What about Thinking?

The Inquisitive Mind and Philosophical Talent

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The purpose of this article is to show—after a short elaboration of the history, goals, accomplishments and dissemination of P4C—that philosophical talent is an important precondition for scientific education and training. Detecting, stimulating and fostering philosophical thinking should offer important pathways as a basic preparation for scientific careers.

Introduction

Philosophy has been and still is considered as the mother of all sciences. Why is that and what does it tell us about the nature of philosophy? This statement implies that when a mother gives birth to a child, the mother is considered as the cause for the existence of a living being. Respecting this causal view, this means that philosophy can be considered as the cause of all sciences. Furthermore this means that consequences can be defined by their causes. What defines the nature of this cause then? In other words: what constitutes the nature of philosophy as a cause?

The classical answer is wonder. Wondering is expressed by the questions 'why', 'what' and 'how'. The moment we ask why, that very moment we are aware of a difference in position between ourselves and the object of our question. Questioning is only possible when a distance between the wonderer and the object of wonder is experienced. This distance or gap is a precondition and is a major characteristic of the process of philosophical thinking. The fish is the last one to realise it lives in the water. This is only possible because he never can differentiate from the water. The fish can never wonder because it is a 'centric' creature. And wondering is typical for an eccentric attitude[1] and this attitude results in questioning.

The importance of questioning is too often underestimated. Questions are the instruments of our inquisitive mind. Questions are the tools to bridge the gap between the asker and the answerer. Questions are like can openers: they open up closed contents.

Question makes a mute and silent world audible. Not all questions are philosophical as not all aspects of our inquisitive mind are aspects of philosophical wonderment.

1. The Phaedrus

"Dear Phaedrus, whereto and wherefrom?"[2] This is the beginning of one of the most beautiful dialogues of Plato. In fact, it is the only dialogue of Plato which begins with a question.

At first sight this question seems to be very common and plain. It is a classical way to start a conversation with a stranger. Yet, in my opinion, it is one of the most important questions one can ask: it is an attempt to find out about the identity of a person.[3] Here one is trying to identify a person by mapping what lies behind and ahead of him. Identity here has to be understood as what lies on the intersection between a product and a project. He is a product in the sense that the 'wherefrom' is the sum of all experiences and events that determine his past. The 'whereto' is a project in the sense that he is a projection based on his past towards the future. We are who we are, established by those two movements: past and future. This question, actually, helps to establish the coordinates by which we can measure a person. It is a kind of geographical process.

In the Phaedrus Socrates meets Phaedrus who just witnessed a speech of Lysias in town. Socrates is curious about the content

of this speech and lures him to a pleasant spot:

> Soc.: Lead on, and look out for a place in which we can sit down.
>
> Phaedr. Do you see the tallest plane-tree in the distance?
>
> Soc. Yes.
>
> Phaedr. There are shade and gentle breezes, and grass on which we may either sit or lie down.
>
> Soc. Move forward.

This second dialogue marks the importance—in order to establish the identity of a person—to look for a secluded spot and to make time to 'know' somebody. Knowing a person takes time and space.

Socrates is well aware of what he desires from Phaedrus and even apologizes: "Very true, my good friend; and I hope that you will excuse me when you hear the reason, which is, that I am a lover of knowledge, and the men who dwell in the city are my teachers, and not the trees or the country."

The Socrates-question is a similar question one asks when one meets a stranger who is travelling: "Where are you from and where are you going to?" The answer could be: "I am from Belgium and I am travelling to a conference in Japan." Those are factual answers. But Socrates' question differs from it. It is a question about learning who somebody is. It is a question which expresses concern, curiosity and interest in a person. It is also a question which requires time and space.

Through this question a stranger becomes a person. The it-object becomes a thou-subject.[4] The stranger finds himself in the centre of interest and gets in the process of this 'knowing' a value. He evolves from stranger to a 'known' person.

2. The Socratic Method

Socrates lived from 464 till 399 BC in Greece. He stimulated people to investigate their own major life-questions not on the basis of book-knowledge or assessed theories but on the basis of their own life-experience. By looking together for the specific rules and values counting in specific cases he tried to find general rules applicable to general codes of conduct.

