



□ Hi guys, good morning. It's Friday, November the 22nd. We are very glad to be here. Thank you, Lara, for inviting us to share this amazing opportunity to reflect upon such an important, intriguing topic as self-doubt. I am Luigi Fassi. I work as an art curator, I direct the Man Contemporary Arts Museum in Sardinia, Italy.

I have the pleasure to be here with Cristina, Giuseppe, and Alessandro. We all come from different backgrounds, so I think it's a good starting point to briefly introduce ourselves, so I'll pass it on to Cristina.

/ I'm Cristina Travanini, I'm a researcher and curator. I'm interested in philosophy, curatorial practices, and creative processes.

* So I'm Giuseppe Di Salvatore. I was trained as a philosopher. I worked in research in the university and then I switched to video journalism in Switzerland. I live in Basel. And in 2016, I founded with Ruth Baettig an online platform, Filmexplorer, that is dedicated to moving images between art and cinema, where I work doing interviews and writing as an art and film critic.

○ Right. And I am Alessandro Salice, and I am a lecturer in philosophy at UC Cork. Perhaps I should say that we do not have different backgrounds at all because we are all philosophers.

□ This is so true, I wanted to stress this out. I mean we do share some background although we took different paths.

○ Yeah, different directions, exactly.

□ But we do share this background.

○ I work on several topics, but I guess my main research field is philosophy of mind and philosophy of emotion. And, I was wondering, perhaps we could start the discussion by trying to figure out what exactly self-doubt is. In fact, partly maybe because I am currently doing work on that, I'd like to suggest that self-doubt might be described as a kind of emotion and, specifically, as what is sometimes called a "self-conscious emotion".

Let me give you an example of what I mean by self-conscious emotions. Shame or pride or self-esteem are usually called self-conscious emotions not really because they involve any kind of reflection or, let's say, the activation of any particular sophisticated cognitive skill, but just because, for instance, in shame you're always ashamed of yourself. Or, when you're proud of something, pride is about yourself. Similarly, in self-esteem, as the name already suggest, you esteem yourself.

So I was wondering whether self-doubt couldn't be described as a self-conscious emotion in the sense that when you are self-doubting, you are in a particular affective state that is about yourself.

Luigi Fassi □
Cristina Travanini /
Giuseppe *
Di Salvatore
Alessandro Salice ○

In fact, let me push this conjecture a little bit further by making an example. I think it makes sense to say that we know we are all Italian native speakers. None of us is an English native speaker. Now, the moment in which you start thinking about yourself talking in a different language, you start to become unsure. Am I all right with my English? Am I doing good? And when you do that, you are not simply activating or computing any particular belief, which somehow assesses the probability that you are doing things in a good or wrong way.

Rather, you are really feeling something. You are feeling a sense of insecurity. And that sense of insecurity, I'd like to contend, that sense of insecurity is about yourself—just as, for instance, shame is about yourself or pride is about yourself. So that was a way of introducing this discussion on this actually difficult, but also tantalising topic.

* I would like to understand better the point you are doing now. I mean, in pride or shame, you don't say self-pride or self-shame. You can say it, of course, but in order to stress the fact that the shame is directed towards, or concern, yourself. But with self-doubt, you can only say *self*-doubt. So do you think that there is something specific in self-doubt just because of the fact that in the notion of self-doubt this self, the word "self", is there?

○ I think that's a very valuable point. Maybe here an analogy with esteem could perhaps help. So, if I esteem say Luigi or Cristina or Giuseppe, of course I'm again thinking of an affective state that is directed towards or is about you. For instance, I esteem Giuseppe because he is such a nice guy and you know I really admire him. But this doesn't exclude that esteem could also be self-directed. That I could also esteem myself. And in that particular case, again, I think you are in an affective state.

So I think you're absolutely right that doubting or doubt more generally does not have to be directed to yourself. But it can, I think. This is also something that we have discussed in preparation of this meeting: the difficulty of rendering the notion of self-doubt into Italian, it seems that we do not have an equivalent of that term in Italian. And I guess this is to say that, perhaps, we need conceptual tools in order to precisely pinpoint what it is that makes doubt self-doubt...

□ It's a good point because I think we all share this concern about how you are to translate this into Italian, being all of us native Italian speakers speaking in English. I think it's been a kind of interesting starting point in the very last days. Because I think in Italian it can have as a slightly different meaning, meaning something which can be translated as a very openly critique towards yourself. So really putting yourself into question. In a way which is going into a sort of negative meaning more or less.

○ Right. I think that is noteworthy. This is yet another suggestion: couldn't one say that, maybe, there are two forms of self-doubting? One in which the attitude is very explicit. In a sense, the presence of yourself in the attitude is very thematic, as you were saying. You are questioning yourself and that is a kind of active engagement with who you are.

And then you have this other pre-reflective or less the matic kind of self-doubt. The one that I was mentioning previously. That kind of insecurity that you had or that you have when you start to speak in another language.

★ So if I understand, with respect to this second kind of self-doubt, that's why you propose emotion as the specific form of self-doubting. You think the less thematic kind of self-doubt as an emotion?

○ Yeah.

/ Maybe the first way to consider self-doubt, as you said, it's more intentional. Where the "self" is more dramatised. And the second way to describe it is more as an attitude, maybe.

○ Yeah, possibly, yeah.

/ As an attitude, self-doubt actually is also very healthy to have. It's not that negative.

○ Yeah, that's a very good point. I mean suppose somebody is entirely immune to self-doubt. I mean, come on, what kind of guy would that be, right? You don't want to engage with somebody like that.

□ Sounds more like a robot.

○ Exactly.

/ This is an interesting point actually. Can a robot or artificial intelligence have self-doubt?

□ Engage with self-doubt, yes.

○ Yeah. Perhaps in the second sense.

/ I doubt it.

○ The question will be: can a robot have emotions? Because if you define self-doubt as a kind of self-conscious emotion the question is whether a robot can have emotions at all...?

/ It's not maybe only a question of emotions, but also of freedom. Because self-doubt is also connected to freedom.

