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Phronesis as the Sense of the Event

Ole Fogh Kirkeby

In this article, the Greek concept of phronesis is analyzed on the basis of its philosophical roots, and the indispensability of its strong normative content is emphasized. This creates a distance to most of the recent understanding of phronesis as prudence, and hence as practical wisdom with a pragmatic and strategic content. The strong dilemmas created by the normative background of real phronesis present management and leadership as a choice in every situation. From this foundation, phronesis is interpreted as primarily the sense of the event, and an alternative concept of the event is developed. The presentation of the event also demands a theory of the relation of mind and matter, and hence of the body in the event. This is achieved under inspiration from Stoic philosophy. With this in mind, the more serious approaches to practical wisdom: phronesis as determinant of meta-concepts of research; phronesis as a liberating organizational strategy of learning; phronesis as a strategy of knowledge management; phronesis as a narrative strategy; and phronesis as the capacity of the leader, are presented and analyzed. Finally lines are drawn as to the importance of the consciousness of the event and of its theoretical implications, such as through the concept of phronesis for action research.

Key words: phronesis, the theory of the event, the sense of the event, ethical imagination, radical normativity

Presentation of the problem

In recent years, the Greek concept of *phronesis* has properly speaking been invading Western culture, and especially the field of business economics, and

the field of management in particular, covering the fronts ranging from spiritual leadership to hardcore, strategic management. Sometimes it is even used as a line of demarcation between management and leadership. In a business world dominated by a new-liberalist capitalism liable to almost religious forms of control through an ethos of passionate devoted working life, phronesis has become both a means to instrumental dominance of the organization, and a rather lacerated meta-concept to legitimate and even to re-negotiate the meaning of management. However, the hard facts stand out: the political consumer, the public world-eye watching the corporate behaviour, the pressures on products and technologies due to the upcoming environmental catastrophe, and the chronic lack of understanding of principles of functioning of the capitalist economy, due to bad macroeconomic science and even more bad politics. Now the classical effects of the Kondratieff-cycle are here: capitalism has simply not got sufficiently new technologies to drive the canonical upsurge, and the chance to prevent the descent, the nurturing of third country overseas markets were neglected. Hopes now rest with global political initiatives, and the OECD appears to have accepted this new agenda.

Phronesis seems, on the one hand, to be the perspective to develop management into a type of leadership which can honour the pressures by employees generally, and by elite knowledge workers in particular, in a market which for the first time in the history of Western capitalism moved towards full employment in the Western countries; and now, in the beginning of the crisis, on the other hand, to have the capacity to keep and change organizational culture at the same time.

Since the Greeks made “Kairos”, the right moment, the essence of opportunity, into a god, and the modern world transformed it into a strategic concept of (military) timing, the event has been seen as the centre of fruitful action, that which must be prepared for, the ever changing position from where history reveals itself, and the scene of dreams and visions of the future. Hence, it is obvious to define phronesis as *the sense of the event*.

It is of course important that this sense is not mistaken for the common sense of the situation, which is so often a vehicle for nurturing our own “enlightened” or more base interests.

As an epistemological framework of communication, with the central focus laid on dialogue, the sense of the event must be the sine qua non of action research. In this setting, phronesis would denote the capacity to receive and create, in relation to the being of the other person. To action research, the implicit doctrine of phronesis, that any person is a unique being, must both guide and legitimate this hyper-qualitative type of research. One could say that phronesis is an inter-relational capacity to become invisible and present at the very same time; a fly on the wall and a rock in the scenery. But first and foremost, action research presupposes sincerity and “authenticity” in the researcher, and hence, sympathy, if not compassion. Phronesis, nurturing on a deeply reflective earnestness and on distinct, clear and “confessed” values, is the way to create the event while at the same time “honouring” it, and action research is co-creating and co-receiving.

However, when considering that phronesis since Socrates, as it is described in a canonical, interpretative context as for example “Historische Wörterbuch der Philosophie”, Plato and his pupil, Aristotle, was the principle of normative action, the increasing dominance of one of its aspects of meaning, prudence, needs explanation. The strategic and pragmatic twisting of its content could be found in recent managerial literature in so far as this aspect is becoming greater and greater. However, Aristotle, in the “Nicomachean Ethics”, restricted the cunning-aspect of practical wisdom (“metis”, “deinotes”, concepts not generally denoting the morally bad when taken out of this context) to the pragmatic, non-normative sides of action, and hence threw the light on its character as a means to realize power through rhetoric – and rhetoric forms, of course, are the trap of action research. The schism between ethical normativity and strategically shaped action is not just a schism, it is an aporia. But phronesis has to do with the capacity of a human being to ethically guide and develop itself as such, the capacity to the *sui conservandi*, so objectively vindicated by Thomas Hobbes, and at the same time the will and ability to act for the sake of the community, on the basis of reflectively affirmed duty. Phronesis is the meta-concept of intelligent, situated action. Thus it is the principle of the insightfully guided life which Socrates advocated, and it relates to all the spheres of our life, which after all only can mean the life in which a human being knows how to honor or be

worthy of the event – as the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus phrased it, and with him Gilles Deleuze (1990). Plato conceptualized this maxim, in the “Laws”, on his overall epistemological assumption that thinking is inner dialogue, and that man has an eristic relation to himself being permanently “at war with himself”. The victory hence is one over oneself, and it is the greatest of all victories (“nikan auton auton pason nikon prote te kai ariste” (Nomoi Bog I, 626E)). This immediately takes phronesis out of the self-conservational context of prudence, since self-sacrifice is a possible consequence.

Plato claims that the inner expression of proving worthy of the event is to honour oneself above all except the gods (Nomoi 334 b-c.). Man must “follow in the footprints of God” (“synakolouthesónton”) (Nomoi IV, 716B).

As Plato (Menon 87 c11ff), and Aristotle (Nic. Eth. VI, 13 1144 b, 28-30), Socrates identifies virtue with knowledge, though accepting some not pronounced normative “techniques” for realizing it (like knowledge or sense of the other person). What Socrates actually meant is difficult to say precisely, but one interpretation could be that he identified phronesis with a knowledge which could be discursively stated, even if this approaches paradox, since phronesis deals with the concrete act, and hence seems to require non-discursive language or trans-reflective capacities. But he identified after all phronesis with that which produces “euprattein”, the satisfaction of acting on behalf of the Good. Plato apparently follows Socrates – though he recreates him – in claiming that phronesis is both a moral virtue, one of the four canonical Greek values, and that it is a meta-value, bringing reflectivity and deliberation into concrete action on the basis of virtues, and it is hence inherent in all the virtues (Meno 88 d 3, Resp. IV 10 433 b 7-c 2). However, Plato is not consistent here (Resp. IX 13, 590 c 2-d 6), which sometimes implies the idea that reflectivity must be projected into the virtues from episteme.

Since Plato, in between, substitutes “sophia” (contemplative wisdom) for phronesis, he seems aware of the importance to place the normative aspect over the prudential, or to rule the latter out as a possible sense of phronesis. However Plato also uses phronesis in the more idiomatic sense, meaning just the capacity to reflect (Philebus) – this might go back to Heraclitus’ use of the concepts as a substitute for “nous”, thinking. Plato also accepts the possi-

bility of a non-virtuous use of phronesis, the “panurgia” the way of the villain. However he generally seems most inclined to define phronesis as knowledge of the quasi-transcendent ideas of the good, the just, the true and the beautiful, because he identifies it with “episteme”, which is a knowledge of the necessary and eternal, and this is strictly in opposition to Aristotle’s emphasis of phronesis as pertaining to the contingent sphere only, having no possibility of applying the apophantic knowledge. (Resp. VI, 18, 506 b 2). In Aristotle this is basic in the development of argument in the “Topics”, “The Nicomachean Ethics”, and in “The Art of Rhetoric”.

Thus it is possible to conclude that Plato was inclined to conceive of phronesis as a kind of knowledge, which did only differ from genuine theoretical, and hence, discursive knowledge, in so far that the eternal ideas of knowledge have a certain transcendence – the famous passages from “The Symposium” suggests that beauty is an almost direct incarnation (parousia) of eternal ideas on the phenomenological level. Tacit knowledge would, to Plato, belong to the imperfect realm of “aesthesis”, even if he acknowledges that the wise ruler has to have practical knowledge (Resp. VII, 18 539, e 2-5).

In this article the phronesis of Plato is preferred to that of Aristotle.

Aristotle is, in the conception of phronesis, committed to his more empirical and more pragmatic approach to philosophy. He sticks to Plato’s conception of phronesis as a reflective capacity in relation to life, but rejects its identification with “episteme” and “sophia”, since it deals with human acts, and since they are phenomena which could have been otherwise. The realm of the “endechomen”, the possible which has no determinant necessity, is the sphere of phronesis (Nic. Ech. 1140 a, 31 b 6). Phronesis does not deal with the subject of episteme, the general and abstract, but with the singular, “ta kath’ hékasta”. (Nic.Eth. VI, 6-8). Phronesis has its peculiar character in relating to action, to that which can be done, “to praktón”, and hence it is a species of the genus “praxis”, and differs from “poiesis”, and its dependency on “techné”. Techne, contrary to what one might think, does not work on the basis of “nous”, intuitive intellectual knowledge. This is due to the fact that artistic making (poiesis) has its goal outside itself (Nic. Ech. 1140 b6 f), and thus has no theoretical first principles, while praxis can have an inherent goal

(to do the good for the goods own sake). The passages referred to are probably the most famous about phronesis in philosophical literature.

To Aristotle virtue (areté) and phronesis are reciprocally interdependent (Nic Eth. 1144 b 30-32).