Originally, as deduced form the dialogues of Plato, the Socratic method consists of two opposite movements: the maieutic and the elenchus.

Maieutic: means midwifery; by the art of questioning, giving 'birth' to ideas that are already present but not yet manifested. It is a constructive process.

Elenchus: means shameful, being in doubt; by trying to elicit insight one often must admit—to their shame—that he/she doesn't quite know the answer. The expression is derived from the Laches, another dialogue of Plato—where Socrates meets two generals. He asks which quality they admire most in soldiers. The generals promptly respond that they admire the quality of bravery. Socrates then asks about the nature of bravery. At the end the two generals must shamefully admit that they don't quite know what bravery means.

In a Socratic dialogue participants start off to look for answers to questions about the deeper meanings of their actions. Questions like: "What is freedom?", "What is fairness?" can investigate cases where topics as Freedom and Fairness raised problems in the experiences of one of the participants. Socrates was convinced that underneath our experiences wisdom was hidden which could be uncovered by using our own mind. He gave us a method to stimulate and act out this process.

2. 1 Characteristics of the Socratic dialogue
Two components are vital for the Socratic dialogue.

a. The Socratic attitude
This attitude is based on one of Socrates quotes: "I know that I do know nothing!"[5] This is a compulsory condition for any

Socratic dialogue. It means that the facilitator never interferes in the content of the dialogue by withholding any opinion he might have concerning the subject of investigation.

Socrates did that for strategic purposes. By not interfering in the content, by deferring any judgment, he tried to achieve three goals:

A so-called 'open space' is created.

In many occasions participants in dialogues are aware of a right—wrong context. For example children in classroom dialogues know when the teacher asks questions there is always a specific answer to be expected. The answer can be either right or wrong. Another example in social work is when a social worker attempts a dialogue with someone in need. The latter expects questioning in order to resolve specific problems.

In both cases a specific role is expected. In the first the role of the teacher is the role of 'knowing' and the children are playing the role of 'not-knowing.' In the second example the social worker plays the role of educator who tries to convey certain insights. The one in need plays a submissive role and lets himself be guided in a 'helping' context.

By creating this open space no given expectations at all are present. This very often utters the question: "What do you want?" The facilitator never replies but questions again. Obviously this may sometime cause a climate of uneasiness. But still there is an invitation for mental inquiry. This open space is needed for starting new or original thinking.[6] This means thinking in a substantial way. It involves substantial rationality, which requires looking at the fundamental basis of problems. It doesn't involve instrumental rationality as mentioned in the two given examples which means problem-solving thinking such as: "How am I to get out of this situation?" or "What do I have to say in order to get what I want?"

Parrèsia[7] is stimuated.

Parrèsia is a strange concept. Literally translated form Greek it means: "The one who uses Parrèsia is someone who expresses what he thinks; he doesn't hide anything, but reveals everything what is on his mind. He is expected to formulate his thoughts in a complete and precise manner to make sure his listeners can exactly understand what he is trying to say." Foucault describes important characteristics of parrèsia. Parrèsia involves courage because it is always directed from bottom to top and from inside to outside. From bottom to top because the one who is addressed often has a superior position, such as the counsellor who addresses his boss. It is a form of criticism which goes along with courage, because it could endanger the own position. Parrèsia is therefore something which should be present at all times amongst friends. Parrèsia is 'a verbal activity in which the speaker expresses his own relation to truth and risks his life because he recognises the duty to express the truth in order to help and to correct the others.'[8] A friend using parrèsia with another friend does this in order to help him. Therefore Foucault relates this to care for oneself. It goes with a feeling of liberty and restores a certain balance.

Parrèsia is also a movement from inside to outside, because it requires careful thinking about what is going to be said, about that what will be brought to the attention of the other.

Mental room is created.

