

The Call and Practice of Wonder

How to Evoke a Socratic Community of Wonder in Professional Settings

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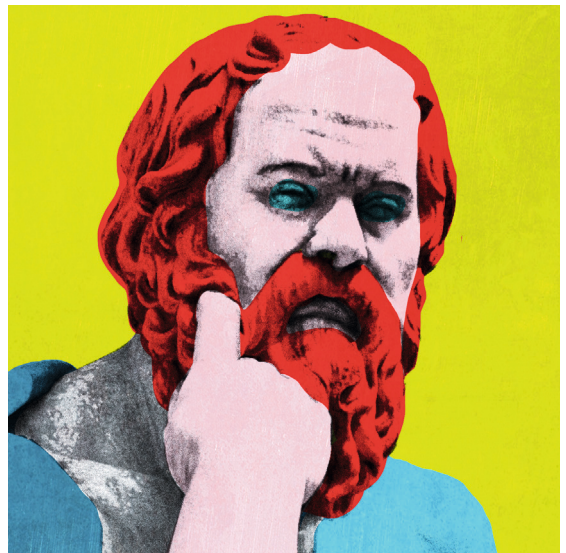
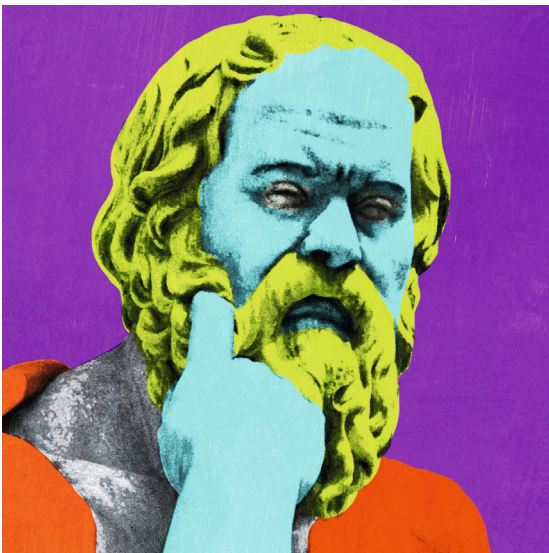
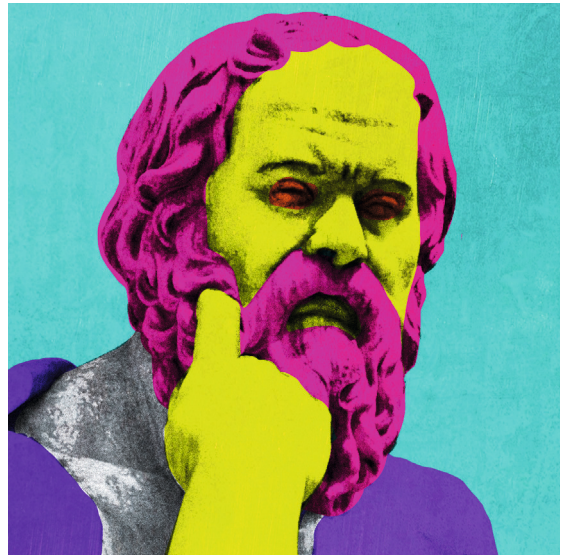
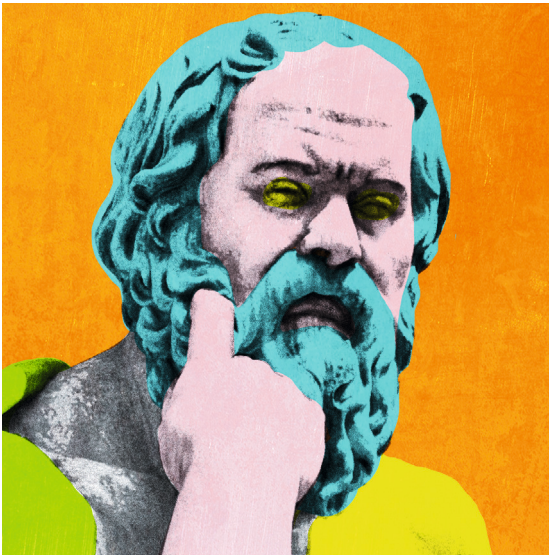
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The Socratic Handbook

Dialogue Methods for
Philosophical Practice

Michael Noah Weiss (Ed.)

on behalf of the Global Ethic's Initiative Austria



The Call and Practices of Wonder

How to evoke a Socratic Community of Wonder in Professional Settings

Finn Thorbjørn Hansen

Abstract

The most basic and most fundamental driving force in a good Socratic dialogue and in a philosophical practice as such is the momentum of being in an authentic wonder.

But the phenomenology of wonder and especially the phenomenology of being in a community of wonder also show that true wonderment and wondrous dialogues are not something you can fix or produce by having the right techniques, skills or dialogue tools. It is more like art. You have to be in a state of surrender and vulnerability, and in a fundamental not-knowing mode, as well as in an openness and listening to something that calls on you in a way where you have to give a personal response.

In this article I describe my experiences and ways of evoking Socratic Communities of Wonder among professionals through what I call the Five Momentums of evoking Socratic wonderments.

*“Each morning you have to break through the dead rubble afresh so as to reach the living warm seed.”
Wittgenstein, Culture and Value.*

Prelude

The most basic and most fundamental driving force in a good Socratic dialogue and in a philosophical practice as such is the momentum of being in an authentic wonder.

But the phenomenology of wonder¹ and especially the phenomenology of being in a *community* of wonder also show that true wonderment and wondrous dialogues are not something you can fix or produce by having the right techniques, skills or dialogue tools. It is more like art. You have to be in a state of surrender and vulnerability and in a fundamental not-knowing mode, as well as in an openness and a listening to something that calls on you in a way where you have to give a personal respond (Lindseth, 2005).

In this article I will describe my practical and lived experiences and ways of evoking Socratic Communities of Wonder among professionals through what I call the 'Five Momentums of evoking Socratic wonderments'.

My for some philosophers maybe thought-provoking and disturbing claim is that the professional philosopher, the one who has been going through a university education to become a 'real philosopher' is not necessarily the best or natural owner of the title to become a good Socratic Practitioner. For many years I have been working with many different professionals (nurses, priests, school teachers, philosophers, social workers, psychologists, leaders, coaches, educational counsellors, HR Consultants, etc.) in educational settings at my university where they have experienced what it means to participate in as well as being trained to facilitate different forms of Socratic Dialogue Groups, Philosophical Counselling Practices and other sorts of philosophical and contemplative, or in Pierre Hadot's word 'spiritual exercises' (Hadot: 1995, 2002).

My experience is that an older and highly experienced nurse, who has been with people and in human relations for many years, will have a better chance of getting a 'musicality' for, what practical wisdom (*phronesis*) and Socratic Wonder (*thaumanzein*) is, than the young ambitious and just educated philosopher who may even own a PhD in philosophy and still does not really get what we are touching upon and aiming for in a Socratic Community of Wonder. This intelligent and conceptual sharp and well-argued philosopher will have a tendency to approach the world and the subject matter, and even worse the person in front of him or her, in a too epistemological and methodological way. What the young philosopher needs to learn is a kind of losing up on his or her trust in the logic of human thought and start listening to the life impressions that came before the clear concepts and definitions. In short, in order to really get into a philosophical wonderment the person has to learn to philosophize from or with his or her heart. And maybe that is why one could say that to wonder in a philosophical sense may be a human condition, which all men and women are capable of doing, if only they were allowed the time and space and atmosphere to do so.