○ Well, yeah the freedom of putting yourself into question as we were saying before.

/ Exactly, I mean, yeah, freedom to choose between different options. And maybe also freedom not to choose.

○ Right. I guess perhaps you can design a robot that is able to compute mental states. But whether a robot can really feel emotions, in the sense that there is something there that you feel like in your guts... I mean at least it's an open question. It's an empirical question.

★ Of course, we shall define emotion because, I mean, the fact of being confronted with oneself, I think, it's not a problem for an artificial intelligence machine, because actually with a neuronal system, whose theory already was developed in the '60s, the system is constantly confronted with all the data *and* the new data, so constantly resetting itself as system. This is the principle of learning machines, systems that develop themselves. Here the system is on a constant confrontation with itself. The fact of being confronted with itself, or with oneself, won't be the problem. The problem is when we attribute an emotion to the machine...

I would like to know a bit more about what you think.

○ About emotions?

★ Yeah. Let's come back to the example of speaking a foreign language. In which sense do you think that this uncertainty that you have in speaking a foreign language should be described as an emotion? And not just as the result of you realising that you are not able to say the same thing in the foreign language? This would be just an objective statement. An objective consideration. What do we mean when we still speak of this uncertainty in terms of emotion? What is there? What is the emotional part of that?

○ Okay, right. That's a very difficult question. I mean it really goes to the core of many disciplines. But okay, so here's one idea. So, I think the kind of comparison that you are considering is about emotions or effective states on the one hand and then beliefs or beliefs analogs, on the other. And here's an example: at the moment we have, each of us has, plenty of beliefs.

The year in which you were born. You know that Rome is the Capital of Italy. You might know the boiling temperature of water. All that is in your head somehow. But that doesn't feel like anything... Now, compare these with a case in which you feel ashamed because somebody else perceived a faulty aspect of your personality. Then that's a very different kind of state you're in, right. There you want to hide. You want to escape. You feel miserable. And I think the sort of uncertainty that accompanies self-doubt could be described in a similar way: I mean, of course, it's a completely different feeling. What it is like to feel uncertainly is completely different from what it is like to feel shame.

But still it's something that you feel in your body. Something that you feel in your guts.

* I would like to come back to the question of speaking a foreign language, which is a very good example, I think. When I speak a foreign language, I find myself in a position where the language that I speak is not properly a part of myself, even if language is an essential part of ourselves, something that intimately defines ourselves. For this reason I feel uncomfortable, deeply uncomfortable. And here comes the important distinction between this and the case of shame. In this case, what is specific in being ashamed does not concern yourself in general, but only a part of yourself, something particular. I mean, I can be ashamed of the fact that I had an accident, for example, and have no more fingers in the right hand, or something like this...

So I think I can be ashamed of many things, which but are always particular things. A completely different thing would be to be ashamed of myself, entirely, I mean being ashamed of my own personality. Of my being. So, when we self-doubt, it is perhaps not just an emotion concerning something of yourself, but concerning yourself as a person...

○ ...as an agent. I think so. I mean, okay, here's another thought that perhaps one might want to consider. So it seems that when you are self-doubting, you are putting yourself under a certain standard of evaluations. You are telling yourself, okay am I a person or an agent that is good enough to pull off? To deliver, right. Am I good enough to do this or that?

And that, I think, is in a way revelatory of who you are. And I think it is revelatory in two different senses. In the first sense, it is revelatory because it tells something about how to evaluate your performance given certain standards. But also it tells something about how ambitious you are in setting your standards. What are your standards? Are they very high? Are they very low? And, so I think, emotions, self-conscious emotions more specifically, are an excellent tool to speak about the self...

A term you are skeptical about the existence of...

□ But it opens up like a bunch of questions, like the pressure coming from society when it comes to setting standards, defining self-esteem. So there is a lot of agents coming from the outside, which are not pre-determined as such.

○ Absolutely. Absolutely.

□ But they are culturally defined.

○ Absolutely and that is why I believe that our "self" is always embedded in a larger social identity. So, who we are is also partly defined by the group or community to which we belong. And so, by the way, we are discussing now cases of, say, shame that are directed to yourself, but of course you can be ashamed of somebody else. Here is an example: suppose you have a son or a daughter and he or she has to play on stage in front of an audience, but he or she shows up drunk in front of the audience. Now, you are sitting in the audience...

I think you will feel ashamed about him or her, right? And why is that? I mean you have done nothing. Why being ashamed? It's another individual, who happens to be on stage, not you. I guess the point here is that of course you identify with that person. Of course, this person is somehow part of who you are. Other individuals can be part of who you are. So, I think that you are right, Luigi, that in great many cases the standard that we set for ourselves are standard that we inherit from our group or our society.

* I discovered that in German there is a specific word for this: "Fremdscham" It's probably just because in German the words are easy to create.

□ Combine.

* Combine. But I find very interesting because that's a word very difficult to translate. I mean you have to do a sort of paraphrase...

○ If I may say, I mean I'm not selling myself as an expert here, but interestingly the word for shame in Japanese is one that applies either to you or to the other in an equal way. This term captures not only self-directed shame but equally well shame directed to others: cases where you are ashamed of somebody else.

* I would like to resist this interpretation of self-doubt in the emotional terms of self-shame. Now it's clear what is in your mind about the question of emotion. I have the impression that there is a sort of presupposition in your point: the fact that the standards that I consider important for myself, define myself. And I would like to resist this reduction of myself to those standards.

Now, if you google "self-doubt", the first thing you discover are articles that sound like "10 ways to overcome or to get rid of self-doubt". Self-doubt appears as a very negative notion because it destroys our self-confidence, our self-esteem. And this is not good because we are supposed to be confident with ourselves. But why?

○ Because we have to be able to deliver. To be productive.

* Exactly.

○ And self-doubting is like an obstacle.

* So I mean, I have the impression the behind your "emotive" notion of self-doubt there is the assumption that our "self" coincides with our performance, our capabilities, our way to cope with situations and to deliver, and to get to the standards that society, or ourselves, impose. In this sense, I can doubt of my ability now to be clear with you. Probably I'm not clear enough speaking in English with you, but this would not involve my personality. I mean, my performance now cannot exhaust the definition of my personality. So this "emotive" kind of self-doubt, with that assumption, is a sort of "local" or specific self-doubt. And I would like to think self-doubt more radically, a self-doubt where the "self" is not defined just through the standards.

