PHILOSOPHISING TOWARDS WISDOM
AS NURTURING THE TREE OF LIFE IN US

PHILOSOPHISING TOWARDS WISDOM ENTENDIDO COMO ALIMENTACIÓN DEL ÁRBOL DE LA VIDA QUE RESIDE EN NOSOTROS

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Abstract: In this essay the author poses the hypothesis that the metaphor "to philosophise is to nurture the Tree of life in us" is a better metaphor than "to philosophise is to cease living" when it comes to conceptualizing what people might experience when philosophising the so called "Dialogos Way". First, the author outlines different usages of the Tree of life metaphor. In line with reflective practice research methodology, she then explores how the metaphor corresponds to the Dialogos approach as a process- and wisdom oriented form of philosophical practice. Further, through original reflection, she narrates six examples from her experience as a philosophical practitioner. From this, six themes are extracted through critical reflection: aha-experience, peak-experience, heart-to-heart synchronization, life-guiding concepts, plateau experience and pluralism. The themes are then reflected upon theoretically and generally. Summing up, the participants seemed to have experienced forms of psychological growth rather than psychological suffering and "death" through participation in Dialogos dialogue series or workshops. The author concludes that even though the long term aim of philosophy might well be to cope with death, and even though philosophising might imply practicing "dying" through letting go of one`s more or less well founded opinions and stances, this might

lead to a new "birth" and thus to psychological growth rather than psychological suffering and death, supporting the initial hypothesis.

Key words: Philosophical practice, Philosophising the Dialogos Way, Tree of life, Wisdom, Education, Reflective practice research

Resumen: En este artículo, la autora plantea la hipótesis de que la metáfora "filosofar es nutrir el árbol de la vida en nosotros" es mejor que "filosofar es aprehender la vida" cuando se trata de conceptualizar lo que las personas pueden experimentar una filosofía entendida como "Dialogos way" (camino dialógico) hacia la sabiduría. La autora describe diferentes usos de la metáfora del árbol de la vida y explora cómo ésta se alinea dentro del enfoque *Dialogos* como una forma de Filosofía Aplicada orientada al proceso. Más tarde, se utiliza una metodología y estructura de investigación de práctica reflexiva para narrar ejemplos de Filosofía Aplicada del autor. De ahí, se inferirán seis temas por medio de una reflexión crítica: la experiencia "ajá", la experiencia límite, la sincronización de corazón a corazón, los conceptos que guían la vida, la experiencia de meseta y el pluralismo. Posteriormente, se reflexiona teóricamente sobre estos temas. Los resultados señalan que los participantes del trabajo parecen experimentar formas de crecimiento psicológico en lugar de sufrimiento psicológico y "muerte". La autora concluye que, en este sentido, aunque el objetivo a largo plazo de la filosofía podría ser afrontar la muerte, y aunque filosofar podría implicar practicar la "muerte" mediante el abandono de las opiniones y posturas más o menos fundadas, esto podría llevar a un nuevo "nacimiento" y, por lo tanto, al crecimiento psicológico más que al sufrimiento psicológico y la muerte; en consecuencia, se apoya la hipótesis inicial.

Palabras clave: Filosofía Aplicada, Philosophising the Dialogos Way, árbol de la vida, sabiduría, Educación, investigación de práctica reflexiva

Introduction

In his essay «To philosophise is to cease living», Oscar Brenifier[1] takes his point of departure in Plato`s words that those who apply themselves to philosophy in the proper way, are doing no more nor less than to prepare themselves for the moment of dying and the

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[1] BRENIFIER, Oscar: "To philosophize is to cease living", available in ob-cl.pdf (buf.no) (last access January 25th, 2021).

state of death. From this, Brenifier proposes that if to philosophise is learning to die and learning how to die, it cannot be done except than by practicing dying. To him, this means that to philosophise is actually dying, in order to acquire a real experience of death. In practice, it implies "to overturn established ideas and induce uneasiness, at the risk of a bad conscience, a sort of psychological suffering and death". For instance, when forcing people to take opposite stances through his method of philosophising through antinomies[2], he causes confusion and sometimes anger and shame in many of his participants. This can be psychologically painful. It sometimes forces people to turn their thinking upside down and inside out, and to let go of some of their more or less narrow opinions and poorly grounded stances. To some, it is a shocking experience, a form of killing of the ego, as it forces people to give up a piece of their identity, because people often identify with their opinions[3].

In this essay, I will take a slightly different stance. I agree with Brenifier that coming to terms with one`s own mortality in such a way that one can face death with a peace of mind similar to that expressed by Socrates in the Apology[4], might well be a long term outcome of philosophising. I also agree that the search of truth involved in philosophising, most likely implies overturning (some of) one`s established ideas and opinions. However, I disagree that this necessarily needs to imply "a sort of psychological suffering", i.e. imply for instance anger or shame. On the contrary, the "death"

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[2] BRENIFIER, Oscar: "Philosophising through antinomies", available in http://www.practiques-philosophiques.fr (last access February 11th 2016).

[3] My interpretation both from reading Brenifier`s writings and from experiencing and studying his practice since 2005.

[4] PLATO: *The Republic,* availabe in http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html (last access August 21th 2015)

of one`s opinions, stances and pieces of identity might lead to a "psychological new birth" and "growth". To nurture such growth does not imply that there must have been a painful "death of the ego" before the growth takes place. On the contrary. The transition between the death of an opinion, or even the transcendence of a world view, can happen through the smooth flow of dialogical exchange over time. In genuine dialogical encounters, people necessarily transcend their existing egos when taking the perspectives of others, critically examining these as well as their own perspectives. In the process, an expansion and deepening and some times change of their horizons of understanding and thus identities necessarily will take place. At least for a period of time after such a gentle dynamic of "psychological deaths" and "new births", people might even experience a sense of uplifted wellbeing and fulfillment. Hence, for this reason as well as for others, I will argue that the metaphor "philosophising is to nurture the Tree of life in us" is a better metaphor than "philosophising is to cease living" when trying to understand what people`s experiences of philosophizing the Dialogos Way over some time.

The Tree of life – from archetype to research methodology

So far, I have not come across anyone who has used the Tree of life as a metaphor in literature about philosophical practice. This is rather strange, the Tree of life being an archetype that can be found in most cultures and spiritual traditions, indigenous as well as Judeo-Christian-Islamic, Hindu-Buddhist and Daoist. For instance, in the Judeo-Christian tradition we meet the metaphor of the Tree of life already in Genesis 2, 9: "The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye

and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil"[5].

Murphy's book *Tree of Life. An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*[6] has served as an introduction to the wisdom literature of the Bible since the early 1990s. It includes the Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and Wisdom of Solomon. Another example is Rabbi Lawrence Troster who uses the metaphor in his article *Preserving the Tree of life: Wisdom Tradition and Jewish Sustainability ethics*[7]. In the Christian tradition, the Revelations 22 even ends with a reference to the tree of life:

> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

While the Tree of life is a widely used metaphor in Judaism and Christianity, it har a slightly different valour in the Quran, where there is only one tree mentioned, namely the Tree of immortality:

"Abu Hurayrah: The Prophet Muhammad said: "In Paradise is a tree in the shade of which the stars course 100 years without cutting it: the Tree of Immortality."[8] Another variant of the Tree of life metaphor is also found in the more than 5000 year old Indian Yoga tradition, however as a tree growing upside down: "There is an

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[5] Retrieved 28.12.2020 from Genesis 2 NIV - Thus the heavens and the earth were - Bible Gateway

[6] MURPHY, Roland: *Tree of Life. An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature,* Doubleday. New York, 1990.