I will start with a concrete example with a young nurse at a hospice who started to philosophize from a lived experience, which had really made an impression on her. What is it like to be struck by a wonder? She had got the time and

¹ See Verhoeven (1972), Sallis (1995), Rubenstein (2011), Vasalou (2012), Hansen (2012).

space to do so through a Socratic Practice, which the hospice had asked me to facilitate.

Then I will start reflecting upon whether we really can ‘create’ wonderment or whether wonder is rather to be understood as something that unfolds and grasps us unexpectedly, which points to the possibility that the event of wonder may be out of our pedagogical reach and intentions, or that as Gadamer would say goes ‘beyond our wanting and doing’ (Gadamer: 1989). And if so, how can we then talk about Socratic Practices of Wonder and what it means to be a ‘Socratic facilitator’?

I suggest a kind of loose practical structure and some metaphorical rooms that may – that is at least what my experience has shown me – inspire people to work through and beyond their old and congealed sediments and layers of meaning and concepts in order to get out in the open and to feel again the living and warm core of the heart of the matter. My point is: to be able to do so, to inspire fellow human beings into the experience of wonder and wonderment, *you*, being a Socratic Practitioner, indeed have *also* to be caught by wonder and a wonderment and share this wonderment with your participants or ‘guests’. If you only understand your relation to your ‘guests’ as a helping relation and not as a fundamental I-Thou-relation (Buber: 2004[1923]), I do not think you will be able to get into or call upon an authentic Socratic Community of Wonder.

I will end the article with a short description of my Wonder Lab at the Centre of Dialogue and Organization at the University of Aalborg in Denmark, where we try to engage our students and local community in different forms of wonder-based dialogues and innovative processes.

To be struck by wonder

The situation might be the following: you are a young nurse at a hospice. You have been there for not more than a year still feeling a bit uneasy with your job because your former job was on an ordinary hospital where your main function was not palliative care. But you wanted to make this career and professional change and were lucky to get this job on a beautiful hospice near the North Sea in Denmark. You are getting to know things now. How the procedures are, who your colleagues are, what to do when working with terminal patients and their relatives, and you are sensing that being with people who are dying or being with people who must accept that their dear ones have to leave this world, is something extraordinary, like a whole new and unknown life (‘death’) world. And you find it both fascinating and also a bit frightening.

One day you are asked to go to a room where a mother in her 40-ies had just died. In the room are her relatives, her old mother in the 70-ies and her granddaughter, a young teenage, and two other of your nurse colleagues.

The following piece of a paragraph is a true story and the words derive from a young nurse when she was later asked by the Socratic practitioner (me) to reflect on and write about a lived experience from her daily work on the hospice where something made a special impression on her. Then this story came up:

The time has come when there should be the last farewell. We gathered in the apartment and they sang a few hymns and prayer was offered. After this session the mother of the dead patient placed herself in front of the coffin in which her daughter lay. With fumbling hands, she found her little wrinkled paper in her pocket and began with trembling and weeping voice to thank the staff as she read a eulogy for her daughter on her deathbed. It was very beautiful and very touching, and I felt that the initiative in reading this, and the fact that she as a mother had the strength to do this came as a surprise to many of us.

Shortly after the speech we left the apartment for the family to have the last farewell to the deceased before the coffin was taken away by the hearse. It came spontaneously that I had to turn my way past the sluice and held of a piece of paper to my tear-filled eyes. The same happened to one of my experienced colleagues, who were also in a very close contact with this patient and her close relatives.

We stood for a moment for ourselves, just collecting our thoughts, while we at the same time had to breathe - together and separately. Then we turned to each other and agreed how touching this speech was and how much it affected us, but also how this was just human, the way we were touched, which meant that we had difficulties holding back our tears. We had to be quick because we had to be at the front door when the coffin was leaving the house.

A different feeling, a feeling where I felt touched in a way that I had never experienced before, when a patient was 'sung out' and said goodbye to.

After this paragraph the nurse in her essay starts to slowly reflect upon her lived experience. What happened? What is at stake in this moment? However, reflecting on this incident as a professional nurse she would – as she is trained to do – normally start to analyze the incident through theoretical-analytical reflections and by professional-inquiring approaches and methods. That is, what kind of medical and healthcare considerations or psychological or sociological conditions or communicative techniques and relations would be relevant to be aware of and reflect upon as a professional nurse in this situation? She might also consider whether it was problematic in a professional sense that she and her colleagues actually – in this concrete moment being with the mother in grief – did not manage to

keep her tears away and thereby became personally involved and acted emotionally in front of 'the client'. What would or should she have done as a good professional instead? What do the rules and professional guidelines say? Where is or ought the boarder to go between being private and being professional? And how could she, for the next time she is in a situation like this, learn to react in a more disentangled, controlled and professional way? Not just in order to be able to keep a professional attitude and overview so that she and her colleagues could see the particular needs and give the necessary care for the relatives in that very moment, but also because such heavy emotional and sorrowful experiences should not take hold of nurses and get them too near their own private self when wanting to survive working with palliative care for many years to come.

Although she and her colleagues did have these specific professional considerations and questions on situations and incidents like this, this was not the kind of reflection she immersed into in *this* essay, which I, as a Socratic practitioner, had asked her to write.

I wanted her to listen to the lived experience, so to speak, from the inside of the lived experience, not from the outside looking at it. I wanted her at first to get into a phenomenological looking and sensitivity where she wrote about 'something' (a lived experience of a phenomenon) that really had touched her and in a way that made her and the reader see it from the inside and re-live it or recall it as much as possible.

Of course we as readers were not there and in an empirical sense we would obviously not be able to see and feel it exactly as she did at that moment. And she would neither, because what we remember and recall of an incident is of course never in an empirical sense exactly the same but an interpretation and construction of the lived experience. Nevertheless you can – as the existential phenomenology shows us – be in a way of listening and receptiveness towards the lived experience and phenomenon that realize a kind of 'pointing act'. If this is the case, the recalling, the concrete description of the lived experience or phenomenon then becomes like a 'pointing finger'. If we, however, only look at the pointing finger and describe that finger in rigid empirical details, we would totally miss the point. What we should look for in an existential phenomenological description is of course what the finger is trying to point at. Likewise, when writing from a lived experience that really has made an impression on us we should listen to and look after what this story is pointing towards. What is it – across and beyond the physical and empirical facts ('the documentary realism of the situation') – that is at stake in this story and situation? What kinds of meaningfulness are we tapped into or being evoked by, when listening carefully to the lived experience?

In an existential phenomenological description we are not interested in the 'narrative constructionism' of the situation, that is, the meaning-making of the storyteller. We do not only want to hear what the storyteller him/herself wants to tell us about this event. We want to go deeper and beyond the empirical and

constructivist approaches in order to reach what I call ‘the lyrical realism’ of the situation.

Here we ask: What is it that Life itself or the Phenomenon itself (or as Heidegger and Gadamer would say: *die Sache selbst*) wants to tell us human beings from this particular life event, and not just what is it that the storyteller wants to tell us about this lived experience? Here we have to listen with a ‘poetic ear’ or with the heart.

