are, or we are what they are. We say they are real, but in a way a story cannot be real, since it subjectively describes in a specific and partial way an event which in itself escapes any description, with words or otherwise. After all, man is the only animal that invents himself!

Thus, to make more clear our idea of philosophy as a rupture with life defined as a sequence of events, let us summarize with the following points. Telling a story is easier and more natural than explaining; it is concrete, it speaks more to everyone. Examples come more readily to the mind than explanations. Stories look more real than explanations, since they are concerned with describing facts rather than giving subjective interpretations and biased analysis. Stories are more gratifying, because we can look good with very few easy and simple words. Stories give much more room to imagination than reason, the latter being much stricter. Stories are more pleasing to hear than abstract thoughts: even children enjoy them, since they have an aesthetic dimension that explanations and ideas often lack. Philosophy has a more arid image, not as easily pleasing, since it implies understanding, much more than narration does. But of course, those work hypotheses are in no way absolute, since they merely try to provide some generalities about general perceptions, that already are not valid for many philosophers, since most of them enjoy what the common mortal does not enjoy. The philosopher is in a way, in the eyes of many persons, someone that at least partially gave up on life. He seems not to be interested in “real life”: he prefers abstruse ideas. Which takes us to our next point: the ascetic quality of ideas.

The asceticism of the concept

This aridity of the philosophical speech takes us directly to another facet of opposition between life and philosophy: the ascetic dimension of the concept. The concept is a crucial tool of the thinking, if not the main one, as is generally accepted in philosophy, in particular since Hegel. For the German philosopher has put forward this “tool” as what constitutes the scientificity of our mental activity. That is why he rejects story telling, which for him is definitely not philosophy, even when encountered in a classical philosopher such as Plato, who indulges in telling stories, as Hegel sees it, when for Plato the myth still had an important founding role in the thinking.

What is a concept? It is an intellectual representation, which capture the theme or the prominent idea in a given discourse; we could as well call it the “key word” or “key expression”. It can be included in the speech, or can be induced by it. Often it can be considered as a category, a common

name to a multiplicity of objects. “Apple” is therefore a definite concept that refers abstractly to an infinity of objects with different form, size and color, but that have in common certain criteria that allow them to enter in the category of “apple”, a concept which in return define those objects that correspond to it. It is the result of a double operation. An abstraction, since it keeps only some characteristics of the objects and not others. For example “ripeness” does not enter in the definition of the apple, even though that concerns us in “life” when we deal with apples. And a generalization, since the characteristics retained are applicable to all the objects that belong to the category. It is a mental object with a double dimension. Comprehension: the totality of the constitutive characteristics. Extension: the totality of the objects these characteristics can be applied to.

Therefore it is short—generally one word, sometimes two or three, rarely more—and abstract or general, since it does not refer to a concrete thing. To show the process and degrees of abstraction, Kant has an interesting distinction between empirical concepts, that refers to objects we can perceive, and derivative concepts, that we cannot perceive, since they refer to relationship between objects, and qualify them. “Hole” or “man” would be empirical concepts, “equal” or “difference” would be derivative concepts.

Actually, it is not so much the concept that interests us here, but the dynamic itself of conceptualization, the production of concepts. As Hegel indicates in his realist scheme—one for whom ideas are real—we don’t want the concept to be determined merely by its object, i.e. to be the concept of something, where reality would be external to the thinking, but rather we aim at a concept which is the object itself of thought: something as a concept, where reality is engendered by the thinking itself. For it is this activity of conceptualization that is a problem for man, reasoning, more than the concept itself, which, as a passive virtual mental object does not represent any concrete threat: to give and use a name, arbitrarily, can be an activity that implies no particular intellectual accomplishment.

Then, what is conceptualization? It is the activity of recognizing, producing, defining and utilizing concepts, integrated in a global thinking process. Each of the four aspect of conceptualization presents some kind of difficulty, which constitutes reasons for resisting conceptualization. But in a general way, the problem with conceptualization is that it consists in an action of reduction, of shrinking, that has a dry and harsh connotation, for the following reasons: we are going from the concrete to the abstract, from the multiple to the simple, from the actual to the virtual, from the perceptible to the thinkable, from entities inscribed in time, matter and space, to a cosmic, immaterial and atemporal entities: we enter the realm of pure ideas, the realm of thinking the thinking.

And if most often the idea of reduction carries a negative connotation, we should remind the reader that in philosophy, it can be on the contrary a positive and useful activity, such as in the concept of phenomenological reduction, as proposed by Husserl. It is a mental process where we are invited to bracket the world and suspend our judgment, in order to seize the inner reality of a phenomenon, in itself, as it appears. Of course, we have to give up on all surrounding reality, in order to contemplate the objects of our mental perception disconnected from any context. This phenomenon can happen naturally, when we are astonished, but the process of phenomenological reduction asks us to recreate artificially such a natural occurrence, a very demanding task that allows us to seize the inner essence of an object of thought by abandoning to the extent possible our established world view, which subjectively taints our thinking. The reduction process can as well occur by observing the variation of appearance of a given object, in order to give up the contingent characteristics and conserve only the necessary, its essence, thus revealed.