[7] TROSTER, Lawrence: «Preserving the Tree of life: Wisdom Tradition and Jewish Sustainability Ethics». In: *Religions: A Scholarly Journal*, Volume 2012, Issue 1, p. 43-49

[8] WHEELER, Brannon: *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis.* Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 2002, p. 24.

eternal tree called the Ashvattha, which has its roots above and its branches below"[9].

However, the Tree of life is not only an archetype in spiritual traditions. It is also used as a biological model and research tool. As such, the common belief is according to Gontier[10] that the Tree of life is first used by Charles Darwin in *On the origin of Species*[11] to explore the evolution of life and describe the relationships between organisms. However, she demonstrates that tree diagrams as we know them today, are the outgrowth of ancient philosophical attempts to find the "true order" of the world, and to map the world "as it is" (ontologically), according to its true essence. The tree archetype was according to her used to describe everything BUT biological evolution. Philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, inspired by Egyptian and Asian religions, began to develop logical systems of classification based on the tree archetype, she argues. Their goal was to find order and stability of knowledge in an ever-changing, continuous world of plenty.

The Tree of life diagram is today most commonly used to describe biological evolution and relationships, according also to Schramm and colleagues[12]. They argue that "reading evolutionary trees is seen as a major challenge for biologists in learning about evolution and its applications in research". They subsume the skills needed for such reading, interpretation, and construction under the term "tree-thinking," which they divide into "tree-reading" and "tree-

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[9] DEUSSEN, Paul: *Sixty Upanishads of the Veda*. Volume 1, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi,1997, p 269-273.

[10] GONTIER, Nathalie: Depicting the Tree of Life: the Philosophical and Historical Roots of Evolutionary Tree Diagrams. In *Evo Edu Outreach* 4**,** 515–538 (2011).

[11] DARWIN, Charles: *On the Origin of Species*. Random House, USA, 1859/2003.

[12] SCHRAMM, Thilo, SCHACHTSCHNEIDER, Yvonne & SCHMIEMANN, Philippe. «Understanding the tree of life: an overview of tree-reading skill frameworks». in *Evo Edu Outreach* 12, 11. 2019.

building." Another example is Fisler et al.[13], who in the paper *The treeness of the tree of historical trees of life* compare and categorize historical ideas about trees showing relationships between biological entities, using «the hierarchical structure of the tree to test the global consistent of similarities among these ideas». They define treeness as "the degree to which shared features among entities fit to a rooted hierarchical non-cyclic connected graph (a «tree»)".

The Tree of life metaphor is also used in other forms of research. For instance, Vivian Estrada in her paper *The Tree of life as a Research Methodology[14]*, proposes a methodology based on some of the values and concepts embedded in the *Ceiba* or the "Tree of Life" in her own Maya Indigenous culture. This brings us to the methodological approach in this particular essay.

Methodology

Danish historian of philosophy of science Kjørup[15] makes a distinction between three forms of knowing, namely knowing as results of empirical research, knowing as scholarship built on the studies of for instance classical philosophy and literature, and knowing as awareness raising. It is this latter form of knowing we know (sic!) from the inscription over the entrance to the temple of Delphi: Gnothi Seauthon – know yourself. We also know it from Socrates as we meet him in the dialogues of Plato, in which he

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[13] FISLER Marie, CRÉMIÉRE Cédic, DARLU, Pierre, LECOINTRE, Gauillaume. «The treeness of the tree of historical trees of life». In *PLoS ONE* 15(1) e0226567, 2020.

[14] ESTRADA, Vivian: "The Tree of life as a Research Methodology". *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 34, 2005, 44-52.

[15] KJØRUP, Søren: *Menneskevitenskapene. Bind 1. Humanioras historie og grundproblemer.* Roskilde universitets forlag. Roskilde, 1996/2008.

claims that «the unexamined life is not worth living»[16]. In this tradition knowledge is thought of as something we are born with and have access to, and which can be brought to consciousness for instance by the Socratic method. This is for instance why we are able to grasp mathematical principles, which we can not see in the empirical world. Still, we can understand them with our minds.

Norwegian philosopher Lindseth[17] brings forward one variant of knowing as awareness raising, namely an experience based form of research which he calls *reflective practice research*. He argues that experience based knowing is not so insecure as some claim, not the least because one through experience is capable of becoming aware of and disclose when self-interest or convenience is the base of one`s action. We can sense that something is right or wrong, good or less good, and disclose when experience based knowing is nothing less than uncritical conformism. It demands a critical vigilance towards habitual beliefs and practices, he argues. This vigilance is promoted and enhanced through a phenomenological basic attitude and method. This attitude can also be compared to the attitude emphasised by Barad[18]. She argues for an onto-epistem-ological perspective in which being and knowing is integrated: We know because we are already embedded in the world.

Such a perspective makes critical and theoretical reflection upon one`s own experiences and practices valuable, as it might increase the critical awareness also of other practices and theories. In line with the methodology of Lindseth above, I have chosen to reflect

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[16] PLATO: *Apology,* available in The Internet Classics Archive (last access April 30th 2020).

[17] LINDSETH, Anders: "Forskningens vei – Fra livserfaring til en observerbar verden og tilbake til livets virksomheter. I Halås, Catrine Torbjørnsen, Ingjerd Gåre Kymre & Kari Steinsvik (red.). *Humanistiske forskningstilnærminger til profesjonspraksis.* Gyldendal Akademisk, Oslo (Norway), 2017 p. 15-37)

[18] BARAD, Karen: "Posthumanist performativity: Toward and understandning of how matter comes to matter". *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 28*, 2003, 801-831.

upon experiences from the process of developing the Dialogos approach to philosophical practice, followed by six examples of participant feedback after participating in a workshop or dialogue series. Much of my research can be categorized as action research, and has had an emergent design, that is, a growth design compatible with the Tree of life metaphor. As such, the Dialogos development- and research process from the mid-90s till now can in itself be viewed in light of the Tree of life metaphor. More important in this essay, however, is the Tree of life as a metaphor that can help describe what is going on inside of and between individuals participating in philosophical dialogues over some time. Therefore, in this essay I will use a reflective practice research approach rather than an action research approach.

Further structure of the essay

The essay is further structured as follows: In the next section, I narrate aspects of the Dialogos development process that can be directly linked to the metaphor of the Tree of life. Then I narrate six examples of people`s experiences from philosophizing "the Dialogos Way" with me. Both is done in a form that can be compared to Lindseth`s notion "original reflection": I have tried to find words to experiences that Lindseth conceptualizes as experiences "that could not be forgotten because it disturbed or made a special impression». Lindseth connects the narration of the experience to the Greek *parrhèsia* – a form of truth telling that implies speaking from the heart, directly from the guts, without paying attention to rhetorical demands or political correctness. This is the first step in Lindseth`s model for reflective practice research. The next step is what Lindseth calls "critical reflection". Here I have chosen to focus on six themes or qualities that became important to me in the reflective process, namely *aha-experience, peak-experience, heart-to-heart synchronization, plateau*

experience and *pluralism*. The themes are reflected upon in through what Lindseth calls "theoretical reflection". Here, the experiences are brought into dialogue with theoretical and philosoohical persoectives and concepts. The aim of the essay is not to create generalizable knowledge in line with other forms of research, but rather to *open up* the examples and thus the Dialogos approach. Through this, the argument that philosophising the Dialogos Way might be understood as nurturing the Tree of life in us, in contrast to Brenifier`s view that to philosophise is to cease living, is also supported.

Introductory reflection section: The Dialogos Tree of life in creation

Most of my life, also when I called myself an atheist, I have had the impression that I often am *given* what I need to develop my understanding or conduct my work effectively and even effortlessly. Some would call it coincidence, others synchronicity, others again divine leadership. Here, I will narrate three such experiences, which all had the form of what I in the theoretical reflection section call "aha-experiences", or even "peak-experiences".

