

**Alessandra Modugno\***

## ***Philosophical Experiences: Action Research and Metaphilosophy***

Single blind reviewed Article. Received: February 11, 2023. Accepted: March, 29, 2023.

**Abstract:** The paper aims at examining the value of philosophy in contemporary society and the most appropriate methodological approach to communicating philosophy, and above all, philosophical experience. More specifically, the theoretical issues underlying philosophical communication are explored, investigating how this kind of experience is connected with self-questioning and the gaining of lifelong skills. Therefore, some key factors in a long-term research on the teaching of philosophy are highlighted, showing their consistency with its epistemological status, and pointing out some possible lines of action.

Il contributo si propone di esaminare il valore della filosofia nella società contemporanea e l'approccio metodologico più appropriato per comunicare la filosofia e, soprattutto, l'esperienza filosofica. Più in particolare, vengono esplorate le questioni teoriche alla base della comunicazione filosofica, indagando come questo tipo di esperienza sia connesso con l'auto-interrogazione e l'acquisizione di competenze per la vita. Vengono, quindi, evidenziati alcuni fattori chiave di una ricerca a lungo termine relativa all'insegnamento della filosofia, mostrandone la coerenza rispetto allo statuto epistemologico, e indicando alcune possibili linee di azione.

**Keywords:** *critical reflection, learning, methodological approach, philosophy, theoretical issues*

**Parole chiave:** *riflessione critica, apprendimento, approccio metodologico, filosofia, questioni teoretiche*

\*\*\*

### **1. Background**

Over the recent years, 'learning to think' and acquiring 'critical competences' have been put forward as emerging and shared cultural needs, even if the meaning of such expressions and their attainment have not always and not entirely been given priority.

Philosophers have always been interested in these issues: the changes brought about by digitalisation and social media - which foreground the confrontation between human and machine operations - and by the knowledge deriving from neurosciences, - which offer deeper and more detailed access to brain functioning - have 'ignited' the problem, rather than solving it, making it more delicate and urgent<sup>2</sup>. What is the current position of philosophers on such issues, both on a theoretical level and in terms of teaching communication? Arguably, this is a field where the aggressiveness and increasingly rapid acceleration of technologies, the exploratory potential of experimental sciences<sup>3</sup>, in particular of neural biology<sup>4</sup>, the pedagogical tools<sup>5</sup> and the didactics<sup>6</sup> intersect operatively.

It is not easy to 'network' the critical reflexivity inherent to philosophising with other forms of knowledge: their dialogue has long been complicated by extreme specialisation <sup>7</sup>

---

\* Prof. Associato - Unige.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. E. Bencivenga, *La scomparsa del pensiero. Perché non possiamo rinunciare a ragionare con la nostra testa*, Feltrinelli, Milan 2017.

<sup>3</sup> See studies concerning the psychology of learning, e.g. C. Cornoldi, *Metacognizione e apprendimento*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. J. Sanguineti, *Neuroscienza e filosofia dell'uomo*, PUSC, Rome 2014, pp. 23-23.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. R. Trincherò, *Manuale di ricerca educativa*, Franco Angeli, Milan 2022<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. G. Bonaiuti, *Le strategie didattiche*, Carocci Faber, Rome 2020<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. E. Morin, *La testa ben fatta. Riforma dell'insegnamento e riforma del pensiero*, Raffaello Cortina, Milan 2000, pp. 6-7; «Thinking by defining borders allows specialists and experts to achieve excellent results in their fields and to cooperate effectively in non-complex fields of knowledge, especially in those that concern the functioning of artificial machines; but their logic extends the inhuman constraints and mechanisms of the

and all the involved interlocutors are supposed to be willing to listen to each other, sharing opinions in view of a further and non-immediate goal, avoiding both overlapping and saturation, deriving from a reductionist attitude. On the other hand, all the knowledge involved - and here I am thinking specifically of philosophy, i.e. philosophers - must question itself on its own epistemological status and on the cultural and educational task that it has to perform in itself and in the present time by facing the pressing demands of a context which must be responded.

