

Socratic Philosophizing with the Five Finger Model: The Theoretical Approach of Ekkehard Martens

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ABSTRACT: Socratic Philosophizing is an open process of thinking that follows a net of methods. Martens develops his Five Finger Model in accordance with Socrates and the history of philosophy. Philosophizing within the community of inquiry is characterized by attitudes of curiosity, openness, and the willingness to make oneself understandable as well as to understand the other person in return. There are five core philosophical methods that assist in making such philosophizing successful: Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Analysis, Dialectics and Speculation. These five methods are understood as reflective operations which are learned in an elementary way and practiced step-by-step: (phenomenological) to be able to describe something exactly, (hermeneutical) to understand oneself and others, (analytical) to clarify in a conceptual and argumentative way how something is understood, (dialectical) to ask and to disagree, (speculative), to fantasize how something could be understood. Marten's Five Finger Model builds on these methods in order to help children build broader and distinct questions through philosophizing. To illustrate this we will present an interactive game that can be used to introduce the teaching themes of Who am I?, Partnership, Tolerance, and Foreign Cultures. The game is called "Distance and Closeness." The game was evaluated afterward using the framework of the five finger method.

What am I actually doing? And what do I want to reach with it? These questions are, according to Friedrich Nietzsche, "the most personal questions of the truth." Martens takes them as his starting point in order to show the necessity of instructing children to think. Following Kant's and Nietzsche's call to orient oneself through thinking, Martens places the question of truth as an anthropological constant at the centre of education. It is possible to take aim at questions of truth with the reasonable and elementary thinking of every person, including children. For instance, Socrates would philosophize with a wealthy boy, Lysis, about what parental love means, even when his parents would not allow him to ride in his father's chariot and hold its reins in a race, although they loved him (Plato, Lysis, 208a).

Socratic Philosophizing is an open process of thinking ahead between dogmatic ideology and arbitrary thinking, and follows a net of methods which can not only be adopted in conversations and discussions, but also within texts, images and games. In Plato's early dialogues (e.g. Laches: Dialogue about learning to fence as an education tool to become brave) the following methods can be observed:

- The heart of the discussion is built upon concrete personal and social experiences
- Problematic experiences of the conversational partners are accented
- Central notions of argumentation are clarified
- The clarification of questions occurs in a controversial discussion of thesis and antithesis, and opens into a synthesis or preliminary answer

- The thoughts are pervaded by metaphors and thought experiments

THE FIVE FINGER MODEL OF EKKEHARD MARTENS

Martens develops his Five Finger Model in accordance with Socrates and the history of philosophy. “Reflecting in cooperation” and “elementary philosophizing” within the community of inquiry are characterized by attitudes of curiosity, openness, and the willingness to make oneself understandable as well as to understand the other person in return. Besides, it becomes easier in the community of inquiry to self-correct and make one’s own argumentation stronger. For this process to occur, philosophical methods exist that can assist in making philosophizing successful: Phenomenology characterizes looking; Hermeneutics includes understanding; Analysis relates to deepening; Dialectics construes the back and forth or pro and contra nature of discourse; and Speculation involves imagining.

These five methods are understood as reflective operations which are learned in an elementary way and practiced step-by-step: To be able to describe something exactly (**phenomenological**), to understand oneself and others (**hermeneutical**), to clarify in a conceptual and argumentative way how something is understood (**analytical**), to ask and to disagree (**dialectical**), to fantasize how something could be understood (**speculative**) (Martens, 2010).

PHENOMENOLOGICAL:

- To observe and describe something in an accurate and differentiated way.
- For example: what was the story about? What attracted your attention? Describe what did X do, say, feel, and think, etc.?

The Greek word, phenomenon, in its literal translation means “what appears.” Socratic-Aristotelian methods emerged from the concrete experience of something that was always self-evident suddenly becoming problematical. Now these problematic phenomena are to be examined accurately. It is thanks to the emphasis on phenomenology that philosophical thinking does not become stuck in the abstract, but always has a reference to concrete experiences. In this method, what is real precedes what is purely imagined.