When working with my book "Philosophising the Dialogos Way towards Wisdom in Education –Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation"[19] an illustration caught my attention. It was an illustration of Proverbs 3:18, named *Wisdom is the Tree of life*[20] . It pictured a human being standing on a book, with the Tree of life enlightening the body, connecting the individual and the

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[19] HELSKOG, Guro Hansen. *Philosophizing the Dialogos Way Towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation.* Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2019.

[20] See the illustration to FJÆRLI, Olav: «Guddommelig visdom». Available in Guddommelig Visdom (bibelfellesskapet.net) (last access June 25th 2020)

universal, the person and the cosmic surroundings. This interrelatedness and connectedness was emphasized also by classical Greek philosophers[21]. For instance, Marcus Aurelius[22] speaks about the "ruling faculty" in us and in the universe, expressing the interrelatedness between the individual, other humans and the universe:

> Hasten to examine thy own ruling faculty and that of the universe and that of thy neighbour; thy own that though mayest make it just: and that of the universe, that thouh mayest remember of what thou art a part; and that of your neighbour, that thou mayest know whether he has acted ignorantly or with knowledge, and that thou mayest also consider that his ruling faculty is akin to thine.

Also the Indian yoga tradition, which basically is a philosophy of life, the interrelatedness between the individual, nature and our cosmic surroundings, interrelatedness is focused. For instance, in an interview I had in 2019 with Yogic guru Hansaji Yogendra, the director of the oldest Yoga institute in the world, she expressed the interrelatedness between humans and nature as follows:

> A tree brings what? Wood. No, I would not say a tree is wood. I would say the tree is part of my lung, because then I breathe, I am breathing. Taking oxygen. Breathing out carbon dioxide. Tree is taking carbon dioxide, throwing oxygen. So my lung is my tree, and I have to see that the tree is part of me[23].

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[21] HADOT, Pierre: *Philosophy as a way of life: spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault,* Blackwell, Malden MA, 1995.

[22] AURELIUS, Marcus: *The Meditations,* available in The Internet Classics Archive http://classics.mit.edu/Antoninus/meditations.9.nine.html (last access Oct. 31st 2020).

[23] The interview with Director Hansaji Yogendra was conducted in 2019 during one of my stays in India in the years 2017-2020, as part of my efforts to better understand Indian philosophies of life and education.

Related to the mentioned illustration, the "ruling faculty" of
Aurelius and the "lung as our tree" of Hansaji, might well be
compared to the metaphor of "the tree of life in us", connecting us
to everything and everyone around us.

The title of the illustration, as well as the illustration itself, struck
me as one of those mind blowing aha-experiences of discovering
connections that I had not seen before. Wisdom had been a key
concept for me since the mid1990s. From the beginning, my work
with pedagogical philosophical practice has been guided by the
following three questions

- What is wisdom?
- What might a pedagogical approach that can contribute to
  the awakening of people's longing and search for wisdom
  look like?
- Is it possible to create such an approach, and if yes, how?

Already the first book in the Dialogos series[24] ended with an
invitation to students to reflect upon their work with Dialogos
based in the meta reflection question *Can we become wiser/more
prudent when we philosophise together?* However, not before this
moment had I connected wisdom to the metaphor of the Tree of
life. If philosophising the Dialogos way is about searching wisdom
together, it can thus also be understood as nurturing the Tree of life
in us.

Intuition at work

This aha-experience made me think about how the name of the
approach – Dialogos – was not chosen rationally from a list of
possible names. I had discussed some alternatives with my editor at
the time, *Agora* being one of them, but I was not satisfied with its

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[24] HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: *Dialogos: filosofi for ungdomstrinnet: Elevbok 8.
Trinn*. Fag og kultur, Oslo (Norway), 2006.

connotations to arenas for fighting or bargaining. Then, one morning in 2004 I simply woke up with the word *Dialogos* filling my mind. I did not know the meaning of the word at the time, nor how it all of a sudden had entered my consciousness. What I intuitively did know, however, was that this was the perfect name for the approach that I was about to develop. The word consists of two parts – *dia* which means through, and *logos,* which has many different meanings. In ancient Greek times, the order of the universe would be called the *logos*. The order of logos and language were intricately related to one another, as shown by the fact that the word *logos* does not only refer to the order in the world. It also translates as reasoning, logic, wisdom and language, as Norwegian theologian Notto R. Thelle[25] made me aware of when sending me the three beautiful texts he had written for the third book for students in the Dialogos series, each representing wisdom perspectives respectively in Islam, Buddhism and Christianity. In the text "In the beginning was wisdom – a conversation with Jesus" he points to the fact that logos is the Greek word used in the opening words of the gospel of John in the New Testament[26]. Thelle had changed the word (logos) to wisdom:

> In the beginning was Wisdom, and Wisdom was with God, and Wisdom was God. He was with God in the beginning. (…) In wisdom was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (see Thelle 2008).

Wisdom – the word – logos refers to Jesus in this passage. Being in the midst of a process of moving from a rational-atheist worldview towards a spiritual-religious one, I was mind blown by this

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[25] THELLE, Notto Roald: I begynnelsen var visdommen. En samtale med Jesus. In: Helskog, Guro Hansen and Ribe, Andreas: Dialogos- Praktisk filosofi I skolen. Elevbok. Fagbokforlaget, Bergen (Norway), 2008 p.200-201.
[26] JOHN 1.1-57, available in John 1 NIV – The Word Became Flesh – In the – Bible Gateway (last access June 20th 2020).

discovery too. It was close to a *peak-experience* (see the theoretical reflection section).

Dialogos as a journey in the Tree of life

Further down the road I chose to describe the Dialogos approach as a form of pedagogical philosophical practice aimed at nurturing our inner lives and relationships by *searching wisdom* together from different angles. For the purpose of illustrating wisdom as a multi dimensional concept, I developed a map consisting of six dimensions: The critical-analytical, the spiritual-ideal, the existential-emotional, the relational-communicative, the cultural-historical, and the practical-ethical wisdom dimensions[27]. When my good colleague and partner in philosophising, Michael Noah Weiss, first saw the model, he made me aware that it looked very much like the Jewish Kabbalah. Looking it up through Google, I was astonished and baffled once more. Not only was the visual similarity striking. The way Rabbi Shaoni Labowitz[28] describes the "journey in Kabbalah" in his book "Miraculous Living: A guided journey in Kabbalah Through the Ten Gates of the Tree of Life", is close to my experience of what developing the Dialogos approach had done to me (see the epilogue in Helskog 2019) and what the experience of philosophising "the Dialogos Way" had done to many of the participants over the years (see the next sections of this essay). Labowitz writes that

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[27] HELSKOG, Guro Hansen. *Philosophizing the Dialogos Way Towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation.* Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2019.

[28] LABOWITZ, Shaoni: *Miraculous Living: A Guided Journey in Kabbalah Through the Ten Gates of the Tree of Life.* Touchstone, New York (USA) 1998, p.22.

When I journeyed the path of the Tree (of life), my life changed. What had been chaotic became simpler; what has been confusing became clear; what had become dissonant became ordered, and what had been sadly ordinary became sacred and extraordinary, (…) This path is referred to in ancient kabbalistic teachings as the journey through the Ten Heavenly Gates of the Tree of life" (p. 22).

Thus, to me there is an unintended yet fascinating connection between the ancient and contemporary Trees of life, and how I through the work with this essay have come to understand philosophising the Dialogos Way as nurturing the Tree of life in us.