The academic context in which I work - a degree program dedicated to educators and pedagogues, in which pedagogy, sociology and psychology dominate, with scientific approaches of an eminently operational and methodological profile, where philosophy is given a minimal space - is certainly an interesting cross-section to analyse the needs and demands of reality, exploring possible cracks allowing to penetrate the specific 'gift' of philosophy. In fact, the interest in theory and the perception of its value in the educational pathways of care and education professionals are becoming increasingly weaker or rare in the students I deal with, reflecting a certain unreflective persuasion concerning the role of 'non-functional' knowledge, which prevails in today's culture.

On the other hand, it is precisely in striving to respond to the need to legitimise and redefine the qualitatively exclusive and irreplaceable contribution of philosophy that I see a number of opportunities: making the formative role of philosophical reflection in the personal and professional life of the human being, whatever his or her situation, come to the fore, and bringing out the issue of teaching philosophy, or rather teaching how to philosophise, as an unexpressed question, which, however, cannot be avoided because it is inherent in the very nature of philosophising.

## 2. Issues at stake and reasons behind them

It seems quite clear that knowing how to philosophise means not only possessing and governing a specific knowledge, but also and indissolubly embodying a certain approach to reality and life. Accordingly, Fabbrichesi argues that one must speak of 'philosophical life', while Foucault refers to philosophy as praxis or 'the totality of its practices'<sup>8</sup>. The meaning of these delicate claims needs to be clarified, all the more so nowadays, when 'cultural policy' promotes the need for innovation in ways that frequently appear hastily and uncritically justified purposes and instruments to foster philosophical learning.

I think we can schematically frame the problem in these terms. On the one hand, political decision-makers, primarily at European level and consequently at national level<sup>9</sup>, define guidelines and cultural standards that must be followed by the educational

---

artificial machine to society and human relations, and their deminimising, mechanistic, quantitative, formalist vision ignores, conceals or dissolves all that is subjective, affective, free, creative, *ivi*, p. 7, nota 3.

<sup>8</sup> R. Fabbrichesi, *Cosa si fa quando si fa filosofia*, Raffello Cortina, Milan 2017, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> It is not possible to reconstruct here the complete development pathway of the guidelines in the field of education developed by the European bodies and elsewhere; by way of example, I would like to point out a few significant stages: the *Bologna Process* that started in 1999 and then converged in 2007 in the definition of the so-called *Dublin Descriptors* (<http://www.processodibologna.it/documenti/Doc/Pubblicazioni/PROGETTAZIONE%20DELLA%20DIDATTICA%20UNIVERSITARIA%20PER%20RISULTATI%20DI%20APPRENDIMENTO.pdf> consulted on 12.12.2022); the *Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning of the European Parliament and of the Council* of 18 December 2006 updated on 22 May 2018 ([https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)) consulted on 12.12.2022); the document promoted by the European Commission in 2008 on the third mission of University *Green Paper. Fostering and Measuring 'Third Mission' in Higher Education Institution* (<https://repositorio-aberto.up.pt/bitstream/10216/118583/2/311212.pdf> consulted on 12.12.2022). These policy statements can be found in the more recent 2030 *Agenda* in which the United Nations sets out 17 goals to be pursued over the next decade for the sustainable development of the planet, the fourth goal concerning quality education (<https://unric.org/it/agenda-2030/> consulted 12.12.2022).

institutions, mainly by training their workers - the teachers. On the other hand, in an academic context, planning and concrete action are entrusted to methodologists with a predominantly pedagogical and psychological background, or to figures with a highly technological background, without any real dialogue with those who possess those epistemic competences - I am referring specifically to philosophers – from which the innovative processes originate. Finally, mistrust and reluctance prevail among philosophers, not only with regards to the introduction of innovative factors in the teaching practice, but first and more profoundly the propensity to consider communication as an inessential and not theoretically pertinent issue, a sort of false problem which can be resolved in the act *tout court* of philosophising, precisely because after all 'communication was born with philosophy' or 'as didactics of philosophy'<sup>10</sup>.