Forceful and successful action without ethical basis is named “deinótes”, a concept which later was to be important as the terminus for the convincing capacity of the rhetor (Nic.Eth. 1144 a 23-29).

Since Aristotle emphasized that it is impossible to find ethical rules which can make the realization of maxims possible – as Kant did many years later – interpreters have widely discussed which type of knowledge he actually refers to as supporting the ethical intention of the “ethike arête”, of the moral person. Aristotle’s own solution is beyond doubt the formation of character through hard efforts to live the virtues and the values, a process which he names “hexis” (translated by Cicero into “habitus”, a word rather misleading due to its generative relation to “habit”), and in which the knowledge of values and virtues giving through the “paideia” (life-long learning) is deepened and made real by trying to realize them. As always, in classical Greek thought and in Hellenism, the utmost purpose is the “ton ef’ temin”, to be the master of one’s own life, and its resulting in happiness (“eudaimonía”).

The rather equivocal work of Aristotle on phronesis has stimulated psychologists and management researchers to try to anchor the ambiguous and analytically weak concepts of tacit knowledge and intuition in phronesis as a means to conceptualize prudence. This has blurred its normative essence, though there are exceptions. However, there can be no doubt that knowledge of norms and values does not suffice for living ethically in the event. We must master knowledge of ourselves and of the other person, the capacity to use the sense of judgment, use ethical imagination, produce overall views, and not at least to have a utopian vision of a just society. But above all we have to reflect on the possibilities of coping with the unpredicted and unexpected, as human beings, and as politicians, administrators and managers, as well. All this is summed up in the sense of the event.

However, logically and historically this presupposes the constitution of historical science done some fifty years before Aristotle by Thucydides.

Let us now investigate the event and one theory about it which I have developed over my many years working with this subject, and deduce *phronesis* from it.

Process and event

Behind the conceptual handling of the phenomenon of process, there lies far more than the paradoxes displayed by Zeno, namely the semantic and syntactic barriers of language games, the common games of truth, the “*koiné aisthesis*” (Aristotle’s concept from “*De anima*”), and the “*koina ennoia*” (Stoics), the forms of experience and thought emerging from them.

This is not due to the one-dimensional conclusion that words and propositions have a representational character. They have indeed, but this representation is not, as Locke and Hume thought, a denotation by the (conventional) sign of inner ideas wielded from sense impressions (the concept of “*phantasia*” from Greek philosophy). The fallacy consists in not seeing that words create what they refer to as an always ambiguous and unfinished meaning, and in that they always differ in relation to the event in which they are spoken, and in relation to the context of this event, and the context of contexts.

The great problem then is how to get a hold of language so that it can express the phenomenon of process, hereby transcending the forms of thought bound to common sense (“*koiné aisthesis*”, “*sensus communis*”).

The answer must be put immediately: There is one and only one solution to this problem, namely that the event in some sense does not exist.

This of course demands some epistemological and ontological reservations about the meaning of the word “exist”.

Generally people would say that something which we are able to perceive does exist. This also counts for a process in the capacity of movements, shades, clouds, and so on, in which no proper forms can be distinguished. Existence is normally tied to both the possible perception of an entity and hence, of some substance, and to the fact that a word can be found for this appearance. Or better, that there might exist some word demoting the perceived, even if we do not know it. When looking into an open human torso

we might not be able to name the different entrails, but to speak of bowels might suffice to match the experience for a lot of people.

When we state that the event does not exist, it must mean that neither does a singular conceptual, discursive experience answer to it, and in a more restricted sense no subject of experience. Neither does there at the pre-discursive level exist any comprehensive “understanding” of this event. The event is “an sich”, a “noumenon”, above the distinction between object and subject. A clearly not satisfying analogy, but perhaps the nearest, would be to say that at the beginning of the universe we had a genuine event which has no object, because there was nothing outside this event. However there must have been something, because, as Plato taught us in the “Parmenides” the same cannot be conceived without presupposing otherness. But before the universe began there was perhaps nothing, and this would better match the concept of an event which at this abstract level is said not to exist.

When I say that the event “does not exist”, I use this concept at several different ontological levels. No, one could object that, to the dead and their families, the event 9/11 certainly existed as something ultra-real and the traces of its material reality could be witnessed for years by the site, and will be incorporated into the new buildings. Also it was conserved on news papers, television, in amateur films, and in memories. It exists as an overall public topic.

Anyhow, what did actually happen is not sufficiently explained, and thus naming it must always rely on hypothetical suppositions. The causal level of explanation contains different hypothesis, among others the raising importance of conspiracy-theories, and nobody is able to survey the totality of the event. This means that there exists no coherent narrative into which this event could be inscribed. Then it is difficult, if not impossible, to conceptualize this event as a species, to define “the objective of preparedness in relation to the catastrophic event itself” (Stattler/Roos/Victor 2006: 7) Recent upsurges in strategic focus on “preparedness” since authorities have great difficulties in generalizing significantly from that which happened to that which might happen in the future. They have an immediately connected difficulty in defining criteria of assessment for lack of a definite hierarchy of values, especially as relevant economic parameters including all losses and related

gains (ibid.: 8). If “also” the human lives, and the consequences on world politics and general attitudes towards life are calculated, we are confronted with the fact that what “actually happened” cannot be “fully” understood until the future, if understood at all. Billions of “facts” would have to be incorporated, but in spite of immense computer power the processing of facts shall not suffice. Estimations as to the balance of loss and gain have to be created, and hence values are involved.

However, this is a statement of the non-existence of the event at a rather “concrete” ontological level, and apparently not with direct ontological implications.

It seems of course a *contradictio in adjecto* to speak at any level about the event which “is” not, and this dilemma was genially presented to us by Nicolaus Cusanus in his “*Triolog de li non aliud*” with the famous phrasing: “*non aliud non aliud est quam non aliud*”. (“The not other is nothing but the not-other”), (Cusanus: 1979). This a positive phrasing of the inaccessible level of a noumenon, and in such a sophisticated thinker as Cusanus, it is not only a repetition of Plotin’s model of the transcendent One and its emergent levels of reality, but simply the statement of a figure of thought which is meant to transgress both ontology, and in the end also its own epistemology.

Since, due to recent theories of “flat time”, but to common sense too, any process consists of events being positions in a coordinate system with a basic time on the one side, and relative or subjective time on the other (relative time does not need to be subjective time, but could be immeasurable or not measured time, because there is no constant), every concept of process which presumes that the event has an ontological existence must presume a movement by stages, be they ever so short, and be their causal relations ever so complicated and even non-linear. This is a necessity because the event is identified which the word or proposition denoting it, whether it is a general concept or a concept for a singular occurrence, and language and thinking demand the concept of the causal, as Kant stated. So Alfred North Whitehead’s proceeding by occurrences in his book “*Process and Reality*” is wrong concerning the basis for a theory of process, and thus Gilles Deleuze, the most influential among the new “process-thinkers”, a philosopher heavily indebted to Whitehead, cannot completely master the conceptual approach to

the phenomenon of process. The other great influence on the process-thinking of Deleuze, Henri Bergson, might be better equipped to escape the paradoxes of Zeno.

Alain Badiou comes a bit closer to understanding the event in his first book on the event, “Being and Event”, when he says: That what counts is not just “how does one think non-being?” but also “how does one name non-being?” The proper name is neither the transcendent God’s nor some aspect of genuine presence, but the “un-presentation and the un-being of the one”. Thus it cannot be interpreted in a Kantian way as a guaranty of the validity of sense impressions – which Badiou naturally must try to establish too (Badiou 2006).

However Badiou does not go far enough, because the event must be conceptually framed at several epistemological levels beyond the determination of its trans-ontological status, it must be seen as an active area of non-sense working in the midst of our experience; as “an empty place”, as Roland Barthes once framed it in his magnificent book on Japanese culture (Barthes 2006).

Following Badiou, the event has no objective existence; but since it exhibits a distinctively reflexive structure, it only occurs through what Badiou (2006: 181) calls an ‘interpretative intervention’. The event is called into existence through the subject who recognizes it, or who nominates it *as* an event, and keeps faithful to it. However, from this perspective only the acceptance of a material causal level could guarantee that the transformation of individual interpretations into narratives of a wider sense, like the one of the French Revolution, would be more than the results of negotiations of nothing, i.e. of a phantasm, and random consensuses.

The alternative is that the event becomes a “phantasma” (“simulacra” in Latin) *per se*. So, in some sense it must be meaningful to state that the event does not exist. But this demands another level of ontology than the first one presented here.

It must be rather obvious that no event can be sufficiently grasped by a word or by a proposition, be it ever so simple. This is due to the fact that nobody could experience the totality of an event, not even billions of cameras

could do it.¹ Every phrasing is an approximation, so the ontological level of what I call the *alma-event* – the second level of ontology, then – must presume the at least preliminary constitution of a subject and an object in some sense. If we conceive of the event as an empty place, and hence *as* place after all, it must be inside space and thus inside time. If this empty place is said to be experienced, it would be a metaphor for the impossibility to perceive the event as a process or as a moving constellation of objects. It would have no content. But we know and feel that the event is something. An accident cannot be explained away, it leaves perhaps terrible effects on physical and psychical being.

If we, by the empty place, mean that the thought of it has no object, as Hegel phrased it in his “Enzyklopädie” one could object that we after all might visualize it unwillingly over and over again – the car hitting the body for example; and that such traumas are sadly real. Anyhow the total event cannot take the form of a “real” object, i.e. an object confirmed by social experience in opposition to private experience, since it would demand a union of all actual, and perhaps also potential, perspectives on it.