Nurturing the Tree of life by experientially connecting the personal and the universal

Concretely, philosophising the Dialogos Way invites people to reflect upon and/or analyze important topics involved in the art of living through collaborative and dialogical thinking. What characterizes the Dialogos approach is, amongst other that it has "the will to wisdom" as a core virtue. It intends what philosophy literally means, namely *philo-sophia*, meaning the love of and search for wisdom. As we have seen, this "wisdom" might be understood as the "Tree of life" in us. Moreover, the Dialogos approach to philosophical practice is mainly developed for pedagogical, philosophical and dialogical work in *groups*, focusing on more or less long term open-ended processes that gradually (and hopefully) will lead to personal growth and expansion of consciousness and wisdom in multiple dimensions and directions in line with the "Dialogos Tree of life" above. Such processes might include different philosophical exercise- and dialogue formats, such

as Philosophy for Children (P4C)-inspired philosophising[29], Socratic dialogue inspired philosophising[30], contemplative philosophising[31], Daimonic Dialogues[32], Oscar Brenifier-inspired philosophising[33], or comparative dialogues[34]. However, regardless of dialogue formats included, the essence of philosophising the Dialogos Way is *connecting subject matter to personal life* and vice versa on the one side, and profound encounters between participants in *heart to heart dialogue*s with each other about shared subject matter on the other. For instance, when working with one of the many topics and exercises created[35], such as the

[29] LIPMAN, Matthew: *Thinking in Education.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (England), 2003.

[30] NELSON, Leonard. "The Socratic Method" in SARAN, René and NEISSER, Barbara (eds) *Enquiring Minds –Socratic Dialogue in Education.*Trentham Books, Chester, 1922/2004; HECKMAN, Gustav: "Six pedagogical measures and socratic facilitation." In SARAN, René and NEISSER, Barbara (eds): *Enquiring Minds – Socratic Dialogue in Education,* Trentham Books, Chester, 2004/1981. 107–120; Krohn, Dieter: "Theory and practice of Socratic dialogue". In SARAN, René and NEISSER, Barbara (eds): *Enquiring minds: Socratic dialogue in education.* Stoke on Trent, UK: Trentham Books, 2004, p. 15–24.

[31] LAHAV, Ran: *Handbook of Philosophical-Contemplative Companionships: Principles, Procedures, Exercises*. Loyev Books, Hardwick, VT (USA), 2006.

[32] WEISS, Michael Noah: *Daimonic Dialogues - Philosophical Practice and Self-formation. A Research Report on a Series of Philosophical Guided Imageries Carried out at a Norwegian Folk High School.* LIT Publishing, Vienna, 2021 (in press).

[33] BRENIFIER, Oscar: "Philosophising through antinomies", available in http://www.pratiques-philosophiques.com/en/english/texts/46-antinomies (last access February 11th 2016).

[34] HELSKOG, Guro Hansen. *Philosophizing the Dialogos Way Towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation.* Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2019.

[35] HELSKOG, Guro Hansen. *Philosophizing the Dialogos Way Towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation.* Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2019; Helskog, Guro Hansen and Ribe, Andreas: *Dialogos- Praktisk filosofi I skolen. Elevbok.* Fag og kultur, Oslo (Norway). 2008.

topics "care for our neighbors", "sustainable development" or "forgiveness", questions concerning one`s individual responsibility, and the limitations of this, could be extracted, formulated, argued and reflected upon. By this, connections are made between content and concept, the personal and the universal, the concrete and the abstract, and the private and the public, the contextual and the universal. Participants can gradually see how their lives are immersed in complex cultural, historical and social structures, while at the same time connecting to themselves on a deeper level. This process will, when evolving at its best, nurture wisdom (and thus the Tree of life) in participants. However, only afterwards can we look back and try to make sense of the process and its "fruits". In this essay, I have picked six "example fruits[36]" that will be in focus. This leads us to the next original reflection section.

Original reflections: Six example fruits

In this section I will narrate six example fruits drawn from the process of trying out the Dialogos approach in pedagogical philosophical practice in the period 2005-2020. I have chosen the example fruits because they have made deep impressions on me, and profoundly impacted my further work. Moreover, they are examples of what might be *possible* fruits of a philosophical process. Fruits II, III, IV, and VI, are already analyzed in other publications[37], however then in different contexts and in dialogue

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[36] The choice of «fruit» as a main metaphor in this section is of course directly linked to the metaphor of «the Tree of life».

[37] HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: "The healing power of Dialogos dialogues: Transformative learning through dialogical philosophizing." *Open Journal of Social Sciences 2 (11)* p.79-83; HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: "Moving out of Conflict into Reconciliation. Bildung through Philosophical Dialogue in Intercultural and Interreligious Education". *Educational action research 3*:340-

with other theoretical perspectives. Fruit I and V are not described elsewhere. Together, the fruits also document aspects my own development as a philosophical practitioner, researcher, and wisdom oriented educator and pedagogue during these 15 years.

Example fruit I: This is magic!

It was summer more than a decade ago. About ten participants from four countries were sitting closely together in the garden house at my farm in south eastern Norway. I begun the workshop Friday afternoon with the question: "Where are you in your life at the moment, and do you have a question? Formulate it simply in once sentence, and put it in your pocket. We will return to it at the end of the workshop on Sunday". They did not share their thoughts nor their question with others. We then spent the entire weekend exploring a variety of philosophical questions and exercises using dialogue formats inspired mainly by Socratic dialogue as I had met it in Germany[38]. By the end of our workshop on Sunday night, I asked the participants to pull out their personal question notes from their pockets, and see whether they had come closer to an answer to their question or not. One of the participants got astonished looking at his/her note. "This is magic!" s/he exclaimed. "We have been working on my question all through the weekend!" The others agreed. They all had gotten new insights with regards to their personal question, even though it was never spelled out publicly. Speaking to the person a few days later, he/she claimed that the workshop "made everything change".

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362. HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: "Searching for wisdom the Dialogos way". In AMIR, Lydia, *Practicing Philosophy: Expanding Boundaries, New Frontiers.* London: Cambridge Scholar, 2017.

[38] KROHN, Dieter: "Theory and practice of Socratic dialogue". In SARAN, René and NEISSER, Barbara (eds): *Enquiring minds: Socratic dialogue in education.* Stoke on Trent, UK: Trentham Books, 2004, p. 15–24

Example fruit II: Never ending horizon

It was spring a couple of years later. We had finished the "Gandhi project" five months earlier, and the students were invited to share how they now saw the experience of participating in the Dialogos dialogue series in the fall. We had met every Wednesday for ten sessions, each lasting 1,5 hours[39]. One of the participants expressed his experience this way:

> When we started the project, it was as if I was trapped inside of a ring. It was narrow inside of me. When I encountered a problem, whether it was at school or in life in general, I stopped. I did not go further. I gave up. Then during the project it was as if something exploded inside of me, like an atomic bomb. It was as if I was looking into an endless horizon. Now, when I encounter a problem, whether in general life or in school work, I do not stop anymore. I know there is a way, and I continue.

Of course, also other activities in his life during these months might have contributed to his experience, and it is not likely that the project deserves all the credit, even though he does so himself.