Recognizing a concept, in someone else’s speech or in one’s own, is difficult because we have to select, among all the words pronounced, which ones are the center of the thinking pattern expressed

by the given speech. It is a difficult process, since we have to eliminate a lot of words, in fact most of them, to only keep one, or very few. We lose the narrative perspective or the overall explanation by nailing the point with a single word.

Producing a concept is difficult because we have to convoke a term which transcends a given reality, we have to identify a term which unites a plurality into one single determination, we have to divide a totality of undetermined objects by a process of naming that implies creating determined categories, or we have to qualify a global reality through a specific term, what can be called labeling. There it seems often that our own language escapes us, that reality is beyond our capacity to think it.

Defining a concept is difficult because we have to determine the reality the concept encompasses. We would rather give examples, since the concrete or the particular comes more naturally to the mind than the abstract and the general. To define is to touch at the essence of a reality, to determine and outline its nature, it is one of the most demanding mental exercise. To do this, another common easy way is to produce synonyms, but even though this might be useful, the problem remains: it does not say how to determine the nature of this reality. The problem as well is that some concepts of a highly transcendent nature are in general used to determine or qualify other concepts: they seem to refer only to themselves, as self-evident entities. This is the case for example with “good”, “beautiful”, “true”, etc. Therefore, they seem to escape any definition, and any attempt to do so will always appear reductionist and highly questionable.

Using a concept is probably the easiest aspect of conceptualization, since it can be done in a much more intuitive fashion, less formal. Of course, to determine if a concept has been used in an appropriate fashion is part of the utilization, and this would be the hardest part of it, since we have to evaluate our own thinking. In order to do this, we have to maintain a rather clear idea of the meaning of a concept. But then again, intuition can sometimes function quite well, and after all, language is taught to us in a rather “natural” or reiterative fashion, as a daily practice, more than as a conscious process. The common reticence of school children to study grammar and a certain abandonment of its teaching in modern pedagogy brings some evidence to prove our point about the “artificial” nature of this formal activity. Although from our standpoint “artificial” is in no way contradictory with necessary.

Thus, to synthesize what is ascetic and unpleasant in conceptualization—and therefore contrary to life—are the following requirements. Having to choose and give up, because we want everything. Producing specific terms with a specific function, because it looks formal and complicated and we prefer what is easy. Dealing with abstractions that have no immediate empirical reality, because it is useless and a waste of time. Analyzing the thinking and becoming conscious of one’s thinking, because it is frightening. One could object to our idea that conceptualization is cessation of life by simply saying that what we described is merely some kind of intellectual work, and that work is part of life, even if we don’t like to work, and some people like to work anyhow. We would like to answer this objection in two steps. First we will deal with the work aspect, then with the intellectual aspect.

Working

Among cultures and thinkers, there are many different visions of work. We don’t want to do an extensive study on the matter, but just provide some intuitions on how the opposition functions between “life” and “work”. As a proof of this, we could already mention the fact that the word “work” itself, in some languages like French: “travail”, or Spanish: “trabajo”, come from the Latin word *tripalium*, which was then an instrument of torture, or a contraption to immobilize animals,

when animals are defined precisely by their mobility. Work is therefore linked to constraint and pain. “Negotium” is another Latin word for work, and it means the absence or rest, of leisure, the absence of what the French call “temps de vivre”, literally: time to live. Aristotle recommends to not give citizenship to the working man, Rousseau criticizes the agitation and the torment involved in working, Pascal pretends we use it not to think about our self, Nietzsche considers that work is a police that is used to control everyone in order to stall the development of reason, of desire and of independence. The concept of alienation has been an important accusation against the idea of work. But the concept of “work” carries as well its fan club. On the favorable side, Arendt thinks that work provides pleasure and good health, Comte affirms it provides social cohesion, and Voltaire writes that it protects us from three terrible scourges: boredom, vice and need. And we will notice that the defense of work does not simply rest on its practical usefulness, but as well because it contributes to existential growth. These “opposing” authors are here mentioned to show that in no way we take our ideas for certitude: they constitute mere work hypotheses.