We are “epistemologically” accustomed to think of the event as being outside us, but of course it also lives inside us in the capacity of memory. Bergson distinguished between “pure memory” and “image-memory”, the pure memory containing the total memory at a non-conscious level, a sleep only broken by the pragmatics use of individual memories as images of experience needed by perception to cope with circumstance. (Bergson 2007: Chapter III). Bergson presents his famous concept of “duration” in this context, and claims that memory is immaterial and obeying another principle of time, less structured than the horizon (in Husserl’s later sense) of the external world with its virtual space of experiences. However, consciousness might have its own “alma-event”, and I developed a theory about this empty space of the

¹ When billions of video cameras filmed a small and limited event in space and time, for example a short encounter between two friends in a super market, they had to be transformed into a format which allowed people to watch it in real time, and yet this transformation would just postpone the problem, since this reception, already an interpretation, had to be interpreted too, and so on in infinity. Computer interpretation would only postpone this predicament. Behind this the problem of the never finished, semantic character of the event hides itself.

“bottom” of the mind (Kirkeby 2008). Actually Epicurus, according to Diogenes Laertius, thought along the same lines with his concept of “akathonomaston”, the unnamable place of the relation between body and mind.

It is obvious that the hypothesis of this second ontological level of the event presupposes a concept of the moment in relation to the now. The now is seen as a point without extension, as a passage leading from the future to the past, making the present non-existent. Every experience is already in the past, as Bergson says. However the moment contains duration, and hence, considering its difference from the “now”, it is outside or inside time. Bergson does not draw these conclusions, but I do, like probably also Meister Eckehart, Cusanus, and Soeren Kierkegaard.

First and foremost the conceptualization of the event must meet two demands arising in our common sense, and from generally all known games of language, beyond their inherent difference in syntactic and semantic notions of time. These two demands are the conceptualization of process and of factuality (“Faktizität”). They both refer to some a priori concept of time, found in the distinction between the “nunc permanens” and the “nunc stans” of Scholastic philosophy. Nunc permanens is finite, eternal time and space, laid out as a map without movement to the eye of God. It is the history of the world unfolded (“explicatum” in Nicolas Cusanus) as a stasis. Nunc stans is the infolded (“implicatum”) world, pressed into one moment of experience and knowledge. This knowledge then, cannot be in real time, but presupposes the duration of the moment beyond time. This “experience” answers to the “theoria”, the “contemplatio” of Aristotle but also has the connotation of the Gnostic and Christian concept of “epiphany” or “parousia”, the appearance of the absolute in time.

These two demands, the conceptualization of process and of factuality, go back to Greek philosophy – “process” was the concept of Heraclitus, and “factuality” is formed from “fact” originating in Latin “factum”, “event, occurrence, thing done” and “factuality” might be a translation of the Aristotelean “tode ti” under inspiration from the Scholastic concept of Duns Scotus, “haecceitas”, playing a great role in Heidegger and Deleuze as “das Faktizität” and as “the singular” and the “unique”, as the immediate (*≠e*)presentation of the external world to experience.

We experience the transient character of the moment of the event, and hence its contextual ambiguity and we feel its irrevocability.

Much wisdom refers to the *nunc stans*, to the capacity to stay in the moment, even to enjoy it, and to come into contact with the real force of life. As to *phronesis* as practical wisdom this could hardly be an option, since action takes place in real time, and organizations do not exactly cherish a contemplation which cannot be controlled.

Phronesis must of course be a capacity which is able to guide the event into social reality, this is not at least underlined by its importance to management. But as a procedure of the “right naming of the event” it must be totally obliged to the normative claims. This claim of normativity is projected onto us the more the free space of the possibilities of naming is realized, i.e. manifested through the metaphor of emptiness.

Considering the idiomatic senses of event in English, “to take place”, “to happen”, “accident”, “incident” and “occurrence” we can create a conceptual hierarchy. But due to the first ontological level, the non-aliud, perhaps *happening*, or just *happen*, connoting the lack of subject-object-relation is the real genus.

<p style="text-align: center;">To happen The moment: time outside/inside time The event To take place The now: The point in time Incident accident occurrence Dialogue</p>

Now, from this the relevance of this epistemological gymnastics of the event could reveal their relevance to action research. Because the existence of external and internal empty spaces blocking final knowledge of both the event and of our own mind, warn us not to believe that we could understand either of them. When we cannot say definitely what took place, or who we

are, then approaches to other persons must be invested with a tentative carefulness. However, the programme of investigation, being through this postponed permanently into the preliminary zone of the future, might also contain lines of flight, and normative-utopian considerations.

The Stoic philosophers who were the first to develop a systematic and complex theory of the event distinguished between *pragma* and *tychanon*, between a level of sense, and a material level. In Stoic philosophy the corporeal realm consisted of space, objects, voice, emotions, thought and mental impressions and images or “ideas” (*phantasma*). The incorporeal realm consisted of time, the void, and sense. If the event is conceived only at the *pragma*-level it would presume an extremely constructivist view – as Deleuze and Badiou seem inclined to do -, and also have a hyper-idealistic character. So, the material level must be considered too, and it has its own reality although it is always subject to intentional experience. The reality of the material level is guaranteed by physics, and thus it is also a construct seen epistemologically and ontologically. But everyday experience relates to physical bodies and things, and to their relations. The bullet is there, the wound is there, the cry is there. They are obvious facts, even if they might make sense, or even lack sense, in many ways.

What does not exist properly is something which cannot be the object of perception, and which cannot be named, although it is there. This might, as already mentioned, denote a thinking without a subject, an all-comprehensive “*noesis noeseos*”, or “*cogito cogitans*”, the thinking of itself by thought, which, at the same time, could also be a “*cogito cogitandum*”, a thought that ought to be thought – referring to Aristotle’s “*Metaphysics*” and to the opus of Descartes. However, this genuine act of reflectivity is not enough to catch this dimension of a trans-experiential experience. Perhaps the concept of “significance” is more apt in this connection by referring moods and “non-discursive” emotional states. This “experience” has no phenomenal character. It does not appear. How then, can it still be?

The only answer is that this empty place of the event is where the world and the mind meet in the depth of the *body-mind*, in the capacity of an embodied “*phronema*”, a sense of self expressing a practical reflectivity.

This material level is the body, and its chiasmic incorporation into language confirms this physicality through the material character of the voice.

I have developed three levels which display a trans-ontological level, and two ontological levels, the last one appearing in the process of trying to name the event (Kirkeby 2005).² This “proto-event” of the bodily level has always the second level inherent in it, the “alma-event” the sense-defying activity of the event as a virtual thought without an object. Both these levels are shaped by the ontology of the body as “body-mind”.³

The way in which the body-mind and the event melt into each other creates the empty space of sense, the untrodden zone, or the trans-reflective domain.

When we accept that the core of a process, the event, can never be named sufficiently, because the naming itself is part of a new event which transforms the very gesture and the conditions of denotation, the process shall not consist of occurrences in the capacities of “elements”. The mind cannot reflect the passage between events which come to be when an event is experienced, and transformed from a presence into the past.

The body-mind is the carrier of the process, and the event is its content.

The body is the medium of process, and it is the concept without a thought, because it is that which can neither experience its own experience nor think its own thinking. Hence, the event can never be a full subject of consciousness, but ascribing sense is restricted by the body as the world of the event, and as the event of World.⁴

² In my three books on the event from 2005-2008, written in Danish: *Eventum tantum – the Ethos of the Event*; *The Event of Beauty – the Aesthetics of the Event*; and *The Self Happens – the Event of Consciousness*. In English I presented the thoughts of the two first books in two articles in the net journal “Ephemera”. In relation to leadership of the event I wrote the book “Management of the Event and the Force of Action” in 2007 (in Danish), and in English I wrote the books *Management Philosophy. A Radical-Normative Perspective*. New York: Springer 2000, and *The Virtue of Leadership*. Copenhagen: CBS-Publishers 2008.

³ I presented the theory of the body-mind in my doctoral thesis from 1994 *Body-Mind and Event. A Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Analysis* (in Danish).

⁴ These epistemological conditions are reinforced to our minds when we reflect on memory. Memory has got similarities to the young earth in that it is subject to violent and permanent transformation. Since there is no definite goals of this transformation-

From this some implications as to phronesis can already be drawn. The fabulous Stoics always concentrated on the body as a jail (the wordplay “soma/sema” already in Plato), and hence as the Trojan Horse of the world in our minds through the fate of desires and passion. From their perspective, philosophy is the means to control the body – they even tended to underline this perspective by claiming that the whole body is thought and hence can be controlled by mind. Phronesis in this Hellenist tradition must then be understood as the way of being master of the way in which the event takes possession of the body. This is done through an ethos of desiring the Good only. Phronesis then, is the mode of being which guides us in controlling the passions and seeking beyond the “kathékon”, the “normal” level of the feeling of duty into the state of the “katorthoma”, the ultimate wisdom.

This conception is repeated in the Neo-Stoicism of the Baroque, for example in the best seller by Justus Lipsius, “De Constantia” from 1584 or in the essays of Montaigne.

Due to classical Greek philosophy the four cardinal virtues, “andreia” (courage), “dikaiósyne” (justice), “sophrosyne” (temperance) and “phronesis” are all functions of phronesis itself. Plato said that to have one virtue means to possess them all (Protagoras 329 c ff). The meta-virtue is actually phronesis in both Plato and Aristotle.

