

Philosophical Practice



From Theory to Practice

José Barrientos Rastrojo
Introduction and edition



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José Barrientos Rastrojo (ed)



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Designed by José Barrientos Rastrojo

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INTRODUCTION
***PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE FOR PHILOSOPHICAL
PRACTICE***

José Barrientos Rastrojo

After 25 years travelling across cultures, continents and countries, Philosophical Practice is finding social and personal places for itself. Some of these experiences are Philosophical Cafes, Philosophical Wines, Socratic Dialogues, Philosophy for Children, Philosophy for Business, Philosophical Counselling for couples or single counselees,...

As a Socrates from the 3rd Millennium, the Philosophical Practitioner has gone to the public agora to meet people and his job (reflection). This seeker, like Seneca, helps us to be conscious of our world and the situations that take us to alienation.

Philosophical Practitioners and Philosophical Counsellors have a lot of things to give to Philosophy and to all of humanity. They have theories, but they also have interesting practices that we hope to develop and show in this International Conference.

Today, Philosophical Counsellors have answers for our societies. These societies are constituted by persons with crises and problems in their lives that could be resolved with the power of thinking. Ortega y Gasset, a universal philosopher, said “Philosophy is useful for nothing, ... for nothing but for living”

But thinking is a power itself. Essentially, thinking is the activity that defines us like as human beings.

The 8th International Conference wants to open its doors to the voice of Spanish-speakers. An important number of Spanish Spanish speakers are working on Philosophical Practice from their countries. FIACOF –International Network for Philosophical Practice and Philosophical Counselling- have joined more that 50

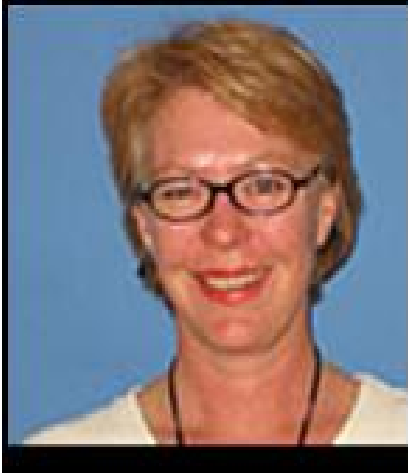
Practitioners and Counsellors from all over the world to speak about the discipline in Spanish. We are sure that English-speakers and Spanish-speakers could exchange their theories and practice to turn Philosophical Practice into a global movement.

Romans, Phoenicians, Arabs, Jews and Christians lived in Spain. Some of them were important philosophers: Séneca, Averroes, Maimónides, Avicena, Miguel de Cervantes, Ortega y Gasset, María Zambrano, etc.

Spain wants to be, like our ancestors, a good host to this Conference and open its doors to the whole world. This conference wants to be a place for comprehension, dialogue, and acceptance of the differences and a place that challenges us to find practical answers for the human being of tomorrow.

Practical and multicultural life; melting-pot world and globalisation; new developments on Philosophical Practice; tolerance, dialogue and new ways for moving minds and creating new thoughts. These items will form the axis of the conference. New axis for the future, the practices of a new future that are waiting for us now.

Seville (Spain), 1st September 2006



IDENTITY AND AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

Pia Hverven Axell

In this paper I will highlight different theories from philosophy and management and leadership, showing how important and how closely connected identity and authenticity in leadership is interwoven with storytelling, narratives and definition of one's own values. To configure a narrative understanding of one's life is a way to understand one's identity!

In philosophy, identity could briefly and very roughly be defined as

1. Become what your potentialities are (Aristotle)
2. You become what you do (Sartre)

This is mentioned to opposite ways of seeing ones identity. Which one you choose depends on your self-awareness of fundamental values and purposes in life.

But, in my opinion, both of them have important information to provide us in our search of own identity, also according to truth about authenticity in leadership.

As Boas, S & Eilam, G. (2005) states:

“Contemporary leadership theory and practice describes authenticity in relation to self-awareness of one's fundamental values and purpose, and attributes the motivational effects of leadership to the consistency of leader's values and behaviours and the concordance of their values with those of followers. Authenticity is not achieved by self-awareness of one's inner values or purpose, but instead is emergent from the narrative process in which others play a constitutive role in the self[5].”

Story telling creates someone who can be referred to when we ask: 'Who has done this?', 'Who has behaved in this way?', or 'To whom did such a thing happen?' This

comes down to asserting that an individual or collective entity can only be identified along with and through the act of composing what we call a narrative, be it of the fictive or the historical kind.

Ricoeur (1987) states[6] in a condensed formula: “the story relates to the whom of the action”. Or, as he also puts it: 'the identity of this whom is no other than his narrative identity'[7]. At this level, the answer to the question “*who*” is the narrative itself, which may amount to little more than the use of a few narrative sentences to outline a story. For the philosopher Charles Taylor (1989)[8], the best way is to find one’s identity is to look for the kind of answer that we require when we ask the question ‘who am I?’.