One might criticize as well the fact that we do not distinguish and rather confuse here different meaning of “work”: as a social function, as a way to earn a living, as an activity, etc, and therefore we don’t distinguish for example the pleasant and free activity of the thinker from the physical and painful activity of the laborer. We shall plead guilty on this account, we do not want to oppose a “noble” intellectual work to a “base” physical work, we find interesting not to oppose those conceptions of labor, since they interchange easily, especially today, even if that opposition can still be very true in many circumstances. For an intellectual can write a book for economic and status reason, a sort of necessity, when the mason can construct a house for the mere pleasure of building something. As well, we will not enter in the debate about the nature of man as “homo faber” (man as a fabricator), who naturally tries to accomplish something in his life, or man as “lazy”, as a “sinner” who engages in the sin of sloth when he tries to get away with doing his share of work. We just want to give some hints about the existential reticence to work, in order to justify and give meaning to the fact that life and work are rather incompatible in many ways, and that work is often accomplished under the strain of necessity, for example as “earning a living”, an endeavor that often if not very often, men would rather do without if they actually were asked to freely choose without any constraint. And indeed, this might be an explanation of why philosophy, which is a practice involving work, a lot of work, by learning a culture, acquiring skills and confronting oneself, without any kind of immediate necessity or easy reward—it is not the most obvious mean to earn a living or become rich—has never filled a football stadium. Of course, if philosophy is a mere discussion about life and happiness, of the kind we would naturally have while taking a drink at the bar, then it is evidently another issue. And that is the direction that some “philosophers” take in order to make philosophy more popular. But if philosophy is work, struggling with oneself and other, in order to produce concepts or being, it will tend to be rejected by the majority as an obstacle to the “good life”.

Work generally opposes it self to life, since it is an obligation when life is desire. Friedrich Schiller, being at the same time a philosopher, poet and dramatist, did not appreciate this rather Kantian dualism between what he called “sensuous drive” and “formal drive”, an opposition which he wanted to resolve through a “play drive”. He claimed that when the philosopher will rebuke his listener by the aridity of his speech, he will bring him back through this “play drive”, because man loves to play, for example with ideas. But of course, this implies that emotions be educated by reason, and emotions resist such an endeavor, although it must be possible, otherwise how could children grow? For the German humanist, in the “beautiful soul”, duty and inclination are no longer in conflict with one another. Expressing oneself does not have to be linked to primitive banal feelings, but can be connected to higher order emotions, to beauty. Human freedom expresses itself therefore as a capacity to go beyond animal instincts. But of course, this implies some kind of work, no such accom-

plishment springs forth naturally. If it is natural, it is an acquired nature, a specificity of man which is as well called culture.

Intellect

Let us now examine the “intellectual” problem of philosophy. To start, we can remind the reader of the famous history of the Thales and the servant girl, told by Plato. Apparently, Thales, philosopher and astronomer, was looking at the stars, and not looking at his feet, he fell in the well. A servant who saw the scene started laughing heavily at such a fool, who so busy with “ethereal spheres” thus ignored the reality in front of him. The question which of course imposes itself to the philosophical mind, which as the story implies is probably not the case of the servant girl, is to know if the well, the hole in the ground, the immediate physical presence, is endowed with more reality than the far away heavens that Thales was engaged into contemplating. This story captures well the general view of the philosopher, of philosophical activity, even though it will be labeled as a cliché. But after all, a cliché is a term that at the origin designates the picture taken by the camera, showing in a fixed way what is immediately visible; therefore, in spite of its reductionist quality, there is reality to the cliché. So the philosopher, by claiming there is a reality other than the immediate and visible reality, focuses on this hidden reality, is obsessed by its secret, and therefore does not see anymore, or much less, what is visible to anyone else. This again brings us back to Plato and the allegory of the cave, where the man that has seen the “light of truth” is blinded once he is back in the dark cave, he cannot play the common games, which will lead his fellow citizens to first laugh at him, then kill him.

Another point of difference about life, when we think of Thales and the servant, is the body issue. For it seems that if the servant inhabits her body, the philosopher does not. We could well think of him—as of many philosophers—as a mind on legs, his body being a mere transportation instrument of his head, as we see it on small children drawings. She has a body, he is some kind of ectoplasm. Contrary to her, he does not care about what happens to his body, and that is why he falls. Immediacy of the senses has no real meaning, since his senses are so stretched out, looking at the stars, that they don’t distinguish themselves anymore from the mind’s activity. When the servant girl seems to be endowed of what is called “horse sense”, this common sense so closely linked to sense perception. She trusts her eyes and her mind for what they tell her, when he doubts, dissects and tries to go beyond. She is alive, she exists, he is an intellectual being. He incarnates the classical intellectualist thesis: the body is a prison for the soul, a soul which desperately tries to reach the unbounded, attain the unconditioned, but a soul that the body constantly humiliates, reminding him of his finite self. While the soul, in return, scorns at this ridiculous piece of flesh called the body. Life is dirty, and messy. That is the reason Lucifer could not understand why God would not prefer beautiful angels, creatures of light, to muddy and clumsy humans. Lucifer as the “saint patron” of the philosophers...