The ethos of the event developed by the Stoics is phrased with great power by Epictetus:

“Do not seek to have everything that happens happen as you wish, but wish for everything to happen as it actually does happen, and your life will be serene.” (Encheiridion, Paragraph 8).

process but only the set of possible ones posited within the field allowed for by evolutionary laws, every new minute something could happen which would change the orbits of development lines and retrospectively change their sense as causal chains. Emergent new stages, leaps, are only possible when they have been carefully prepared for by absorptions of relevant events in the bodies of earth or man, and so it is with the sudden capacity to overcome oneself through a phronetic act. The Laplacian perspective on evolution emphasizing the teleological aspect must also be projected on phronesis: We carefully prepare for the unexpected which we have made possible. Both Husserl and Bergson failed to see this “working” autonomy of memory, the former relying too little on the transforming powers of the moment of the perceptual event, the latter too much (Kirkeby 2008).

However, this cannot be enough to develop an ethics. Much more is demanded. I created two other maxims besides “proving worthy of the event”, namely “to guard the secret of the event”, and “to prepare the world for the event”. These two maxims prepare the individual to active ethical praxis, to ethical imagination, and to utopian and political vision. Thus the core problem of human existence as seen from the event is to transform our mindset and conceptual framework into action. This also explains why the theory of the event must be the meta-theory of action research.

How matter and mind is related

In action research the great question is “How to speak?” when we want information that both we and the interlocutor do not know that they know.

We saw that to the Stoics the voice was material, and that the working of the mind was seen so too.

In speech sense is created, and sense is incorporeal. This demands a theory of speech. I coined the *principle of translocutionarity* many years ago in my doctoral thesis “Event and Body-Mind. A Phenomenological-Hermeneutical investigation.” (1994). This principle says that when I hear myself thinking or speaking, I recognize something at work in these processes of sense production. This can never be directly articulated, and even if we for example are inclined to identify it with a feeling of shame or unjustified hostility already immediately in the process of thinking or speaking, it is not the sensed significance proper.

The principle of translocutionarity says:

I do not know what I mean until I hear what I myself am saying.

I do not know what I do until I experience myself doing it.

I do not know what I can until *we* experience ourselves performing it.

Thus, through a physical act sense is created, and through the communicative power of sense, the material world of the other person’s mind is moved.

This reciprocal effect controls my processes of experience and knowledge.

This is exactly what is meant by wisdom in the Stoics: To master these processes of transformation by “synkatathesis”, by accepting or denying sense.

The problem is to command one’s own inner world through incorporeal sense, through the logos, a world which is totally physical; and to be able to master all impressions from without. This means to be able to choose the event as it actually happened.

Marcus Auerelius said in his “Thoughts to myself” that the only thing which distinguishes a human being from a pig is that when the latter is drawn to the butcher it cries, but man can chose not to.

So, our body as a material being could be said to be ahead of us – as hypothesized by B. Libet and Gray⁵ –, acting at a physical level, which is inscribed in sense. This sense cannot be voluntarily chosen, as Deleuze and Badiou seem to think, but must be worked out, on the one hand through mastering our own mind; on the other hand through communication.

Social activism was not an option of the reverent Stoic wise man, but a passive activism controlling the mind was the ideal, and hence controlling the prejudices of the “doxa”, and one’s own behavior.

In this Stoicism does not only differ from Christianity – Pascal scorned its lack of humility – but from the classical Greek roots of the phronesis as shaped by Plato and Aristotle.

One could say that the Stoic ideal of being rested on the capacity to use the empty place between the mind and the world, which I earlier spoke about, letting the event of the self form a no-man’s-land of perceptual freedom.

Phronesis then has to do both with mastering one’s own thought through controlling speech by an inner mechanism of the veto, or simply by thinking,

⁵ Gray (2004) and Libet (1986) claim that we become aware of willing an action only after the unconscious part of the brain causes it. Libet (1986) demonstrated that subjects show a readiness-potential for a ‘willed’ behavior before they report becoming aware of willing that behavior. From this he created the hypothesis that the unconscious part of the brain causes behavior independently of our conscious sensation of willing. To gauge the relation between unconscious potential of readiness and subjective feelings of volition and action, Libet required an objective method of marking the subject’s conscious experience of the will to perform an action in time, and afterward comparing this information with data recording the brain’s electrical activity during the same interval.

and hence, feeling, in another way. Neither must the speech of the other be able to touch you, nor must you be touched by your own speech and driven by it. You must be able to control the event.

In this we can find modern ideals of dialogue like Martin Buber's, Gabriel Marcel's, and Carl Roger's, but in a much more pronounced altruistic setting. Phronesis was always first and foremost the propaedeutic basis of protreptic, the art of mastering dialogue in relation to basic values.

The concept of phronesis

"Phronesis" is the sense of the event in its classical Greek roots. This implies a sense of the possible and a sense of the self ("epimeleia heautou", "cura sui") too, because phronesis must produce "euprattein", the feeling of having acted ethically right.⁶

Considering that phronesis in a managerial context deals with building preparedness or a readiness which due to the unpredictable character of the unforeseen cannot rely on models of theoretical predictions, it could be tempting to interpret phronesis as a sort of intuitive capacity to act spontaneously and with cunning – capabilities relative to the challenges of the unpredictable event. Empirically such action often seems more instrumental than normative. The challenge of phronesis then must be to let all immediate action be guided by an inherent normativity. This is a rather obvious task since organizations create our reality by projecting the future through products, services and HR, and in relation to catastrophes evaluation and weighting of interests often life-important between groups are pertinent.

Johan Roos and Matt Statler (2006: 105) use phronesis as a meta-concept do criticize management science's obligation to theories and laws as the conditions of action. They argue that especially the preparation for the unprepared event demands a normative stand. They refer to Sternberg (1998, 2001, 2004), Clegg and Roos-Smith (2003), and Tsoukas and Cummings (1997) to defend their view.

⁶ The next one and a half pages are borrowed from forthcoming book "Protreptic – the Concept and the Art."

Phronesis is characterized by being always normative action. Norms are often identified with values. A value is always far more than a maxim. It is the mental environment in which the maxim makes sense. By it the dispositions, the emotional atmosphere, and the relevant modes of reflection which they give raise to, are conjured up, and hence the possible ways of action are prescribed (Kirkeby 2003). Due to the uniqueness and complexity of any event values must be foci of attention, and hence, individual modes of leading one's experience towards the right goals, and towards the goal as set by a norm. A value is a set of criteria for distinguishing salient traits in the event, and a tacit capacity for acting this knowledge out guided by the image of the other person conveyed by benevolence. Feeling responsible towards another person limits the strategic use of psychological common sense knowledge often so brutal and cynical in its core.

The mental functioning of values are inextricably connected to two capacities philosophically related to the aesthetics of Immanuel Kant, the sense or capacity of judgment, and imagination. The capacity of judgment appears where reason does not suffice, or when the relevant or sufficient information is lacking. Situational imagination is a type of event-sense making it feasible to realize a value in all situations.

The capacity of judgment is sometimes understood as an aspect of the Greek concept of "phronesis". Because it has several meta-levels in Aristotle, and because it was translated and transferred through different interpretations, phronesis can be difficult to press into a univocal definition.

Phronesis is the core concept in the book on "Protreptic" by Aristotle. However, its modern interpretation is often very diffuse, because it is translated by "practical wisdom" and in Latin by "prudentia" and "sapientia", concepts also found in English. But phronesis is not prudence, neither is it just sapience. The problems arise, because the Greek did not distinguish between theoretical and practical knowledge in the same way as we do. In the Greek thought successful practice means a practice which is in harmony both with the state of the world in the event, with the norms of society, and with the mind of the actor. However, harmony of mind is only possible on the basis of an ethical attitude. Practical wisdom does not mean mere empirical knowledge of men and their affairs, but knowledge of oneself. However,

knowledge of oneself is at the same time knowledge of the ethical norms and the capacity to realize them. This means that phronesis is incorporated in ethical virtues. No virtue can be realized without phronesis, but even if phronesis does not suppose apophantic knowledge, because it deals with the possible, not with the necessary, it presupposes intuitive knowledge, "nous", and both a portion of knowledge of truth, episteme, and a genuine wisdom of the absolute, "sophia" or "gnosis".

The capacity to live for the virtues might to a certain degree be an inborn capacity, it belongs to the "aristos", to the gentleman of noble decent – this is certainly the view of Aristotle – and it is a product of the upbringing and lifelong learning (the paideia), but it is first and foremost a result of "askesis", of hard work to perfect oneself. So nobility has quite another sense than to us, in the end it means a quality which one grants oneself.

Phronesis is given to us through the way we act in the event. It is the junction of our "êthos", of our constitutional character, and of our "ethos", our will and capacity to transform the given, normative values into action, and through this effort to create our character (ethopoiesis). This is the essence of the concept of "virtue" (Kirkeby 2008).

Phronesis is the event-sense, and a normatively guided sense. It is the principle of self-reflection, and is directed towards the winning of the war against oneself – as Plato speaks of in the dialogue, "The Laws". Phronesis opens and guides the entrance to the self by mastering its becoming, and it produces the right feeling of self, the "ho phronema". Thus phronesis exemplifies the movement denoted by the concept of "hexis", a self chosen, deliberate, action-directed "tropos", a state or disposition permanently created by an inner force.

This is the way in which Aristotle argues in his *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Hence, phronesis manifests itself in an ethical fantasy in the event and is directed towards the other person, but it is also a way to help oneself to the ideal of "ton ef' hemin", to master one's life. Since Plato, phronesis was also directed to actions which strengthen the community. The paideia demands that the care for one self must always be a care for community too, since norms are of a social, and hence of a general character due to the fact that similarities dominate over differences across history and culture, – be they

ever so locally limited as to Athens. It implies a radical sense of possibilities, combining experience, and memory with thought. Phronesis is an individual strategy of “*epimeleia heautu*”, of taking care of oneself, but it is both a meta-value at the highest level of the moral virtues, and a dianoetic, or intellectual virtue, being both (as already stated) a species of praxis, and poiesis, and in the end contemplation – “*theoria*”, “deep insight”, and the mind-forming result of phronesis being translated in Latin into “contemplation”. Thus phronesis is always more than poiesis, it is a practice in which the good is practiced for the sake of the good.