Said in another way with reference to Heidegger and Gadamer, we are when we listen to the story on the level of ‘lyrical realism’ as opposed to ‘documentarian realism’ and ‘narrative constructivism’, not interested in the human beings’ ‘wanting and doing’ (and all the facts and constructions that follow those intentional activities) but how it is ‘to be’ immersed into life events that take a grip on us and lift us to higher understandings and horizons that lie beyond our ‘natural attitude’, gestalt and constructions and cognitions of the perceived and interpreted life world.

It is the abundance or generosity of the meaningfulness and wonders *in* life that life as such offers us and which a life experience can be saturated with (Marion, 2002; Van Manen, 2014), *if* we engage ourselves trustfully and lovingly in and with life. This is the engagement and dance or dialogue with life that we want to get into as Socratic practitioners, at least if you understand Socratic Midwifery (*maieutics*) through existential philosophers and phenomenologists and hermeneutics like Søren Kierkegaard (1997[1841], 2002 [1846]), Gabriel Marcel (1950), Hannah Arendt (1978) and Gadamer (1989) and Jan Patocka (2002). In short, it is the tacit and often invisible wonder *in* the ordinary and everyday life that we seek out and call upon, and it is also this kind of searching and preparation for an ontological openness and receptiveness for the wonders of and in everyday life, that I, as a Socratic Practitioner, want to give birth to.

When I later asked the young nurse to reconsider and concentrate on that specific part of her story and lived experience that really had made an impression on her (“Where is the heat of the moment in this story?”) she pointed to the specific event in the incident, where the old mother of the deceased reached out to find her crumpled speech note:

It was almost an indescribable moment. A feeling of being grasped by something very big - almost a heavy silence, filled with emotion, love and fellowship I was holding on to for so long, it now lasted. It was a few minutes, but it was like it was much longer, and it was in a moment as if time stood still. The outside world stood still. The family’s life was put on hold. Something was finally over and close to the opening of a new chapter in their lives - a whole new life without a human being who had meant everything to them - as a daughter and as a mother; she had a significance which should now

be infinitely difficult to live without. But the core of this experience was, for me, definitely during the speech. All of this was a very strong emotional experience.

When we now read this fine story and later her description of the moment where she really felt touched we should also know that the young nurse was, at the beginning of the Socratic dialogue process and essay writing, not at all so well-articulated and precise as it is shown here. When I first met her and asked her to recall a lived experience, which really had made an impression on her, she said she could not really think of anything. Not really, she said apologetically. She had to search in her mind or soul for a while and find a quiet moment for herself to rethink and recall and listen to her many impressions and memories. Of course she had a lot of lived experiences but she was unsure which of those was 'good enough' or which really 'talked to her'.

So a part of beginning a Socratic Practice of this kind is to go slowly and gently forward and to be patient and especially to let the participants or interlocutors know that they should be in no hurry.

After a while listening to the other stories of her colleagues who also participated in this Socratic Practice, she suddenly remembered this incident. But at that moment, when she suddenly became aware of this experience and told her colleagues and me about it in the philosophical practice, her memory was only vague and she only had an unarticulated and imprecise sense of a strong feeling or mood that had occurred at that time. However, little by little through different phenomenological, hermeneutic and Socratic exercises in writing and dialogues – which I will describe in more detail later – she slowly evoked an image (like in film developing before photography became digital), which made her able to reflect upon it in a sensuous and gradually also wondrous way.

The interesting thing is namely that approaching a lived experience in this slow, phenomenological and listening way makes us become aware of the deeply mysterious and enigmatic dimensions of our normal daily lives and behavior. Slowly and imperceptibly she became struck by wonder from listening to her own lived experiences. She discovered how awesome and wonder-striking life can be, even when it seems trivial or very clear and explainable or not so important at first sight.

This incident was of course neither trivial nor ordinary or unimportant, by all means, but to get into a state of wonder not in a curious or fact- or cause-seeking sense but in a reverent, existential and philosophical sense, requires a kind of 'new beginning' or 'birth to presence' (Nancy, 1993) of the person where one sees oneself and life or the phenomenon one is absorbed by (in this case the old mother's brave and heart-breaking Heroic attempt to bear the unbearable) as if for the first time again. Something you sense in the moment of wonder is transcending your former and current understanding and grip on reality, and still, this something

seems to talk to you and be in a kind of tacit relation with you. It is a strange and marvelous feeling and experience.

What in fact also happened during this exercise of recalling the memory of this incident and starting to see the wondrous and amazing in the event was another movement in the young nurse. A move or turn that turned her into a deep wonderment about herself and her own relation with the world and especially her understanding of the meaning of the world. By dwelling in the story and especially in that specific moment in the story that made the greatest impression on her, she started for the first time in her life, she told me later, to really ask herself: What is the Meaning of Life? Of course she had through her life talked about this big question with her family and friends many times before but not in this way. Not in this authentic and vivid way. Now she sensed, she said, as if she was raising the question from the inside, from within a lived experience, and as a true question, a question she for the very first time was struck by and in a non-knowing position and in a deep longing to answer. She was now, as the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke would say, 'living the question' for the first time. It had become a living truth or existence for her, which had forced her to stop and stand still and listen to herself, her own life and the life of others in hope to find an answer. She was in a kind of 'touched not-knowing' (Lindseth, 2005). As she later writes in her essay:

I wonder what it is that affects me in the experience with the relatives in relation to death and the 'singing out'², and why I was so moved by this crumpled piece of paper with the beautiful words. Why am I being affected, and what is it – *really* – that touches me?

Through this Socratic practice she had started to find her own voice to describe and to experience the incident (again). She no longer used the voice or language of the professional or Science only (the voice of procedure and knowledge) and she was now, so to speak, wondering from within her own lived experience.

Later – through the other momentums in the Socratic practice I facilitated at the hospice with her and her colleagues – she was also asked to relate her own personal lived experience and personal lived wonderment with the Great Questions and Wonderments of Humanity, that is, to find a philosopher or artist or myth or novel or artwork which/who, in some way, was addressing the same question as she was now pointing to. Meeting the Great Thinkers and Artists and their Great Stories and Wonderments will of course expand the participants horizons in a breathtaking way. You feel a deeper longing and this longing or 'Socratic Eros' is here qualified by these Great Thoughts and Wonderments of humanity.

² Translation of the Danish word: 'udsyngning', which is a beautiful word for what happens when the palliative team and the relatives of the deceased sing when the coffin is taken out and driven away by the undertaker.

But one has also to find oneself again in all these great and beautiful words and ideas and ideals. Who and where are you in these thoughts and “higher” horizons? How do you in your daily living live these thoughts and questions or longings?

Now, one could also say that it is one thing to be spontaneously struck by or called into wonder as an unexpected event that suddenly and surprisingly takes a hold on you; another thing is to deliberately try to create or at least invite and call upon wonder to happen. So how do we ‘practice’ or ‘create’ wonder?

Can we create wonder?

I don’t think it is possible to construct or steer a process to wonder and wonderment as if it was a question of didactics or knowing the right methods and techniques.

But I have over the years learned that it is possible to create or better: *call upon* an atmosphere and ways of being which can (but never to be sure) bring us to the neighborhood of or doorstep to wonder. This is only what we can hope for when we use deliberate practices for wonder.

Why? Because we basically do not *know* what wonder is.