It's not defined by the expectations I can have for myself. This is why I resist the consideration of the self-doubt as an emotion. This is why shame or pride are not probably the best examples for the self-doubt.

/ I was thinking that defined like this, I mean as a negative emotion, self-doubt is pretty close to the concept of confession, somehow because it's a way to express your limits and identify your weaknesses.

○ Right, now, that's an interesting suggestion. Perhaps we should explore that a little bit more. I mean there is a sense in which perhaps we're all making some confessions here in this bunker, isn't it?

/ And the bunker is conducive...

○ Yeah, it's conducive to a confession.

/ Because it is protective. Safe. As you said before, self-doubt is a question of expressing insecurity. And now we are here in a bunker, in a super safe and isolated place, but at the same time our audio is recorded.

○ Yes, exactly. So that goes back to, I think, what Giuseppe was saying. I agree with him on that. I mean, of course, there must be boundaries here. We must be able to say that these emotions sometimes are unwarranted or unjustified. Sometimes, I'm not evaluating myself based on my own standards, so it is what philosophers would call an "heteronomic" evaluation. But at the same time, I think your point, Cristina, is very valuable here. I mean: yes, we are all talking here in this bunker and it's only the four of us. But, in fact, potentially there is the whole world hearing what we are currently saying.

□ The elephant in the room.

○ Exactly.

* I'm quite interested in your idea of confession. In which sense do you think that self-doubt has something to do with confession? Because confession is more something that explains or exemplifies the "self" or your personality. When you confess, you are supposed to tell the truth, anyway you try to touch something very deep in yourself. And self-doubt seems to be almost an opposite concept, in the sense that if you doubt yourself, you probably put in question what is deep in yourself, that is your own personality. How do you connect self-doubt and confession?

/ I would say that self-doubt entails a form of confession. Self-doubt can be considered as a first phase, where you express your limits and you're aware of your weaknesses. Then once you realise and you're aware of these weaknesses, you also think about how you can interpret your actions. So maybe you find out that what you are doing is wrong and it's not correct. And so, at the same time, when you express self-doubt you end up confessing that you made a bad decision.

* Can you make an example? I'm sure you think of something that happened to you or to somebody else.

/ Actually I have plenty of examples of self-doubt conducting to a confession, but still, this is a betrayed confession. By our audio report.

* For example, I don't know if you are Catholic, at least as a child... I did the experience to confess to a priest.

□ I mean, as Italians we have all been educated more or less in a Catholic way.

/ Of course.

* Yeah, so was the experience to confess for you an occasion to self-doubt?

/ I would say so.

* Wow!

/ I would say so. To reflect on what you did and thinking back.

□ I think it's again a kind of pressure coming from society. In the Italian culture, we had to cope with that as kids, going to church and confessing from time to time.

○ Right.

□ And I think it's something that was kind of awkward because you were supposed to basically bring to the surface in a sort of public realm, through the confrontation with a priest, the little secrets or like things that you perceived were really bad in your life. Bad things you did yourself. Or things that you didn't think were bad but you were supposed to think were bad and therefore you had to confess according to the criteria that were set upon you. So I think it was a very rigid monolithic way of confessing yourself. Because you had to... It was like a fiction somehow. You had to openly sort of play the role of some baddie...

* ...a kind of a narrative that expresses yourself.

/ ...and feeling guilty. It's a question of guilt.

○ It's a predetermined kind of narrative... You have to act a little bit, yeah.

/ Playing a role.

○ ... talking for five minutes. Playing the role of the one who confesses that you did this and that.

* Still, I didn't completely understand the point. I understand that in confession the "self" is there. The question of self-communicate or speaking about oneself. But where is the specificity of the self? Do you really experience yourself when you confess yourself? Do you really doubt of yourself? Because it could be also seen just like a liberation. I mean you feel guilty for something in particular. You confess your sin. You're free again. You're happy.

○ I think it is both.

When it's about confessing something about yourself, according to Catholicism, I think it is like a two-steps process. It is precisely the sort of self-doubting first in order to, then, go through this kind of healing process and to become a better person, somehow.

* Okay, so the idea is that self-doubt is sort of...

□ It's the trigger.

* It's a trigger.

○ Through a development process.

* So the confession is sort of output after self-doubting.

○ Yeah.

* Okay.

○ It's like becoming a better person by getting rid of your sins somehow. And you can get rid of your sins only by confessing them in that specific context. By talking to a priest.

* So the idea is that confession is actually a way to overcome self-doubt, in a sense.

/ Yeah. At some point.

○ It's a kind of healing process. Somehow, it's about overcoming but obviously you would come back to committing sins sooner or later. So, it's a never-ending process...

* But the suggestion you did, Cristina, is very interesting because it's about betrayal... If we consider the self-doubt just like the trigger to confess, we self-doubt and then we heal from this doubt and we confess. But then... and this seems interesting to me...we discover that this confession is betrayed. If for example we discover that the priest told my sin to my mother.

○ No, right but that's, you know.

/ And the secret is broken, of course.

* That's our situation now. I mean, we are in bunker, we are speaking. We confess our sins, in a way, but there are the mics, the other people are there, you know.

○ Right, exactly.

* And that's the betrayal...

○ But then what about the famous literary genre of confessions? Did Saint Augustine *really* confess? Did Rousseau *really* confess? It's hard to say. It's very hard to say.

/ I doubt it.

A literary operation, isn't it?

* Yeah, I think they all had an audience in their mind, right.

○ For sure, for sure.

/ This is a good point. The audience. Because when you self-doubt or you confess something, what is your audience? Yourself?

□ But it's such an interesting point Alessandro because I think it's something that we can say it's at the very core of the western identity. Precisely the idea that you have to confess and go through a personal struggle-process. Like a kind of healing process to develop yourself. Saint Augustine and Rousseau are two great examples but there is another one, that can be brought to the table. It's the tradition of the *Bildungsroman* as a literary genre.