We have a very precise treatment of phronesis by Matt Statler and Johan Ross when they write:

“Precisely in view of the tension between science and cunning, Aristotle helps us to define practical wisdom (‘*phronesis*’) as *the virtuous habit of making decisions and taking actions that serve the common good*. This distinct form of human intelligence effectively serves the good of the community even in the face of ambiguous or uncertain circumstances. Thus precisely where the predictive capacity of scientific knowledge breaks down, practical wisdom addresses normative considerations about what *should* occur in the future. Similarly, though practical wisdom may draw on cunning to realize such normative goals, it disciplines cunning to avoid deception and to focus on advantages that may be shared by all members of society” (Statler/Ross 2006: 101).

This determination of phronesis puts severe limits as to its use in business economics. It cannot refer to the clever or even smart way of handling things. There is no compromise in phronesis as to its strategic, pragmatic, and functional use. In Greek thought its functional basis is the “*eudaimonia*”, the union of psychic and physical bliss, and this can only be obtained through acting out the good (“*euprattein*”). This must be considered when it is translated into “wisdom”, especially in a capitalist society. Hence, the radical impact of phronesis constitutes no anachronism, but a challenge.

Phronesis is a utopian concept designing a future community of the ethically perfect human beings. Every phronetic act must be done with this in mind. The “*Res publica*” of Plato is such a utopia of phronesis, even if it is not a democratic society in our sense. However, aristocracy might be neither the necessary nor the sufficient condition for an “ethical society”.

Since phronesis demands a hexis, which means a lifelong elaboration on changing oneself in the image of the values embodied in virtues, and passion in the capacities of “epithymos” and “hormé” were seen by the Greeks as the main inner enemy, every human being must be invested with practical assumptions and instruments for strategic assessment of the event, and pragmatic psychological knowledge of the other person. Even “endoxa”, the wiser part of common sense, has this character. Realizing ethical fantasy in perception seems after all rather difficult to obtain. This means that phronesis presents us to an eternal dilemma. Its nature is aporetic, it contains the tension between the genuine normative and the strategic.

However, phronesis is also a meta-capacity to overview this aporia between the levels of phronesis. This is why it is both a moral and an intellectual virtue in Aristotle. We cannot escape this dilemma, but the prudential side of it must not be given too much emphasis, if we are to save the content of the concept.

It is important to realize that the Greek classical philosophy did not accept humility, resignation, and contemplative passivity. It is a philosophy of the self *and* of the social. This implicates that there is a conflict between Aristotle and the Stoics as to the content of phronesis. Recent use of the concept “practical wisdom” all refer to Aristotle since he propagates action, not putting up with or resigning. This, of course, increases the normative demands on the basis of phronesis.

When phronesis is seen as a hexis one might be prepared to underpin the often emphasized concept of “the middle” in Aristotelean thought. By this one could smuggle cunning into the normative. A hexis as the container of an ethical imagination must nurture normative tacit knowledge and intuition, but to develop this takes a lot of time, and even normative tacit knowledge is never serene, it is always mingled with desire, especially by its being driven by the *sui conservandi*. Thus, often, immediate reaction based on tacit knowledge must be stopped by the normative filter, and what is left is the dilemma between survival and destruction. If the middle expresses some ideal of mental balance it shall very often be either a compromise or an illusion. Phronesis allows for no compromises. The individual must be ready to “sacrifice” and even to sacrifice himself, and though this claim might not be conse-

quently argued by Aristotle, it is the consequence of the essence of his thought. One loses Aristotle by interpreting him as a pragmatic, and especially one lets go of his Platonic core.

To the general who is confronted with the unexpected event which presents him to the choice between surrendering or losing half of the army, there exists no compromise. Especially not when one considers that the surrendering will be killed or transformed into slaves. Often, however, the value of honour will be stronger than the value of life, and there shall be no further value above honour. Probable the possibility of obtaining balance increases when values are not that unconditionally adhered to, but this opens up the pragmatic interpretation of values, and hence a negotiation of the situation which makes one unable to be worthy of the event. After all one cannot compare death to slavery, since the more specific information about both is lacking. One must choose.

A choice made on the basis of honor only shall often neither seem strategic, nor favorable to the interests of the individual and the community. Here we touch the ambiguous concept of the enlightened self-interest, the core of liberalism and neoclassic economy. It must be evident that normativity suspends with this concept because the concept of information loses its sense, unless we confront delicate problems of understanding the other person. This is due to the fact that although norms might be influenced by deeper knowledge of the event, they do not change; and it is due to the fact that normativity implies acting for the norm's own sake, hereby suspending with personal interest.

If the general said: I did what I felt was right, or I acted as I ought to do, these arguments can be transformed to a discursive level, they are subjects of consciousness, and hence *not* tacit. The problem, and this refers to why Aristotle writes a book on protreptic, is that values are virtually discursive – alternatively they were not social and they could not be addressed at the common good. Hence, it is right, of course that values as the mediated and context-based articulations are relative as to history, but never to situation, if they do not have to be pragmatic – and further, values cannot be hybrids.

Phronesis and management versus leadership

Generally phronesis is translated into “practical wisdom”, not so often into “prudence”.

”Practical wisdom” gives 33 millions hit, and “practical wisdom, management” gives 331.000 hits on the internet. It is beyond this article to give an overview of the literature, instead I shall choose some important, and typical contributions.

On the internet address www.thewisdommeme.com/Articles1/practical-wisdom.htm we can read a definition which answers to common sense:

‘Wisdom has been described in many different ways over the centuries. Here Joseph W. Meeker sums it up in a profound paragraph from his article “Wisdom and Wilderness”:

“Wisdom is a state of the human mind characterized by profound understanding and deep insight. It is often, but not necessarily, accompanied by extensive formal knowledge. Unschooled people can acquire wisdom, and wise people can be found among carpenters, fishermen, or housewives.

Wherever it exists, wisdom shows itself as a perception of the relativity and relationships among things. It is an awareness of wholeness that does not lose sight of particularity or concreteness, or of the intricacies of inter-relationships. It is where left and right brain come together in a union of logic and poetry and sensation, and where self-awareness is no longer at odds with awareness of the otherness of the world.

Wisdom cannot be confined to a specialized field, nor is it an academic discipline; it is the consciousness of wholeness and integrity that transcends both. Wisdom is complexity understood and relationships accepted.” (<http://www.wisdompage.com/meekart.html>).

This is a definition, which aptly grasp the common conception of wisdom. The important issue is, of course what profound understanding and deep insight are.

Ever since Socrates, it belongs to the criterion of wisdom that the wise cannot say: “I am wise”. Actually it is not that common, or acceptable, to speak of oneself as wise, more often it is a predicate given to an individual by others. However to render this predicate following the definition only the

wise can nominate the wise, since it must be presupposed that he who calls a person wise, must know himself from own experience what profound insight and deep understanding are. However, the predicate “wise” is often given due to peculiar traits of character (kind (not unconditionally, though), temperate, modest, able to give advice, emphatic, just and decent, and almost as a rule “old”), and hence through folk psychology – which definitely via Christianity often mirrors old Greek virtues. The Greeks were well aware of this dilemma, and Aristotle saw like his contemporaries wisdom as a state of behavior and mind realized among peers, and probably only existing between friends as a potential, reciprocal social relation. Wisdom demanded age and a right life. It could well be argued that to acknowledge wisdom in another person, one must possess it oneself.

It is also acknowledged that wisdom might not be proportional with the knowledge of the scholar. But this concession already presupposes that there exist common traits in different lives which might form wisdom. This, however, shall most often be prudence, and hence not necessarily based on a normative attitude. However, peculiar enough, we do not deduct wisdom from religious belief. The simple man shall perhaps know much about the tragedies of the will to power, desires and ambition, and the hell of manual labor, or the-win-and-lose in horse-race, and such knowledge is to be found in plenty in “The Nicomachean Ethic”, which could guide on the realization of virtues. Here philosophy is caught in its most common trap the one of a historically relative folk psychology. It is performed in much philosophy from Descartes’ “Les passions de l’âme” to Kant’s “Anthropologie”, and to the works of Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer, and it is often a determination of existentialist philosophy to fall victim to this trap. It characterizes Nietzsche’s opus that he tried to escape it, and the magnificent “Sein und Zeit” by Heidegger that he almost really succeeded.

One often speaks about a wise person, when one actually means an “experienced” person in relation to life in general. However, since it seems very common to speak about experience in relation to life in general, we must know what this is, but even if this concept is not historically relative, it is hard to define. Of course phronesis must also have this content, since it tries

to escape the albatross of thought referred to by Plato and Baudelaire sitting defenseless at the deck of the ship caught in the power of its own wings.

The awareness of wholeness is also a commonplace, probably with its origin in Plato's concept of "euboulia" in "Res publica", the capacity of the philosopher-rulers to overlook the needs of the society as a whole. It could actually be a normative virtue, but most often it is strategically belonging to the general's cognitive and experiential repertoire.

The union of logic and poetical sense is yet another commonplace which hardly gives any sense to a more critical reflection, as is also the case with the union of the general and concrete aspects of experience, although not with the capacity to understand both yourself and others. Such commonplaces which are all too often tacitly accepted have to be analyzed to the bottom. For example it might not be possible to understand yourself nor the other person at any degree approaching certainty. I myself would state that it is impossible.

