



Maieutic - Socratic philosophical midwifery

1. Philosophy of or relating to the Socratic method of eliciting knowledge by a series of questions and answers. He called his method the '*maieutic*' i.e. 'obstetric' art where the teacher is a philosophical midwife even Doula if one will, who through her questioning could induce the delivery of superior understanding in the other person, because the knowledge was already present in that person's mind. Intriguingly Socrates' mother was a midwife. Strictly speaking the Doula is one who holds the space i.e. the hospital room and bed safe for the Maieutic/Midwife to assist the wife bring forth the baby/new idea or praxis.

2. It is a [dialectical](#) method, often involving a discussion in which the defence of one point of view is questioned; one participant may lead another to contradict themselves in some way, thus weakening the defender's point. This method is introduced by Socrates in [Plato's Theaetetus](#) as [midwifery \(maieutics\)](#) because it is employed to bring out definitions implicit in the interlocutors' beliefs, or to help them further their understanding. In a group this process may be called a Maieutic Circle or Socratic Circle.

Such a circle is a pedagogical approach based on the Socratic Method and uses a dialectical approach based on a dialogue to understand information in a text/action/painting/craft etc. Its systematic procedure is used to examine a text through questions and answers founded on the beliefs that all new knowledge is connected to prior knowledge, that all thinking comes from asking questions, and that asking one question should lead to asking further questions. A Socratic Circle is not a debate. The goal of this activity is to have participants work together to construct meaning and arrive at an answer, not for one student or one group to 'win the argument'.

3. **Word Meaning:** (C17): from Greek *maieutikos* relating to midwifery (used figuratively by Socrates), from *maia* midwife

Obstetric: C18: via New Latin from Latin *obstetrīcius*, from *obstetrix* a midwife, literally: woman who stands opposite, from *obstāre* to stand in front of.

4 **Word Background:** **maieutic** /mer'ju:tk/ adjective; (philosophy) of or relating to the Socratic method of eliciting knowledge by a series of questions and answers. He called his

method the '*maieutic*' i.e. 'obstetric' art. **Word Origin:** C17: from Greek *maieutikos* relating to midwifery (used figuratively by Socrates), from *maia* midwife
Obstetric: C18: via New Latin from Latin *obstetrīcius*, from *obstetrix* a midwife, literally: woman who stands opposite, from *obstāre* to stand in front of; see obstacle

Sources:

<http://www.worldwidewords.org/weirdwords/ww-mai1.htm>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socratic_method

Paul Wildman paul@kalgrove.com 08-2016