What wonder is, *is* truly a wonder, and we always seem to reach out too late with our human thoughts and language to be able to get it. Wonder lives *before* language. In the beginning was not the Word, as is said in the Bible, or the Deed, as it is said in Goethe’s Faust, but Wonder.

Or, I don’t know. Maybe wonder is a kind of cloud formation that runs together when we as human beings are touched or called upon by something we do not know and understand but still sense we are connected to on a deep ontological level, *and* when being in that relation we act and speak in order to better hear and get into a dialogue with this ‘something’ (or the ‘Thou’, as Martin Buber would say) that talks to us? Or said in another way inspired by Gabriel Marcel (1973): To philosophize in this way is to give a personal answer to a call. We have to think in resonance with the phenomena (die Sachen selbst as Heidegger and Gadamer would say) that is calling at you.

In any case, my experience is that we can practice certain kinds of Socratic dialogues and reflections that may help us loosen up and unfreeze our former rigid and fixed and frozen concepts and understandings, meanings, ideas and assumptions about a subject matter, a value or a phenomenon.

Being brought to an epistemological *aporia* by Socratic dialectics and by ironic and critical gadfly-movements and stings is a first step or preparation. Then we may find ourselves in the phase of the Socratic Paralysis, where our external behavior and expressions freeze in a kind of shock or breathtaking amazement or puzzlement. We just have to be still in order to be able to hear because the priority now, in this very moment, is that we sense – on an inner level – something, which

is not us and which we experience on a ‘heartfelt-level’ to be of great importance. This wondrous and existential moment brings us to a silence and what Gabriel Marcel has described so eloquently as a kind of ‘ontological humbleness’.

What from an epistemological point of view and approach had looked like an *aporia* and perceived as a logical or rational dead end for our thoughts or as a dumb ‘empty silence’, now unfolds to us as a ‘filled silence’ saturated with meaningfulness, though you are not yet able to comprehend even the slightest meaning of it. Something meaningful is speaking to us from that silence if only we can manage to be quiet and listen.

This is the moment for the possibility not of *aporia* but of *thaumazein*, which Socrates says is the very grounding impulse not just for starting to philosophize, but also the driving and guiding force behind the actual philosophizing, as well as it should aim as the result of the philosophizing.

Socrates, as also Kierkegaard reminds us, wanted again and again to lead us though these philosophical practices to this saturated silence of wonder.

Why? We don’t know of course, but following Kierkegaard’s (and other existential philosophers’) interpretations of the Socratic Midwifery (*maieutics*), it was because Socrates wanted us to catch up with ourselves – or to let our language and action catch up with where we are in an existential sense. To become who we are, or are called to be or become.

The Art of Socratic Midwifery can therefore be seen as a kind of existential wake-up-call for human beings (see Arendt, 1978). But not, I must emphasize, only to become who we are, but indeed also to see and hear what we are not, and to feel joy and gratitude for what we as human beings are not able to control and construct but nevertheless experience as embedded or immersed into and which is experienced as a kind of a meaningful sounding board for our lives.

I believe that the young nurse was on the trace of this secret or tacit meaningfulness in the midst of her important experience and story from her meeting with the old mother with the culled speech at the hospice. As the young nurse writes full of wonder: “Why am I being affected, and what is it – *really* - that touches me?” If this question was asked from a fact- or explanation- and cause-seeking wonder (like when you ask for the biological, psychological or sociological reasons and mechanisms or structures) the wonder (the *thaumazein*) that we are aiming for in the Socratic kind of Wonder would disappear at once like dew in sunlight. But is she really stuck by wonder – as if she for the first time listened to a situation or event from the question: “What is really a value or meaning and meaningfulness?” – then she is in a Socratic wonderment.

The Five Momentums of calling upon and being in a Socratic Community of Wonder

Having made the above important reservations I now would like to go into details about the practices of wonder, or how I as a Socratic practitioner more concretely facilitate exercises and ‘moves’ and reflections in order to get the participants or interlocutors into a wondrous mood and perhaps even in to a *community* of wonder as I see as a kind of zenith in the Socratic Bildungsprozess³.

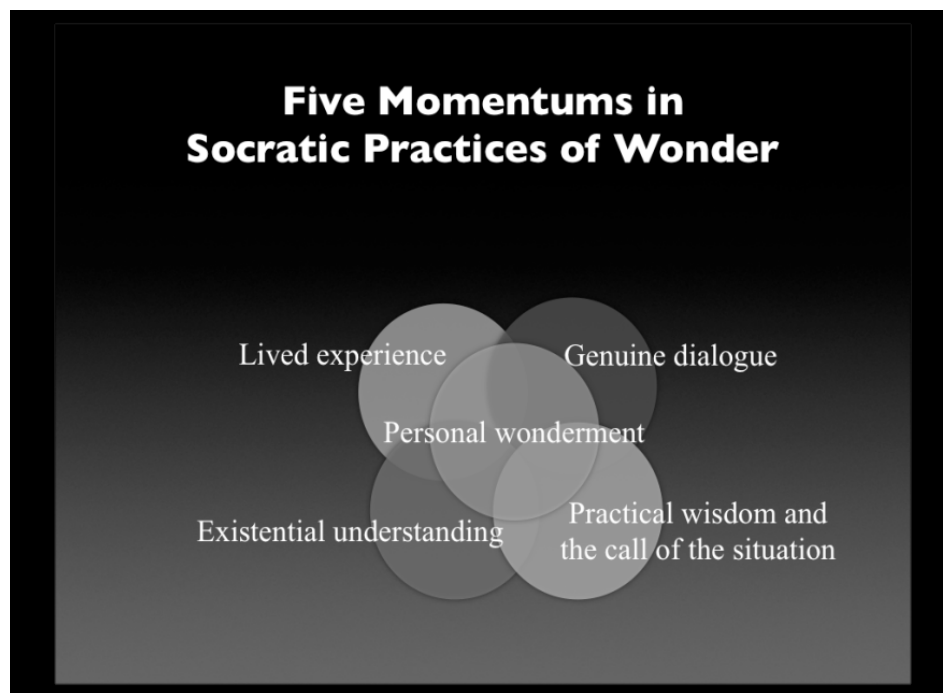


Figure 1: The Five Momentums in Socratic Practices of Wonder

These five momentums can be illustrated in this figure of five meetings with 1) a lived experience, 2) a personal wonderment, 3) the other and the otherness through authentic dialogues, 4) an existential grounding and understanding and 5) the practical wisdom and call of the situation in the midst of our daily and practical lives.