The problem coming up immediately here is that there are neither analytical criteria nor practical criteria of fulfillment of such wisdom. Since we can easily say that somebody is wiser than another, who might be wise too, we must possess criteria of comparison. There must be some presupposed evaluation criteria hidden in this use of the language game, but they are extremely difficult to grasp since they differ by situation. The only criterion of wisdom must be the wise man's capacity to handle the event. But what it might mean to handle the event is also obviously bound to end either in an infinite regression, or in a plethora of subjective assessments.

The concept of mental balance inherent in this definition was also put forward by Plato who introduced the musical metaphor of harmony, and even a more beautiful one, the "synarmotton", the running at trotting speed by our internal dialogical partners of the mind, from the "Laws".

All too often such conceptions of wisdom are transferred to the use of practical wisdom in relation to management without critical balance.

The use of phronesis as practical wisdom ranges from serious social science to more esoteric and utterly popular contributions, as the tacit knowledge of the Dreyfus-brothers, as woman wisdom, cunning intelligence and, promises of swift transformation of your own life, to the guarantee of finding

happiness, and ending probably with the appeal to practical, real farmer knowledge and Machiavellian cynicism.

Let us look at four types of what must be judged as serious approaches to the use of phronesis in the social sciences:

1. Phronesis as determinant of meta-concepts of research

The work of Bent Flyvbjerg ought to be mentioned here. In his book “Making Social Science Matter”, he argues that instead of trying to copy the natural sciences, the social sciences should be practiced on the basis of phronesis. Phronetic social science is based on four value-rational questions: (1) Where are we going? (2) Who gains and who loses, by which mechanisms of power? (3) Is this development desirable? (4) What should we do about it? (Bent Flyvbjerg 2001) (these “why’s” are a bit ironically very close to the why’s of the firm propagated by Ikujiro Nonaka).

Flyvbjerg wants to give phronesis a social-historical basis by introducing the concept of “progressive phronesis”, leaning on Jürgen Habermas’ theories of communication, and on Michel Foucault’s theories of power. Even if it can be doubted whether human beings have acquired more insight into the norms, not to speak of the question of whether the norms have changed, the conditions of their “implementation” have definitely changed. Probably norms conceived as ethical value-zones in contrast to morals only change when power-relations change fundamentally, i.e. in their essence; which is the same as a rather great change of the structures of production, the range of population and the basis of knowledge. The appearances of the norms have certainly got different communicative conditions, but power has been even more diffused to all levels of life and complicated by what Foucault named “biopolitics” during the last decades. The formal distance between people has diminished, but not the real differences as both to the absolute and the relative conditions of life. If “progressive” in relation to phronesis should mean more empathy, more ethical imagination, more sensitivity to values, this is wrong. New faculties of communication have developed, but there have developed no “new” sense of the other (just look sixty years back in time, or

just now to Africa), no strengthened love for your neighbor, no new forms of solidarity – even if solidarity with new agendas do exist.

Flyvbjerg interprets phronesis as a multiplicity of perspectives, referring to Nietzsche, but however democratic this might seem to make research the problem of the synthesis, i.e. of the consistency and inherent hierarchy of perspectives cannot be neglected:

“Hence, ‘objectivity’ in phronetic organization research is not ‘contemplation without interest’ but employment of ‘a *variety* of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge’” (Flyvbjerg 2006).

But even though neither apophantic axiomatically sound knowledge nor totally corroborated single-perspective-hypotheses can be claimed to exist in social science, multi-perspectives must rely on a criterion of epistemic and logic compatibility which can only be deduced from a pragmatically interpreted system of values. The alternative is eclecticism or “pragmaticism”.

One may object that if the prudential aspect is too heavily stressed in relation to the normative – and Flyvbjerg wants to do the oxymoron science of the concrete almost forgetting the Greek dictum that nothing is so practical as a good theory – and if phronesis is seen as a meta-concept of research, in spite of the attractive intentions of such an initiative, then social science bases itself on mere prudence, unless it is interpreted beyond any *techne*, i.e. beyond a method. This is in relation to research a contradiction in adjecto. Social research is often driven to be pragmatic through the very urge to shape heuristics and methods, and to secure reliability and validity. Hence, the norm of truth is easily differentiated from the other three canonical norms of Western culture, the good, the just, and beauty, and even in the Popperian version it is a principle of the prudence of research. Only a genuine, closed system (with due respect to Gödel) can come near to the perfectly normative by defining its empirical field unambiguously.

In the context of action research, and in particular what concerns the case method, interpretative effort legitimated by some interpretation of phronesis must be explicitly built on normative perspectives. Phronesis could here mean that the full consequences of a normative framework to the assessment of data-creation were elaborated with the utmost care.

2. Phronesis as a liberating organizational strategy of learning.

Another serious approach is presented in the article “Dear Prudence: An Essay on Practical Wisdom in Strategy Making” by Matt Statler, Johan Roos, and Bart Victor (2007).

The issue is to find strategies for organizational learning which contain normativity but have a prudential character. In the author’s own words:

“If we presume an organizational ontology of complex, dynamic change, then what role remains for strategic intent? If managerial action is said to consist of adaptive responsiveness, then what are the foundations of value on the basis of which strategic decisions can be made? In this essay, we respond to these questions and extend the existing strategy process literature by turning to the Aristotelian concept of prudence, or practical wisdom. According to Aristotle, practical wisdom involves the virtuous capacity to make decisions and take actions that promote the “good life” for the “polis”. We explore contemporary interpretations of this concept in literature streams adjacent to strategy and determine that practical wisdom can be developed by engaging in interpretative dialogue and aesthetically-rich experience. With these elements in view, we re-frame strategy processes as occasions to develop the human capacity for practical wisdom.”

I agree with the overall perspective of the authors, but the questions as to whether wisdom can be learned, and hence, both taught through the experience of dialogue, and strategically furthered by organizational aesthetics, are certainly implicated here. As a professor in a business school, though memorizing all the reservations a chair in management philosophy might produce, it is hard to deny that some aspects of practical wisdom are able to be successfully taught. But the concerns already hold by Plato in the “Meno” whether such knowledge is of a trans-rational kind, cannot be subdued. We speak of types of knowledge then, which can only be transferred through the classical institution of apprenticeship, or at least demand new forms of collegial teaching. Statler and Roos suggest the narrative and the dialogues as instruments to further the incorporated learning which is a core of phronesis, but especially the narrative might create problems.

It could be claimed that it is very difficult to stage the scenarios and experiences which will produce wisdom. Actually, wisdom happens. If there can be traced any pattern in its evolution it is the complicated patterns inherent in the lines between events.

The Greek protreptic discipline tried to develop wisdom in leaders by using value-based philosophical dialogue, but this discipline was built on a unity of culture and a lifelong pedagogical environment (the *paideia*), which gave it the utmost chances to succeed – which it however not did at all times when we considerate the ethical-moral role of the mentor or political adviser, since the protreptic guide was often banned by the ruler which he was serving, like Plato by Dionysius, or executed by the ruler, like Seneca by Nero.

3. Phronesis as a strategy of knowledge management

The author of “Managing Flow”, Ikujiro Nonaka (2008), is seen as Japan’s most renowned managerial scholar famous for his work on knowledge management. In “Managing Flow”, Nonaka summarizes and extends of his lifetime work on knowledge management.

However, what is of interest to us is that Nonaka understands the importance of the event in relation to practical wisdom. In *Managing Flow*, he Nonaka quotes Soichiro Honda: “You have to grasp the atmosphere of the occasion,” Honda said, “which exists only for a particular moment. A joke is all in the timing, in understanding what the present evokes. To joke is to understand human emotion and be present for it.”

However, Nonaka’s perspective is genuinely pragmatic and strategic. He uses his life long experience with analyzing the Rylean opposition between knowing how and knowing what, in relation to knowing why, in order to identify practical wisdom with the Aristotelean “*techne*” in opposition to “*episteme*”. *Techné*, which is pejoratively judged by Plato and Aristotle, is in Nonaka transformed into a way, an organizational method, and an ethos, in which knowledge can be shared. Hence, community feeling and mutuality is seen as the basis of innovation, which could point to a normative stance.

This is clear especially when Nonaka emphasizes that “*Why* is ultimately a question of purpose: *Why do we exist?*” In most organizations, people are not

encouraged to keep asking questions.” Thus, Nonaka’s concept of a knowledge-creating company is ideally the kind of community in which classical Western virtues such as recognition and honesty prevail.

However, it does not seem necessary that the repertoire of tacit knowledge, non-discursive knowledge, emotions, not yet matured ideas, hunches, etc., should necessarily have the normative content which Nonaka advocates – besides perhaps being the possible subject of a community feeling.

Especially his idea of the “virtuous artisans,” is complicated for several reasons. Although a strong sense of mutuality existed among English silk weavers in the nineteenth century when they collectively opposed industrialism, the skilled workers were the conservative core of the Weimar Republic and a driving force in Nazism. The skilled workers in the late nineteenth century steel industry in the USA strongly opposed the unskilled emigrant laborers which is understandable but not that easy to defend. Artisan faculties and manual skills seem to relate empirically to the same small degree to normative values as does scholarship to humanist normativity. The possible normativity peculiar to an artisan “phronesis” would rather be chauvinist, totalitarian and hostile to the environment and to all intruders. The guild could easily be seen historically as a germ to “micro-fascism”.

For Nonaka, phronesis is to know “what must be done”, where *techne* is “knowing-how,” and *episteme* is “knowing-why”. Here it seems that *episteme* represents the normative aspect by being the domain of understanding organization’s purpose. However in order to stabilize the organization phronesis must be broadly distributed. The phronetic leader must inspire timely judgment in the employees by building a culture which facilitates depth level experience and communication, and informal relations. We are here able to identify the complexity or perhaps absurdity of strategic management as distributed practical wisdom.