Thus Bernhard Waldenfels, a leading representative of the newer phenomenologists, propagates a “return to the things themselves” and, in a variation of Kant’s *sapere aude*, says “Have the courage to make use of your senses!” (1992, p. 13). For Waldenfels phenomenology is philosophy “from below,” liberation from the bonds of preconceptions, traditional reservations and methodological constraints, which stands in opposition to the systematic thinking of neo-Kantianism, in which the constructs are formed “from above.”

However, the central problem of phenomenology is the question, “What are the things themselves?” The epistemological or defining question, “What is X?” can be translated

phenomenologically as “How does something reveal itself to me as X?” The most important elements of a non-ontologically understood phenomenological method are double reduction and the bodily dimension of knowledge.

The first step of the double reduction is phenomenological reduction, e.g., observation and description free of prejudice and theory. With a flower, that would be the awareness of one’s own feelings and experience, e.g., mediated naiveté. With the second step an eidetic reduction occurs: the “thing itself” appears not as an essential form (Husserl) which can be intuitively grasped, but is, according to Waldenfels (1992, p. 15), a kind of regulative limiting concept: “It isn’t that the object is simply one and the same, it reveals itself to be the same in the interchange between the given and the intentional” (Waldenfels, 1992, p. 15). This leads to the following set of considerations:

- proximity/distance
- the expected/the imagined
- what is evaluated/dealt with/aspired to
- cultural influences

The bodily dimension of knowledge occurs through the senses. In the example of “recognizing flowers” (Berger and Luckmann, 1995, p. 11f) the bodily dimension of cognition is given by the fragrance as well as the feel and the uses of the flower.

Martens summarizes the epistemological position as follows: “We can only really recognize something as something if we first eliminate all theoretical patterns of explanation and instead describe the phenomenon as thoroughly as possible in the variety of its appearances and also pay attention to how we access it in terms of our life-world, its physicality and problem orientation” (Martens, 2010, p. 72).

HERMENEUTICAL:

- To understand somebody. How you or another person understand or regard something.
- Show empathy: “How did X feel?” etc.

Literally translated, the Greek word (gr. *Hermeneutike technē*) is, “the art of Hermes,” which means, “the art of interpreting” (Martens, 2010, p. 75) and connects the divine with the human word, and the writer with the reader of the text. The application of the hermeneutical method consists of reading texts, understanding and interpreting the message of a text outside of its context. Therefore, the original aim of hermeneutics is the understanding of content, which can be difficult to decode. Everything can be seen as a text that has to be decoded, for example, that of our own feelings and the facial expressions of our opponents. Hermeneutics is about the improvement of one’s own interpretation as well as foreign interpretations as believable arguments (Aristotle).

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was mainly concerned with the sense of hermeneutics as method; he was moved by the question how the reader could understand a text. According to Martens, for Schleiermacher the method of understanding was a “psychological process of intuiting the intentions of the author from the total context of his text and his life” (Martens, 2010, p. 75).

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) expanded upon this view. According to Dilthey, hermeneutics was a method of understanding the interrelationships of meaning and therewith a special method of the humanities in contrast to the sciences, the latter giving priority to explanation instead of interpretation.

On the other hand, Martin Heidegger (*Sein und Zeit*) and his student Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) in *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960) understood hermeneutics as a branch of philosophy. For them the goal of hermeneutic philosophy is the interpretation of the understanding of being which distinguishes humans in their existence from everything else that exists. Thus Gadamer developed the hermeneutic method as a process of understanding, i.e., as a process of the “dialectic of question and answer” (Gadamer, [1960] 1990, p. 271). In this process, we have 1) the preliminary sketch, 2) the understanding of the text, and 3) the fusion of horizons that alternate among themselves. That is, we read a text with our expectations, understand its individual statements in the context of the whole, and understand the whole from the individual statements. This process is called the “hermeneutic circle” (Martens, 2010, p. 76). However, according to Dilthey, intuitive understanding is only a heuristic principle, not a sure method of cognition, since the verification of hypotheses is lacking.