In order *not* to lead my participants – and especially professionals who want to learn how to facilitate Socratic Practices of Wonderments – into a belief that this is about learning the tricks of practicing a clear step-by-step-approach with clear procedures and techniques, I have learned to describe the processes and practices

³ For my more nuanced and detailed and expanded descriptions and reflections upon Socratic dialogue processes and the phenomenology of wonder in different settings, please read Hansen (2000, 2002, 2007a,b, 2008,a,b, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014).

through five metaphors and mental or spiritual rooms to attend. These rooms are each described in a paragraph below, with one or two related exercises:

Rooms and Exercises

Paragraph 1. The Phenomenological Dark Room

- exercise 1) *The trio of the story-teller, the re-teller and the sensor*

Paragraph 2. The Philosophical Secret Chamber

- exercise 2) *Finding a philosophical question*

- exercise 3) *Writing a philosophical essay*

Paragraph 3. The Cathedral

- exercise 4) *Communicating with the Great Thinkers*

Paragraph 4. The Chamber of the Heart

- exercise 5) *Silent dialoguing: What talks to your heart*

Paragraph 5. The Deed

- exercise 6) *Insight-Transfer*

The Phenomenological Dark Room (or ‘Soap Bath’)

Some might have seen the American movie called *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, directed by Robert Redford from the year 2000, starring Matt Damon and Will Smith in the key roles. There is especially one scene at the end of the movie which should have our attention. The golf player (Matt Damon) is going to swing his ‘putter’ in a golf competition⁴. It is a crucial moment in the game, and he really has to concentrate and do his best. Matt Damon is at first very self-assured, knowing very well what to do when his turn comes up. But standing now in the field, all alone with himself and the putter and the golf hole many 100 meters ahead, he gets uneasy. And it is only first in this vulnerable moment and state of mind, within a kind of acknowledgement of his not-knowing position and fallibility, that he is open and receptive enough to hear the words from his caddy and wise golf coach (Will Smith). The coach advises him first to look at one of the ‘masters’ on the field (another famous golf player who is at the same moment going to get ready to swing his putter). The coach asks Matt Damon to take a good look at this master, while he is commenting on what he wants the player to see:

He is practicing . . . almost as he is searching for something . . . and then he finds it. He is putting himself right into the middle of it. Can you feel that focus? And he got a lot of shots he could choose [...] but there is only one shot that is in perfect harmony with the field. One shot that is his . . . an authentic shot . . . and that shot is gonna

⁴ The scene can be seen on Youtube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=60PQRpo9T-Q>

choose him. There is a perfect shot out there that tries to find each and any one of us. What we got to do is to get out of its way. Let it choose us ... Uhm, look at him. He is in the field!

The coach describes that authentic moment and swing as a moment where the golf player looks at the world with a 'soft eye'. By that he means an eye that sees from or through the wholeness of the situation, where golf player, the grass, the sky, the flag and the hole 100 meters in front of him and the swing become one - a kind of contemplative holistic moment.

I find that this scene describes very well the situation we – as phenomenologists or as participants in a Socratic Wonder Workshop (this is what I call these practices) – are immersed into when working with what I call the 'First momentum' in the Practices of Wonder. We too have to get 'into the field', meaning the lived experience of the participant, and being *there* in the middle of it, to look at it or rather *with* it, with the soft eye, in order to see 'the heat of the moment' in the lived experience, that is, what really matters and calls upon our attention and thinking.

Another metaphor I use is the Phenomenological Dark Room because the process is a kind of walking into another room where the bright 'rational hard light' cannot get in and where we have to take our first impression and the memory and put it, dip it, into the different vasculars of developing fluids and fixatives in order for the negative (the lived experience) to become a positive picture (do hear the silent meaningfulness that this experience is secretly embedded in – cf. Derrida & Ferraris (2001) and Van Manen (2002)).

I also sometime describe these phenomenological writing, dialogue and reflections exercises in this first momentum as a 'Soap Bath', because it can be quite joyful and giving to immerse yourself into the lived experience and really see the landscape of this particular incident from within.

Exercise 1: One of the exercises I use is what I call the 'Trio of the Storyteller, the Re-Teller and the Sensor'. The first challenge in a Socratic Workshop is to find an impression from your own life, which is still making a great impression on you. You can easily find a lived experience that once made a great impact on you but now you have sorted it out, so to speak so that you know what it was all about. And you may often have told this story to use it as an example for a point you want to make. But this kind of story is what I call a 'closed story' or a 'finished story'. There are no longer any enigmatic tones connected to it. What you should search for is a lived experience, which has made and still makes an impression on you, but you do not know why, and therefore you want to share this experience and story to inquire into and wonder about what might be at play in this incident. This is what I call an 'Open Story' or living story.

The next challenge is to find a language for this story and lived experience so that it will open itself for you. As professionals we typically arrive with a professional language and way of describing and reflecting. This is what I above in the first paragraph called the language of 'Documentarian Realism' (page 5-6). So we have to find our own voice and language first.

But having found that, we can easily get in the way of the even more important silent voice of the lived experience itself. This is what I above (page 5-6) called the language of 'Lyrical Realism'. Like in the scene of the golf player, we too have to let the story find us. It is not what we want to tell that is important, but what life in *this* situation wants to tell us about human life as *such*. This is what we should be listening after. And it is not an easy exercise to do, but you sense when the person gets in touch or stands aside for the voice of life to speak, because in that moment the person starts listening to his or her own story with a new interest and growing amazement.

One critical comment I as a facilitator often hear myself say when listening to the participants first attempts to open up the lived experience by finding their own voice, is: "The story does not let me into the lived experience (to see and feel it from within) but only into *your* glance at it and your understanding of it."

In journalism they have a saying: "Don't tell it, show it!" and in a similar way the storyteller must let the lived experience tell its own story so that we as listeners feel that we are there. Or as a French phenomenological saying expresses it: It is not about knowing ("connaître") what you see, but to be born with what you see ("co-naître").

In the above-mentioned Trio-exercise, the Re-teller helps the storyteller listen to his own lived experience with other and another's words. This might help the storyteller find better an expression of the impression that he or she is trying to get in resonance with.

The Sensor is a person who is asked to listen beyond the words, so to speak, to what the words seems to point to. The Sensor is not asked to find explanations or give an interpretation of what the story is about, but to express his or her immediate intuition and sense of what is at play. Again, this is not an easy thing to do, but my experience is that when they get a sense of how to listen to the story in this more poetic or contemplative way (with 'the soft eye'), they really often give the Storyteller something extra to work further with on the lived experience.

At the end of this first momentum, the Socratic Practitioner should ask the guest what he or she had experienced as the wondrous in this specific lived experience. The Socratic Practitioner should be aware of not asking for an abstract reflection *about* the lived experience, but ask the guest on a sensitive and intuitive level to tell where she experiences and sees the wonder in this specific experience.

The participants are then all asked to write and re-write until a fine and personal and evocative story emerges that circles around the intuitive wonderment and impression that seems to be embodied in this lived experience.

The Philosophical Secret Chamber

The next momentum is a kind of beginning hermeneutical reflection from within and over the lived experience. I cannot, because of the extent of the chapters allowed in this book, go as detailed into this momentum as in my description of the first momentum.

The starting move in the second momentum though could be to ask the guest to consider for himself or herself what might be the general *philosophical and tacit assumptions* that this lived experience and intuition seems to be taking for given.

Here we are not so much interested in the spoken meaning and reflected personal philosophy of the person but in the *lived* philosophy and philosophical worldview that seems to imperceptibly carry or be the backdrop of the thoughts and views he or she has on the essence of the story.

This is not an easy task because people are so eager to tell their meanings and explanations and overall interpretations *about* the meaning of a story. But we are in a Socratic Practice of Wonder not aiming for finding quick answers and explanations of or solutions for the wonder, puzzlement, dilemma or problem we see in the lived experience. We seek to qualify and deepen our wonder in order to better get even deeper into a dialogue and presence of the phenomenon we want to understand.

As Gadamer would say: the hermeneutic experience has the structure of a question. Only if we arrive with a genuine and open question will we be able to be open ourselves and to be receptive for insights and understandings that are not sensed in the horizon of the worldview and meaning-making-paradigm that we normally construct our world through. Thus, how can we strengthen a *philosophical* kind of wonder now, which at the same time still is in tune or under impression of the personal lived experience?