Ikujiro Nonaka and Ryoko Toyama write in the abstract of the article “Strategic management as distributed practical wisdom (phronesis)”:

“This article claims that effective strategic management requires distributed wisdom (which the philosopher Aristotle called phronesis). Strategy is created out of one’s existential belief or commitment to a vision of the future, the ability to interpret one’s environment and resources subjec-

tively, and the interaction between subjectivity and objectivity. These abilities need to be distributed among organizational members. Strategy as distributed phronesis thus emerges from practice to pursue common goodness in each particular situation since a firm is an entity that pursues a universal ideal and a particular reality at the same time. Such idealistic pragmatism means that in a specific and dynamic context knowledge can be created and refined to become wisdom.”

One must ask if it is safe to claim that any firm in the capitalist market is at all able to seek common goodness as anything else than a strategic-branding initiative? This “particular reality” is defined by profit and power, and this does not go along with normativity unless it by chance favors profit. However, this should be no argument against the possibilities of using the new pressures, due to world-crisis on enterprises, as levers to increase social responsibility, sustainability, and to conceptualize new types of bottom lines. The question is only whether this is already an established performance in any firm? If this is not the case it might serve as an ideology of, and as an excuse for, refined lean-techniques.

4. Phronesis as a narrative strategy

The story is the way in which an event is related and in which its causal inscription is presented by everyone, be it the lay man or the expert. Recently there has developed a great amount of literature on the strategic use of the narrative (Boje 1999; Czarniawska 1997, 1998) but not much on phronesis and the narrative, although considerable amounts on practical wisdom (in the capacity of “experience”) and storytelling, a relation so obvious from the fable. However, there is much misuse of the concept of phronesis in relation to the conceptual framework of Aristotle, and much confusion of prudence for normative wisdom. This new trend in managerial theory and practice relies on works of the event inside philosophy and history mainly drawing on theories of memory in its more common sense as developed by Paul Ricoeur, and not on the more esoteric works of Edmund Husserl, Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze – psychological science does not play as important a role here as one should presume.

Aristotle remarks in his *Art of Rhetoric*, III, 13, 3, 1414 b: “for narrative (*diégesis*) only belongs in a manner to forensic speech (the so called ‘*genos dikánikon*’, OFK)”, since the forensic speech is characterized by refutation and “*epideiksis*” which are also found in epic. Forensic speech is a restructuring of individual and community-memory through the creation of coherent and consistent story-lines. Epic is a draft to transform this restructuring of personal memory into a fictive realm of remembrance and hope which challenges “objective” reality by confirming its apparent factuality. But the story is also the construction of the reality which it discovers and yet never totally reveals. Since epic and drama as discourses exclude the problem of truth both in the apophantic sense and in the sense of “*veritas est adaequatio intellectus et rei*”, it can never be epistemic, but its lack of the demand of objective truth which follows from its forensic roots transforms it into an advanced rhetoric. Hence it is often, though not exclusively, hostile to *phronesis*.

Probably the most important opus of the narrative since world war two is the one of French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, but research within literary theory has had a great impact too, and anthropological and philosophical analyses of the symbol and of the myth also play an important role – like the work of Ernst Cassirer and the hermeneutical philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Ricoeur’s concept of the narrative emphasizes its function as an incorporation of the different experiences of time in the light of a reconciliation of *mimesis* and *phronesis* transcending its severe distinction by Aristotle. Ricoeur analyses the narrative through a differentiation of *mimesis* into three levels: The *mimesis-I* is a “prefiguration” of the field of action, it refers to a pre-reflective cogito of games of experience, language and truth. The *mimesis-II* is a “configuration” of the field of action, it refers to the imaginative configuration of the pre-reflective experiences, through the “pragma”, the plot, thus it is the essence of memory. The *mimesis-III* is a “refiguration” of the field of action it is the projection of the imaginative or “fictive” perspective offered at the level of *mimesis-II* onto one’s own memory (Ricoeur 1984).

A very positive interpretation of Aristotle inspired by Paul Ricoeur is made by Richard Kearney in his book “On Stories” from 2002 by claiming that the myth in its development into the historical narrative and into fiction tried to mirror events through the norms. Thus the mimesis of Aristotle is interpreted as “a creative description of the world such that hidden patterns and significance can unfold”. Stories thus could be “a newly imagined way of being in the world.” He thus claims that *phronesis* in the capacity of wisdom is a part of the sense- and intentionality-creating storytelling. Hence, stories can be claimed to produce the basis of community as an immediate and reflective concept. This actually sums up the use of the narrative in recent management theories.

“Kearney suggests that people need a story which is recognisable to others (a public story) on which to model and thus share their own stories. This process of triple *mimesis*, refiguring one’s own life story in terms which are recognisable in the public sphere, may then provoke *catharsis* (the ability to ‘feel what wretches feel’) in the listener through *phronesis* (the application of good judgment in human conduct, and the ability to recognise truth in fiction) and a process of ethical evaluation made possible by a shared *ethos*” (Roeper 2005: 174).

It is thus tempting to join *phronesis* to *mimesis*, *catharsis* and *ethos*, but why does Aristotle exclude this?

The gospels prove that normativity can be communicated by the narrative, but Christ also presents us directly discursively to his message. The drama and the epic often incorporate direct, monolog- or dialogic-statements about their content, and hence, opening up to an overt meta-level in the presentation. The point is probably that Greek drama does not refer to the normative dimension in the capacity of social norms only, but to laws of life as a part of nature, to “heimarmene”, to fate which is directly cruel, unjust, and with a kind of truth which destroys the fourfold union of the good, the just, the true, and the beautiful. Nature overcomes the fragile social reality in these dramas, and hence excludes normative *phronesis* – but not the younger Stoic *phronesis* of proving worthy of the event.

The power of the story lies in the often delicate balance between ambiguity and relative precision of referential framework which it produces. How-

ever, it is always first and foremost its own context, so it has no referential or representational relation to truth.

Even if stories are constructed by logical means as in detective stories and scientific fiction the capacities of judgment and intuition would dominate the process of creation since it has such an intimate relation to personal experience.

Most people would probably think that the best epic and dramatic authors are “wise” persons. But this capacity is of a prudential and technical kind. The impact of judgment and intuition is probably one reason why prudence is suggested in this context.

It is almost evident that Shakespeare exhibits great knowledge of the human psyche, the social conditions of life, and the mores, and at the same time does not let himself be trapped in the prudential dimensions, but that his dramatic nerve is due to a clash of “universal” norms and values presented to us with such great impact. The rhetoric and protreptic basis on which Shakespeare writes immediately suggests the omnipresence of a phronetic awareness – if not a proper program.

To Plato the meta-concept of art is mimesis, but the arts defer as to their representative and referring character – the famous Book III of “The State” deals with this. The drama excludes the presence of an author, the epic directly take advantage of it. Hence, drama reproduces the ambiguous character of un-recognized surface-phenomena – although this is considerable moderated by the ritual origins of Greek drama – while epic contributes with a meta-level dependent on the degree of reflective presence of the author in the narrative. Perhaps his “Poetics” could be interpreted as pointing to the fact that Aristotle thought of phronetic gestures as a way of communicating which must not yield too much ambiguity to interpretation.

Plato would not be inclined to use episteme or phronesis in relation to art, but his determinations of the epic does not in principle exclude our use of phronesis, if we conceive of mimesis as the product of an intentional act carving certain foci of experiential data out of the perceptual field. What excludes phronesis is the destruction of direct reflection through the media of art. Aristotle does not refuse the value of art, especially not of the drama, although he places phronesis and techne as opposites – the criterion used for

this distinction was that *phronesis* refers to acting as a goal in itself, but that *techne* has an external goal, proves of course archaic alone when we consider the Romantic conception of art as the highest form of knowledge, and also “l’art pour l’art”. Thus he apparently does not identify *mimesis* with *techne*, since *mimesis* is the epistemological context of the drama, and *catharsis* might be interpreted as a performance of the emotion for the emotion’s sake. He could be said to conceive the drama as a means to some knowledge, since he accepts *mimesis* as a concept which reproduces important aspects of reality – although as a result of twisting them through the perspective of the inherent laws of life which might appear close to the level of necessary truth. *Mimesis* might lead to “*catharsis*”, and thus in the capacity of a phenomenon of the mental economy of the happy life might be an expression of some “lower” *phronetic* effort. However to him Kant’s canonical distinction between the domains of knowledge and art would hold, because the concept of fate expressed in the Greek dramas cannot be said to be a pure *phronetic* incorporation. So, *phronesis* comes much closer to *episteme* and *sophia* than to *techne*.

If *phronesis* is seen in the context of the narrative it might represent intensity of the experience of life, and different from genuine programmatic dramas of normativity it would be prudence and hence very often covered by the concept of being well experienced in life. But very often experience of life would come close to the possessing of knowledge of the desires, power-plays of man and the fortuitousness of the event, insights which do not necessarily imply deep reflective acquaintance with the normative level, but rather could be said to need the latter in order to be coped with to defeat the backside of wisdom, resentment. However, since epics generally result from an incorporation of post-eventual reflectively grasped perspectives into already interpreted but revived awareness, with the aim of creating factuality, it could in principle be of a *phronetic* character. But the trap of exchanging *sapientia* for *prudentia* is obvious. Perhaps Emile Zola was a true normative writer, but Marcel Proust was not, today however, one would estimate the latter higher.