By withholding his judgment he creates mental room for himself to control the process of inquiry. He becomes responsible for the development of the process of inquiry. And—by this—the responsibility of the content of the dialogue shifts towards the participants. Furthermore the facilitator can displace himself in the mental world of the one who is questioned. By this he can 'learn' from the other, which is a very important disposition for a social educator or worker.

b. The art of questioning

Questioning is a very important tool in Socratic dialogue. It is an art, because it shapes the form of the dialogue. Socratic questioning differs a lot from police-questioning, although there are some similarities.

A description should clarify this.

- Start with a statement which seems to make sense. For example: "You should always speak the truth."
- Ask about the meaning of this statement. For example: "What do you mean by truth?"
- Can you think of a situation where this statement isn't true? For example: "What if by telling a lie you can save somebody's life?"
- If so then the original statement must be false or at least inaccurate. For example: "Life has a greater value than the truth."
- The original statement must be adjusted in order to fit the exception. For example: "You should always tell the truth unless there are vital exceptions."
- Repeat this process with new questioning about the meaning and exceptions of this corrected statement.

2．2　Actual forms of Socratic dialogue[9]

Socratic dialogue as described in the texts of Plato remained—as a form of so-called practical philosophy—mainly an activity that only occurred in literature. Nothing is known how those dialogues really happened and under which circumstances.[10] But since the start of the previous century actual forms of Socratic dialogues where developed and applied in many settings such as education and other organisations (profit and non-profit).

a. The Nelson approach[11]

Leonard Nelson (1882−1927) was a German philosopher who belonged to the neo-Kantian movement. Besides the fact that he was Professor in philosophy at the University of Berlin he was also active in the socialist movement in Germany. One of the topics (still is) in the socialist movement is education of the workers. For this reason he founded a Socratic school in Melsungen (near Kassel in Germany, 1922). The school was closed in 1932 by the German National-Socialists.

Important to know is that he developed a practical application method of the Socratic dialogue, which was adapted later on and is still used in many settings. Nowadays it is applied in organisations to resolve second-level problems.[12] In Belgium and the Netherlands (also abroad) more and more Socratic dialogues are organised in order to clarify those kinds of problems.

Socratic dialogue can be used:

- To clarify difficult and always returning practice-problems;
- To train skills which stimulate a more effective way of cooperation: asking questions, mark out questions of investigation, suspension of judgment.
- To make space in a conversation, to strive for mutual understanding, investigation of disagreements.
- To investigate fundamental problems such as: "What is the goal of our organisation? Or "Which values are indicative in our organisation?" Or "What is at stake in our profession?"

Skills that are trained:

- Is capable to formulate complex emotions and thoughts in a precise and clear way.
- Can deal with aspects of own dialogue-attitude such as impatience, tendencies of carrying out monologues, impulsivity, difficulties to listen etc.
- Learns more about alternative interpretations.
- Can displace himself in the reasoning of others.
- Can postpone the own judgment in order to investigate it.

b. The Lipman approach

Mathew Lipman, a former Professor of Philosophy of the Columbia University, created the I.A.P.C. (Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children)[13] in the early 1970 in New-Jersey, USA.

His observation as a professor was that his students weren' t able anymore to think critically and creatively. This puzzled him especially because other observations learned that young children (between age 4 and 6) were capable of asking questions and very often introduce philosophical problems. For example: "Mama where do I come from? Out of Mama's belly? Yes, but before that?" Or another example: "One day our cat had to be treated for flees. I warned my five year old daughter not to touch the cat because of the toxicity of the product. Very interested she asked where those flees came from. I answered that one day our cat went walking and met another cat with flees. Those fleas then jumped on our cat. Aha, she said, but five minutes later she came back and asked where the fleas from the other cat came from. I realised that she caught me with an infinity problem, because the fleas could be jumping from cat to cat and from where did the fleas come from before they jumped on the first cat?"

This form of thinking is primarily a form of philosophical thinking which Lipman defined as forms of creative and critical thinking. In that way any child in an early age performs philosophical skills but loses them as they grow older. One of the major reasons of the disappearance of those skills is the conventional educational system.

Therefore the IAPC developed a curriculum for schools in order to stimulate philosophical thinking. Lipman found out that philosophical thinking had a major influence in the formation of self-esteem. This self-esteem is major in the motivation for learning.