* "Bildung" could be translated as formation or education, I don't know...

□ "Bildung" is a tough word to translate into another language. Self-education is maybe the best way to translate it in English.

/ Or also self-development.

□ Self-development as well, yes. So I think there is, as we all know, like a huge genre which is basically the *Bildungsroman* going through western literature and I think we can name, at least among the most important names, *Wilhelm Meister* by Goethe, *Buddenbrooks* by Thomas Man, Adalbert Stifter, and Green Henry, the *Grüne Heinrich* by Gottfried Keller, which is a quite iconic as a piece of literature.

★ Can you tell us something about the story of the Green Henry?

□ Why not. The Green Henry, it's a story of a guy that basically grows up with his mother, after his father passed away. And so he grows up with a widowed mother and he develops like certain artistic talents. The years passing, he basically realises that he wants to be an artist. And his mother agrees to send him to arts and craft artisans, in a small Swiss village. Precisely where he grew up, in order to develop his artistic talents.

And the years passing by, something happens because basically he decides to work as an artist. He moves out of Switzerland to be in Munich, which back then was an artistic capital, the place to be in order to at least try to be a professional artist and engage with a large community of artists living there. He's never able to achieve what he was supposed to achieve though, for instance being economically independent as an artist. There is this clash described by Keller between the will of being an artist and the pressure coming from the society and from the bourgeoisie to be a good citizen back in country, Switzerland.

So he drives away from that pressure by moving out to Germany and settling in Munich. But at the end of the day he fails as an artist.

★ Did he fail?

□ He fails because he's not able to deliver according to the standards of the time... There are two versions, quite interesting, of Gottfried Keller's novel. So in the first one he fails completely, goes back to Switzerland and his life is miserable because he failed and there is also this kind of judgment coming from the Swiss bourgeoisie. That guy left the country, wanted to be something else. Wanted to be an artist. Failed. Came back and now he is rejected by society. The second version gives you a better idea of the struggle involved. Gottfried Keller himself had to go through such a process, it's pretty autobiographical.

Gottfried Keller in this second version provides a different kind of narrative. Heinrich fails to establish himself as an artist in Munich, goes back to Switzerland, and thanks to the struggles he had to go through, and the failure he experienced, he's able now to grow and become a respected public administrator of his region in Switzerland. He becomes the head of the district, a wiser and experienced person. Somebody that because of the struggles he had to cope with and go through, has now the capability to be a political representative of his society. He's somebody...

★ He was a failure as an artist but...

□ ...he achieved a higher moral status.

★ But in another field.

□ At the end of the day he becomes a citizen with a higher moral standards, which makes him a better person. One able to lead his own community.

★ Out of curiosity: there are really two version of the books?

□ There are two versions of the book. In the first one, quite interestingly, Gottfried Keller is, as I say, much more severe because I think you can really see in it the pressure coming from society. In the second version, he goes through a development process and only because of that become a civil servant. Somebody even able to lead his community.

/ And so we are taking another direction, another concept of self-doubt. One that is very positive. Self-doubt cannot be only negative. It has a very powerful outcome in the end. I mean it's a way to explore your...

○ Yourself.

/ Yourself and new ways of being yourself.

○ It's again that kind of healing process. I mean we can even go a little bit further and claim that precisely this self-development process is at the core of the Western Society... We mentioned Saint Augustine, the *Confessions*, that you can read as a *Bildungsroman*. I mean absolutely. You can read it in an existential way.

★ So, just to understand you better. The self-doubt, here, is in the process of self-education or *Bildung*. Or is it rather in the output of the process, in the fact that at the end the process kind of fails, and one has to doubt oneself? I mean the self-doubt is when, after this process, you are in a sort of puzzlement. You don't know where to go. You don't know what is your existence, your character. Or is it really during the process? A part of the process?

□ I think it's ingrained in the process but from the very beginning because at least in the case of Keller's the Green Heinrich, the self-doubt is at the very beginning of the process. Heinrich has to understand that he's going through a clash precisely between the will of being an artist, which means driving away from what he was supposed to be, like a decent Swiss citizen, and the model of achieving a better life, becoming like a lawyer or like an artisan or something like this. But being an artist was back then and maybe still nowadays something that would make your parents not sleep well.

○ Right, but this is interesting because it means that, if I followed your reconstruction, the hero of the novel starts acting based on a certain self-image. On an image that you have formed about who you are, what you want to achieve, what you think is good for you, and what is good in general. And then you go through a process of self-alienation, if you wish. So, you have to give up on your self-image. Thanks to the self-doubt that has emerged through time, you alienate from yourself.

□ I mean in a sense you have to become somebody else. You have to...

* That actually expresses the romantic idea of *Erfahrung* – experience – which has the idea of traveling (*fahren*), of transformation of one's own identity. The philosophy of the *Wanderer*. This would be an historical point, and I'm not a historian... But it could be interesting to think the fact that subjectivity is a sort of productive modality. In the modern era the subject becomes something like very important. And then, in the romantic period...

□ Where precisely Keller comes from, yes.

* ...it is a moment where this subjectivity is probably put in question, exactly in the sense that you have to build it again and again. It is no more something given, because the model of education of the Enlightenment is probably not enough to get the true essence of your personality. Then the only way is to go in search of it because, I mean, in the *Bildungsroman* there is always exactly this idea of traveling, of exploring.

□ To move out.

* To move out from your place. To discover. To be open to new experiences, something that comes, that happens and is not planned. So the specificity of this self-education is very far from the idea of having a plan of education. There is actually no plan at all.

/ It's informal somehow.

* It is totally informal, yeah. In this sense it is a very progressive attitude. In the *Bildungsroman* the self-doubt, I think, is exactly this idea that you transform yourself.

That's where my question comes from, because I think it's very important to put the self-doubt in the process of self-education. Even when we read Keller's novel, the self-doubt is in the process and not at the end. What is more interesting in the novel is probably not the end.

□ No, absolutely... a kind of happy end.