Since prediction can have the form of a narrative of an objective character, although it remains historical fiction at some level, it is suggested as a way to incorporate knowledge into agents in relation to for example catastro-

phes (Stattler/Roos/Victor 2006). In the capacity of a “remembering in forward direction” storytelling might prepare for the activation of preparedness, and because a narrative is able to express a normative stance or the conflict between norms, it is subject to practical wisdom. That storytelling and dialogue used together could create awareness of the character of coming events can hardly be denied in so far as these stories and these dialogues are initiated in freedom and from the bottom. The picture changes when the manager is the storyteller, and as to the impartiality of the authorities.

The professional identity of the manager excludes the story as a means of genuine, normative diversity management. Some voices must not be allowed to be heard, and there could be no interest in every single voice. Branding has very often totalitarian overtones through its planned echoes into the organization, and the freedom lacking on the shop floor cannot be invoked through the mutuality presumed by an authoritarian narrative voice.

In principle the narrative could have phronetic elements, though, if the context is discursive, but in practice this is almost impossible. One condition of a limited realized normativity could be a growing community under pressure in which mutuality was very strongly felt, be this can probably only happen under exclusion of other communities, and empirically of community groups too.

5. Phronesis as the capacity of the leader

In English “to lead” means to go in front and to search for. Management etymologically originates in horse training for the circus. Recently much effort in theory and consultancy practice has been spent on speaking of leadership instead of management, and in this connection wisdom and practical wisdom are important concepts.

This does not mean that all literature on leadership is ideology this is by far the case. Serious attempts to create new attitudes towards management are endeavored at.

Bruce Lloyd, professor of strategic management at the London South Bank University has published an article on the internet under the program “Collective Wisdom Initiative” in which he writes:

“In essence, Wisdom is the vehicle we use for integrating our values into our decision-making processes. It is one thing to turn information into knowledge that makes things happen, but it is quite another thing to make the ‘right’ (‘good’/‘better’) things happen. How we actually use knowledge depends on our values. Instead of moving up from knowledge to Wisdom, we actually move down from Wisdom to knowledge – and that is how we incorporate our values into our knowledge based decision-making, as well as see the application and relevance of what we generally call Wisdom. It is only justified to consider that decisions can be reduced to a cost/benefit analysis, if it is possible to quantify all the ‘values’ elements within the equation in monetary terms. In the past values have been included implicitly, whereas today that dimension need to be made much more – if not fully – explicit. All decisions involve the integration of the economics dimensions of value, with the ethical (ie ‘right’) dimension of ‘values’” (<http://www.collectivewisdominitiative.org/>).

This is of course both correct, and important, and seems to support the view of the author of this article. The issue of integrating the economic dimensions of value with the ethical ones is the great task of the coming years, but will it be possible?

A balanced assessment would argue that several ethical issues shall prove worth money, this counts especially in relation to environmental care and political correctness of products and processes. Care in general for people and society, and attentiveness to global development, and care for the employees and for the environment in particular are a branding necessity, and seem recently to acquire almost more weight than care for stakeholders.

Hundreds of thousands of contributions exist to define the faculties which characterize the manager. One speaks of types of managers, and of different sorts of capacities ranging from the distinct military virtues as courage, fastness of decision, the ability to form an exact overview, calmness and keenness of survey, iron hard consequence, precision, perseverance and inflexibility; to the more feminine virtues like empathy, indulgence, kindness, tenderness, carefulness; and even to the “management of love”. Between these virtues lies a domain of social virtues, i.e. virtues with no distinct professional or gender profile like respectfulness, ability to recognize and to build trust, reliability, honesty, sincerity, tolerance, generosity and also love. These latter virtues belong everywhere in life except perhaps in the organiza-

tion. Since management is built on the power of one group and the relative powerless of another and since its first commandment is evaluation of capital, and its second competition, it must obey the written law, but not the unwritten one of mutual human bonds. For centuries management was not responsible to the ideal of the humanist commonwealth, and the factory was no place in which to find freedom, equality and brotherhood among men. Things have changed, but in many parts of the world all is still the same.

Not so many years ago business economists began to speak about virtues of leadership, and I was one of the first to do it in Denmark. In 1997 I wrote the book “Philosophy of Leadership. A Radical-Normative Perspective” (in Danish). In 2000 I published the book “Management Philosophy: A Radical-Normative Perspective” in English, and in 2004 I wrote the Danish best seller “The New Leadership” (the first parts were translated 2008 into an English version, “The Virtue of leadership”) in which I developed twelve leadership virtues.

A leadership virtue must meet three demands: It must be normatively founded; it must be functional in relation to managerial tasks; and it must also be a social virtue relating to the capacity of communication. These claims are hard to meet at the very same time, but one thing is sure, only phronesis can create the proper synthesis of them.

A virtue is obviously an incorporated norm integrated in the life of an individual. From this follows that no virtue is exactly identical, although there exist some rather blurred criteria of mastering it with not that great differences between cultures. One can say that even if laws and the practical performance of justness might differ among cultures, the sense of justice does not to the same degree (there is of course a difference also what concerns the sense of justice between people who vindicate the sharia and the death penalty, and people who do not).

When phronesis is the meta-capacity of virtues it means that these virtues are subject to normativity and that they must have a spiritual, existentialist and humanist dimension. Spirituality however, is problematic as more than the right to develop one’s own meaningfulness in freedom – to speak about “sense-making” shall come dangerously close to a totalitarian expression. Spiritual leadership might implicate too idealist a view of the leader’s possi-

bilities, enforcing the already produced schizophrenia in his poor person. In the amazing book “Leading by Wisdom” by Peter Pruzan, Professor Emeritus at the Copenhagen Business School and his wife, Kirsten Pruzan Mikkelsen based on interviews of business leaders all over the globe, spirituality in relation to leadership is defined as to rely on the essence of being; to realize a deep connection with a force deeper than ourselves; to use principles from many belief systems, and to live them as a natural way of life; and to be able to answer man's quest into his innate divinity.

These ideals are of course beautiful and they overrule more pragmatic, practical wisdom through the classical, religious image of wisdom. But one must ask oneself if they can be realized in the setting of the organization. In this light wisdom cannot be built on compromise, but even if we wish that it were not so, they too have to be transformed at the strategic level.

To my opinion perennial wisdom cannot be reconciled with leadership, i.e. with plain practical wisdom, or prudence, from this simple reason that the manager is hired to break the golden rule when necessary. Neither could real phronesis. If there is just a slight feeling of doubt about legitimate reasons the leader must dismiss himself and not the employee, but he seldom does.

Phronesis and action research

Perhaps a chance to save phronesis as a normatively founded concept from practical wisdom and prudence would be to manifest its working in the context of action research. This was already done brilliantly by Olav Eike-land (2008).

The main problems then would be how one approaches the other person without making compromises as to respect and even compassion, while at the same time “getting information”. Since all social research has a political bias, action research is forced to develop a platform of political reflectivity, and of course phronesis is the meta-concept of politics.

Unless prudence is controlled firmly by norms it could easily become another form of an advanced rhetoric, trying to allure the other person into convictions not proper to his own attitudes towards life.

Having elaborated for the last five years on the classical Greek *protreptic* tradition (Kirkeby 2009), the art to help the other person to turn himself towards his own basic values, I developed it as an instrument of action research and as an instrument of organizational management and coaching. A discipline forming already the basis of the Greek executive academies from around 400 B.C., and apparently only taken up by me, and independently by Olav Eikeland, in his powerful work on phronesis (Eikeland 2008) – a fact which I can only explain through the Scandinavian focus on democratic and dialogical management. I used it for work-place evaluation (the Confederation of Danish Industries has recently applied it), personal coaching, and organizational dialogue.

Since phronesis is the meta- and core-concept of protreptic this protreptic attitude might be inherited by action research. Niels Arvid Sletteroed developed protreptic further at a genuinely original basis in his doctoral thesis which is defended this autumn (Sletteroed 2009).

Actually we might speak about the virtues of the action-researcher. Such virtues would be sense of the event, righteousness, generosity, fairness, sympathy, empathy and compassion. The Stoic virtues of “akroasis” and “prosoché”, the capacities to listen and to display an intense attention, are extremely relevant here.

To master intuition, and ethymemic (abductive) conclusions, and to be able to do an emphatic maieutics, are further attitudes strengthening communicative capacities – as they condition proper management.

Phronesis then must be understood as the will to display an unyielding self-reflectivity, destroying every strategic and manipulative disposition in oneself. This cannot be done without a phronetic basis, uncompromisingly focused on the realization of values in every ever so tiny act.

It demands self-control and hard work to dispense with the cunning aspect of prudence in guiding an investigation, but it can certainly be done, and the opportunities are much better than the ones offered the protreptic leader, because power could be excluded. The ideals of the protreptic dialogue, namely symmetry and co-creation of the event, can thus be the maxims of a humanist action research.

Let us draw the lines to the sense of the event. What does it mean to see action research as an implementation of phronesis?

A symmetric event is an event in which is created an empty place between the interlocutors. An empty place means a place which is yet untrodden by projections, meanings, and power-realizations. This place ought to be at the same time a refuge, a place of freedom and the centre of creation and becoming. What happens must never be anticipated, it must be given free to take place. Thus the persons asked about for example their conditions of work should be able to borrow both well-known and unexplored expressions from their own voice, and tacit perspectives given for disposal to them by the investigator. In these processes there might arise a “conceptual invocation”, renaming what happens, with an authority by the asked. Thus the wording by the asked could ideally form the content even of new theoretical concepts.

The event might then be present as a mutual consciousness of an event of the event, from the reflective platform of which lives could be seen and articulated in a new light, and the past re-interpreted and new futures projected.

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