

PHILOSOPHY FOR PARENTS

5 August 2020

Andrei Simionescu-Panait & Anca Cornelia Tiurean



What is philosophical practice?

Philosophical practice is the group activity through which individuals

- learn to be aware of themselves, of others and of the world around them
- think about their beliefs, motivations, behaviors and contradictions
- deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge about human nature
- acquire rigor in their thinking and master themselves and their minds

What value does philosophy bring into parenting?

Philosophy trains parents attitudes and logical competencies:

- they learn to tolerate their own and their child's need for exploration and failure
- they learn to facilitate their children's reasoning abilities and improve their own
- they learn to listen, to understand, to question and to accept their children's views

What attitudes do we train that allow for a collaborative reasoning process?

1. Using reason

Because we have the ability to think, reason will guide our thoughts and dialogue.

2. Accepting challenges

We will respond to questions as they are, without trying to change them, dilute them or deviate them. Questions are invitations to dialogue. They often require effort and attention to be formulated. They usually represent the interlocutor's interest in you and your views.

3. Having good faith

We will trust our interlocutors without suspecting them of bad faith or treating them with bad faith. Our encounters are opportunities to practice our thinking skills, to confront perspectives

and to assess the limits and implications of our beliefs. We do not want to trick each other, nor to set traps, nor to persuade or defeat the other. Set your agenda aside to better enjoy the ride.

4. Prioritizing common sense

Common sense is our reference. Yes, common sense can be objected to through reason and arguments, but we won't ignore it by being stubborn or trying to impose our subjective ideas.

5. Overcoming the fear of being "judged"

We will not fear the judgements that others formulate about us and we will not ignore the judgements we make about the others. Judgement is an essential instrument for reason. Judgements will be based on arguments and arguments will be examined critically. We will learn to look at ourselves and others through the lenses of various concepts.

6. Owning your sayings

Know yourself through what you said, especially when you said it accidentally. The language we use describe the universe we live in. When you are faced with uncomfortable questions or questions that have an uninteresting content, you can learn about yourself and about their author by accepting them and by viewing discourse as an aspect of the one who produces it.

7. Self-accepting

Do not deny what you have said. You reveal more of yourself with what you have said than through what you wish you had said or think you should have said. Accept your own discourse and the limits of your own being.

8. Overcoming the instinct to compete

You will not try to be right, to impose your opinion or to defend yourself because these encounters are not wars and we are not here to attack each other. Dialogue is a collaborative reflection by which we discover our humanity in its various forms. We are diverse and that is ok

9. Respecting others

You will not apologize for what you have said. Do not regret it, because everything means something and everything is an expression of your being. Your discourse can be tiring, strong, faillible or weak -- it is anyway a matter of perspective and something that can be valuable.

10. Self-distancing

We will not become obsessed with our beliefs and opinions and will not use our needs, wishes or emotions as arguments. We are free to feel, but not free to subjugate the world to our feelings. When we do not take some self-distance, we are actually subjugated by our feelings.

Why should we start with practicing self-consultation?

Self-consultation introduces the parent to the art of self-distancing - that is to become an observer of oneself in the context of one's life. We self-consult every day, but what is the quality of this inner dialogue? Would you rather have a reasonable talk with yourself or a *hot* one, in which your passions compete for immediate fulfillment? In the exercise of self-consultation, the parent is both carrier of beliefs and questioning his beliefs - it is a bit like playing chess with yourself. In this interchange of roles, we speak to ourselves, listen to ourselves, understand ourselves and question ourselves. This process will help each parent be more respectful with himself and self-assess more adequately instead of maintaining grandiose ideas about himself or on the contrary, self-diminishing unjustly. A reasonable relationship with oneself trains the parent in how to manage a reasonable relationship with his children.

We prepared a detailed table for you which contains all of the attitudes and competencies that we will go through in our course:

<p>Developmental stages by Pam Levin, <i>Cycles of Development</i>, 1982</p>	<p>Philosophical attitudes + Cognitive competencies</p>	<p>Examples of exercises for reasoning practice</p>
<p>0-6 months old: Learning to exist</p> <p>The child as well as the parents need to feel wanted and welcome, even if or when (s)he is just needy and impotent.</p> <p>Both children and parents with children of this age need other people to be tolerant, available and understanding.</p>	<p>Who is in this stage, big or small, learns to function as an extension of the other, to guide the other, to be guided by the other and not to impose a personal agenda.</p> <p>In order to think together, the two individuals have to accept their presence, their limits and their possibilities. They practice observation skills and primary discerning (predicting through signs)</p>	<p>Parents who participate in the workshop will be asked to write one idea or one question each - or to read a short story.</p> <p>Instructions may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - formulate presuppositions about the author and check them by examining evidence - formulate comprehension questions and answer them, then check them by examining the evidence.
<p>6 months - 1.5 years old: Learning to choose</p> <p>The child explores the world through all senses, is curious, wants more and meets limits. So does the parent of this child. We develop our interest, we learn it is ok to be active, to have initiative and to make choices. We fail, we get frustrated, we meet obstacles and we need to experience the permission that it is ok to renounce and ok to practice.</p>	<p>Attitudes and competencies the parents can practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - being patient to experience randomness and repetition - favorizing the process over a desired result. - being ok with representing a frustrating limit for the others. Limits can be annoying when you have ambitions, but they also mean contact & connection - letting go of perfectionism and enjoying to experiment 	<p>In the training workshop, the participating parents will-:</p> <p>Engage in group exercises and evaluate each other's work as well as their own. They will be given challenges such as to make choices and position themselves, then to have their choices & ideas critically examined, defend their ideas, give up their ideas and improve their ideas, noticing limits and implications.</p>

<p>1.5 years - 3 years old: Learning to think</p> <p>The child and parent become more separate individuals: they have “<i>their own</i>” opinions and they differ. Each wants to solve problems “<i>my way</i>” and will object to “<i>your way</i>” thus both ways will be pushed and tested. Not all ideas will survive these tests. Parents and children will learn to defend their ideas and to oppose their ideas. Both parts need help from each other in these examinations, to overcome themselves.</p>	<p>Required or useful attitudes parents will need to practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - refraining from imposing <i>truths</i> on the child. - formulating questions to deepen and to problematize the obvious or banal ideas. - encouraging imagination & the ability to evaluate ideas. - linking concepts into chains of cause and effect - being curious and intuitive - using instead of dismissing what the child knows - validating reciprocal help - thinking and feeling at the same time. 	<p>Types of training exercises for parents include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - being exposed to various stimuli (texts, images, etc) - formulating brief and clear ideas (conceptualization) - basic socratic dialogue - formulating arguments - formulating comprehension and reflection questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - paraphrasing - evaluating arguments <p>We learn about ourselves and about others through examining various points of view and discerning facts from over-interpretations .</p>
<p>3 years - 6 years old: Exploring roles and powers in relationships</p> <p>A stage of self-discovery through various roles in various relationships might involve lots of labeling. Some labels describe reality others describe merely our fantasies of who we or the others are. We need to be allowed to test our power to influence others, thereby finding out who others are and who we are, but also what we are each capable of.</p> <p>We need to feel the permission to be in various even contradictory ways: powerful and in need of help, potent and impotent, able to create and able to destroy, able to hurt and able to heal.</p>	<p>The important attitudes and competencies for parents to best face this stage include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to produce concepts - to use concepts - to define concepts - to compare concepts - to link concepts - to accept the challenges that the children raise and to profit from the opportunity to grow up together through these challenges. - to be willing to look at oneself through the labels the child gives to the parent. - to be comfortable with labeling, not take labels personally, not be obsessed with a single image of who I am or who others are. 	<p>In order to practice these competencies and attitudes, participating parents will be provided with interesting stories, containing various characters in various situations. Working with these stories imply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - judging the characters - interpreting the behaviours of the characters - questioning the character’s choices and ideas - checking through the texts to find evidence of their ideas about those characters - formulating comprehension questions that help discern fact from interpretation - formulating reflection questions to consider various points of view.

<p>6 - 12 years old:</p> <p>Skills</p> <p>This stage is for both parents and children a period for gaining tools, values, attitudes and abilities to get by in the world. To gain these, both will need to argue about rules, structures and responsibilities and to explore together the reasons that led to mistakes & misunderstandings. Both need to feel that it is ok to do things their way and to manage their own lives, while mindful of how they affect each other, which means they will need rules and structures to make sure there is a place and time for all. They must learn to disagree and not to punish each other.</p>	<p>The philosophical attitudes and competencies useful for parents in this stage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tolerance for conflict, for mistakes and imperfections - openness to be aware of your own excesses and shortages; - being patient & reasoning; - encouraging the child to experiment with fleeing and standing firm in different situations - exploring sets of values with the child, without arbitrarily imposing them - profiting from constraints instead of hating them. - discussing repair instead of punishing the child for his mistakes. 	<p>Parents who participate in the training will practice these skills using various stories (cultural or personal) based on which they will discuss conflicting values.</p> <p>Practice will include questioning that solves contradictions and moral dilemmas, through collaborative ethical reasoning.</p> <p>Participants will be encouraged to formulate their reasons for choosing certain values over others as well as for their tendencies to impose them or renounce them too quickly.</p>
---	--	---

The Introductory workshop of August 5th 2020

What did we do?