/ Interesting, yeah.

□ I mean, a happy end in the second version...

/ And so maybe self-doubt, if you consider it in the framework of the process, as a phase, has its own beginning and an end also.

○ Right, I think there is this idea that when you live through a crisis, eventually you acquire better judgment precisely because you have lived through it, right.

- At the end of the day it is precisely this...
- Right and self-doubt is core to any crisis or any existential crisis one might have is when your self-image is going to crumble, it's going to...
- * Yeah, yeah, and any growing process also is a consequence, I would say. So you go through a crisis and only because of this you are able to grow as a human being, in terms of your vision of life...
- It would be interesting to explore whether during these critical processes, these moments of crisis, whether you're actually transforming yourself into somebody else or whether, by contrast, you have discovered who you really are. What your real, your deeper concerns really are. I mean, it sounds very psychoanalytic, but I think there is a grain of salt in that. It seems that, going back to what you, Giuseppe, said at the very beginning, society imposes on us all sorts of standards and all sort of evaluations. And then at some point you realise: why at all am I acting the way I'm doing? What is it that motivates me? What are the fundamental reasons that drive me? And you find out, maybe precisely in this process of crisis or of self-doubting, that in fact those standards are not your standards. They are not, you know you don't want to live that life.
- * That's why I think that the question I sketched before is very important. I mean, the distinction between what is your "self" in general and what you're judging, as a particular aspect of yourself, when you self-doubt. This is a part of yourself that is probably not so important, like some social standards that you impose yourself. A completely different thing is your entire personality. One of the interesting aspect of the self-doubt as part of the process of a crisis, for example, is the fact that you are almost obliged to recognise what is essential to you.

When you judge, you can doubt an aspect of your "self", but this would never mean a radical self-doubt, insofar as these aspects will never exhaust your personality. Even a familiar problem will remain always just an aspect of yourself. Self-doubt in an existential crisis is, in a way, a real self-doubt, that is when you recognise that what you doubt is something really essential to you. For example, when you doubt something that affects your identity. I don't want now to introduce the question of identity, it's too delicate. But for the question of crisis, I was thinking about two examples.

One concerns jobs. For example, when you change or you decide to change job or, better, I will say not just change job, but change a career. For example, you are philosopher, you spend 20 years doing philosophy and then – it happened in different ways to all of us but you, Alessandro – you start doing something completely different. In this moment, you cannot but experience a crisis, because a job, a career, the motivation in working, all of this is really important. It defines your existence. So, even without saying now what is the "self", we can say that working, for example, contributes in a relevant way to define your personality. Therefore, this kind of crisis, the crisis of changing career for example is really a moment of self-doubt. We can say that that's a good example of self-doubt.

○ Here's another... sorry, did you want to say something, Cristina?

/ No, I just wanted to say that that's why it's very important also to end the process of self-doubt in order to get something.

○ Right, to get the better job then, yeah. So here is another example. I mean suppose you have to make a really big life-decision about say your career. Pursuing your career would mean for you to, say, move to a different country. But you have attachments. You have a family. And your family lives well in the place where you are. So, what do you do? How do you solve the dilemma? And there, I mean answering that question reveals to you what your priorities really are. You're saying: okay, no, you know what, I'm committed to my attachments. They are part and parcel of who I am. It's important to them to stay in this country. I will not move to another country for my career. Or, you say, you know what, yes, of course these persons are important to me and their well-being is so central to my life, but there's something else which is equally important. And this something else compels me to foster my career. And then, I think, how you solve that dilemma, that crisis, I think that's just ...

* This is exactly the fact that you are obliged, in this situation, to fix the priorities and to say, okay, probably career doesn't matter so much. A career as a philosopher is not so important, it's more important that your relations with your wife and your daughter are good. And so you say: okay, now I remain here. But the interesting point, I think, is the fact that you are in this situation, you are obliged to sort of take a decision or to see clearer in your situation.

And for me, another example I'd like to bring to the table is the gender question. In this moment, I do many interviews with trans persons and it's very interesting to hear the stories of the trans persons, also because they always concern a big change in the life, a big crisis. The transition itself probably allows to answer the question you raised before, Alessandro. When in self-doubt you enter the process of transformation, will you discover something new or will you recognise something that you already are?

○ Right.

* In the stories of many trans persons, this often remains an open question. Because there are some people who say: okay, I discover something new. But the most of them, actually they say: no, I just discover what I am, what I've always been. Here the self-doubting process would be a way to discover who I really am. And that's interesting because in this case the self-doubt would not be a way to go towards a new direction, but just a way to reveal to yourself that probably the picture of yourself that you had before was not the good one, or the one which you are satisfied with.

○ Right, so when you are saying discovering, you doesn't necessarily mean exploring something new. I think I'm perfectly in line with you. I mean I would say discovering who you are in the sense of *gnothi seauton* – know thyself.

So, to come to the moment where you say: okay, this is the person who I am now, I see that clearly now. I didn't, before that. The image that I had of myself was opaque, was not transparent, because it was infiltrated by all sorts of expectations from society, expectations from other people. But now I really see that, okay, this is me. I base my decision on that and, in that sense, I have discovered my true self. Whatever that exactly is.

/ This is a kind of hard question. Who am I really? I mean, is it even a possible question? How can I manage to find out who I am really? It's weird.

○ No, yeah, but I think your decisions, your actions...

/ Exactly. Exactly.

○ I mean it's this-

/ Maybe it's not an epistemic question. But it's on the moral side.

○ You know the things that you do, those reveal to you who you are. Of course, nobody knows that before acting or making decisions, right.

/ Because maybe also the self is part of our beliefs. I'm thinking about Wittgenstein right now. He says we have a background of beliefs that are beyond doubt and the self, the self in itself, somehow is something beyond doubting. I mean, its part of this background.

○ I mean I think when you start to question that stuff... when you start to question those "hinge propositions", those beliefs that are so primitive... if you really do that not from a purely abstract point of view, I mean: from a philosophical one, but when you start to question them existentially, then I think you are moving towards an altered state of the mind, a potentially psychopathological state of the mind. I mean it is something that is observed, for instance, in schizophrenia where patients have abnormal self-experiences and constantly question all the commonsensical assumptions that we make on an everyday basis. So, for instance, they start questioning: am I really a member of the human species? Am I not...?