Example fruit III: Classroom full of light

A couple of months after the completion of the Gandhi Project I was asked by the principal at the school to try out philosophical

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[39] HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: "The Gandhi Project: Dialogos philosophical dialogues and the ethics and politics of intercultural and interfaith friendship". *Educational action research* 1-20, 2014; STOKKE, Christian and HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: Promoting dialogical democracy. Dialogos philosophical dialogues as an approach to intercultural and interfaith dialogue in *education. Studies in interreligious dialogue, 2-04,* 2014, HELSKOG, Guro Hansen and STOKKE, Christian: "Enhancing relational spirituality. Dialogos dialogues in intercultural and interfaith education". *Studies in interreligious dialogue*, *2-04,* 2014.

dialogues with a class ridden by severe conflict[40], giving some of the students stomach aches, making them not sleep at night, making their grades drop and making them want to drop out of school. After each dialogue, students wrote anonymous meta-reflection notes, helping me decide what topic and which dialogue format to choose next. After the ninth dialogue, the students had chosen to philosophise upon the question "what is happiness"? They were sitting on their tables in a circle, and I asked them to find a personal experience of when they themselves experienced to be happy. When the turn came to one of the students most severely affected by the conflict, she looked at the others, and said that she was happy now because the conflict was over, everybody were friends and she looked forward to go to school every morning. Another student wrote the following in her meta-reflection note:

> The conflict was like (excuse the expression) hell in the beginning, and it did not get any better (…). As time past by it became "brighter" here in the classroom, and the positive energy took over. Today it is like *blue sky* here in our class. [It is] wonderful to come to school to meet good friends and a classroom full of light. During the dialogue I felt comfortable, and I have not been afraid to say what I think and feel. The thought that we will soon be separated gives me stomach ache. Now I really like it here! We are laughing together, work and discuss together without any negative attitudes. I have learned a lot of new things [during the dialogue] today. I see things and think about things in many and different ways.

Of course, it is not possible to claim that the Dialogos project was the only reason the conflict dissolved. Also the work of the class teachers in between the philosophical dialogues were important. But there are reasons to believe that the topics of the dialogues, as

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[40] HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: "Moving out of Conflict into Reconciliation. Bildung through Philosophical Dialogue in Intercultural and Interreligious Education". *Educational action research 3*:340-362.

well as the activity of philosophising upon personal experience in relation to text material and concepts, were crucial in the reconciliation process between the students in the class.

Example fruit IV: "...even though forgiveness is the best you can do in Islam"[41]

The next fruit stems from one of my regular classes in post graduate teacher education in Norway. We philosophised upon the topic forgiveness, and a Muslim student told a story from his own life experience as a teenage refuge in Norway, which we analyzed and reflected upon. One and a half year later I asked him if he would allow me to write about the dialogue. "If you want to, we can meet, and I will tell you some more", he said. We thus met in my office. He then told me that this single dialogue and the concept forgiveness had made him reflect upon his upbringing and schooling in Afghanistan, compare Afghan and Norwegian culture, and see his family relations as well as politics in Afghanistan in a new light. He had made forgiveness an ideal which he tried to live by, though admitting it was difficult, and that he was not always able to "even though forgiveness is the best you can do in Islam", as he expressed it.

Example fruit V: Walking on air

The fifth example is provided by a participant in a three day international Dialogos workshop a few years ago. In an e-mail sent the day after the workshop she exspressed that

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[41] See HELSKOG, Guro Hansen. *Philosophizing the Dialogos Way Towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation.* Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2019.

> Since I arrived home yesterday morning I can't land yet. I feel walking on air and even the despair over the political situation in my country can't erase this feeling. I think the workshop filled me up with a load of positive energy

One year later I asked her again, to see if she had changed her impression. However, her expressions are rather consistent: "The Dialogos workshop was a truly dialogical experience for me. Three days of workshop charged me mentally and emotionally for many days afterwards".

Example fruit VI: Different students- different inner movements

The sixth example involves ten students in a 30 ECTS course on Intercultural understanding and religion at the University of South Eastern Norway, which started with a 10 ECTS module on philosophical dialogue. Upon completion of the last dialogue session of the module, students were asked to describe their development as shortly as possible, preferably in one word or two. This is what they wrote[42]:

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[42] HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: "Searching for wisdom the Dialogos way". In Amir, Lydia, *Practicing Philosophy: Expanding Boundaries, New Frontiers.* London: Cambridge Scholar, 2017.

Table 1. Students' development, according to them[43]

Student	From:	Towards:
Eric	Interested	Knowledgeable
Elinor	Accepting other views	Understanding other views
Eckhart	Nothing on the ground	Flower that almost bloomed
Evan	The accordance	The analysis
Eva	Closed	Open
Evelina	Exhausted, insecure	Energized, embraced, and curious
Emily	Closed opinions and shallow thinking	Open-mindedness
Erica	Debating communicator	Dialogical communicator and listener
Esther	Open	Accepting
Edward	Insecure, troubled	Trust in myself, relaxed – troubles dissolved

Critical reflections

In this critical reflection section it is in its place to point to the fact that all examples except for two (III and IV) are drawn from Dialogos workshops or dialogue series in which participants participated voluntarily. Either the participant was an adult who had travelled far to spend a weekend philosophising the Dialogos way (example I and V), they were students who had accepted the

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[43] The students are anonymised and given a name beginning with an E. The research is reported to and approved by NSD (Norwegian Centre for Research Data).

invitation to take part (example II) or they had signed up for a
teacher education course involving philosophical dialogue
(example IV). Hence, they were not for instance teachers who were
more or less forced by their leaders to participate[44], nor students
being drawn into philosophical dialogues as part of the mandatory
activities in their teacher education program.

Degrees of inner movement

In the latter cases, participants are not likely to experience such
deep and profound inner transformation and growth as the
participants in the chosen example fruits in this essay did. One
reason might be that non-voluntary participating teacher students
and voluntary international workshop participants are likely to
come to the Dialogos process with very different attitudes. While
there are reasons to expect some participants in the first group to be
hesitant, skeptical and/or resistant, most individuals represented in
these examples have participated because they were interested to
begin with. This might be an important reason why they
experienced their states of minds so profoundly changed due to the
Dialogos process.

When beginnings are challenging

In my experience, a challenge is that when working with teacher
students and practicing teachers, they often expect to be given
models and tools that they can apply directly with students in the

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[44] WEISS, Michael Noah and HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: "'They often have
AHA-moments': how training teachers to philosophize the Dialogos Way with
their students can promote life skills and democratic citizenship in education".
Available   in   *Educational   Action   Research,   2020*
https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2020.1811744 (last access 25.01.2021)

classroom. They do not necessarily see the need to work with themselves and their attitudes and ways of being in the world, in order to avoid becoming instrumental. In addition, they often do not participate voluntarily, which sometimes makes it difficult to unleash the full potential of the philosophical process. Therefore, I often enter the room with certain presumptions explicated on the basis of almost two decades of action- and reflective practice research[45]. These include the following:

- Some participants need time to let go of resistance
- Some participants need time to move from an argumentative to a dialogical way of communicating
- Some participants fear being wrong, and need time to develop the confidence needed to engage in open explorative inquiry
- Some participants need time to open themselves up for genuine heart to heart communication with others
- Some participants need time to move from chatter towards inner silence
- Some participants link aims, learning and assessment in an instrumental way, needing time to discover the power and beauty of dialogue, expanded understanding and self-development for its own sake

So, even though a main presumption is that the Dialogos process is likely to be best if it starts directly in the personal realm, it is usually wise to find a balance between fulfilling participant`s pragmatic expectations and challenging them to start philosophising the Dialogos way. As stated in the introduction section, the essence of philosophising the Dialogos Way is

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[45] HELSKOG, Guro Hansen. *Philosophizing the Dialogos Way Towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation.* Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2019

connecting subject matter to personal life and vice versa on the one side, and profound encounter between participants when engaging in *heart to heart dialogue*s with each other about shared subject matter. Through fostering experiential dialogical relationships between the individual participants and the topic and thus the world around them, an inner movement and edifying process towards increased wisdom is promoted.