This is, I would say, the main experience and credo in the genre of the essay or *essai* in the spirit of Michel de Montaigne and the many who follow this special kind of 'self-examination' (see also Merleau-Ponty, 1964; Adorno, 1976; Nehamas, 1998). It is a kind of moment where you are alone with yourself in a kind of spiritual wakefulness and self-reflection through the written words. I call it the 'Momentum of the Philosophical Secret Chamber' because you have to seek a kind of wonder-evoked presence and solitude with yourself, and – as it is so special with the essay in the spirit of Montaigne – with what seems common to mankind *in* the personal experiences that you reflect upon. So, in this momentum you are asked to lift yourself above the spontaneous, intuitive impressions and personal story in order to seek what is lived experience and of philosophical interest in this story.

Exercise 2: One of my practical exercises before I ask them to go to each private chamber to write is to let groups of two persons go for a walk outdoors with the purpose of finding one interesting and thought-provoking philosophical question to the story that they are told to get in dialogue with. It might be the storyteller himself and a colleague, but it might also be two strangers that are asked to take this story and find and give their philosophical question to the storyteller when they get back.

I normally work with groups of say 8 people, so one way of doing this is to have the participants take a round, a walk, with each story, and then they come back in the classroom and share it while the storyteller who is asked not to comment but just listen to their questions and reflections and picks out those questions and reflections that intuitively speak to him or her.

After having such a round the storyteller leaves the room with lots of inspirations and normally also with an expanded wonderment on some of the general themes, values and assumptions that seem to be taken for granted in both the lived experience and the story. Here you might, as a Socratic Practitioner, advice the storyteller to zoom in on *that* philosophical question and that general theme which seem to be most evocative and wonder-awaking for him or her. If he or she does not make that delimitation and ‘sonar exercise’, he or she will too easily get lost in too many different questions and themes, which don’t really seem to speak to each other. The aim of the second momentum is to let the individual participant formulate his/her or own *personal philosophical wonderment*. This will finally be developed in solitude and through writing.

The Cathedral (or ‘Socratic Acid Bath’)

When the participants have ‘induced’ a little personal story full of wonder and a personal philosophical wonder from and about the values, themes and assumptions, then time has come for the third momentum.

In this momentum – what I name ‘The Cathedral’ – the participants are asked to leave their private chambers and philosophical essay writing and to step into the conversation with the Great Thinkers and Artists of Humanity. Now each person has found and arrived with a unique lived experience that has something to say to us, and they have also found or developed their own personal wonder about this lived experience and the core theme and enigma that it touches upon.

But if we really want to get into a seriously *hermeneutic* reflection that also relates critically and dialectically to the phenomenological intuitions and to the personal assumptions and limitations, which are also always encapsulated in our personal and individual reflections, we have to expand our horizon by listening to the Grand Stories and Grand Wonderments in the history of Humanity as well.

There are three doors into this Cathedral:

1. to meet some Grand Stories and Wonderments which seem to speak back and into the lived experience and personal philosophical wonderment of the participant,
2. to meet as participants around a shared dialogical inquiry and later maybe even a shared community of wonder around some of the themes and questions that emerge and
3. to emphasize the *Socratic* character of the dialogue so that the participants too are forced to reflect critically, playfully and dialectically with their own thoughts and also with the so-called Grand Stories and Wonderments.

Exercise 3: In practical terms, the participants in this momentum are asked to find a Grand Story (for instance a play by Shakespeare or a music piece by Bach, art work of a great painter, a novel, fairy tale, poem, myth, spiritual or religious or philosophical text), which seems to give resonance or in some way be in tune with the ‘little story’ and ‘little personal wonder’ of the participant.

This will have the effect like playing the violin in a cathedral. Suddenly, the big amazing room seems to play back or give back greater reverb to the player and listener. And the same experience can happen when connecting the lived experience and personal wonder to the conversation about the Big Questions in Humanity.

But, I have to emphasize, there is of course a great danger that the participant only chooses those Grand Stories that fit with their own personal views on the truth of the matter. So, in the spirit of Socrates, it is very important that the participant is encouraged and challenged to find other Grand Stories as well that can function like a kind of Counter-Story, so that the person is forced into a *dialectical* way of thinking yet not in a Hegelian sense, that is, in a strive to find a synthesis of the oppositions, but in a *Socratic* kind of dialectics, where the participants are gently pushed towards what I earlier in the first paragraph called the ‘filled silence’ and ontological wonderment (*thaumazein*).

Some participants feel uneasy when we move into the third momentum. They apologize for not knowing, really, the Grand Thinkers or Artists of Mankind (Seneca, Dante, Shakespeare, Spinoza, Goethe, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, etc.). My quick reaction is usually “But you don’t have to!” It should be sufficient here just to relate to a fairy tale they have once heard and now remember, or a novel that they have read, which made an impression on them, or an art painting or some music and lyrics they have experienced or read and which now seems relevant for deepening their thoughts and wonder on their lived experience. That will do. The important thing is to get them to relate their stories and personal wonderment to *another and bigger* context than their own, and to put these alternatives and views at play in a dialectical way. The exercise then is both to recall a Grand Narrative

and Counter Narrative and to have a Socratic dialogue in the group around the chosen narratives in relation to the individual lived experience and personal wonder, but it is also expected that the participant takes inspirations and new wonderments from the Socratic Dialogue Group session back to his or her own philosophical essay writings.

The hermeneutics would search for and seek 'the Otherness' in a way that will make them even better *understand* what they now are questioning. But the deconstructivist, such as Derrida, would also question this kind of move towards a greater understanding through the meeting and dialogue with 'the Otherness'. Maybe, he would add, we have to differ between being in an 'understanding' and being in a 'longing', or between understanding and hope? Maybe there is, as Derrida seems to indicate, a kind of 'hermeneutic deafness' connected to the common approaches in philosophical hermeneutics. Maybe the blindness of the phenomenological intuition and seeing and the deafness of the hermeneutic understanding and 'hearing' can only be overcome through a radical longing for the un-known, the not yet thought or lived, which only a radical deconstructivist thinking may give room for? I like the quote by the late Derrida when he said in an interview: "I am trying, precisely, to put myself at a point so that I do not know any longer where I am going."⁵ This is exactly the spirit, I would say, that should lead the Socratic Practice!

The Chamber of the Heart

However, my experience tells me that there is also a need for a fourth momentum. And this has to do with a kind of 'existential grounding', where you ask: Who and where am I in all those beautiful, great and wondrous words and ideals and reflections?

You can be so captured and easily seduced by the Great Thinkers and Artists that you risk losing yourself *not* into a kind of 'filled silence' or openness, as I suppose Derrida is heading for, but into an inauthentic and superficial relation to these many thoughts and ideas. This happens when you lose sight of the lived experience and your personal philosophical wonder that brought you into the 'Cathedral'. Therefore, it is paramount that you as a Socratic Practitioner also make room for a kind of silent and existential self-contemplation among the participants.