“To know who I am is to know where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can, at least, try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of making a stand”[9].

To configure a narrative understanding of one’s life is a way to understand one’s identity! As a species, we are terribly interested in ourselves and our place in the world, at least as young children. We strive for a sense of uniqueness, wanting to be singled out for recognition, status and love. What does this mean in creation of own world-view? How does this imply in our lives, our uncertainty and our anxiety? According to May, we might understand Kierkegaard’s ideas on the relation between guilt and anxiety only by emphasizing that he is always speaking of anxiety in its relation to creativity (May, 1977)[10]:

“One has anxiety because it is possible to create - creating one’s self, willing to be one’s self, as well as creating in all the innumerable daily activities (and these are two phrases of the same process). One would have no anxiety if there were no possibility whatever”.

The power lays first and almost in the possibility of insight and change in own judgements and value-system, on the way to create new and original forms of living through our narrative. According to Kierkegaard, one is, or ought to be, continually creating his own selfhood every instant of his life (Kierkegaard, 1884/1994: 96).

The power of storytelling

Communication through storytelling is a basic human activity. Since stone-age, people have told stories, and today we find their messages in cave paintings. Through story telling we interpret our past memories and feelings and future anticipations. We interpret where we are now in terms of where we have come from, and where we are heading. In this way, we present ourselves and give a sense of ourselves as a narrative identity that develops and cohere over a lifetime (Kearney, 2002)[11]. Between birth and death there is one important overriding issue all individuals have to go through; the creation of an individual life (Axell, 2002)[12].

Plato was concerned about storytelling. In the *State*, Plato mentioned the danger in storytelling, especially the art of poetry; which could influence people’s thoughts, and then become an intruder and conflict maker for the ideals in the establishing of an

ideal state (Book 10). The famous Greek maxim, "*Know Thyself.*" - *Gnothi se auton*" is attributed to a number of ancient Greek philosophers, including Socrates. It was inscribed on the Sun god Apollo's Oracle of Delphi temple in ancient Greece. To know oneself, which is from the start an ethical requirement, is to know oneself reflected in the other[13]. Later Freud's contribution to science gave a new approach to science of psychology. He was an excellent writer and used storytelling to present his ideas, and he was inspired by Greek mythology.

Language is not only a strategic tool for communication with others, but also a tool for investigation of own experiences and existence in this world, and a tool for creating stories. Storytelling is a creation of own identity and might be ceaselessly reinterpreted by new narratives. Stories always create a relation to others.

In his three volume work *Time and Narrative*[14], Ricoeur deals with the relationship between fictional narratives and historical narratives. According to Ricoeur, there are two major uses of the concept of identity, uses that have at times been confused or conflated, and he thought to have solved the problem of identity by dividing it in two parts. And maybe he has? The two major concepts of identity are identity as sameness (which he calls *idem*) and identity as self (which he calls *ipse*). *Idem* as sameness consists of four aspects each of which can be clarified in relation to its opposite:

- 1) the re-indentification of the same, opposite = plurality;
- 2) resemblance, opposite = difference;
- 3) the continuity of a process, opposite = discontinuity;
- 4) permanence over time, opposite = diversity.

In marked contrast the notion of *ipse* cannot be so easily codified.

The essence of *ipse*, according to Ricoeur, is the 'range of responses' to the question who, as distinct from the questions of what, where, why etc. *Iipse* is a pole of selfhood, including trustworthiness and faithfulness to oneself, despite all the deviation and transformations which mark the path of life. *Iipse* may be better understood as personal integrity[15]. According to Ricoeur our *ipseity* is only captured by narratives. To the extent we can *tell* a life or *tell* a company's story, we do succeed in capturing the persons or the company's identity.

New trends of organisational theory is storytelling

To be able to manage employees one must be able to manage oneself.

But, as important, the employees must orientate themselves in the same manner such as the group may form unity according to values, attitudes, ideas, presumptions and symbols within the organisation. This implies sharing a collective life of emotions and attitude within the organisation[16]. This implies the ability to find meaning and tell stories that contribute to create loyalty and construct a common reality in the organisation[17]. Knowledge of history, ethics and philosophy is essential. A recent

research among 100 managers all around the world asking what they want of knowledge and ability of middle managers, shows that: "Knowledge of philosophy has been more important than the technical knowledge of business[18]".

Reliable, trustworthily and authentic stories are important transmitters of norms and values within cultures and in companies. Narratives contribute to our common identity as well as own identity.

What is it to be authentic in a philosophical sense?