The other body ignored or despised by the philosopher is the social body. Just like the personal physical body, the social body is binding, heavy, banal, rude, messy, coarse, immediate, etc. What is common is bad, what is special is good. What is distant is beautiful, what is close is ugly. What is perceived is determined, what is thought is freedom. Of course, once again, such a cliché of the intellectual cannot pretend in any form to establish some kind of absolute prism, but as a general “thumb rule”, it works pretty well, and is useful to understand our own functioning, as one more of the classical dualisms inhabiting man’s existence. To understand for example our own tendency not to trust anyone but ourselves, the fundamental mistrust against common opinion, a suspicion that seems to inhabit at different degrees all human minds.

Last but not least, the other manner in which the intellect denies life is in its relationship to feelings. Let us take one which is common and is often a reason not to philosophize: empathy. Empathy, like

compassion, love, pity and others are the social feelings that make us human, that make us livable. But the intellect, like any other mental functioning, by privileging its own activity tends to ignore, diminish, deny, frustrate or suppress other types of activities, especially if they are not of the same nature. And indeed, to analyze and conceptualize, and to demand from someone that he does so, to search and expose truth, to question, can be and most likely will be painful and contrary to social feelings that would rather prefer to ease things for our neighbor. Of course, the partisans of “wholeness”, another form of omnipotence connected to the “new age” trend, or persons indulging in some form of “psychologism”, will claim that these two activities combine very well. But from our own experience, those “humanists” tend to project their own fears and ideas on the adults or children they deal with, expressing more than anything else a lack of trust toward their own intellectual identity, and from then a mistrust toward the intellectual identity of others, a very common phenomenon. There again, feelings seem to constitute basic life principles, a common way to behave, and philosophizing takes the appearance of a forced and artificial activity, often with a demanding, therefore harsh and brutal connotation. They forget that philosophy, like any martial art, cannot avoid tripping, falling and bruising. And that is probably the way it teaches us to grow, through dealing with reality.

These different specificities of the intellect can be covered by an existential concept that is dear to us: authenticity. And in spite of its existential connotation, we claim that authenticity is a form of death. To be authentic, means to radicalize our position, to dare articulate it, to accomplish it without constantly looking behind our shoulder: authenticity has no need to justify itself. A good reason for others to qualify it as haughty and arrogant. This extreme singularization is one of the main reasons explaining the ostracism against the philosopher, although it can as well be the cause for his glorification. The cynics are a good example of this case, who dare think and express what they think, without any consideration for established customs, principles, morals and opinions. They show disrespect for everything considered sacred by their entourage and fellow citizens. Of course, this can only take them on a confrontation course, or isolation. They appear rigid and dogmatic, when in order to survive one has to be flexible and adapt. One can even accuse them of falling into a pathological type of behavior, suicidal like. And if they are accused of making mince meat out of the people they encounter, one should not overlook the fact that they make mince meat out of themselves as well. If only because of the perpetual state of war they are de facto engaged in, although that is not their purpose: it simply derives from their incapability to pretend and play social games. But as well because their own person is denied in favor of something more important, some transcendent concept, be it truth, nature or else, a concept they might not even be willing to pronounce, but to which they are willing to sacrifice everything including themselves. The only reason they appear like faithless outlaws is because they don't accept half-measures and compromises. When we observe the daily forms of conversation, we observe how most dialogues are composed of three main ingredients: small talk about weather and gossip, self-glorification and self-justification, and obtaining some practical advantage from someone. The authenticity of the philosopher is in a total rupture with this scheme: small talk is boring, one has no need to glorify and justify himself, dialogue should have only to do with transcendent preoccupations. If not, it is better to keep silent and shut up the interlocutor.

The allegory of the cave captures well the two frequent distinct attitudes the common man maintains toward the philosopher: laughter and anger. Laughter because he acts in a strange way, anger because there is the suspicion—or the certitude—he knows something the others don't know: envy. This description fits the philosopher defined as another person, but what about the philosopher within oneself? How do we relate to him? Let us examine how this inner philosopher—this daemon as Socrates calls it—stops us from living. We can answer this question indirectly by stating that in the general educational process, parents will simply not encourage this kind of preoccupation or world outlook in their offspring. For the simple reason that a child with this kind of attitude would

generally be perceived as carrying a sort of handicap: he would be clumsy, not really inhabiting his self, not being practical, being bothersome, etc. In other words, he would not seem to be preparing himself with the struggling that most people consider life to be, even when they don't claim it openly. One has to adapt, one has to be practical, to be outcome minded. Especially today, at a time where economic competition rages fiercely, engaging oneself in philosophical preoccupation does not seem to provide the most useful preparation for life. It seems at best to be a luxury, at worse a threat. We observe this frequently in our work with children, where one of the main objections against philosophy we encounter is that learning thinking takes time and there are more urgent matters to deal with. While we are on this topic, we can add that secondary to the first objection but still important is the suspicion that the child would be destabilized or troubled by this kind of activity. His child life would be inhibited by the activity of thinking, which could only provoke anguish and unsettle him. Life is considered hard enough, without having to think about terrible things; so let the child be a child, they say... Probably the adult as well... Thus, beside the actual difficulties of thinking, as we have already examined it, is the suspicion that the kinds of thought that would come about would be destructive. Which in a way is most likely true. A path that takes us with the next contradiction between life and philosophy: the issue of problematization.

