

## The Experience of Philosophical Wonder and Its Implications on Both Psychological and Relational Well-being.

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### Abstract

This paper explores how the experience of Wonder and the movement of thought/ thinking are connected. It explores how the occurrence of wonder catalyses our thoughts to be expansive, leading to psychological well-being. Furthermore, there is a relationship between the disruption of cognitive stagnation and the appreciation for the self, others, and the world. The paper would further show the implications of this idea through imago therapy, where couples start seeing each other with a renewed perception and changed attitude. Therefore, the paper would show that “Wonder” is not just a Philosophical and aesthetic experience but a force vital for our psychological and relational well-being.

**Keywords:** *Cognitive disruption, Constituted identity, Dialectic partner, Epistemological framework, Imago dialogue*

### The Experience of Philosophical Wonder

We always attempt to know the world and a person as much as possible so that we can predict their unfolding precisely. However, if we think hypothetically that we see every outcome and can anticipate every event precisely, the thrill of discovery would disappear. Each moment would lose its enchantment, and the unpredictability that makes life rich and exciting would dissolve into a predictable pattern. The awe we feel when we encounter something new or unexpected — a new idea, a serendipitous event, or an unanticipated reaction from a friend — would vanish. We would be aware of all the surprises life holds, turning what was once a continuous invitation to explore into a stale routine. This would be a state of absolute boredom. To be in a world like this would ultimately frustrate us. However, I am not saying that absolute chaos is what we would enjoy being in. The absolute chaos would do the same.

It appears that the most healthy way to be in the world should be a combination of knowledge and mystery. Something predictable with the scope of deviation as well. Somewhere between omniscience and ignorance. Omniscience will lead to boredom, and absolute ignorance is a scary state to be in. We need something to hold on to as well as something to transcend to. A

state of forming a definition, as well as redefining the definition.

One could safely assume that what we ultimately crave is a middle ground — a world that holds some degree of mystery while also allowing for understanding and growth. We enjoy the excitement of unpredictability, coupled with the comfort of familiarity. It is in unexpected moments that we often find the most profound beauty; it is through the unknown that we cultivate resilience and creativity. Life’s richness stems from our capacity to navigate this delicate balance, embracing uncertainty while still seeking to comprehend the world around us.

The analogy of chess beautifully encapsulates the essence of unpredictability and exploration in both games and life. In chess, when a player reaches the point of checkmate, the game feels concluded and definitive, leading to a desire to replay. This desire stems from the need to explore alternate possibilities and strategies, highlighting the dynamic nature of the game. The enjoyment derived from playing chess or any game, for that matter, lies in its unpredictability. It is the ever-changing scenarios and the challenges they present that truly engage a player. If every move were predictable, the game would lose its charm; players thrive on the excitement of the unknown. This can be likened

to our interactions and experiences in the broader world. Just as in chess, where each game is unique due to different strategies, opponents, and circumstances, our lives are enriched by the surprises and changes that people bring into our lives. When we encounter situations or individuals that defy our expectations, it stirs a sense of wonder within us. This wonder acts as a catalyst for growth, prompting us to redefine our understanding of identity and reality. An instance in Plato's Republic exemplifies it, when Adeimantus says to Socrates:

"When you talk in this way, a strange feeling passes over the minds of your hearers...and at the end of the discussion they are found to have sustained a mighty overthrow and all their former notions appear to be turned upside down." (The Republic, 2000, Book.6, 487)

While conversing with his interlocutors, Socrates induced a feeling of perplexity, and he happens to be in a state of perplexity too. This state is where one realises that what they were taking for granted had something that they need to rethink. This experience demonstrated a humbling realisation of knowing what one doesn't know. This experience also shows that acknowledging uncertainty can lead to personal growth and new insights. The journey of questioning becomes as important as the conclusions one reaches, revealing that true wisdom emerges through grappling with the perplexity one feels while experiencing wonder.