- We introduced the concept of philosophical practice.
- We presented ten most useful attitudes that facilitate reasoning.
- We started a demonstrative exercise about working on our presuppositions.

Working with our presuppositions:

Instructions for the participants:

Step 1: *Imagine you are going to participate in a consultation with a philosopher and you want to explore something about yourself. Formulate one question.*

Step 2: *Take a look at the questions the others formulated and write a few presuppositions about what the author of each question thinks, feels, wants, has difficulties with, etc.*

Step 3: Look at all the presuppositions you see below the questions and check if they are problematic or if they make sense. Try to name the problems you notice and to explain why they are problems.

Step 4: Discuss each presupposition with the group and examine to what extent a presupposition is it probable, possible, improbable or impossible.

This type of exercise is going to help you train your ability to use evidence and to become aware of your tendencies to “contaminate” evidence with subjective interpretations. The best outcome of this type of exercise is that you are more able to keep in touch with reality and less prone to be stuck in your subjectivity.

The following examples are produced and discussed in the August group workshop, so you can use them to practice formulating presuppositions and evaluating them, naming the problems you find in them and providing more probable ones. Some were already approached, others are left in the handout for you to enjoy and play with.

EXAMPLES

How can I make people feel my love?

- the author wants to make sure her love is received
 - the author is not sure how to show it
- # overinterpretation: the question doesn't show a preoccupation with certainty

How did you get so wise?

- the author wants to reach that too;
- the author's difficulty is choosing the way to become wise.
- the author thinks it is difficult to get wise.
- the author thinks that it is hard to understand or see from the other perspective.
- the author thinks other people are wiser
- the author feels curios regarding wisdom
- the author has difficulties in finding ways to get wiser
- the author wants to learn from others how to get wiser

Why am I often so impatient in dialogue with others?

- the author doesn't like herself
 - the author thinks a certain amount of impatience is bad
 - the author is too fast and the others are too slow :-)
 - the author thinks she is impatient
 - the author feels she shall practice patience
 - the author wants to know if being impatient can damage the dialog
- # overinterpretation (asked about reasons, presupposition about consequences)

How can I be a good parent for my kid considering I am such a bad parent to myself?

- the author thinks she still has plenty of work to do in order to be called a good parent.
- the author feels that what she does is not enough.

- the author's difficulty is to value her actual efforts and accept she's good just because she is.
- the author thinks she can't be a good parent
- the author wants confirmation.
- the author judges herself too harshly - she needs to accept and love herself first (like in an airplane crash when you put the oxygen mask to yourself first).
- the author thinks she is a bad parent for herself

How can I know who my girl really is and accept her for what she is?

How could I help my child to stand up, to accept and take pride of who she is?

- the author thinks her child needs help; she may be feeling at a loss or helpless; her difficulty resides in finding the correct tools/ advice/mindset to do this; she wants her child to accept herself as she is

How can I control the feelings I have towards what other people tell me?

- the author needs to put a limit
- the author wants to have control

What should I do with this load that I have in this period of my life?

- the author thinks she is going through a difficult time;
- the author feels overwhelmed;
- the author has difficulty getting help;
- the author wants guidance

Why don't I value myself more?

- the author thinks she is a bad mother
overinterpretation: this interpretation is disconnected from her question.
- the author thinks that she is not important.

FEEDBACK AND COMMENTS

Thank you very much for the workshop. I find the information valuable and worth giving further thinking. Even the "simple" thing to focus on people's questions instead of our interpretation. I would be glad to attend some more events (even greedy for more if you like :-). I believe this kind of workshop would be extremely valuable for children, especially teenagers. That would give them some valuable tools to cope with some challenges and for sure the information would be better received if that comes from someone other than parents. That may be interesting to have a parents group and a children group and put together the outcome.

Thank you very much for this workshop. For me it was more an opportunity to get more familiar with philosophy and philosophical discussions. It would be very interesting for me if there will come follow-up sessions in which we can "discuss philosophically" parenting "hot topics" (discipline, limits) but also general things such as what's education, what do each of us think is most important thing we want to teach/ give to our kids. Generally, in various

topics, the thing I value most is the opportunity to "sit together" and learn about each other's opinions, points of view. Thanks Again!

More examples about actual situations with kids would help encompass the philosophical concepts (such as the example with the grades). i.e. What is the philosophical perspective on handling kids tantrums? How would a philosopher address kids bullying? How can we avoid interacting with our kids in bad faith? (thinking they are trying to delude us, to manipulate us, etc). It is a useful perspective to interact with your kid as with another adult by observing some principles / guidelines / attitudes. I would be curious to know what does philosophy say about the good parent