In my opinion, not only is the future of philosophy at stake here, but first and foremost its present, meaning its cultural and educational role, the direction it is taking on or may take on in the future. This is not an 'abstract' problem, detached from everyday life, but a very concrete one, because this vision is underpinned by and influences the choices made by individuals, which are all the more decisive if they are political decision-makers or men and women involved in such sectors of society and of the professional world impacting the lives of many other people. In fact, I am convinced that many of the social and political ideas we are both creators and victims of are rooted in a kind of 'anorexia of thought' whose causes and perpetrators cannot be easily identified, their treatment directly challenging philosophers.

In fact, I believe that a specific form of intellectual charity<sup>11</sup>, which the philosopher cannot and must not avoid, is to identify the faults of his own time, to take them on and respond to them. More than other men of culture, the philosopher possesses the resources to 'stand' in finiteness and limitation, precisely because of his tension towards the infinite and fullness, a tension that would not exist without a profound awareness of the truth of the human condition and the need for the untiring restlessness of intelligence.

I would therefore like to propose below some reflections that, moving from the surface - that is to say, from what is observed in the daily experience of relationships and teaching in particular - go down to the depths of phenomena, trying to grasp their genesis, and then go back up to the surface to observe them with a sharper gaze, making it possible to decide the appropriate guidelines for acting with initiative and responsibility, in line with the current difficult moment, whose factuality is inescapable but not ineluctable.

### 3. A real experience of philosophising

The document *Guidelines for the learning of philosophy in the knowledge society*, drawn up in October 2017 by a group of experts appointed by the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR), had the aim of "proposing the renewal of the teaching of philosophy in schools and the diffusion of philosophical learning as an opportunity for all" with the intention of "relaunching the debate on the role of the educational and cultural function of philosophy"<sup>12</sup>. As already pointed out<sup>13</sup>, the fact that the document was drafted by several hands together with its programmatic nature have left some significant assumptions unargued and therefore implicitly assumed, namely the reasons making a change opportune or necessary and the factors justifying the proposed framework and

---

<sup>10</sup> C. La Rocca, *L'esperienza filosofica*, Postfazione a A. Modugno, *Filosofia e didattica universitaria. Un progetto di ricerca per l'acquisizione di competenze*, Carocci, Rome 2017, pp. 197-207, p. 197.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. M.A. Raschini, *Responsabilità storica della filosofia*, Marsilio, Venice 2001, pp. 25-33.

<sup>12</sup> MIUR, *Orientamenti per l'apprendimento della filosofia nella società della conoscenza (Guidelines for the learning of philosophy in the knowledge society)*, October 2017, pp. 4-5.

<sup>13</sup> Let me point out the extensive and rich discussion on *Orientamenti (Guidelines)* found in issue 40 (May 2018) of *Philosophical Communication*

objectives. But it is precisely here that I believe we should dwell, or rather it is on this point that questions should be raised and the space for reflection should be widened.

In order to understand whether innovation is opportune or necessary - given that I do not think that the 'new' is to be desired as such - one might well ask what the purpose of innovation is, and thus the need underlying the demand for innovation still - and always! - questions the constitutive core of philosophical experience and what makes it generate humanity in man. Arguably, this question must be constantly reopened, both because of the inexhaustible repetition of every philosophical question - its purpose not resolving itself into definitive or defining solutions, but making us aware of the distance to the solution - and because every period requires a reformulation of that same question and itineraries of investigation and reflection that are in line with its needs.