* A really radical questioning...

○ Yes, but no, I mean, if we really think the self-doubt in that specific sense, that goes...

* ...can drive you crazy.

○ Yeah, exactly. I mean when you take that seriously or existentially, right. Not from a purely philosophical or epistemological position. When you take that seriously, I think that leads you in territories that are more closely related to psychopathology.

* Yes and no. I mean, I'd like to resist this, because exactly this fundamental questioning is not just philosophical, even if there are definitely the philosophers that raise those questions.

O Right, right.

* The people that engage in this radical questioning just try to explore self-doubt in a radical way – and here “radical” means exactly speaking in terms of very fundamental questions. They go even to doubt about the grammar of your existence. Is it in this direction that you were going, Cristina?

/ I wanted to resist the idea that we can define the self.

* You want to say that this questioning is a sort of never ending process?

/ Yeah. And I wanted to criticise the idea that we can define the self and we can even ask the question about what is the self. And maybe considering that it's this concept that is beyond doubt, in some sense.

O Yes, of course. No, I mean, I guess... philosophically, we can debate right. And people have debated for centuries on that, but I think, and to go back to your point, Giuseppe, I think there is a very clear line that distinguishes self-doubt considered from a philosophical perspective (I mean a doubt that questions those fundamental concepts) from this other form of self-doubt, which eventually impacts your actions. It impacts your way of living and inhabiting the shared world. And I think this second form of self-doubt is pathological. That has nothing to do...

* If you push very far the second one, yeah.

O Yeah, when you can't engage in a proper conversation with other people because, rather than spontaneously talking to some, you constantly over-self-reflect about who am I? What am I saying? How the other is going to receive what I'm saying?...all that impacts the way in which you act normally. And that is pathological, I would say.

* I would like, I don't know if it's a good moment, I would like to propose something philosophical, now. Actually it's a philosophical point, very simple, in order to introduce another way to think the notion of self-doubt. Because until now we discussed self-doubt in terms of activity, assuming that it is an activity we do. We doubt the self, about the self. And, in a way, this is natural. Because the question of the self of course is difficult. We cannot define the self. But one thing is clear: the self is the *object* of the doubt. I mean when we spoke now about self-doubting, what we doubt is *something*. And this something is nothing but ourselves. Now I think that we are legitimate to consider this approach as suspect.

□ The approach that doubting is an act?

* The approach according to which, if doubting is an activity, it has an object, it is directed to something. And this something is exactly the self or ourselves.

□ Right.

* So, insofar as speaking about the self is very complicated, we can say that when we self-doubt, we have also reason to doubt that the object of doubting could be the self. That means that in any self-doubt there are at least two things. When we self-doubt, we doubt ourselves but at the same time we doubt of the fact that we can consider the self as the object of doubting.

This is a sort of second level of self-doubt – a second level that is necessary: to doubt the self as object of the doubt itself. In this sense we are pushed to put in question not only the self but the doubting itself in self-doubt. That is, we are pushed to think the self-doubt in a different way than an activity that is oriented to ourselves, to ourselves as an object of the activity of doubting. Now, my proposal is to think self-doubt not in terms of doubting (about) *ourselves* but in terms of doubting *by ourselves*.

So we can rephrase self-doubt in terms of “it’s *me* that doubts”, “it’s me the person who doubts”. The object of the activity of doubting is no more important. The accent is now on the subject. In this way *self*-doubt would not refer to the self as object of the doubt, but to the self as the agent in the activity of doubting. Self-doubt would so underline the spontaneity of doubting. Let’s take a very simple example.

Let’s say we are in this bunker and I speak now for example of the fact that it’s raining in Venice. I mean we don’t see it right now. We are in the bunker so we don’t see outside, but until some minutes ago it was raining and we know that the forecasts all agree in saying that it rains today.

Okay, I say this. What happens? Lara decides to break the rules and enter the bunker. Then Luigi says: “Hey Giuseppe, are you really sure that it’s raining?” Look, Lara is completely dry. So I look at Lara, I see she’s dry. But I make the hypothesis: “Okay, probably she had a big umbrella, that’s why she’s not wet.” And then I say to myself: “Okay, but where is the umbrella?” I don’t see the umbrella. Probably she left the umbrella outside. But then I think: “No, outside there is no place to leave the umbrella but under the rain. It is not plausible”. I mean, through this process of the mind I doubt the fact that it’s raining. Now there are two senses, here, of saying “it’s *me* that doubt”. The first is that this “me” refers to me formulating the doubt, even if it is this situation or someone else, in this case Luigi, that *makes me* doubt. Here it’s me just because it’s me that do all the process of doubting.

But there is another sense of saying “it’s me that doubt”, which is exemplified by Luigi saying this. When Luigi says “it’s me that doubt”, of course he has more reasons to say this just because he was the first to raise the doubt.

And for me this is an interesting point. Therefore, the idea of self-doubt as doubting by oneself can be told in two ways. A weak way: in this sense, any time we doubt, we can say that we doubt by ourselves. And a strong way: in some situation, like the situation of Luigi raising the doubt, it is really him, and not someone else, that has introduced the doubt.

This is the spontaneity of doubting. So the idea that I want to propose is that self-doubt as doubting by oneself can be thought in terms of a spontaneous doubt – which expresses the subjectivity of the activity of doubting. And now it comes the last step of my reflection. The fact that we doubt spontaneously can also be considered in two different ways. First way: when Luigi raises the question “are you sure that it’s raining?” he is the agent of the activity of doubting. He is responsible of this activity.

But you can also think of this spontaneity in another sense. And here is the second way: just to say that the doubt happens. In fact, Luigi could also say: “okay, it’s me that raised the doubt, but just because it was so evident... The fact to see Lara completely dry struck me so that I could not but raise the doubt that it’s really raining. I’m not really responsible for this activity of doubting”. Luigi actually had an evident reason to doubt. So the true responsible for the doubt is the reason, or the fact that Lara is not wet. This example explains another aspect of spontaneity. Spontaneity as something that is not subjective at all, that is impersonal.