The IAPC also organised courses for teachers in order to develop their own philosophical skills in such a way that the educational system could be transformed in a more reflective way of teaching.

Since then many countries adopted his curriculum[14] and the Philosophy for Children programme (P4C) takes his way in the world.

Also the P4C-programme is considered worldwide as a method of educating democratic values and a way to deal with cultural, intellectual and social diversity. For that reason the UNESCO made an international declaration in 1998 in which all the countries in the world were asked to implement philosophy in their educational system.

In the eighties P4C received a new meaning as it was adopted in some Latin-American countries, as well as in Australia where it was applied in different social settings. Social workers and educators discovered that philosophy for children was beneficial for children in need. In fact the P4C-programme in the Latin-American countries is considered as a tool for intellectual emancipation. In many reports the method showed positive results which were later confirmed in some modest scientific researches and reports.

Where philosophical dialogues took place on a regular basis children and adolescent people showed:

* Increased respect for opinions of others;
* Increased tolerance for different opinions;
* Increased critical reasoning;
* Increased interest for many topics;
* Increased capability in formulating thoughts in a clear way;
* Increased cooperation;
* Increased self-esteem;
* Decreased fear for starting discussions and disagreements;
* Increased parrèsia;
* Increased critical and creative thinking skills.

3. The inquisitive mind

Strangely enough we all are born with an inquisitive mind. It is a natural gift, a quality, a talent. This inquisitive mind is the basis for philosophical questioning. We all have asked philosophical questions and we all agree that this is the basis for any inquisitive process. Why is it then that we have not a clear understanding about the characteristics of this philosophical talent for questioning? Why is it that we, although we attach much value to human, scientific and moral progress of mankind, we seldom foster, stimulate

and develop this philosophical curiosity?

The very obvious answer is that philosophical and therefore critical questioning is often considered as a subversive and unpleasant activity.

But still the main question remains unanswered: "What constitutes the philosophical nature of the inquisitive mind? Is there such a thing as Philosophical quality and Talent? In that respect I want to draw the attention at the PhD-thesis from Dr. Thecla Rondhuis called "Philosophical Talent. Empirical investigation into philosophical features of adolescents discourse." [15]

Let us first look at the starting views.

- Why do children and adolescents sometimes perform such authentic thinking patterns when dealing with philosophical questions?
- Is it based on a stable philosophical quality?
- Is it linked to personality traits, in other words: a (philosophical) talent?

- And if so, how could that be determined scientifically?
- Philosophical quality is strongly related to concepts of "philosophy", "philosophising" and "wisdom"

The general aim of her thesis is to clarify and define the concept of philosophical quality and talent. Once achieved she developed a quantitative and scientifically based test to measure this philosophical talent. In order to do so she defined clear and measurable indicators. Those indicators consists of six distinguishable components where oral utterances could be identified and categorised:

3.1 Indicators[16]

1. Indecisive thinking

This indicator refers to the discovery and awareness of ambiguities, contrasts, uncertainties. It is noticed in several verbal expressions such as: "It is difficult to say," "in principle but," "fundamentally".

2. Openness

This indicator is demonstrated in expressions of wonder. "It is a divergent thinking pattern."[17]

3. Tentative behaviour

A description of an attitude of trying-out. The inquisitive quality. It is consists of a more convergent thinking pattern.

4. Epistemic position

This show the attitude towards knowledge and experience. It demonstrates the awareness of critical gap between the speaker and his declarations: "I think that, I believe..."

5. Reasoning quality

Awareness of argumentation especially in if-then sentences. The use of 'thus' or 'so then'. The awareness that there is a fundamental difference between the form and the content of expression.

6. Anecdotal quality

Finding connections between real-life experiences and abstract ideas in both directions.

The definition of these indicators made it possible to measure philosophical talent. Obviously this may lead to some dispute because philosophical quality is represented as a quantitative defined item. This means that the typical "What is philosophy?" question only is answerable in terms psychological statements. This could lead to an awkward conclusion that either philosophy doesn't exist (when we follow the scientific reasoning that whatever isn't measurable doesn't exist) or that philosophy remains indefinable.