ANALYTICAL:

- To conceptually verify with arguments what somebody intimates.
- Describe the arguments of X? Why does X think that way? What are the reasons of X?

Taken literally, the Greek word (gr. *analysein*) translates to abrogation, and liberation. At the same time, it is about disintegration of conceptual and argumentative difficulties and perplexities. This aim is the prime action of philosophy: The *clarification of sentences* in contrast to simply *holding sentences*. Wittgenstein writes in the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1921). “Philosophy is not a doctrine, but an activity [...] Philosophy should [...] clarify thoughts and draw clear boundaries” (Wittgenstein, 4.112).

The model for contemporary analytical philosophy was Socratic philosophizing as a conceptual-argumentative “giving account” through “what-is-that-questions” (Martens, 2010, p. 80). Socrates already had this exemplary function in ancient times: Aristotle, like Socrates, refers only to the logical form of concepts to clarify them. From Socrates Aristotle learned “intellectual midwifery,” e.g., the recourse to “logical, conceptual, or linguistic-analytical techniques,” and thus achieved a distinction between pseudo-knowledge and knowledge that is well-grounded (Aristotle, 1935, XXX 4).

Analytical philosophy's claim is to clarify central concepts and arguments of everyday and scientific language. Analytical philosophy today represents a linguistic turn: that is, the philosophical problems are understood exclusively as linguistic; it is not what exists that is investigated, but language about what exists. Through this, as Wittgenstein explains in *Philosophical Investigations*, the functioning of language games can be understood. Martens develops this process further: "If one analyzes more precisely the way designations such as "intentional," "considered," "spontaneous," or "responsible" are attached to the concept "freedom," or that freedom can be understood as "freedom from" or "freedom to," then one-sided or distorted examples of usage can be corrected, not through recourse to an ideal linguistic meta-rule, but to experiences of intrapsychic phenomena (Bieri, 2001)" (Martens, 2010, p. 83). The solution to the philosophical problem is thus found through insight into the language game.

DIALECTICAL:

- The act of talking back and forth, disagreeing with one another and arguing about contentious issues
- Do you agree with X, Why or why not?

The dialectic (gr. *dialektike techne*), is the art of discussion which means "to runaway of the logoi" (Martens, 2010, p. 85) ultimately leading to comprehension through endlessly talking back and forth.

The process of the dialectic back-and-forth includes the following elements:

- phenomenological experience of the external facts
- one's own moral feelings
- hermeneutical discussion of texts concerning the problem at hand
- one's own interpretation of the meaning of experiences
- persistent interrogation of the problem at hand
- a feeling for what is humane

The interaction of these factors leads to insight concerning how the problem might best be resolved. For Heraclitus, being itself is dialectically structured in the sense of internal contradictions and tensions. Heraclitus clarifies this by pointing out these pictures: "We step and do not step into the same rivers; we are and are not." (Fragment 49a) or "Cold things become warm, and what is warm cools; what is wet dries, and the parched is moistened" (Fragment 126) or: "What opposes unites, and the finest harmony stems from opposing tones, and all things come about by strife." (Fragment 8). Heraclitus mirrors the experience of contradictory, tension-filled phenomena in natural occurrences or personal/social life situations.

The modern representatives Hegel und Marx understand dialectics as the philosophy of being in which intellectual and social being is grasped in three steps, as thesis and antitheses leading to a synthesis.

The aim of dialectics as a process of dialogue consists in the clarification of controversial notions and arguments in a real process with other people. In this process, personal and shared conceptions should be considered and corrected. This is what Socrates meant by demanding: “Always give an account of yourself and others” (Martens, 2010, p. 86). That means “*logon didonai*,” one should not cling to arbitrary beliefs, but find good justifications for one’s position and beliefs.