Essentially, each new experience or interaction encourages a revaluation of previously held beliefs and notions. Just as a chess player continuously adapts their strategies based on the movements of their opponent, individuals must remain adaptable in the face of life's unpredictability. Moreover, this constant redefining fosters deeper connections and a richer understanding of the world around us. Wonder, in this context, becomes a vital force, allowing us to see others not as fixed entities but as evolving beings full of potential for change. It underscores the beauty of human experience—an ongoing journey shaped by unexpected twists and turns. Thus, whether in a game or in life, it is the unpredictability that enlivens our experiences

and propels us forward, encouraging us to embrace the adventure of discovery.

This understanding shows the paradox of logic. Which begins with the principle of identity, the first principle of thought ( $A=A$ ). Where we fix and freeze an identity. Only by locking our identities are we able to think. However, this assumption of logic gives the impression that there is a "datum" with which we begin thinking. On the contrary, movement in thinking comes when there is no fixation on identity. Rather, in confronting the contradiction as well as accommodating the contradiction, thought moves dialectically. Therefore, identity is a provisional identity. Datum is actually an abyss.

Cornelis verhoeven puts it as :

"The logical standpoint is like a "freezing" of a constituted identity which limits and cripples thought before it can move. This effect may indeed be the aim of the rule. Thought must, therefore, abandon this standpoint in order to move. (Verhoeven,1972)

The phrase "freezing of a constituted identity" highlights how adherence to established identities or truths can stifle intellectual movement and exploration. This notion implies that when individuals or systems rigidly cling to fixed identities or principles, they hinder their capacity to see further possibilities. The text suggests that the intended purpose of such rigidity may be to maintain stability within a given framework or to ensure clarity in reasoning. However, the author argues that this constraint is ultimately counterproductive. By portraying the logical standpoint as something one must "abandon" to allow thought to "move", the text emphasises the necessity for flexibility and openness in intellectual exploration.

Verhoeven further says:

"However, this is quite simply not possible, so a dialectic partner must provisionally retain the principle of identity. It may well be that the logical inconsistency of the problem, as formulated, is precisely connected with this. As a last foundation, it can go no further than itself, is forced thus to accept itself as a datum, and is nothing but an impatient stamping in the

crumbling soil of its nature as an abyss.” (Verhoeven, 1972)

Furthermore, the reference to a “dialectic partner” retaining the principle of identity introduces the necessary tension between holding onto established concepts while simultaneously inviting change and growth. This dialectical relationship suggests that, while identity is a crucial element of thought, it must not become an unyielding barrier. In summary, the analysis critiques the limitations imposed by a rigid logical framework, advocating for a more fluid and dynamic approach to understanding thought, identity, and the complexities of existence. It underscores that while principles of identity are important, they should not become impenetrable walls blocking intellectual progress.

### ***Physiognomic Impact***

When someone experiences wonder, they pause while thinking, halt, and feel a disruption in the thinking process. It is like being silent in the middle of a conversation and paying intense attention to something so that one can observe. The observation can only happen when one is open to receiving it. When one is wonderstruck, one develops this openness to receive. The more one is open, the more one experiences oneself. The shock of wonder compels one to come to himself so that one can gather himself to receive the openness provided by wonder. Its impact can also be seen in the body itself.

Cornelis Verhoeven presents it as:

“This halting is the human way of being present in the midst of things. In this way the whole human body, from head to toe, can experience and express the fact of wonder... This halting doesn’t result from an inner deliberation; it is the involuntary break in a rhythm not only of thought but the whole of life.” (Verhoeven, 1972, 37)

Verhoeven’s concept of “halting” is a vital aspect of human experience, suggesting that it is essential for being present in the world. This notion challenges the typical flow of thought and activity, highlighting how halting acts as a necessary interruption that allows individuals to

fully appreciate the complexity and beauty of existence. The phrase “the whole human body, from head to toe,” indicates that this experience of wonder is not merely intellectual but involves a holistic engagement of the self. It implies a deep, physical presence that transcends mere cognitive acknowledgement, aligning body and mind in a state of awe. Furthermore, halting is not a conscious decision or a result of deliberation; instead, it arises spontaneously within the rhythm of everyday life. This involuntary break signifies a moment of reflection where individuals can pause and reconnect with their surroundings, possibly leading to greater insight and appreciation for life’s intricacies.