Thinking the unthinkable

One of the important skills of philosophy is the capacity to problematize. Through questions and objections, one is supposed to critically examine given ideas or theses, in order to escape the trap of evidence. This "evidence" is constituted by a body of knowledge and beliefs that philosophers call "opinions": ideas that are not reasoned, they are merely established by habit, hearsay or tradition. Thus, when engaging in the philosophical process, one must examine the limits and falsity of any given opinion and envisage other possibilities of thinking, which at a first glance or to common thinking seems odd, nonsensical or even dangerous. In order to do this, one has to suspend his judgment, as Descartes invites us to do, and not trust usual emotions and convictions. Further on, through his "method", he asks us to undergo some mental process that for him guarantees to obtain a more reliable kind of knowledge, which he calls "evidence", in opposition to some kind of established opinion, be it vulgar or scholar. In order to be reliable, this "evidence" has to be able to withstand doubt, avoid precipitation and prejudice, and take clear and distinct forms. With the dialectical method, be it in Plato, Hegel or others, the work of criticism or negativity goes further, since it is necessary to be able to think the contrary of a proposition in order to understand it, evaluate it and go beyond it; any possibility of "evidence" therefore disappears. Of course, to put into effect such cognitive procedures, one needs to be in a certain mental state, to have a specific kind of attitude, composed of distance and critical perspective.

This attitude is very demanding, it knows many obstacles. Sincerity for example is such an obstacle to this attitude, so is good conscience and subjectivity, that must give up their tight hold on the mind. More radically, the moral principles, cognitive postulates and psychological needs that guide us in life have to be put in parenthesis, submitted to a harsh critic and even rejected, which of course does not happen naturally since it produces certain pain and anguish, unless one is capable to take distance from himself. To split oneself, as Hegel suggests, as a condition of real thinking, as a condition for conscience. And in order to accomplish such a shift in attitude, one has to die to oneself, give up, even momentarily, what is dearest to him, idea wise, emotion wise. "Biologically, I cannot do this!" answered me once a Spanish professor when I asked her to problematize her position on some subject. She had quite well perceived the problem, without visibly being fully conscious of the intellectual consequences of her outcry. Our life, our being, seems to be founded on certain established principles that are non negotiable. Thus, if thinking implies to problematize as a condition of deliberation, therefore one indeed has to die in order to think. And if we observe how

persons involved in a discussion get heated up when contradicted, and resort to extreme positions and strategies in order to defend their ideas, including the most blatant bad faith, we can conclude that indeed, in general, abandoning one's own ideas represents a sort of small death.

One can wonder why we so eagerly refuse to abandon an idea even for a moment, why so much resistance to such a short interlude of problematization, as we regularly encounter when such a demand is formulated. At least for adults, since this does not seem to be as much of a problem for children, less conscious of the implications and consequences of such an "artificial" counterpoint position. One insight we have on this matter is provided by Heidegger, through the status he gives speech: "Language is the house of being", says he. For him, to speak is to make something appear in its being, we could therefore say that speech provides existence. Of course, for man, a being of language par excellence, this is rather obvious all though often denied, for example by the common objection "These are only words". Without histories, myths and history, without narration and dialogue, what would we be? Certainly not human beings! Therefore, what we say about ourselves, be it in the form of narration—mythos—or in the form of ideas and explanations—logos—is indispensable and dear to us. To prove the importance of speech, we just have to observe how we feel threatened when our speech is ignored or contradicted; suddenly we pretend to be so preoccupied by truth! Actually, our real worry bears upon our own image, our self that we have laboriously and painstakingly constructed, a self that pretends to master his own production, a self that has strong pretensions to detaining knowledge, experience, reason, i.e. a valuable self... Our image is an idol to which we are willing to sacrifice anything; no oblation is too excessive. So when philosophy or a specific philosopher invites us to examine the shallowness, absurdity or vanity of our own thoughts, our whole being reacts strongly, instinctively, without having to think about it, as a mere survival reaction. The spinozian conatus, our desire to persevere in existence takes over our thirst for truth, our desire for being specific, for existence, is ready to deny any form of otherness, deny reason itself. The person, this empirically constructed self, feels threatened in its very existence by the faceless, identityless being. To problematize our innermost thoughts, our fundamental principles, to slightly give up or freely examine those postulates we have stated or defended sometimes for many years, becomes an intolerable position. Our ideas are us, we are our ideas. And such a modus vivendi should not be seen simply as a form of stubbornness. After all, how could we position ourselves and act in society if we did not have such an attachment? How could we commit ourselves to any life project, if we did not pledge allegiance to some fundamental principles? How would we exist, without some regulatory ideals guiding our life, however distant we are from realizing them? If man is the thinking being, he is a being of ideas. The only problem here is that if ideas are tools for thinking, too often the means is taken for the end and the ideas becomes an obstacle for the thinking. Therefore, to problematize is the attempt to reestablish the primacy of thinking over ideas, a task which is not easy to accomplish, since the empirical self has a hard time to give way to the transcendent self. To give up specific ideas is a form of death, thinking is therefore like dying.