Six themes

In the examples all participants had experienced a profound inner movement. However, the movements seemed to have been slightly different in each example, and were thus differently verbalized by the participants. I have thus conceptualized six themes that also implies a categorization of possible outcomes or states of minds following a Dialogos process. The themes are as follows:

1. Aha-experience
2. Peak experience
3. Heart-to-heart coherence
4. Life guiding concept
5. Plateau experience
6. Pluralism

Theoretical reflection section

The six themes were conceptualized in dialogue mainly with the philosophy of Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss[46], and the theories of Abraham Maslow[47] and Rollin McCraty[48]. These

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[46] NÆSS, Arne and HAUKELAND, Per-Inge: *Livsfilosofi*. Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, 2005.
[47] MASLOW, Abraham: *Religions, values, and peak-experiences*. Stellar Books,

theories were chosen because they could help me interpret and understand aspects of what the different participants had expressed.

Aha-experience

In the critical reflection section I indicated that it is usually wise to find a balance between fulfilling the diverse pragmatic expectations of participants, and challenging them to start philosophising the Dialogos way. This is what I tried to do when I in the beginning of the workshop in example fruit I asked participants to write a personal question and put it in their pocket. Some of the participants in this workshop were deeply fascinated by rational-logical ways of philosophising at the time. This is why I begun the workshop Friday afternoon asking participants individually to think about their life at the moment, and formulate a question, without sharing with the others. I had the hypothesis that participants would intuitively and indirectly be working with their question anyway. My pragmatic facilitation move was thus to try out an indirect way of connecting the subjective and the objective realms in this particular workshop. Hence, we did not use the personal questions explicitly, but we did work with personal examples in two six hour Socratic dialogues, combined with rational philosophical exercises. My hypothesis was confirmed at least for the one participant in example 1. S/he had found (at least a preliminary) answer to his/her question. The Dialogos process thus seemed to have resulted in an

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USA, 2014/1964.

[48] McCRATY, Rollin: "The intuitive heart". In CHILDRE, Doc., MARTIN, Howard, ROZMAN, Deborah and McCRATY, Rollin: *Heart Intelligence. Connecting with the intuitive guidance of the heart.* Waterfront Press, USA, 2016; McCRATY, Rollin: "The Energetic Heart: Biomagnetic Communicaton in and beteen people". In ROSCH, Paul J. (ed) *Bioelectomagnetic and subtle energy medicine,* second edition, London and New York: Routledge, 2015.

inner movement or transformation which can be compared to what McCraty[49] calls an *implicit, intuitive process*. The theory says that if we work on a problem, one that is not quickly solvable, and which we may eventually put on a shelf (or in this example in the pocket) for a while, our brain can still be working on it subconsciously. The insight can then, so to speak, pop into the conscious mind of the person as an intuitive insight – an "aha" or "Eureka" moment. This seems to be close to what had happened to the participant in example fruit I.

Peak experience

The participant in example fruit II describes an experience that goes beyond the experience of the participant in example fruit I. While the person who experienced fruit I only had participated in a workshop over the weekend and was baffled by an aha-experience, the person having experienced fruit II had participated in a Dialogos series over 12 weeks. The series was finished five months before we met for the post-project interview. This means that the philosophical dialogues had worked in him for several months, and what he told about his experience is more comparable to what Maslow[50] call "peak experiences". Peak experiences, "ecstasies" or "transcendent" experiences were earlier considered supernatural revelations. However, according to Maslow, they are perfectly natural and common, and they can be investigated empirically, as he has done. In the beginning of his studies, Maslow expected most

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[49] McCRATY Rollin: "The intuitive heart". In CHILDRE, Doc., MARTIN, Howard, ROZMAN, Deborah and McCRATY, Rollin. *Heart Intelligence. Connecting with the intuitive guidance of the heart.* Waterfront Press, USA, 2016, 43-44.

[50] MASLOW, Abraham: *Religions, values, and peak-experiences*. Stellar Books, USA, 2014/1964 p 33.

people to be "non-peakers", and only a few to have had peak-experiences. However:

> (…) as I gathered information, and as I became more skilful in asking questions, I found that a higher and higher percentage of my subjects began to report peak-experiences. I finally fell into the habit of expecting everyone to have had peak-experiences and of being rather surprised if I ran across somebody who could report none at all. Because of this experience, I finally began to use the word "non-peaker" to describe, not the person who is unable to have peak-experiences, but rather the person who is afraid of them, who suppresses them, who denies them, who turns away from them, or who "forgets" them"

According to Maslow, such peak experiences are the universal core of every known high religion. It has been seen as "the private, lonely, personal illumination, revelation, or ecstasy of some acutely sensitive prophet or seer". The hypothesis of Maslow, which I have come to share due to my work with the Dialogos approach in multicultural and multi religious contexts[51], is that to the extent that all mystical or peak-experiences are the same in their essence and have always been the same, all religions are the same in their essence" (Ibid: 34). This essence was phrased in terms of whatever local and particular conceptual, cultural, philosophical and linguistic framework the different mystic seer or prophet had available at the time.

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[51] HELSKOG, Guro Hansen. "The Gandhi Project: Dialogos philosophical dialogues and the ethics and politics of intercultural and interfaith friendship". *Educational action research* 2014, 1-20; HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: "Moving out of Conflict into Reconciliation. Bildung through Philosophical Dialogue in Intercultural and Interreligious Education". *Educational action research 3*:340-362

Heart-to-heart synchronization

The participant in example III expressed joy and happiness that the relationships between the students in her class no longer were ridden by conflict, using the metaphors "hell" to describe that situation in the beginning, and "bright", "light", and "blue sky" to describe the situation towards the end of the Dialogos process. She also claimed that she was now looking forward to go to school every day, which is a profound change from the beginning of the process, where students wanted to quit school due to the unbearable situation in the class.

Her metaphors indicate that there is a new atmosphere in the class that can be compared to what Morris[52] calls *heart-to-heart bio-communication*. A study showed that people trained in heart coherence could energetically facilitate heart coherence in other people who were physically close, but not touching. There was a heart rhythm synchronization between people. The authors of the study concluded that this was evidence of heart-to-heart synchronization across subjects. This again lends credence to the possibility of heart-to-heart bio-communication. In an earlier study from 1996 researchers had discovered that when an individual is in a state of heart rhythm coherence their heart radiate a more coherent electromagnetic signal to the nervous system of other people (and also animals). They found that the heart radiated a magnetic field that was almost 100 times stronger than the magnetic field produced by the brain. This field could be detected several meters away from the body of the individual.

Interpreting the Dialogos process from the perspective of this research, it is possible to indicate that there had been a process of heart-to-heart synchronization going on, moving the students out of

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[52] MORRIS, Steven M. "Facilitating collective coherence: Group Effects on heart rate variability coherence and heart rhythm synchronization*". Alternative Therapies in Health and medicine*, 16 (4), 2010 p.62-72

a "dark" conflict modes characterized by fear, anger and hatred, towards "light" and "bright" relationships created by friendliness, collaboration and laughter. Could it be that when students listened to each other`s stories of caring and being cared for, of rulefollowing and their thoughts about Thelle`s interpretations of the wisdom respectively of Buddha, Muhammed and Jesus, a sense of togetherness and love began to grow amongst the students, who initially were in deep conflict? My heart as a dialogue facilitator obviousely played a role here, but so did the hearts of each and every one of the students.

Without knowing about the heart synchronicity research before working with this particular essay, I have actually used the expression "philosophising heart-to-heart" as essential to the Dialogos approach[53]:

> If personal problems dissolve, it is probably because people's inner obstacles dissolve. They experience to be seen, heard, received and understood, and opposite, they experience seeing, hearing, receiving and understanding others and the subject matter. At its best, they experience communication heart-to-heart, in an open and honest way. For most participants, this is a powerful experience that goes far beyond conceptual schemata and formulations. For some participants, it is life changing. It is an experience unlike any other experiences they have had in their lives. When it happens, it is as if they have been given an unexpected gift.