Therefore, being in the present means grasping the bewilderment regarding what truly and integrally characterises the human being, the increasingly acute difficulty of relating with the other, even in the paradoxically excessive availability and power of means of communication, the diffusion among young people of a fragmentary culture, which can be quickly and immediately acquired and enjoyed, being valued according to the benefits in terms of performance and professional success. Such a picture does not saturate reality, but I believe it photographs its dominant profile. What is then the task of philosophy? What constituent element must be brought to light so as to intercept the profound needs of this time, being both a critical conscience of the current lacerations, deviations, defections from the truth of man, and knowledge capable of exercising the 'art of mending'<sup>14</sup>, of leading us back onto the main roads and rekindling the desire for integrity?

Clearly, these questions require a much broader exploration than the one of this paper: I will only mention a few elements that I consider most crucial today. Firstly, knowing how to constantly self - question, an expression of the Socratic commitment to 'give an account - to others and to oneself - of saying and doing, of every certainty and every private and public decision'<sup>15</sup>. The philosophical question – characterised by thinking bearing in mind the ultimate aims<sup>16</sup>, the search for the principle, the disposition to inner excavation<sup>17</sup> – implies taking life on first-hand, reflecting on it and relating to it and its demands. On this point, Fabbrichesi states that all philosophers cannot but agree: philosophising "means freeing oneself from the cramps of language and thought"<sup>18</sup>, which is an exercise in initiative and responsibility, because it implies reflexively and affectively taking charge of oneself<sup>19</sup>. In fact, in the course of its history "philosophy has elaborated categories to understand and study that 'I' which returns to reflect on itself" to respond to the need of every human being, especially when growing up, to "seek himself and define himself as unique"<sup>20</sup>. " This reflection takes place within different relational levels, namely in the inner dialogue - "voiceless dialogue of the ego with itself" that makes men "questioning beings"<sup>21</sup> – and in the relationship with the other, in the context of an encounter, through the "concrete face of another individual"<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, the specific aspect of philosophising, as a gaze aspiring to totality, is to stand in partiality but leading each part back to totality

---

<sup>14</sup> Cf. L. Mortari, *Filosofia della cura*, Raffaello Cortina, Milan 2015, p. 35.

<sup>15</sup> R. De Monticelli, *Il dono dei vincoli. Per leggere Husserl*, Garzanti, Milan 2018, p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. S. Belvedere, *La comunicazione filosofica*, Rubettino, Soveria Mannelli 2008, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. M.F. Sciacca, *Filosofia e metafisica*, Marzorati, Milano 1962, 2 voll., vol. I, p. 100.

<sup>18</sup> R. Fabbrichesi, *Cosa si fa quando si fa filosofia?*, cit., p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *ivi*, p. 29.

<sup>20</sup> S. Belvedere, *La comunicazione filosofica*, cit., p. 106.

<sup>21</sup> H. Arendt, *The life of the mind*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York-London 1978, translated by G. Zanetti, *La vita della mente*, il Mulino, Bologna 2009, pp. 146 e 157.

<sup>22</sup> R. Spaemann, *Personen. Versuche über den Unterschied zwischen "etwas" und "jemand"*, J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung, Stuttgart 1998<sup>2</sup>, translated by L. Allodi, *Persone. Sulla differenza tra "qualcosa" e "qualcuno"*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2005, p. 23.

<sup>23</sup>: this intellectual attitude is so decisive for life! I believe it is, in itself, a valid tool to stem all forms of reductionism and scepticism, nowadays not only rampant, but, more seriously, assumed - often unknowingly - as entirely natural approaches to reality, and therefore unquestionable<sup>24</sup>.

In spite of the brief overview, philosophising can certainly be seen as a solid buttress against the drowsiness of the reflexive and critical disposition, a deterrent to speed and simplification to nth degree, a form of resistance or containment to the approximation, fragmentation, and the claim of control and functionalisation that the unconscious or disorderly use of technology can induce<sup>25</sup>.

#### 4. Research and teaching practice experiences

The above-mentioned issues have accompanied my research over the recent years, being partly a motive, partly an outcome and a new stimulus, making me aware of an important civil issue that in my opinion today challenges those who are professionally involved in philosophy, those who not only should have the fate of humanity at heart more than others, but who possess privileged instruments to serve humankind.