More important things to do

In certain cultures, the philosopher maintains a real status, he is admired, for his knowledge, for his wisdom, for his depth, for he seems to have access to a reality that is denied to the common mortal. In other cultures, on the contrary, he is viewed as a useless being, suspicious, awkward or even perverted. To come back to Thales and the servant girl, some societies give more room to the celestial perspective than others, and some societies are more earthly than others. The second case is generally manifested through different forms. First possibility: philosophy is rather absent from the cultural matrix, or is reduced to a strict minimum in terms of its importance in the collective psyche. Second possibility: philosophy is viewed as an enemy, since it undermines the postulates and principles guiding this society, by introducing doubt and critical thinking. Third possibility: philosophy

adapts to the cultural matrix, anchors itself in material preoccupation, in order to stop the thinking from escaping into some kind of ethereal reality. Of course, those three aspects can easily combine, the Anglo-American culture being a good case of this. Be it in the USA or the UK, philosophy is a rather weak cultural endeavor. It is often viewed as a threat against established political, economic and religious postulates. And its philosophical tradition tends to remain within the realm of empirical and material reality, as we historically see in the schools of empiricism, utilitarianism and pragmatism.

This third aspect, a specific form of philosophy, is therefore not accidental. The issue here is one of axiology. What are the values of a given society? What is the hierarchy of values around which this society is organized? We can here be reminded of the famous painting by Raphael: the school of Athens, which shows Plato pointing at the heavens and Aristotle pointing toward the earth, while different philosophers seem concerned with different issues. The history of philosophy is nothing but a series of statements and rebuttals, accompanied by some epistemological considerations on the methods and procedures used in order to prove different points. Therefore the criticism of philosophy or rejection of philosophy is still operating within the realm of philosophy, because it is always only the criticism or the rejection of a specific and particular form of philosophy. Philosophy produces its own criticism and strives on its own criticism. This is the reason why philosophy can claim as its own any form of anti-philosophy, be it religious, scientific, psychological, political, traditional, literary, etc. For it seems, as we are subjectively willing to claim it, that man cannot escape philosophy, no more than he can escape faith or art. The only parameters that change are the values adopted, the methods used, the attitudes taken and the degree of consciousness. Man creates his own reality, and this production of reality has philosophical content. The meaning of man's accomplishments may differ, the desire to determine the meaning may vary, the relationship to meaning may change, the relative importance given to meaning may oppose the importance given to "factual" observations, but whatever we do, we cannot escape meaning, because man is a rational animal, and he cannot escape reason. This signifies that he interprets, he judges, he evaluates, he subjectively decides which degree and nature of reality he grants to reality, he sets the standard for what truth is, and we can state that reality and truth are nothing but concepts, human constructions or inventions. Even when man declares that reality escapes him, because it is materially bound, objectively defined or God given, he makes a commitment, he engages himself into a defined set of values.

In other words, the servant girl is as much an interlocutor—and in a way as much a philosopher—as Thales, even though she looks a lot like our next door neighbor. Which brings us back to the issue of "vulgar" philosophy and "elitist" philosophy. Because philosophy is an attempt to step out, to go beyond, but those spatial transformations cannot make any sense without the this-sidedness of things. Thales is meaningless without the servant girl, strangely enough she is his "alter ego": she is just another ego! Without the dialogue and the tension between those two postures, Thales becomes meaningless, the girl becomes uninteresting. Let us here bring back the allegory of the cave. Why does the philosopher come back to the cave, in Plato's allegory? He comes back to die! He cannot stay outside, looking at the pure light, even though he would prefer to be a slave in this enlightened world rather than a king in the darkness. But Plato cannot help it, he cannot not propose to bring this man back in the cave, just like if some fatality obliged him to this forced dialogue, to this confrontation, to this death. There is no philosophy without "agon", claims Nietzsche. The agon being in the Greek tragedy the moment of confrontation, of drama, of tension. It is, ambiguously and paradoxically, destructive and constructive. Thinking is a dialogue with oneself, claims Plato, and there cannot be dialogue if there is no distance, no gap, no interval, if there is no confrontation.