SPECULATIVE:

- Fantasizing and speculating how to understand something totally different
- What else could X be? How would you do X in the future? Which wish do you have with regards to X?

Philosophy often seems to be “crazy” and aimlessly speculative. For many such unusual, almost incomprehensible, abstract ideas and considerations are seen as sheer folly. Philosophers appear as other worldly, abstruse eccentrics who indeed define and argue in an acute way, but who do not really have anything practical and reasonable to say. “Speculation derives from the Latin word *Speculari* and means to explore something from a vantage point; that means in a positive sense to stand above the things.” Here the awareness we gain can appear as “a sudden light” (Martens, 2010, p. 91).

In a broader sense speculative awareness is “intuition,” “bold formulation of hypotheses,” fantasy and creativity, which means the irreducible initial point or endpoint of philosophical awareness. For speculative philosophy, there is no method under which it can be subsumed in the narrower sense, for such restriction would stifle knowledge and not ignite “a sudden light.”

The speculative elements in philosophizing are “crucial experiences,” “magic moments,” creative coincidences, had by all the great philosophers, like Augustine, Descartes, Kant, Wittgenstein, Arendt, Popper, Nussbaum, etc. They are not easily available, but one can leave oneself open for them. With the help of Ekkehard Marten’s Five Finger Model (Martens, 2010, p. 11), children can learn to build broader and distinct questions through philosophizing.

AN EXAMPLE FOR WORKING WITH EKKEHARD MARTEN’S FIVE FINGER MODEL: PHILOSOPHIZING ABOUT THE GAME “DISTANCE AND CLOSNESS”

As an example I will show an interactive game as an impulse for philosophizing with the help of Ekkehard Marten's Five Finger Model. The game is called "Distance and Closeness." In it the class is divided into two groups, lined up in pairs in two rows about 2 meters apart. One partner slowly approaches the other and stops at the point where either party seems to begin to feel uncomfortable. Applying Marten's Five Finger Model opens up the rich experiences and beliefs such a simple game can elicit.



The game was evaluated afterward using the framework of the five-finger method: *phenomenological, hermeneutical, analytical, dialectical und speculative*. To illustrate what the students got from the experience, here are some excerpts from the dialogues.

On the phenomenological level, the children talked about their observations:

K16: I was laughing a little, and so was my partner.

K17: I paid attention, like, to how my partner's expression looked and how she had her mouth.

K 18: That you look your partner in the face, and how it looks and what he does.

K 19: I was always looking into my partner's eyes, and I really liked that. It was a lot of fun.

The players primarily observed their partners. They were most interested in the partner's facial expression, which they tried to read, and not the body posture. The second step, self-perception and perception of the other, was developed hermeneutically. This second step is supposed to help the children develop reliable access to their own private inner world and minimize self-delusion and self-doubt about achieving such access. Insight about one's own participation in the game, through the act of distancing and the interchange of perspectives, makes possible an access to the private worlds of others.

Central here is the question concerning the reasons why people felt what they did during the game. Two explanations predominated, one interactive: "I thought it was fun because you looked at your partner" (K 34), and the other situational: "I liked it that you did something you never did before" (K 37). Most of the children prefer to explain their positive feelings through recourse to the social experience; they interpret the friendly facial expression as permission to come closer:

K 69: I could tell by the expression on my partner's face that he was saying ok, I could come closer.

K 70: So when you look someone in the eye, you have the feeling you can tell if he wants it or not.

K 75: Because his eyes had a friendly expression, and it looked to me as if I could come closer.

K 78: When my partner laughed I knew right away I could go one more step.

(K 88) takes this interpretation to be a general norm and applies it to her own situation: "I haven't known Jana for very long yet because she skipped a grade, she skipped second grade, and I knew I could go further anyway because she laughed and then I laughed too, and then..."