The context in which I mainly operate is a degree program that trains educators and pedagogues, professional figures, where philosophy is considered an additional rather than a core training area. Perhaps precisely because of these characteristics which are at first less favourable to the teaching and learning of philosophy, it has been and is both a field of intervention and a particular and interesting observatory. In fact, my research constantly has to focus not only on what epistemic content should be offered to very cognitively inhomogeneous students, but also on how to convey it so that it can work in their effective learning and can be perceived as educational on a personal and professional level. The research project - which began in 2013 and is still ongoing intertwining action-research and metaphilosophy - has developed thanks to the collaboration both of several of my senior students and for some years now of colleagues from the University of Bari <sup>26</sup>. The

---

<sup>23</sup> Raschini states that philosophy « tends to reconstruct the totality of reality within the unity of the principle, starting from the subject's experience of reality itself, to include, along with it, the subject »: M.A. Raschini, *Dialettica e poiesi nel pensiero di Rosmini*, Marsilio, Venice 1996, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> In this regard, De Monticelli speaks of two forms of scepticism, calling them "postmodern relativism and reductive, or even eliminative materialism. The former is still today (at least in the western world), if not the dominant philosophy of culture, then at least the dominant mentality in the broadest circles of knowledgeable people; while the latter is ultimately the dominant natural philosophy, especially with regard to man and his mind. Both are forms of scepticism concerning the things immediately given on the horizon of everyday life, including ourselves, human beings": R. De Monticelli, *Il dono dei vincoli*, cit., p. 112. Cf. for further reflections on the topic D. Marconi, *Per la verità. Relativismo e filosofia*, Einaudi, Turin 2007; G. Maddalena, G. Gili, *Chi ha paura della post-verità? Effetti collaterali di una parabola culturale*, Marietti, Genova 2021<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. J.-M. Besnier, *L'homme simplifié. Le syndrome de la touche étoile*, Librairie Arthème Fayard, Paris 2012, translated by Davide Frontini, *L'uomo semplificato*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2013; Tagliapietra observes that technology 'is not the cause, but rather the instrument allowing us to go faster and faster. It is because we want to go faster and faster that the speed of technology is never enough for us'. However, technology is not a need immanent to human nature, but rather an ideological and intellectual necessity: A. Tagliapietra, *Esperienza. Filosofia e storia di un'idea*, Raffaello Cortina, Milan 2017, p. 64.

<sup>26</sup> The project started from a research traineeship on the level of reception and implementation of competence-based teaching in high school: cf. A. Modugno, *Filosofia e didattica. Apprendimento e acquisizione di competenze a scuola*, Carocci, Rome 2014. Then, it focused on the teaching of philosophy in the university context: cf. A. Modugno, *Filosofia e didattica universitaria. Un progetto di ricerca per l'acquisizione di competenze*, Carocci, Rome 2017 and G. de Mita, A. Modugno, *Insegnare filosofia in università. Riflessioni teoretiche verso nuovi scenari metodologici*, Franco Angeli, Milan 2020, as well as various articles that account for specific aspects of the research and/or its development, among which I highlight: A. Modugno, *Il servizio formativo della filosofia*, in 'Paradigmi', no. 3, year XXXV, September-December 2017, pp. 181-195; A. Modugno, *L'attuale esigenza di apprendere filosofia*, in "Giornale di Metafisica", no. 2, year XL, 2018, pp. 656-663; G. D'Elia, G. de Mita, G. Giordano, A. Modugno, *Didattica e*

project has focused on the exploration of various theoretical issues, experimenting with participatory teaching methods and activities, always proposing direct encounters with philosophical texts, emphasising the personal involvement of the students, their participation, dialogue and mutual confrontation.