Verhoeven further writes:

“When we halt in wonder, we say that we hold our breath, but we might equally say that the breath catches in our throat. We may also listen in breathless wonder to a fascinating lecture or a piece of music. Our rhythm of life ceases for a moment in order to concentrate on keeping time with a different rhythm. This is the significance of the physiognomical expression of wonder. It is the attitude of someone temporarily shaken out of his shell or even of a mentally backward person.” (Verhoeven, 1972, 38)

It begins by highlighting how we often describe moments of wonder by equating them with physical sensations, such as holding our breath or having our breath catch in our throat. This imagery underscores the intense, often overwhelming nature of wonder—it can momentarily disrupt our natural rhythm of life, suggesting that such experiences are both absorbing and transformative. This alteration in our perception of time aligns with the idea that experiencing wonder can detach us from our routine, allowing us to engage with the world on a deeper level.

“Total wonder can be expressed only by the wide-open mouth. It is a sign of total and unconditional capitulation. Anyone who views the world thus renounces any attempt to create order in it.” (Verhoeven, 1972, 38)

The phrase "total wonder can be expressed only by the wide-open mouth" suggests that genuine awe often leaves individuals speechless, overwhelmed by the vastness or complexity of what they encounter. This physical manifestation of wonder implies a surrender to the moment, indicating that true appreciation comes from relinquishing control and acceptance of the unknown. Therefore, a worldview centred on wonder inherently rejects the notion of strict control or predictability. By embracing wonder, one acknowledges the beauty of uncertainty and complexity, suggesting that life is best appreciated in its raw, unfiltered form. This attitude can lead to a more profound connection with the world, fostering curiosity and openness rather than anxiety and resistance. Overall, the text invites readers to consider the value of surrendering to wonder to engage more deeply with their surroundings.

### ***Psychological Impact***

The psychological effect of wonder plays a crucial role in shaping our understanding of the world and ourselves. When we habitually view the world solely through the lens of our own beliefs and definitions, we risk developing an inflated ego. This self-centric perspective can lead us to feel as though we have the authority to define reality based solely on our understanding. However, the experience of wonder disrupts this limiting mindset. Wonder, characterised by surprise and awe, acts as a catalyst that liberates us from our self-imposed philosophical constraints. It invites us to acknowledge that our understanding is just one of many possible interpretations of reality. This realisation can be profoundly humbling; instead of diminishing our worth as knowers, it enriches our existence by opening our minds to the complexities and uncertainties of life.

As we confront the limitations of our epistemological frameworks- those ways in which we make sense of the world- we begin to cultivate a sense of humility. This humbling experience is not one of self-deprecation; rather, it encourages a deeper, more profound engagement with both the external world and our internal selves. We become more willing to

question our assumptions and explore the mysteries that lie beyond our current knowledge. This process invites us to dwell in the questions that arise from our encounters with the unknown, fostering a spirit of inquiry that enriches our lives. As we embrace the unpredictability of existence, we find ourselves more connected to the world around us.

This newfound humility often gives rise to a deep sense of gratitude (Pedersen, 2015). We learn to appreciate not only the extraordinary but also the beauty embedded in the ordinary. When we shift our perception to recognise the remarkable depth of everyday experiences, we foster a spontaneous appreciation for the beauty, mystery, and goodness that permeate our lives. This appreciation generates an internal flow of gratitude that enhances our connection to everything around us. It encourages us to engage with life more fully, recognising that every moment has the potential to inspire wonder and deepen our understanding of the world. In embracing this mindset, we open ourselves up to a richer, more fulfilling experience of life, ultimately leading to personal growth and a greater sense of belonging within the vast tapestry of existence.