The children who attribute the way they feel to the situational aspect either feel animated by the new experience, "I thought it was fun too, because we never did that, and then we laughed some too" (K 72), or else they feel unsure of themselves:

K 85: Because you never did this before, and then it's kind of strange.

K 86: You feel a little unsure of yourself sometimes. Should you go ahead or should you stop.

K 87: And because you feel nervous.

Since thinking and speaking are closely related, an important goal of philosophizing with children is the promotion of language ability. Because many of the children felt nervous, they worked out the range of meanings for this state of mind with the help of their experience. For example:

K 112: Sometimes it depends on how nervous you feel. It could be that you're nervous, that you're happy. For example Maike and I, we're in ballet, and we have a performance on Saturday, and we already did that last year, and we are happy, too, and nervous.

K 116: With stage fright, you're mostly nervous and mostly afraid about whether you'll do it right or wrong.

K 118: You don't know if you should go a little closer or not, if the other person wants you to or....

K 120: You're kind of excited, too.

K 122: You think... uh oh, should I go one step farther? What is the other person thinking? Should I go now?

Together the children consider in what other contexts they could use the concept "nervous:"

K 126: So for example, when you're at a funeral you're kind of nervous and sad, somehow.

K 128: I went to see a film yesterday with my friends. While I was waiting for them I was nervous that they wouldn't be coming anymore, because it was already five minutes before it was supposed to start.

K 142: Sometimes I'm nervous because, like when it's my parents' birthday, what I want to give them.

K 144: Before an exam you're nervous, too.

The children came up with a wide spectrum for the concept "nervous". The insecurity that is the basic feeling underlying the concept "nervous" refers to qualities of experience with an uncertain outcome or which can be designated as "hope for something" or "fear of something."

With the help of the dialectic method, the palette of various opinions, positions, and states of mind can be surveyed.

K 155: Some children, they think no, I don't want that, and others, like Johanna and me, we got pretty close, and some have a bigger distance, because they think no, I don't want to go any farther.

K 156: I didn't get so close because I thought my partner didn't want me to come any nearer.

K 158: I got really close because I've already known Maike for a long time.

K 159: Since my partner was grinning so much I went farther.

K 161: My partner was about this far away and then I whispered to him, “You can come closer”....but he stayed where he was.

Almost all the reasons given for choosing a given distance relate to the relationship level between the play partners. The signals received regulate the distance. However, some children don't respond to non-verbal or even verbal (K 161) exchanges, but only pay attention to their own inner state of mind.

The speculative method offers a multitude of impulses; for example, the transfer to the future:

K 163: Maybe I would take look, if I think, yes, she looks pretty nice, and then maybe I'd talk to her.

K 188: For someone who doesn't look so friendly, I'd ask if he...it could be that he's having a bad day, or if he...

K 192: If the person looks so angry, if he's a tough guy or something.

K 196: I'd wait first and see how he is or something. I'd see how he is in the schoolyard, if he fights with other children, then I wouldn't talk to him.

K 197: If maybe he's having a day when he thinks it's stupid, first I'd wait till the next day to see how he looks at me then.

K 203: If you have a friend that you've known for a long time and know she's a good friend, she can't look so nice and friendly all the time.

K 205: It could also be that the other person is really mad at you or someone else, then I'd ask if it's because of me or if I can do something to make things better.

K 207: Well if I got sent off to camp and didn't have any friends there, and I'd see someone sitting there all alone with no friends, I'd go up to her and ask what her name is and so on.

The most important learning experience the children gained from this game was reflecting about the other person's state of mind. For one thing, it became clear to them that one can draw conclusions from the facial expressions of others, about their willingness to be approached, but that the opposite conclusion should not be generalized. A “closed-off” expression would not necessarily indicate personal rejection, but could result from many other circumstances. The game encouraged the children to discuss in a multifaceted way the topic of approaching a play partner.

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