Although it is not possible to comprehensively examine all the ways in which I translated these factors on the operational level, I would like to emphasise that it was not the mere application of a series of techniques or methodologies that are particularly 'fashionable' today in the action research of experimental pedagogy, i.e. an extrinsic operation. Rather, the techniques and methodologies were functional in allowing those who accepted the challenge and had the courage to 'come out of the closet'<sup>27</sup>, not to maintain the sort of anonymity that a crowded university lecture hall often allows, to experience something new and unexpected in philosophising. When called upon personally to penetrate the philosophical questions rather than merely passively receiving them, perceiving the issues raised by Plato, Descartes, Kant or others as their own questions, not only did the students acquire a new or deeper awareness of those questions, but of themselves as intelligent, sensible, volitional subjects.

They discovered, either for the first time or with an unprecedented insight, a desirable tension that helps to break out of mental laziness, to fathom reality, to broaden perspectives, to take responsibility for coherence between thought and action.

Before proposing a few experiences from among those tried and tested, I feel it is appropriate to briefly clarify the correlation between the constituent factors of philosophising and the methodological choices made. I therefore propose a synoptic table in which I also include the Dublin Descriptors, focusing on those relating to the first cycle of the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) degree.

---

*filosofia in dialogo per l'università*, in "Comunicazione filosofica", no. 42, May 2019, pp. 28-44; A. Gresele, A. Modugno, A. Revelli, *L'esperienza filosofica nei corsi di studio universitari. Insegnamento e ricerca a servizio delle professioni*, in "Comunicazione filosofica", no. 44, April 2020, pp. 160-170; A. Modugno, *La comunicazione didattica. Forme, esigenze e opportunità relazionali*, in "Comunicazione filosofica" no. 46, May 2021, pp. 40-53; A. Bongioanni, A. Marci, A. Modugno, *Sperimentare la riflessività critica: questioni e metodologie nella e dalla filosofia*, in "Comunicazione filosofica", n. 48, maggio 2022, pp. 22-40 .

<sup>27</sup> Certainly not all students show the same reception and adherence to a stimulating and captivating teaching and learning activity, also requiring commitment, generosity and courage, which are not for everyone. In many cases, the relationship established with philosophy - often with the philosophy teacher - in high school clearly made the difference; in fact, frequently the students with no previous philosophical training or those who were adult and more mature, maybe with some previous teaching experience, are those who benefited most from the teaching activity and appreciated it.

<i>Dublin Descriptors</i>	<i>Activities or techniques</i>	<i>Factors of effectiveness in the philosophical experience</i>
<i>Knowledge and understanding</i> Demonstrating a systematic understanding of a field of study, even about some current issues	Identifying implicit questions in a text; identifying issues, theses and arguments in a philosophical text and/or situation or context	Focusing on issues (problematizing), grasping their connections with the life context or with knowledge
<i>Applying knowledge and understanding</i> Demonstrating a professional approach to work or vocation, and having competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study;	<i>Think-Pair-Share</i>  Small group discussion of texts and issues	Clarifying and verifying personal beliefs; stating one's position, discussing
<i>Making judgements</i> Ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgments that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues	Study of a case study	Taking a position, operationally translating one's convictions, taking responsibility, identifying strategic choices
<i>Communication skills</i> Communicating information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences	Discussion and debate	Elaborating and presenting a thesis, constructing and proposing well-founded and valid arguments, listening to the other's point of view and being able to rethink one's own positions if necessary
<i>Learning skills</i> Having developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.	Drafting of texts and action plans	Interconnecting issues and contents, developing arguments, building projects and action strategies

As it can be noticed, there is correlation and interdependence between the skills and attitudes that describe the personal profile at the end of the first cycle degree and the processes implemented by those who experience philosophy, promoted in a linear and coherent manner through certain techniques and activities suggested by experimental pedagogy. Identifying and posing questions, self-questioning, reflecting, taking a position, arguing, proposing strategies and courses of action are the constant pillars of my lessons, implemented not only as a *modus operandi* of linear communication in the classroom, but also required when students interact with me and with each other and in some brief activities to be carried out at home, which give me the opportunity to further monitor the students' learning process, while allowing them to prepare for assessment and above all to acquire self-awareness and understanding of what philosophising means, being involved first-hand.