Anyway, based on this quantification paradigm, the definition of these indicators made it possible to express philosophical talent as an index on two levels:

Pq-index= individual performance of philosophical quality[18]

PQ-index= group performance; to check if generalised performances supersedes that of the group.

Dr. Rondhuis used these indexes to measure philosophical qualities among children and youngsters in three age-categories (between 11 and 19-years old), two educational levels (high-level, middle and low level) and among about 334 participants.

3．2 The results

The results were formulated as follows.

First the research showed that philosophy is a distinguishable domain of cognitive behaviour. One of the major qualities of philosophical thinking is that it is a form of divergent thinking, it expresses a strong relation to openness of experience an that it contains a strong rooting in rational beliefs.

Secondly it showed that philosophical talent is positively correlated with personality and educational level. The latter means that the degree of education has an significant influence on the performance of philosophical quality. This presupposes the influence of intellectual stimuli such as formulated in the theory of cultural deprivation[19] .

Thirdly there seems to be no correlation between pq, PQ and age. This is interesting because it shows that philosophical talent is truly a personal trait and that it is a stable quality.

Further—and this is surprising—there is a low—and therefore not significant correlation between pq and iq. This destroys the prejudice that only gifted people have high philosophical talents.

Finally there is no correlation between pq and the way people lead their lives—i.e. regular or irregular lives. This last conclusion is especially interesting for social workers.

Conclusion

Philosophical wonderment, thinking and talent as a precondition for inquisitiveness is surprisingly well defined in terms of openness to experience, rational beliefs, tentative behaviour, epistemic behaviour. The fact that these elements can very well be stimulated op programs and methodologies such as P4C and other Socratic methodologies means that philosophical talent and a research attitude have a lot in common and justifies any effort to foster and stimulate philosophical thinking. In fact the indicators can even help to screen future research talents.

Notes

1) PLESSNER, Helmut, *Philosophy of Organic Being* ("Stufen des Organischen", 1928). Plessner makes a distinction between centric and eccentric beings. The first (most of the animals) are centric, they have awareness and react from a central poit of view (they can observe and react). Human beings have an eccentric position because they have self-awareness. They can make statements about themselves. Interesting to know that some mammals have also eccentric characteristics such as dolphins, orca's, bonobo's and elephants.

2) The actual question is: "My dear Phaedrus, whence come you, and whither are you going?" But this seemed so corny.

3) In fact the Who-are-you-question is far more difficult to answer then a What-are-you-question.

4) See also *I and Thou* by Martin Buber, Touchstone Books, 1971. Original edition, 1924.

5) From the defence speech of Socrates in *Apology*

6) Original thinking means literally going back to its origin; it involves starting over. This disposition is necessary to gain real insights.

7) Michel Foucault, *Parrèsia, Open-hearted Speech and Truth* ("Parrèsiia, vrijmoedig spreken en waarheid," Boom, Amsterdam, Nederland, 2004. In English: "Fearless speech," MIT Press, 2001.)

8) Foucault, page 15.

9) There is also Philosophical consultancy, Philosophical café and Socratic intervision.

10) About many forms of practical philosophy in the ancient times and the reason why it stopped until now, read *Philosophy as a Way of Life* by Pierre Hadot (English translation of "Qu'est-ce que la philophie antique?," Gallimard, Paris, 1995.)

11) What follows is a brief description. There is a lot of literature available about these approaches.

12) A First-level problem is like: "How can we improve the quality of our customer related service?" A second-level problem would be: "What is quality?" or "Which presuppositions do we use in order to speak about quality?"

13) http://cehs.montclair.edu/academic/iapc/ , Montclair state University, New Jersey, USA

14) For an extensive list, look at http://www.icpic.org

15) Phd-thesis for Doctor in Psychology, University of Utrecht, The Netherlands, 2005, ISBN 90-393-4033-1

16) RONDHUIS, Thecla, 2005. You find an explicit description of indicators from p.58 to 62.