Here, our claim is that by adopting the position that there is more important or more urgent things to do than philosophy, we are already in the philosophical debate. Even by forgetting that philosophy

exists, we are in the philosophical field. The role of the philosopher, like the one of the artist, is to point, to show, to indicate. Foucault claims that if the scientist makes the invisible visible, the philosopher makes the visible visible. Once one has seen, he can accept he has seen, he can deny he has seen, he can forget he has seen, but his eyes are not the same anymore, the world is not the same anymore: he can no longer claim some kind of virginity. Philosophy makes fire out of all woods. In dialogue, the philosopher always wins, just by engaging the dialogue with the other. But he does not win in the way of the rhetorician; we should not confuse philosophy and eristic. In dialogue, the philosopher wins in two ways: by getting the other one to see something, and by seeing what the other one sees. This is why dialogue is so fundamental for philosophy. This is why Socrates so adamantly and relentlessly pursued his fellow human beings in the streets of Athens, and claimed no more fundamental interest in life than examining the minds of his fellow humans, delving into their souls. He claimed to find truth there. How is this possible? Was he surrounded exclusively by prophets or wise men? Not if we look at the dialogues, where Socrates looks much smarter than his interlocutors. Our proposal is that Socrates found truth in those people because they gave him the possibility to abandon himself, to die to himself. By entering those strange and foreign souls, he was able to confront himself, as a kind of ascetic pursuit, just like the fighter or the soldier needs an opponent in order to challenge himself, to go beyond himself, to become himself, to die to himself.

If we look at the history of philosophy, we have another reading of this matter. At its origin, philosophy was everything thinking was concerned with: knowledge on all topics: nature, religion, wisdom, ethics and even practical know-how. And indeed, there was a strong connotation of omnipotence in this activity at the time, both in terms of theoretical and practical knowledge. We can here remind ourselves of Hippias the sophist telling Socrates that everything he bore on him he had made himself. Or Callicles, that explained that through his art of rhetoric, the strong could take over the weak, or again Gorgias, that pretended he could convince anyone of whatever he wanted. There are not limits to intellectual pretensions, hubris rules. Truth there does not have a stand, neither does common reason, nor any regulating principle; it is the law of the jungle. The only reality of the speech is the subject and his desires. Then, of course, the erudite will criticize our words, saying that philosophy was born out a rejection of those conceptions, as a search for the true and the good, accusing us of willfully confusing the philosopher and the sophist. But our claim is that sophism is nothing but a specific school of philosophy, and in fact through the relativist and amoralist—or immoralist—stand they proclaimed, they were precursors of many more modern strands of thought. And the pretension to omnipotence of the sophists, even though it takes later on other forms, has remained as a characteristic feature of the over bloated self-image of the philosopher, which in his time Socrates was trying to take on, correctly so. By stating those were not philosophers, from our standpoint Plato was essentially right but formally wrong. Although he knew this, he recognized the proximity of two species, as indicates his analogy on the subject: he claimed that the philosopher compared to the sophist like the dog to the wolf, or the wolf to the dog...

Throughout history, philosophy lost a lot of its domain: science of nature—physics, astronomy, biology, etc.—and science of the mind—psychology—are the striking historical losses of philosophy, to which we could add many other more secondary specialties: linguistics, grammar, logic, sociology, etc. Strangely enough, as soon as a particular field wanted to claim some certitude, it abandoned philosophy and establish itself as what we call now a science, a knowledge constituted of objective “irrefutable” evidence, founded on facts and figures, observation and experimentation. Philosophy could therefore claim only the “problematic”, as Kant calls it: what is merely possible. But philosophers, like their sophist ancestors, do not want to give up certitudes. The result is that today, the type of certitudes they are left with and claim are of three kinds: certitude of a world outlook, with political, social, spiritual or other content, certitudes of historical knowledge on ideas, schools and authors, rather academic, and certitude on how to think, bearing on method and epistemology. And post-modernism, with its rejection of any universality, has just managed to create a

“new” type of certitude: a omnipotent figure of the subjectivity, finally quite cousin to the one of the sophist.

With all this, we are trying to justify that the “agon” principle is consubstantial to the philosophical activity, and not only the “agon” but the “agony”, this slow endless dying to oneself. And even if many “moments” of the philosophical history have pretended to have provided some kind of definitive answer to the previous endless debate, there was always some “new” claim emerging, ready to “kill” that “definitive” thesis. Hegel had forged this concept of “moment”, and he tried to show us how each “moment”, as it followed and refuted the previous moment, participated to reaching some kind of absolute, that of course he himself had been able to discern. But in a funny way, his claim to the absolute, his “inviting himself at the table of the divine”—the criticism he held against Shelling—is part of the process, and even a necessary step of it. The criticism launched by Marx against this hyper idealist dialectics was therefore only a lawful and necessary reaction. The other aversive reaction to such a absolutist vision was American pragmatism. And if those two schools of thought have determined in large the future of humanity, intellectually, culturally, politically, etc. the latter is of course still largely hegemonic. But if we retain a common criteria to both these inverted avatars of “traditional” philosophy, we will mention the advocating of reason as “common”, belonging to some immanent process, and not to some transcendental power. Once again, the philosopher had to die: he theoretically cannot claim some “god given” or “spirit given” power: he has to answer to some property that belongs to everyone, as Descartes coined it already when he wrote that “Reason is the thing in the world that is the most widely shared”. And this anti-elitism is probably, when faced to it, one of the most humiliating and inhuman experience for the philosopher. And probably, for the same reason, one of the most fundamental philosophical experiences. Unlearning, called it Socrates. Philosophizing with a hammer, called it Nietzsche. It could be called : “The triumph of the servant girl”.