I call this fourth momentum 'Heart Chamber', and this is the momentum where we hope to reach a kind of silent insight and wonderment, where the spoken and written words does not seem to be sufficient any longer. Therefore I am here encouraged to ask the participants also to 'philosophize with their heart' through different contemplative, spiritual and aesthetic exercises. I am inspired by Pierre Hadot's understanding of philosophy as a way and an art of life and his view of the philosophical practice as a kind of praxis of presence (Hadot, 1995, 2002, 2009).

⁵ Quoted from Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Strange Wonder*, 2011, p. 133.

Exercise 4: One way of making people ‘return’ to themselves in an existential and contemplative way, inspired as they are when they arrive from the third momentum and maybe also a bit changed after having met the new and strange horizons, could be to ask: “Now we have for a while enjoyed the company of the Great Thinkers and Artists, and felt uplifted and amazed about how enigmatic, large and unknown human life is when we take a closer look at it. We have here in this dialogue been occupied with the theme and question ‘What is really dignity?’ Have we – in this room and in the dialogue we have had – experienced dignity, in our soul and thoughts and in our relations to each other here and now?”

This kind of surprising question brings so to speak the subject matter or phenomenon to life right in the middle between us. People typically become silent, and after a while they speak with another voice or tone as if they spoke and reflected now in connection or attuned to the lived-here-and-now-experience of the phenomenon of dignity. And then the dialogue will often become deeper and the pauses longer, as if they were also consulting their own hearts.

But I also ask the participants, for example, to write a poem, or paint or draw or sculpture as good as they can, what they sense their heart is saying to them at in connection to the wonderments and reflections and insights, which came up during the Socratic Practice.

Or I use ‘exercises in silence’ or let them talk with each other so that when one person has said something, the other person should then wait for 30 seconds before he or she speaks, and the same goes for the other. This simple exercise very often brings in another and deeper kind of listening and awareness, which also affect the depth of the philosophical thoughts that emerge. They are now philosophizing also in an existential and spiritual way: “How do I live the thoughts I have? And which kind of virtues and ways of being can help me keeping myself more in tune with and having a musicality of seeing the wonders in my ordinary life?” At the end of this momentum I might ask: “What in all these many great thoughts and ideas specifically talks to your heart? What does your heart lead you to say to these specific chosen thoughts and ideas? And if you should express it through an aesthetic expression: what would it look like?”

When talking about virtues in the fourth momentum, I especially mention what I have described as the ‘Seven Socratic Virtues’ (Hansen, 2008a), which in brief are: *Love* (Eros and Agape), *Silence* (ontological silence), *Humility* (to be intellectually virginal when speaking about existential matters that seem to transcend our discursive language), *Humor* (in Kierkegaard’s sense of the word), *Courage* (to be and to stand in the openness), *Philosophical Discipline and Self-discipline* (to learn from the great thinkers and to try to live a ‘philosophical life’ with ‘ethical self-care’) and *Friendship*. Working with these virtues in philosophical counselling and Socratic dialogues have helped many of my participants to go from a primary epistemological and cognitive understanding of what it means to philosophize to an ontological and existential understanding.

The Deed

The last momentum is about bringing the participants back to their daily lives and work situation, so that the musicality of seeing the wonder *in* the ordinary does not disappear.

I called this momentum 'The Deed' because it is a deed we ask for when we try to react and give a personal response to the call of the Thou (Buber), Being (Heidegger) or Transcendence (Marcel).

Hannah Arendt has also given some fine analysis of what it means to act and why an existential act is not only driven by a personal decision but also by a dialogue with what we sense as the Truth, the Beauty and the Good. The moment of *natality*, of seeing the world and the other as if for the first time, and reacting to the call of the situation and relation in that moment, helps the person act from a kind of *phronesis* and *Sophia* (practical and existential wisdom) and not just from theoretical knowledge and methods or idiosyncratic preferences and cognitive and personal choices.

This momentum is about searching for the practical wisdom in daily life and working life or education that the participants may be occupied with, and about finding practical ways of organizing our life and work so there will be time and space to hear 'the call' of the situation or relation and see the wonders *in* our ordinary lives.

In this momentum we may talk about ethical self-care and how – very practically and individually or collectively – to live a philosophical life, as well as how old structures in our organizations, habits of working and living, that we now share with each other, may have to change. This means also being critically discussing and reflecting upon the policies and current managements, and how we through our wonder-based approach may come up with new ideas, innovations and changes in our common life and view on what we consider to be life qualities and values to follow.

Exercise 5: Here I might end the momentum by asking questions like: "Where and who are we in all these great and beautiful thoughts and ideas? How do we live these thoughts, ideals and ideas? If you should express it through a concrete daily action, which action would that be? And which practical wisdom and actions do your reflections and wonderments over the lived experience now call you to consider in relation to your own life and in your profession? How would these thoughts and wonderments make a concrete practical difference in your common life and work? What would be a great 'Deed' in your and your colleague's life and at your work? How would you and your colleague concretely strengthen your shared abilities to care for moments and ways of dialogues and reflections that will keep you open and aware of the wonder in your shared and ordinary life and work? If you in a community should come up with one concrete suggestion for a

change in your daily life and work, what would that be? What could help increase a Socratic Dialogue Culture in your organization?"

Wonder Lab and how not to facilitate a Socratic and Philosophical Dialogue Praxis

Let me now end my descriptions of how I experience and understand the Call of Wonder and how I try to create Practices of Wonder at my university.

One of my tacit assumptions in my description is that to be in wonder is good and that it is worthwhile to seek and create 'landing sites' for wonderment in different settings. One could and should of course question that. Might there not be situations and settings where it is not advisable to wonder and 'stand in the openness'? For sure! There are lots of situations and settings. Sometimes it is better to be curious or inquiring or playful or critical or concept analyzing or therapeutic or coaching or strategic or functional and problem solving. And sometimes it is better to wonder in a fact-finding or cause-and-effect-finding way as the normal scientist would do.

There is, in my view, for example a huge phenomenological difference between being in a helping situation (e.g. therapy, coaching, professional counselling, etc.) or being in a community of wonder where we basically are in an I-Thou-relation with the world, the phenomenon and ourselves.

In my view, Socratic Dialogue and Philosophical Counselling practices as such deteriorate if they become a therapeutic and coaching practice based on a helping relation. As a Socratic Practitioner we only invite our guest⁶ to join us in our passion and love of wisdom (*philo-sophia*), a wisdom we do not have either.

Philosophical Practice should be understood and practiced, I would say, more like inviting to a music concert. We – as Socratic Practitioners – are not the great musicians and by no means the Music, but only the (hopefully) humble listeners to a 'music' that can emerge when we are grasped by the great thoughts and wonderment. What we – the Socratic Practitioners and guests – meet around is not the guest's idiosyncratic or psychological wants and problems. We meet indeed to seek to transcend our 'small' idiosyncratic, psychological and social constructivist 'caves' and to meet in a shared admiring wonder and maybe even gratitude of how wonderful or enigmatic life is – if we look at things so to speak with the caring and 'soft eye', and not just the pragmatic, analytical, critical and constructivist or therapeutic one.

⁶ Or if we describe the philosophical practice situation as if we are the guest and the participant the *host*, it would be, I think, even more correct and require us to be more humble. See Derrida (1996).

One attitude or approach that I also must warn myself continuously not to use or be caught up by is the approach or attitude that wonder – to be in wonder and to ‘create wonder – becomes the overall aim of doing Socratic Practices of Wonder!