17) Id. P. 60.

18) Id. P. 76

19) Term defined by Reuben Feuerstein.

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【解説】

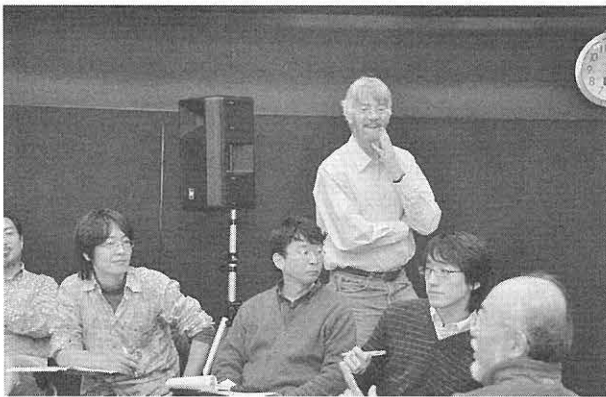　大学教育実践センターでは、2004年4月の設立以来、昨年度まで毎年、高等教育研究に関する多様な国際集会を開催してきた。昨年度は、以下のようなセミナーを実施した。

　第5回高等教育研究国際セミナー「思考筋を鍛える」ワークショップ／「P4Cを応用したインターラクティブな授業」レクチャー

　共催：大阪大学コミュニケーションデザインセンター、大阪大学理学研究科

　開催日時／場所：2008年11月10日（月）午後1時〜5時／大阪大学21世紀懐徳堂

　11日（火）午後3時〜5時／大阪大学大学教育実践センター　6階大会議室

　講師：リチャード・アントン　カール大帝ユニバーシティカレッジ教員（ベルギー・アントワープ）

　このセミナーの狙いは、教員と学生とが教室でのディスカッションを通して（教員対学生ではなく、教員も学生も同じ学びの公共的空間の構成に参画する一員として、互いに「他者」として相対する）、批判的思考（クリティカル・シンキング）の能力と技術を高めるためのメソッドを開発することであった。最近、ヨーロッパや南米あるいはオーストラリアで「子供のための哲学」（Philosophy for Children, P4C）がたいへん盛んになってきている。今回は、その手法を取り入れた教授法を実践するワークショップ（1日目）、さらに哲学的素質とは何であるか、それを伸ばし諸科学の教育のために活かすにはどうしたらよいのかを解説するレクチャー（2日目）を二日間にわたって実施した。

　講師に招いたリチャード・アントン氏は、子供のための哲学の実践家として活躍するのみならず、その技法を応用して青少年の更生施設や刑務所での哲学教育を推進している。著書に、『遊技場のソクラテス〜子供とともに哲学するための理論と実践』（Socrates op de speelplaats - Theorie en praktijk van het filosoferen met kinderen, Richard Anthone en Freddy Mortier, ACCO Leuven, 1997. Vierde, volledig herwerkte uitgave: 2007）他がある。

　ここに掲載する論文は、当日のレクチャーの原稿に著者が加筆して完成したものである。著者の多忙のために本稿の完成までに時間を要したのみならず、諸般の事情から掲載が遅れてしまったことをまずお詫びしたい。

　さて、この論文では、著者は「ソクラティック・ダイアローグ」（討議を通した合意形成の技法として開発された対話のためのメソッド）の成り立ちと現代におけるネルソンとリップマンによるその展開を簡潔に紹介するとともに、哲学的素養とは何であるかについてロンドハウス博士が開発した指標とそれにもとづく実験の結果を紹介している。この実験は哲学と心理学を架橋する試みとしても興味深い。このような研究の成果をもとにしてはじめて、学習者中心の学びのための教授法は理論的な裏付けを得て進化することが可能になる。そうして進化した教授法は、高等教育にも十分応用可能なものである。クリティカル・シンキングの教育の必要が叫ばれているが、クリティカル・シンキングはそれをいくら講義したところで、それを主体的に実践すること抜きには体得されない。しかし、その実践には確かな理論に支えられた技法が不可欠なのである。

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　（望月記）