To be no one

Odysseus is a real hero for Socrates, most likely his favorite one, as he defends it in the Lesser Hippias dialogue. The main reason for this stand is that Odysseus is “no one”, as he tells Polyphemus the Cyclops. He is nowhere and somewhere, he deals with men and gods, who fight over him, he is shrewd but is at the mercy of powerful forces, he is a leader and a lonesome man, he always longs for what he is not, he is elusive, even to himself, his life is constantly on the brink. He seems to be the Mediterranean version of the classical Taoist vision of life, which we can summarize in the following way: he who preoccupies himself mainly about his life and is too attached to life does not live, not so much because this worry will undermine his joy of living, but because it blocks and corrupts vitality, the very source of life. This idea that life—endless procession of small preoccupations, tensions and rigidities about “small things”—is an obstacle to vitality, offers the existential equivalent that ideas are an obstacle to thinking. Vitality does not cling to life; thinking does not cling to ideas. We get another echo of this in the figure of Christ: son of man, son of no one and everyone, born to die, who does not even have a stone to rest his head, as he told the scholar who wanted to follow him.

Thus, the essence of philosophy is dynamic, tragic and paradoxical. Be this in the passionate western tonality or in the detached eastern version, the challenge facing man through life and philosophy is to let go without giving up. But life as we know it has an aversion for letting go, a rigid posture for which the only alternative is all together giving up. Thus life is often summarized as a series of chronicle manic depressive cycles, which luckily or unluckily ends with death, the ultimate manic or depressive state, according to moods and circumstances.

The fundamental philosophical experience is an experience of otherness, and experience of other-sidedness, which can be lived only from the standpoint of a this-sidedness. The gap, the abyss, the fracture of being, the tension between finite and infinite, reality and desire, affirmation and negation, will and acceptance, are as many forms of the same experience. The eternal interplay between singularity, totality and transcendence. There are as many ways to describe what drives man to think and explore, and as many ways to obscure and deny what he looks for. Strangely enough, the history of philosophy has been constituted as a superposition of visions and systems pretending to complete, explain or reject the previous ones. All philosophical texts are mere footnotes added to Plato's text, said someone. But if we already look at Plato's text, it captures the paradox of philosophy. The initial drive of Plato's work is to witness the story of a man who questioned more than he stated, a man who never wrote one line, as far as the story goes. But already, Plato starts to state, starts building a thesis founded on this man, or inspired by him, and wrote a lot. Immediately afterwards comes Aristotle, whom in our sense will set the frame for future western philosophy: a sort of encyclopedia of knowledge, including everything: natural sciences, political sciences, psychology, ethics, etc. Something solid and reliable... But like Socrates, we think philosophy is not reading or writing, since this has to do with mere objects: books, when philosophy has primarily to do with tackling the human soul. Then why do you write books, if you are against books, correctly objected someone once? Well, how can you unlearn if you have not learned? How can you burn books, if you have not written them? How can you die if you have not lived? And with dialectical reversal so common to philosophy, let us ask as well the following. How can you learn if you have not unlearned? How can you write books if you have not burnt them? How can you live if you have not died?

The only problem with philosophers, like with all human beings, is that they confuse or invert the means and the ends. For the very simple reason that one is closer to hand than the other. To be a professor, to have knowledge, to write books, to have a title, to have ideas, to be famous or important, to be bright, to be respected, to be recognized, as many possible consequences of philosophizing, as many obstacles to philosophizing. Because philosophers, like all men, want to exist, as philosophers. This is probably what motivates Socrates to quote Euripides in his discussion with Gorgias the sophist, when he says: Who knows if to live is not to die, and if on the other side to die is not to live.

That philosophizing is dying to the world, is a rather common idea. That philosophy is dying to oneself, is already more rare and strange. But if furthermore we state that philosophy implies the death of philosophy, we fall right into the absurd, where few people will want to accompany us. But we think that this is where philosophy is, is where it dies. That is probably the best definition we could give to philosophy as a practice, although it does not mean very much.

And right are the philosophers that criticize the concept of philosophical practice, claiming that philosophy is nothing but a practice. However multiple and contradictory are the forms that this practice can take. Even though the truth of the matter is that academic philosophers reject philosophical practice because it challenges the self and questions the person, having little if no respect for it.

But let us leave this at the momentarily concluding point of stating that the essence of philosophical practice is to do what is left to be undone, whatever we have done. Quite an unlivable regulatory idea! It must be philosophical... No one can do this... Definitely...