It seems that much of the power of the Dialogos approach lays in the synchronizing of heart-to-heart bio-communication, to use the expression of McCraty.

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[53] HELSKOG, Guro Hansen. *Philosophizing the Dialogos Way Towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation.* Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2019.

Life guiding concepts

The participant in example fruit IV claimed that after the philosophical dialogue on forgiveness, this concept had become life guiding for him. To borrow the words of Maslow[54], he had been able to bring experience

> back into philosophy and psychology as an opponent of the
> merely abstract and abstruse, of the a priori, of what I have called
> "helium-filled words". It must then also be integrated with the
> abstract and the verbal, i.e. we must make a place for "experientially
> based concepts", and for "experientially filled words", that is for an
> experience-based rationality in contrast to the a priori rationality
> that we have come to identify with rationality itself.

The participant had filled the concept "forgiveness" with experiential content during the philosophical dialogue as well as afterwards, thus making it not only meaningful to him. The concept had, so to speak, become an ethcial compass needle in his life.

Plateau-experience

A slightly different theme came to the fore when I reflected critically upon example V ("walking on air"). I found it comparable to what Maslow[55] calls "plateau experiences". The plateau experience is according to him a state of consciousness that implies "a form of witnessing, an appreciating, what one may call a serene, cognitive blissfulness which can, however, have a quality of casualness and of lounging around". The plateau experience is

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[54] MASLOW, Abraham: *Religions, values, and peak-experiences*. Stellar Books, USA, 2014/1964 p.11
[55] MASLOW, Abraham: *Religions, values, and peak-experiences*. Stellar Books, USA, 2014/1964, p. 13

more voluntary than peak experiences, and they also have an ethical (noetic) and cognitive element. This not always the case of peak experiences, which can be purely emotional, he argues. The possible plateau-experience of this participant did not seem to have cognitive and ethical elements.

While "the peaker" according to Maslow is in danger of becoming anti-rational, anti-empirical, anti-scientific, anti-verbal and anti-conceptual, the "plateauer" will have a healthy, humble and realistic openness to the mystic, in realization that we don`t know much. S/he will also modestly and gratefully accept gratuitous grace as well as that which must be seen as plain good luck, according to him.

Pluralism

Brenifier[56] argues that philosophising is about ceasing to live (at least for a moment), and that philosophising is solely about rational and logical thinking. This brings us to the sixth and last theme that I will theorize upon, namely what Arne Næss[57] calls *pluralism.* The pluralism of Arne Næss` is a stance that holds that there are several sides to an issue, and that it is important to use different perspectives and multiple "torches" when shedding light on a situation. This makes it possible for people with different feelings, attitudes and convictions towards an issue to come together around a cause such as the deep ecology movement founded by Næss himself in the 1970`s. "Deep" here means to go "down to the fundamental premises of what we value in life", Næss states. On this deeper level of our value judgments there is diversity and lack

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[56] BRENIFIER, Oscar: «To philosophize is to cease living", available in ob-cl.pdf (buf.no) (last access January 25th, 2021).
[57] NÆSS, Arne and HAUKELAND, Per-Inge: *Livsfilosofi.* Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, 2005.

of consensus amongst us. If there was concencus, it would be a sign of alignment of our intellectual and emotional lives, which is not good (Næss and Haukeland 2005: 16).

This stance is especially relevant to understand differences in the forms of inner movement expressed in the examples, not the least by the ten students in example fruit VI. They had attended the same course on philosophical dialogue, but they conceptualized their development, i.e. their inner movement from beginning to the end of the course, quite differently. This shows that even though there are profound heart-to-heart synchronization and communication developing through a good Dialogos process, the individual students are present in the dialogues in their own unique ways, experiencing their own unique forms of growth and their unique individual fruits. If we accept this stance as plausible, it is a strength that a couple of students described their inner movement through the course as a movement from insecure, exhausted and troubled towards energized, embraced, curious, while another couple of students described their process as an inner movement from closed, opinionated and shallow towards open-minded. Yet another student had developed from a debating communicator towards a dialogical communicator and listener, while another claimed to have moved from "accepting other views" to "understanding other views".

Moreover, it seems that an existential community had developed in the midst of the diversity of participants, making possible a plurality of individual "journeys in the Dialogos Tree of life" to evolve, to return to the guiding metaphor of the essay.

General reflections

In the next sections, I will shortly reflect upon three general issues or attitudes that I have found to be essential for the person who wants to facilitate Dialogos processes that can nurture wisdom or "the Tree of life" in participants.

Possibilism as a basic attitude

Philosopher Arne Næss, being a mountain climber, exemplifies his possibilist life stance by telling about his experience of being trapped at a mountain shelf in a very steep mountain side[58]. With the choice of either trying to find a way and risk falling down and be killed, or starving and thirsting to death at the mountain shelf, he chose to try to find a way. He tried climbing upwards to the right, ending in nothing, but discovering a possible route to the left, which he successfully tried. To him this was a bold confirmation that there are always possibilities present, even though the situation seem completely hopeless. As a life philosophy, possibilism implies the insight that all conclusions, also scientific, are in principle insecure. Even though one for ages have held a certain mathematical law for evident, the next generation might revise it all. Hence, it is possible to be strongly convinced about this or that, without claiming that it is true[59]. Or as Dewey formulates it: "For endeavor for the better is moved by faith in what is possible, not by adherence to the actual"[60]. Similarly, the young student in example

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[58] NÆSS, A. and HAUKELAND, P-I. (2005), Livsfilosofi. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.13-15
[59] NÆSS, A. and HAUKELAND, P-I. (2005), Livsfilosofi. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, p. 13-15
[60] DEWEY, J. (1934). A common faith. New Haven. Conn.: Yale University Press, p. 14

fruit II expressed that he did not stop when meeting hindrances in life or at school anymore, because he knew there was a way.

Transferred to the practice of facilitating Dialogos workshops or dialogue series, a possibilist attitude is helpful in order to have faith in the process of gradually creating movement *in* and *between* participants, also in situations where there is resistance, or where one seems to be stuck.

Taking emotion into account

Philosophers throughout the ages have tended to be suspicious of feelings, desires, or emotions. They are to be controlled and suppressed, and it has been claimed that desires are an obstacle to thinking and thus to philosophising. Indeed, desire is found at the heart of the philosophical dynamic, as Brenifier[61] puts it. *Philo sophia* is pivotal to all kinds of philosophising, not the least to a Dialogos process. A common trait of how participants describe their experiences and personal development of participating in a Dialogos process, is that they describe how the rational and logical thinking processes made them *feel.* This is an aspect that can be interpreted with the help of Arne Næss` Spinoza inspired view[62]. According to Næss, all progress in things essential to humans, are driven by emotions. However, emotions are ambiguous. They can be an inspirational source to insight, wisdom and meaning in life, but they can also be a source to the opposite, i.e. to destructive and self-destructive attitudes and actions. Friendliness and love are positive feelings that activate our human nature, while negative feelings like hatred, envy and arrogance passivate us, he argues. Næss also claims that our emotional condition can be characterized

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[61] BRENIFIER, Oscar: «To philosophize is to cease living", available in ob-cl.pdf (buf.no) (last access January 25th, 2021).
[62] NÆSS, Arne and HAUKELAND, Per-Inge: *Livsfilosofi.* Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, 2005.

as a stable *key tone* for a shorter or longer period in life. This tone can be positive or negative, and more or less intensely and strongly so, making a person something between what I metaphorically speaking chose here to call "light minded" or "dark minded". It is important to note that this can be a tone dominating a period in life, and not a tone characterizing someone`s personality. That would be to take it too far. With this in mind, a third metaphor is also possible, namely the "grey minded" person who over (some) time is indifferent and without any emotional engagement and initiative at all. Such a person is likely to become a burden to his or her surroundings, according to Næss. In some cases, such a person might be comparable to Maslow`s "non-peaker". As Maslow[63] formulates it:

> Any person whose character (or Weltanschauung, or way of life) forces him to try to be extremely or completely rational or "materialistic" or mechanistic tends to become a "non-peaker". That is, such a view of life tends to make the person regard peak-and-transcendent experiences as a kind of insanity, a complete loss of control, a sense of being overwhelmed by irrational emotions, etc.