The experience of wonder serves as a profound catalyst for personal transformation and growth. When we encounter something that evokes a sense of awe, we are often struck by an ineffable beauty or a profound mystery that transcends our usual perception of reality. This experience encourages us to adopt an imaginative mindset, allowing us to perceive the world with a renewed sense of eagerness and openness, much like a child exploring their surroundings for the first time. This fresh perspective not only enhances our ability to appreciate the world around us but also cultivates a suspension of judgment. Instead of rushing to categorise or analyse what we see, we are invited to engage with our surroundings more deeply and thoughtfully. This focused attention helps us to remain receptive, fostering an attitude of acceptance toward the richness of experiences offered by others and the environment.



In embracing this openness, we develop a willingness to surrender control and to let go of preconceived notions (Pedersen, 2015). This surrender is not a defeat but rather an invitation to delve into the mysterious and often unpredictable nature of life. As we learn to navigate the unknown, we unlock a treasure trove of possibilities that often go unnoticed in our day-to-day routines. Moreover, this sense of wonder transforms our perception of everyday experiences. Each moment becomes a doorway to deeper appreciation, encouraging us to reflect on the intricate layers of meaning that exist in our interactions and the phenomena we encounter. By cultivating this attitude, we find ourselves more attuned to the subtleties of life, allowing us to fully embrace its complexities and nuances.

Consequently, living in this state of wonder and receptivity connects us to the larger tapestry of existence. We become more aware of the ties that bind us to others and the world, recognising that every experience is interconnected and that we are all part of a greater whole. This mindset fosters a sense of presence and mindfulness, encouraging us to savour each moment and acknowledge the beauty and mystery inherent in every facet of life. Ultimately, embracing wonder opens up a pathway to profound richness. It teaches us that life is filled with endless opportunities for discovery, deepening our connection with the world and enriching our human experience. In this way, wonder becomes not just a fleeting emotion but a way of being that encourages us to live fully and engage with the world in all its complexity and beauty.

### **Implications in Imago Therapy**

The dynamics within a married couple's relationship can be profoundly influenced by the tendency to predict each other's strengths and weaknesses. As partners become more familiar with one another, they often start making assumptions about how the other will react in various situations. This predictive behaviour can lead to a rigid understanding of one another, where each partner begins to define the other based on their own beliefs and expectations. Such definitions can lead to a kind of emotional

imprisonment, where the depth and richness of the relationship are diminished. When partners become overly certain in their perceptions of each other, the thrill of discovery that typically characterises romantic relationships begins to fade, resulting in a sense of monotony and dullness. The excitement that comes from exploring each other's evolving identities is replaced by a stagnant routine of expectations. As a result, both partners might experience a growing sense of isolation and disconnection, feeling as though they are living alongside each other rather than engaging in a vibrant, intimate partnership.

To counteract these challenges, many couples turn to Imago therapy. This therapeutic approach is founded on the idea that our innate desire is to connect with others and that this connection is fundamental to our existence. Imago therapy emphasises the importance of relational dynamics and encourages couples to foster a deeper understanding of each other, recognising that humans are fundamentally social beings who thrive on connection. The therapy aims to mend the ruptured connections that often occur in marriages, helping partners rediscover the joy of being together and supporting one another in their individual and shared journeys. By engaging in open communication and practising empathy, couples can move away from rigid definitions of one another, allowing room for growth and change. In doing so, they can reignite the spark of excitement in their relationship and cultivate a more profound sense of intimacy, ultimately rejuvenating their emotional bond.