The table should ideally contain a further column specifying, in an essential manner, the type of learner. In fact, in my opinion, the methodologies, techniques and tools chosen for the learning activity 'work' if there is coherence between the training potential of

philosophy and the reality of the human being. Although it is not possible to explore this complex issue here, I believe that the learning situation best corresponding to the profile of each person's being - especially that of a young adult - is the one in which individual activity and confrontation with peers are combined, particularly in the small-group dynamics that are increasingly part of professional contexts, underlying the need to acquire communication skills.

The intra-personal and inter-personal dimensions together demand and promote the use of intelligence and freedom, as well as the reflexivity intended as listening to oneself and to the other self. Therefore, my lectures are characterised by the alternation of brief initial moments of personal and silent reflection on a question or on a short text, followed by small group discussion and confrontation on the subject. This requires and allows students to express their own positions and justify them, listening to the reasons of the other, relating them to their own, in order to confirm or modify them, partially or totally. At the end of individual and small-group reflection, the general session allows for a broader sharing of the various positions under my guidance, which gives me the opportunity to highlight the significance and relevance of the aspects that have emerged, correcting any conceptual, lexical or methodological errors, and relaunching new questions or aspects to be further explored. This way of working - extremely simple but demanding in terms of organisation and management, particularly if the number of students is high, as in my lectures – allows several levels and factors to intertwine with surprising fruitfulness.

Firstly, the properly theoretical level: proposing a question to the students or asking them to identify the question(s) posed by a philosophical text - but also by a situation, a scene from a film or an extract of a literary work - means giving primacy to the question over the answer. This does not mean that there are no answers, but rather emphasises that if thought is not exercised in the first person, it will be difficult to translate it into responsible action or to read facts and actions responsibly. The ability to 'endure in asking', not indulging in the haste to resolve the problematic nature of human thought<sup>28</sup>, is decisive for learning to 'ask and argue'. As De Monticelli points out, the question operates in the "aspiration to 'see', from which philosophy, the love of wisdom, takes its name, the aspiration to verify, to provide a reason or justification for every action we are faced with, or otherwise suspend our consent to it".<sup>29</sup>

A second element of considerable relevance is the direct dialogue with the philosophers, through their texts and the ideas they put forward: the mediation of the teacher or other scholars does not disappear, but fades into the background, despite the difficulty given by the historical distance from the authors – from a lexical, cultural point of view, etc. -, in order to privilege commitment and responsibility over listening and personal involvement, and to situate the clarifying guidance of the teacher or other scholars in the context of the examined authors only afterwards. What I would like to underline is that one cannot experience philosophy without 'inwardly listening' to the authors, without trying to experience them as 'contemporaries', i.e., by letting them speak directly, and without the teacher's reworking, which even minimally constitutes a thread. This seems exactly what Fabbrichesi intends to recall when referring to Plato's metaphors in the narration of the allegory of the cave. The philosopher does not give solutions but promotes actions to find them, teaching "to loosen the limbs and strengthen the body tone with the gymnastics of the mind [...] to move the limbs correctly with painful postural gymnastics and to free them for new actions"<sup>30</sup>.

Evidently, thinking requires the mobilisation<sup>31</sup> of processes and skills, and at the same time develops and strengthens them: some are properly inherent to philosophising (hard

---

<sup>28</sup> Cf. M.A. Raschini, *Concretezza e astrazione*, Venice, Marsilio 2000, pp. 26-28.

<sup>29</sup> R. De Monticelli, *Il dono dei vincoli*, cit., p. 53.