I have often observed myself easily running into such a position. But wonder should *never* be the main purpose of philosophizing. It should only be the bridal veil of the bride that follows her wherever she goes, or the aftermath of the ship sailing.

If wonderment in Philosophical Practice becomes the main purpose we indirectly assume that we then *know* what wonder really is, and then a kind of ‘wonder fetishism’ can occur and ‘wonderment pedagogy’, which may reduce the freedom and openness of *philo-sophia*. What we must have as our only main purpose in doing Philosophical Practice, Socratic Dialogues or Philosophical Counselling is to focus on the subject matter (“zu den Sachen selbst”, cf. Heidegger) and not on some of the results of seeking to understand the phenomenon or the subject matter.

How to arrange and “install” philosophical practice at universities: Having made these last reservations I will now turn to my last description of a way of bringing Socratic Practices of Wonder into play with society and professional organizations through what I in 2013 founded as a Wonder Lab at the Centre for Dialogue and Organization at my university in Denmark.

People with an insight into phenomenology, and especially existential phenomenology in its practical writing or dialogical versions (see respectively Max Van Manen, 1990, 2002, 2014; Halling, 1994, 2008) will see the similarity between the Five Momentums of Socratic Workshop and the Community of Wonder, which I have described above – and the momentums in a good phenomenological-hermeneutic inquiry described in human science. Following Van Manen (1990), these are the momentums in such an inquiry:

1. Turning to a phenomenon that seriously interests us and commits us to the world
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it
3. Reflecting on the essential themes that characterize the phenomenon
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting
5. Maintaining a strong and wondrous relation to the phenomenon
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

As we can see, we also go through similar processes of ‘*Bildung*’ (cultural self-formation) in a Philosophical Practice, so that some years ago I began to wonder why we did not try more systematically to arrange and ‘install’ philosophical

practice at universities, in our research approaches as well as in our higher education pedagogy (Hansen, 2010, 2014). What I now and contemporary works have come up with is a research unit at my university where we inquire into many different ways of wonder-based teaching, educational guidance at a higher educational level, and ‘Wonder-based Innovation Processes’ as well as the ‘Socratic Video Self-Confrontation Method’ and ‘Socratic Research Interviewing’ (Hansen, in print) used in qualitative research and in what I call ‘Socratic and Phenomenological-oriented Action Research’ (SPAR) (Hansen, 2014).

The Wonder Lab has five operative platforms:

- A. The Workshop
- B. The Experimental Station
- C. The Gym
- D. The Salon and Analysis Room
- E. The Knowledge Base and Meeting Place

A. The Workshop (“Værkstedet”) where professionals and practitioners (nurses, social workers, teachers, coaches, leaders, HR-consultants, etc.) meet with researchers and research students in order to find new ways of working with wonder-based practices and philosophical counselling and Socratic dialogue Groups. The purpose is to see and inquire into different ways of doing philosophical practice so that this particular profession and group would learn from it. I have learned that working with nurses requires another way of working with philosophical practice than for instance with teachers or HR-consultants. This may not be surprising, but nevertheless interesting to systematically acquire knowledge about and do research on.

B. The Experimental Station (“Forsøgsstationen”) are typically longer and external sponsored research projects, where organizations ask me to work with and follow them for 2-3 years. It is here that I develop my Socratic and Phenomenological Action Research approaches and it is in these processes that I experience how the practitioners/professionals become a kind of ‘co-inquirers’ through genuine Socratic Dialogue Groups and Communities of Wonder. This has been done in Denmark by me at a Design College where ten design professors and some of their students worked with different forms of both non-verbal and verbal wonder-based innovation processes and Socratic dialogues for more than three years, and where the research question was about the relationship between creativity and philosophical wonderment (Hansen, 2014). Another 3-year and Socratic action research project was on a Danish Hospice where the research question was that the

nurses, priests, psychologists and the management were inquiring about in co-operation with me was: In what way, if at all, can philosophical practice qualify the existential dialogue in palliative care? And right now I am engaged again in a 2-year Socratic action research project with a larger municipality in Denmark (Vejlse), which is very interested in how wonder-based innovation could be used and understood in their organization at different levels (in the HR-department, at managerial level and at a more practical level between local municipality consultants in education and health and care).

C. The Gym (“Træningsrummet”). This is the platform where professionals ask me to go out into their organization to train them in doing Socratic dialogue groups, philosophical counselling and other wonder-based exercises. I also make an agreement when doing it that these processes will be videotaped and that I will end the session by interviewing the participants. I do this to secure that my ‘education’ of them is not just an education or training session but will also become new material for systematic research and knowledge gathering about the use of philosophical practice in different settings and situations.

D. The Salon and Analysis Room (“Salonen og Analyserummet”). When we arrange a Salon in the Wonder Lab we do it with different kind of experts and scholars, philosophers and artist, in a setting that is relaxed and ‘bohemian’. We might light some candles and drink a glass of wine as if we were sitting in front of a fireplace. And the theme and way of talking and bringing people together is untraditional, cheerful and playful or daring and seeking in a way where you have the courage and mood to try out thoughts and articulate things which you only have a dense impression of but sense that they could be important.

In the Analysis Room we invite experts and researchers in human science and philosophy to share and discuss their hardcore academic and scholarly analyses and texts. It often serves as a forum for writing a new book or preparing a new research project or conference.

E. The Meeting Place and Knowledge Base (“Mødestedet og Vidensbasen”). The Meeting Place is the place where we invite common people from the local environment or Denmark as such twice a year to a speech or lecture about philosophical practice or other wonder-based approaches, or maybe a theme about the relationship between an artist’s personal and philosophical life and world view and his or her ability to create artwork. We do that often in co-operation with the Danish Society of Philosophical Practice, of which I also am a board member.

The Knowledge Base is the name of our attempt and concrete effort to collect in a systematic and accessible way empirical and theoretical knowledge about the practical experiences, ideas and theories behind philosophical practice, Socratic dialogue and midwifery practices and the phenomenology of wonder in different

settings. Thus, Wonder Lab sees it as its duty to report and collect information and materials from every activity that happens in the auspices of Wonder Lab in order to do research on it later.

The Wonder Lab is only one out of four other Labs and the Dialogue Labs⁷ at the Centre for Dialogue and Organization at the Department of Communication, Aalborg University. The other Labs are: Inquiry Lab, Play Lab and Material Story Lab, which my colleagues are responsible for. In the Inquiry Lab, they take a more psychological and communicant analytical approach focusing on different ways of coaching and professional dialogues and conflict-solving in professional organizations. In the Play Lab, they follow the lead of the philosophers Schiller, Gadamer and L  gstrup by saying that play and playfulness is a fundamental sovereign and spontaneous life expression. They inquire how play can facilitate creativity and innovation in professional companies among adults and professionals. Material Story Lab looks at how the material surroundings and the space and atmosphere in a room affects and interacts with our ways of having dialogues and relations in professional and creative settings.

What is so interesting and only at its very beginning, as I write this, is the ‘Over Labs’ between our Labs in Dialogue Labs. That is, what might be the similarities and differences between Wonder Lab and Play Lab, or the other Labs. What can we learn from each other? And in what way can the Practices of Wonder and Call of Wonder be of inspiration in the other Labs? This I will be keen to tell you more about in the years to come.

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⁷ See: http://www.kommunikation.aau.dk/forskning/vidensgrupper/cdo/dialogue_labs/

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