And this is still another version of self-doubt, as impersonally doubting by ourselves. Actually, I should say “doubting *by itself*”, because, in a way, it is the doubt itself that doubts, that doubts through me. Here doubting is no more an activity, a responsible activity. It’s something that happens. It’s a doing. It’s not something that you start. There is not a moment when *you* start doubting.

To recap: we spoke always of self-doubt as an activity that is oriented to ourselves, or parts of ourselves, ourselves as objects of inquiry, objects of the doubt. Now, I wanted to propose a purely subjective way to think self-doubt, independently of the complication of making ourselves an object. That is the self-doubt as doubting *by ourselves*. Which is still an activity. And then, through a different interpretation of the spontaneity of this activity, we can imagine a further version of self-doubt, impersonal, a doubting *by itself*, which is more a doing than an activity. To express this last version in a less philosophical way, I would say that this self-doubt is not an activity that *we* do, and *we* do about *ourselves*, but it’s more a sort of attitude, a way of being. An attitude that you always have.

/ Or should have.

* Yeah, that could be a point. But what I wanted to propose a self-doubt that is an attitude as a fundamental mode of being, a way of behaving, a way to approach things in general, not as an attitude to get, to learn, not as a goal. One should rephrase this self-doubt in adverbial forms: as self-doubt is no activity more, I will do any other activities, so to say, “self-doubtingly”.

I self-doubtingly see, I self-doubtingly think.... Self-doubt would be a sort of constant attitude that is always present. Like a permanent critical stance that we have in general, in the practical sense that I have a sort of distance towards things...

○ Right, so let me try to understand. So is the idea that being in the world, being an agent, means also being susceptible to reasons and reasons are something that comes from the world, so to say. It's not something that you develop or elaborate. Suppose that I leave the room and you ask me, "Why did you leave the room? Why did you leave the bunker," and I say, "Well, because as a matter of fact it was very cold." And then the coldness was the reason for my action. So, is the idea that being open to these sorts of reasons is a self-doubtingly attitude towards the world?

* Yeah, I introduced the example of having an evident reason to doubt just to say that you are...

○ You are not the initiator of the doubting activity.

* ...you are not completely responsible for this doubt.

○ Right.

* That's why I stressed the twofold interpretation of the spontaneity of the doubt. One in the subjective sense of a responsible agent of the activity of doubting, the other in the impersonal sense of a doubt that, in a way, raises by itself. In the first, subjective sense, I decide to doubt, it's me that doubt (in the strong sense of the expression). In the second sense, we don't doubt because we decide to doubt. There is not a moment where I say: "okay now I doubt". It's something that comes, that happens.

But I see your problem, Alessandro. One thing is that this impersonal doubt comes because of a reason that concerns the object of the doubt, like the evident reason for not raining in the case of Lara's dryness. Another thing is to say that this impersonal doubt is the expression of a general attitude, the "self-doubtingly" attitude. In this case, self-doubt applies even in absence of any objective reason to doubt. Actually the fact that you doubt is not dependent on the object of your doubting. It's an attitude. It's always there. It's like a methodological position – like for the methodological skepticism. I mean you doubt every time. It's a sort of rule.

/ It's true, but not about everything.

* Why not?

○ Well you won't doubt that, if you open the door, there is an outer world behind that door.

/ Exactly.

* Why not? I mean, going so far would be pathological, even if you could do it philosophically.

○ No, but of course you have to have a reason to doubt that.

/ Exactly, yeah.

* I mean I don't say that you can doubt out of nothing. We have always reasons to doubt something.

○ Right.

* But the point is that we're speaking again of doubting as an activity here. It is for the activity of doubting that I need reasons to doubt. Self-doubt as an attitude doesn't need any specific reason. This is something that you do always, I mean, not actively or responsibly. That's why I think of this kind of self-doubt more as a sort of state. It's not a thing that you can want to do, that you can choose. It is a state that you *convert* to. If you have not already this attitude of self-doubting, you can only convert to it. You do a sort of conversion and then you become a self-doubting person. But it doesn't mean that you will become undecided on everything.

A good example, here, I think, is Prudence. The old notion of *prudentia* in Latin, it actually translates the notion of *phronesis* in Greek. It is a sort of moderation, a sort of wisdom actually. Something very different from being cautious, from fear and so on. But more in the sense of approaching things critically.

○ So it's not a self-defensive attitude, but it's more like engaging in a kind of pro-active-attitude.

* Definitely. It's pro-active, and very practical. It's not that I'm in front of a glass and I reflect about this glass, I skeptically evaluate it. Not, I simply consider this glass in the circumstances where the glass is. I mean that's wisdom. That's the older notion, Greek notion of wisdom, *phronesis*. In Latin *prudentia*. That's a fascinating version of self-doubt for me.

○ But not everybody is wise, right?

* That's why I say some people would need a sort of conversion. I mean if you enter this state, then you are all the time in sort of wisdom state, you'll always have a sort of distance, a critical approach to things. But that does not mean that you really put in question the existence of anything.

○ Well, that should be practical, right?

* Yes. Even if this attitude doesn't necessarily need objective reasons to doubt, still it is let's say particularly sensitive to the reasons that would push you to doubt. Without waiting for you reflecting and deciding to doubt.

□ And differently from what we said at the very beginning, so it's an attitude which cannot be defined, as far as understood, as a self-conscious emotion, right? This attitude of self-doubting can't be seen as an emotion.

* It's not an emotion. It's an attitude.

/ It's more related to epistemology.

* Epistemology? I won't say it in term of knowledge, probably more in terms of, I think, practical thinking.

□ It's like putting things into brackets. Like a sort of epochè...

* No, I think it is probably too strong to say putting things into brackets. I would rather say in the sense of a critical attitude actually. A critical stance on things.

/ An antidote to arrogance.