<sup>30</sup> R. Fabbrichesi, *Cosa si fa quando si fa filosofia?*, cit., pp. 6-7.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. D. Maccario, *A scuola di competenze. Verso un nuovo modello didattico*, SEI, Turin 2012.



skills), others are proper to human thinking and acting (soft skills). Philosophising requires and makes use of certain essential capacities that to some extent must already be present in the subject<sup>32</sup>, it is ignited and takes shape thanks to the ability to problematise, to take an informed position in the face of questions and to know how to argue their validity and justification; it also contributes to the dissemination of an attitude towards thought - whatever its object - and action - in whatever sphere it is carried out - that is reflective and conscious.

Finally, I think this way of working may also be considered as the seed of a research or working methodology, and perhaps this aspect connects the theoretical level with the pedagogical-existential one. Questioning reality, which primarily means perceiving the questions it poses to human thought, and sharing with others one's own point of observation on situations, interpreting them from a broader perspective, certainly add considerable value to the sphere of life and work, whatever the profession may be. In my opinion, direct and active participation is a peculiar and determining factor of learning, not only of specific fields of knowledge, but of being a personal subject. The exercise of freedom, the involvement of the emotional-affective dimension, the relationship with colleagues, the experience of one's own limits - difficulties, mistakes, partiality - and the desire for fulfilment lead to a more conscious experiential knowledge of oneself.

Finally, in some key teaching moments, I have recently included a tool that I believe enhances precisely these pedagogical-existential factors: metacognitive reflection<sup>33</sup>, its aim being to provide students with additional opportunities to implement reflexivity by experiencing it as a resource both for themselves and for others. This is in fact a further enhancement of the questioning and confrontation among peers, which shifts the focus from epistemic content to other factors at stake in philosophical reflection - interest, strategic resources, emotions connected to the relational aspects of methodologies - that tend to remain in the background but are in fact decisively implicated in learning. Reflecting metacognitively on thoughts, actions and emotions supports the rooting of reflexivity as a stable disposition and can foster a greater awareness of one's thinking, acting and feeling, assess its quality, confirm it or direct it in a more valid and adequate manner.

## 5. Operational suggestions, between constraints and resources

I would like to conclude with some reflections on perspective: these years of research, for me a truly stimulating learning experience and challenge, have persuaded me of the need of expanding experiments as mine, both by increasing in numbers and by moving to other academic contexts, where philosophers graduate, but also where philosophy teaching is not (yet) envisaged. Firstly, the interest of philosophers in the communication of philosophy must grow - without thinking that exploring its didactics is a non-problem or that it may run the risk of losing epistemological autonomy in relation to pedagogy - and secondly, there should be a contextual *governance* action able to 'systematise' some still sporadic initiatives. I believe that both factors can be promoted by the 'networking' of sensitive and interested researchers, by a collaboration and research interconnecting different universities, also including high schools: an excellent opportunity for training and growth even for secondary school teachers is to make their teaching a conscious object of research,

---

<sup>32</sup> Cf. A. Modugno, *Filosofia e didattica*, cit., p. 90: «being able to grasp the informative content of a text, [...] being able to identify and understand the meanings of information, being able to convey the information learned in one's own terms, being able to ask open-ended or closed-ended questions, being able to make connections between different pieces of information, being able to rethink the information acquired in a personal and autonomous manner ».

<sup>33</sup> For some essential information about metacognition see. C. Cornoldi, *Metacognizione e apprendimento*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1995.

which will result in an increased effectiveness of their work, while rendering a valuable service to those who work in the academic context.

It is the task and responsibility of those who teach philosophy to 're-envision' the purposes for teaching philosophy, which means first and foremost to return to a profound awareness of the reasons and the objectives that make philosophy a discipline to be learned: only in this light it is possible to think about 'what' and 'how', which can only be founded if they take into account a living tradition to be explored personally and vitally. Moreover, I believe that another important task implies a serious theoretical reflection on the anthropological aspects of the methodologies and reflections experimental pedagogy has offered in the recent decades: this is a concrete way of living the integration of knowledge, a specific contribution that philosophy can offer to this specific field - as it can to others - but at the same time a way of not shirking the commitment to convey the philosophical experience more appropriately.