The central tool of imago therapy is imago dialogue, which is a three-step process in which couples learn to take turns talking and listening (Hendrix, 2001). The first is called "Mirroring". When one of the partners (sender) has something to say, they begin by expressing their thoughts and feelings in a short sentence. The partner has to say it from his perspective, beginning with "I". For example, I don't enjoy homemaking when you don't even recognise it as work, which requires a lot of effort. Then the other partner (receiver) restates the same sentence in their own

words and asks whether it has been received correctly. For example, the receiver will respond, “Let me see if I understood it rightly. You find it hard to invest your effort in homemaking when I don’t recognise and appreciate all the hard work you put into it. Is this what you wanted to say? Have I understood it correctly? This process is repeated till the other partner clearly sees what the other partner meant to say. In the mirroring step, the receiver re-states accurately what he or she understood. When they talk in turns, it gives them the space to allow one another the opportunity for various viewpoints without any diversion or interruption. For the time being, they allow the coexistence of different viewpoints. It helps them to see that even if they disagree, their viewpoints make sense in their own worlds. The second step is called Validating, where the receiver states that what they have heard makes sense. The third step is called empathising, in which the receiver imagines the emotion and feeling that is imbued in the words expressed.

In the practice of imago dialogue, a pivotal moment arises when the receiver continuously inquires, “Is there more?” (“The Practice of Wonder Towards Psychological Wellbeing,” 2016, 61). This simple yet profound question signifies an understanding that there is deeper emotional content waiting to be explored. It acknowledges the receiver's feelings, particularly their sadness regarding the perceived lack of appreciation for their efforts. By persistently asking this question, the receiver can transcend their previously held notions of self and their relationship, enabling them to uncover layers of unresolved issues that may have previously gone unnoticed.

This dialogue encourages them to delve deeper into their emotions, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying sentiments and thoughts. The three-word phrase “Is there more” operates like a key to unlock hidden emotional doors. It instigates an unanticipated journey for the receiver, revealing the sender’s willingness to engage in a more profound and extended conversation than they were initially accustomed to. This process allows

the receiver to not only examine unexpressed feelings but also to enhance their emotional vocabulary, enabling them to articulate complexities that might have been buried beneath the surface. Simultaneously, the sender experiences a profound release, discovering the power of expressing emotions and thoughts they had long kept suppressed. This moment is not just transformational; it becomes a deeply moving experience for both parties.

As they navigate this rich terrain of emotions together, each person begins to see the other in an entirely new light. The receiver's perspective shifts, allowing them to appreciate the sender’s depth and humanity in ways they had not considered before. Within the imago community, the phrase “Is there more?” transcends its basic meaning, evolving into a “magic phrase” that holds the potential to catalyse wonderful connections between individuals. Such moments of inquiry evoke a sense of wonder and curiosity towards one another, fostering a bond that is liberated from fixed and limiting identities. The process encourages participants to embrace the complexities of their emotions, cultivating a moral sensitivity that informs their perceptions and interactions. By experiencing one another with greater awe, both the sender and receiver are encouraged to step outside the constraints of defined identities, leading to a richer and more compassionate understanding of themselves and each other. This transformative dialogue not only influences their perceptions but also lays the groundwork for deeper empathy and connection in their relationship.

## Conclusion

The paper establishes the connection between wonder and expansive thinking, asserting that this experience is essential for fostering psychological well-being. The Paper emphatically highlights the necessity of balancing knowledge and mystery in life, a state in which both predictability and unpredictability coexist. This balance is not only desirable but essential for growth, resilience, and creativity, as the thrill of discovery significantly enriches our experiences. The analogy of chess powerfully exemplifies this dynamic, illustrating that the

unpredictability in games mirrors the surprises and changes in life, which are fundamental to evoking a sense of wonder. Through references to Plato's Republic and Socratic dialogue, the paper unequivocally asserts that engaging with uncertainty and perplexity leads to profound personal growth and deeper insights. Ultimately, It Further argues that the occurrence of wonder effectively disrupts cognitive stagnation, enhancing appreciation for oneself, others, and

the world. By utilizing imago therapy as a case study, the paper demonstrates how couples can gain transformative perspectives on one another, confirming that wonder is, without a doubt, a vital force for psychological health. The experience of wonder is crucial for re-evaluating beliefs and fostering an enriched understanding of identity and reality.

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