* Yeah! Actually I am fascinated by this proposition even because we can reformulate the big question of identity in less rigid terms. Identity would be something that's not fixed once for all... So I join your point, Cristina, about the never ending process. I mean self-doubt is a never ending process.

○ But then, what defines or what characterises the negative counterpart? Who is the unwise? What is it that makes somebody an unwise person? Somebody who lacks wisdom or...

□ Who's not acting with this attitude....

* The one that never doubts.

○ Never doubts, yeah.

* Or the one that want to doubt.

/ Also the one that doesn't react to the reasons to doubt.

□ That can be the case, yes.

* Yeah, exactly.

/ Which come from the context.

* Yeah, people that are not sensitive to the circumstances, for example. Or people that think of doubting as an activity. Say something that you start and you go through forward. And that you have the legitimate expectation that it'll finish.

□ Then we are not so far from what we were saying before. A kind of existential process you have to go through in order to gain a better understanding experience.

* But I wanted to introduce this because I think that with this point you think doubting as a process that necessarily never ends. Necessarily. And that's why you don't doubt because you want to get the truth, that's the point. I mean self-doubting as an attitude has nothing to do with the doubt that is motivated by the idea to overcome the doubt and get the truth. This is typical of the unwise person, the person that decides to doubt.

Nota bene: the wise person is not necessarily the radical skeptical, but more the methodological skeptical.

□ Right.

/ Yeah, I would love to put an example on the table. Like in the creative process. I mean, self-doubt is really important when you want to understand if your work has some artistic qualities. I was reading recently Virginia Woolf, who was really hyper critical on her own works. And so she says, okay, I read my things first time, they're good. Second time they're not too bad. Third time, oh my God...

□ Let's trash them!

/ So the point is: okay, it's true. I mean I agree with you: self-doubt is a process and probably, it should be a constant attitude because it brings creativity with itself and it's against arrogance, so you're constantly aware of your limits and so on. But still, when you're in a creative situation and you need to put an end to it, do you need at some point to overcome this self-doubt? So, this negative side is still on the table.

○ I like to put the period at the end of a sentence. I like to conclude the process and move on, right. And then, of course, then you reengage again.

* I mean a very important thing is that, what I'm proposing now is not hesitation. It's not exemplified by the fact of hesitating all the time about things. I mean you put the point. Well! But after having put the point, you already know that you are going forward and put in question your own point. That's the idea. The idea is that the wise person is not the person that is not able to take decisions. It's not this. The wise person say something, then say "okay, I believe that is so", but in saying so, he's already thinking that it's probably not the case...

○ Probably a new sentence would start.

★ It's the person that feels compelled to search for some counter-examples. For this reason I've always been suspicious about any over-dramatisation of self-doubt, like in the Cartesian way, a subjective thinking about existence and the ego, and so on, ah! This is over-dramatisation... And self-doubt remains nothing else than an activity. So there is a subject. There is a responsibility. The self becomes an object, something that is there, upon which we reflect, etc. That's completely fictional...

□ Yes, I fully agree but I don't think we are that far from what we were saying before because I think I would resist what you were saying that in the other version the self-doubt there is a kind of happy ending. The self-doubt is a kind of growing process more or less but it doesn't bring in a happy end. It's rather a never ending process any way.

You have to start over and over again and bring it always forth. And I think this makes me think of something that me and Alessandro have been discussing for a while, the notion of transformative experience. As it was stated by American philosopher Laurie Ann Paul in a book that came out a few years ago, which was quite instrumental for me in this matter. Having to move to another country or engaging with key, life-changing decisions, are basically defined by her as transformative experiences. And you cannot predict or forecast the outcomes of them.

You just have to give yourself to the process. Lauri Ann Paul uses this amazing word, revelation. She says you have to go through the process and give yourself to the revelation that the process will bring for you. So you know everything is going to change and what you'll encounter is a revelation. Something that you could not foresee. And at the beginning there is definitely a self-doubt process. Precisely because you're aware you can't fully foresee what's going to be the outcome, the output of the process.

★ Actually the situation of being sensitive to the things, actually to things that are different from what you think, a disposition to be...

□ Yes, to be open.

★ To be open to what could be different and teach you something that you didn't imagine before.

□ Exactly.

○ So, I mean, this is perhaps what makes our life worthy. If you could predict everything, you know what will happen in your life, what would be the point of living your life? So maybe self-doubt is core to what makes life worthy.

□ And then to freedom because again it's about robots. I mean robots would be able maybe to predict any and everything.

○ Right.

/ They don't know any revelation.

□ Yes, exactly. This is why it's such an interesting word.

/ And again we are using words coming from the religious lexicon, it's interesting. I mean we were talking about confession, then about conversion and now revelation. So self-doubt is really engraved into this context somehow.

□ It's so true. Interesting.

* I discovered something intriguing concerning the classic iconography of *prudentia*, wisdom. There are different symbols in the iconography, but one of them is a woman with a snake and a mirror. The snake has many meanings but one of it is transformation. So the ability to be open to transformation.

And of course the mirror. With *prudentia*, wisdom, you're almost obliged to go through reflection and then to actively self-doubt.

□ Right.

* And exactly this is present in Western tradition.

/ Yeah.

□ The snake and the mirror. Does the woman see herself in the mirror?

* No, I mean, there are several images. In the one I think now of, the mirror is not in the position that expresses the classical narcissist relationship. But, yes, *prudentia* will bring both transformation and reflection.

/ And the snake changing the skin...

* ...which is typical of the reason. One says: change your mind, develop...

□ All right. That was interesting. That was an interesting conversation. We could develop more, releasing like a 500 pages book. But we should definitely bring it forth.

/ It's beautiful to finish, I think, with this image of the mirror.

○ And the revelation.

/ And the revelation of the mirror, yeah.

□ Right, well done. Thanks a lot guys for this.

- Yeah, thank you.
- Thank you, it's been amazing.
- Thank you all, it was great.
- Thank you for responding so positively to the invitation.
- Thank you again, Lara, for the occasion.
- Thanks again Lara. We're all excited to listen to ourselves and see what is going to be the next output of the project. Maybe the book or something else, who knows.
- We look forward to that.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.