While Maslow points to the rational, materialistic or mechanistic oriented person as a non-peaker, in my interpretation comparable to resistant participants who are unable to "go with the flow" of wisdom seeking dialogue, Brenifier[64] argues that desires or emotions becomes obstacles to philosophising when they make people abandon *truth* in order to seek more immediate satisfactions, such as power, glory, wealth, knowledge, and lust. What Maslow`s peaker seem to have in common with Brenifier`s truth seeking philosopher, is flexibility of mind. Yet, I would assume Maslow

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[63] MASLOW, Abraham: *Religions, values, and peak-experiences*. Stellar Books, USA, 2014/1964 p. 36
[64] BRENIFIER, Oscar: «To philosophize is to cease living", available in ob-cl.pdf (buf.no) (last accessed January 25th, 2021).

would agree with me that this flexibility can be understood through a growth-metaphor rather than a death-metaphor.

However, it can never be an instrumental *aim* of philosophical practice to for instance turn a "non-peaker" into a "peaker", to use the expressions of Maslow, or to turn a "knowledge seeker" to a "truth seeker", to use the expressions of Brenifier. People must find their own ways, in line with the pluralist stance argued earlier. Yet if they engage truly *dialogically*, and thus both emotionally and rationally – i.e. with their whole being, transformation *is* likely to occur, in some way or other, unique to every person. It seems that this was the case for the participants having experienced the example fruits narrated in this essay.

The deeply personal as the deeply universal

It is also worth mentioning that the life-stances of participants in the examples were diverse. They were respectively a) cultural-catholic, b) practicing Catholic with a background from a Buddhist majority country, c) ethnic Jew born in Russia living in Jerusalem, d) practicing Muslim born in Afghanistan living in Norway, as well as e) a variety of Christian, atheist and agnostic stances amongst the eight European, one Asian and one Latin-American students in the last example. Despite their different wold views and life philosophies, religious, or non-religious, they experienced comparable personal transformations due to the philosophical dialogues. How can we understand this?

Again, it is worth borrowing perspectives from Maslow. The original religious questions can be studied, described and investigated in a scientific (and philosophical) manner, because they are deeply rooted in human nature, he argues. The questions are common to all of mankind. The difficulty begins with the traditional attempts to *answer* the questions. This is where different world views and different religions have come to

conclusions that are unacceptable to others. As Maslow puts it: «Though the answers were not acceptable, the questions themselves were and are perfectly acceptable, and perfectly legitimate». I see this as an argument for philosophising the Dialogos Way in multi cultural and multi religious context inside and outside education. Investigating questions together that are relevant to us all, regardless of our religious and cultural backgrounds, is valuable in itself. More importantly, if the process also leads to the slightest increase in epistemic humility and openness across cultural and religious divides, it is even more worth the time and effort, because then it also might pave the way towards peaceful relations more broadly speaking. This is a reason in itself why we are in urgent need of philosophical practices in main stream education across the globe[65].

Summary and final remark

I began this essay by posing a slightly different hypothesis than Brenifier. I agreed with him that philosophising implies overturning (some of) one`s established ideas, that this implies a form of psychological "small death" as our opinions and stances are often dear to us and part of our identities. However, I disagreed that philosophising necessarily needs to imply "a sort of psychological suffering", arguing that the initial "death" of one`s more or less narrow opinions and poorly grounded stances leads to a new "birth" and psychological growth rather than suffering. The reason I gave was that in genuine dialogical encounters we necessarily transcend our existing egos when listening to other people, striving to see from their perspective, critically examining their ideas, as well as our own ideas. In the process, an expansion

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and deepening of our horizons of understanding and thus identities necessarily will take place. At least for a period of time after such a gentle dynamic of "psychological deaths" and "new births", we might even experience a sense of uplifted wellbeing and fulfillment.

Then followed an overview of different usages of the Tree of life metaphor, and a description of how the metaphor corresponds to the concept Dialogos and to Dialogos as a process oriented form of philosophical practice. Using a reflective practice research methodology and structure, I organized the paper in three main sections: In the original reflection section, I narrated six exampled from my practice. In the critical reflection section, I presented six themes that I reflected upon in the theoretical reflection section. The themes were respectively aha-experience, peak-experience, heart-to-heart synchronization, life-guiding concepts, plateau experience and pluralism. The question is now whether or not I am justified in arguing that the metaphor "philosophising is nurturing the Tree of life in us" is a better metaphor than "philosophising is to cease living" when it comes to conceptualizing what people might experience when philosophising the Dialogos Way. Summing up, neither of the participants in the examples had experienced their transformations of opinions, stances or views of life as "forms of death", nor of "psychological suffering". Rather, most of them had experienced their transformation positively as leading to forms of (individual-psychological or collective-relational) growth.

To navigate as a philosophical dialogue facilitator in the midst of people`s different backgrounds and starting points, gradually creating heart-to-heart encounters between them, as well as helping them connect experiences and concepts, isn`t necessarily easy. The facilitator needs to be awake and aware, paying attention not only to what is said, but also to what is emerging underneath and between what is said, acting intuitively and tactfully in ways that

nurtures the flow and growth of wisdom and thus the Tree of life in participants. This can not always be understood conceptually. However, when being truly present in the situation, the body of the facilitator is likely to registrate what is going on, making him or her able to respond in adequate ways, without damaging the integrity of participants.

There are of course always risks that the facilitator makes not so wise facilitation moves (needless to say, I have done so an endless number of times myself). A not so wise facilitation move could make hesitant participants even more resistant, even more argumentative, even more fearful of being wrong, or even more closed in their communication and ways of engaging with other participants. It is thus pivotal to begin the Dialogos process in a way that does not scare people away, while gradually challenging them to let go of fear and resistance, and instead start engaging openly and dialogically with the subject matter as well as with each other.

A "wise" facilitator would ideally be able to set a process in motion that in the long run can lead towards human flourishing and wisdom in a broad sense, unique to every particular individual, yet universal in the sense that it is connected with the shared reality of people, nature, things and phenomena in the universe. Such a process would imply to nurture the Tree of life or *logos* in participants, as seem to have been the case for the participants in the six examples in this essay. Their outcome-experiences are rather rare, however *possible* side-effects of philosophising the Dialogos way. It is this rareness that has made them unforgettable for me as a philosophical dialogue facilitator and educator.

To conclude, I believe I am justified in claiming to have supported the initial hypothesis of this essay: "Philosophising is nurturing the Tree of life in us" is a better metaphor than "philosophising is to cease living" when conceptualizing what people might experience when philosophising the so called "Dialogos Way" towards

wisdom. Even though the long term aim of philosophy might well be to cope with death, and even though philosophising might imply practicing "dying" through letting go of one`s more or less well founded opinions and stances, this might lead to "new births" and to psychological growth rather than psychological suffering and death, thus nurturing the tree of life in us.

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