Authenticity has been explored throughout philosophy. I will briefly go through some theory from some of the philosophers. It is just meant to give some examples of how we might perceive ourselves and others in this world, and highlight the different results we arrive at, depending on how we choose, decide and reflect upon this topic. I will among others emphasise with Heidegger (1926/1962). To live an authentic life, means to live intense, passionate and whole, which include adoption of an attitude of courage and resolve: a willingness to 'stand naked in the storm of life'. Maybe even more important; we need to face our anxiety. Everyone will meet situations full of doubts and dangers. Meeting this turning points with courage and even welcoming them, is helpful in our attempt to be authentic[19].

We all have to make choices, whether they are good or bad for us in the short and long run. Making a choice that is bad for us (like drinking alcohol or smoke) will include a sort of guilt. In this respect, an attitude of decision also involve courage and facing one existential guilt, like the guilt of not having fulfilled ones potentialities in life. This is anxiety in the existential sense and it is not irrational, and ought to be considered as a guide. Sometime we do referee to these emotions as a hunch or a sort of intuition. Kierkegaard states:

"Whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way, has learned the ultimate... The more profoundly he is in anxiety, the greater is the man" (1844/1980:155). We might even say that a resolute and authentic self rational stance involves a commitment to projects despite their absurdity. And with Cooper (2003)[20]: "It involves a decisive dedication to what we want to accomplish in our lives".

According to Heidegger (1927:266)[21], it is only when we remove the interference of the world of objects and others, and face our being in time and towards our death, that we can find the proper foundation of an understanding of what we are really about. In other words, we need to set out on an ontological investigation of what makes human being possible. This is, according to van Deurzen, when we find out that our existence is ruled by a number of given capacities or existentialia[22]. This can only be done through reflection and self-reflection. Among existential thinkers authenticity appears differently.

Sartre tends to define authenticity with a commitment towards one's own project, but he uses another definition. To live in-authentic is to live in bad faith. To be in bad faith, is to pretend that we are other than we are and to reduce all of our many possibilities to one reality, which we pretend to be all there is to life at the moment. We are condemned to choose and by the choice betray a lot of truths of ourselves on the way. We are capable to become a lot of things in this world. And the key to this knowledge is our consciousness, both to the illusions and errors of our ways and

possibilities, and to a more self-reflective attitude[23]. This is of course a human paradox: on the one hand, we are nothing due to our definite according to Sartre, and on the other hand we are able to become many different things. We have to invent ourselves and make something out of ourselves in this life. For many of us, this is a large threat, it is our responsibility, so we might choose not to choose, and use our available energy in pretending it is not our choice at all. We might run into the first option of a social role, not reflecting upon our own will and values we ourselves hold. And we very often succeed quite well in this task, the game of make-believe and imagine ourselves to be substantial well-defined in our choice of role. But are we authentic as human beings? There are other routes to an authentic life. First of all, we are not alone in this world.

The philosopher Buber says that human existence is not a self-contained phenomenon, like in Sartre's theories, but we do co-exist in this world[24]. To be authentic in this sense is to acknowledge and actualise our being-with-others in the world[25] and included in that lays our freedom and responsibilities.

Leadership requires ownership of the inner meaning of personal responsibilities and accountability, according to the philosopher Peter Koestenbaum[26], which might also be considered as authenticity. But in my view, knowledge of our liminality, our limitations as a human being, is of the uttermost importance.

What is authentic leadership ?

According to t Boas, S & Eilam, G. (2005) authentic leadership contains of 4 essential elements[27]:

“1. The role of the leader is a central component of their self-concept. They have achieved a high person role merger (Turner, 1978[28]). They do not necessarily have to use the term leader to define themselves. They may use other terms (e.g., freedom fighter Mandela, 1994) but these terms imply a leadership-role, and they think of themselves in terms of that role and enact that role at all times, not only when they are officially in role”.

2. “They have achieved a high level of self-resolution (Turner, 1976[29]) or self-concept clarity, which refers to the extent to which one's self-beliefs are clearly and confidently defined and internally consistent (Campbell et al., 1996[30]). High self-concept clarity implies strongly held values and convictions and a stable sense of self-knowledge, which several writers (e.g., Bennis, 2003[31]; Luthans & Avolio, 2003[32]) regard as attributes of authentic leaders. The importance of self-concept clarity for authentic leadership derives from the fact that people's self-views reside at the centre of their psychological universe, providing the context for all other knowledge. As people become more certain of their self-conceptions, they are more inclined to rely on these conceptions to organize their experiences, predict future events, and guide behaviour (Swann, 1990[33])”.

3. Their goals are self-concordant. This means that they are motivated by goals that represent their actual passions as well as their central values and beliefs (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999[34]; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001[35]). In contrast, non-concordant goals are ones that are pursued with a sense of behaving to, as the person does not really

own the goals or believe in them. Authentic leaders are self-concordant individuals, namely people who pursue life goals with a sense that they express their authentic choices rather than externally imposed duties or conventions. In other words, the authentic leader is motivated by internal commitment, which, in the final analysis is a commitment to a self-concept (Shamir, Arthur, & House, 1993[36]).”

4. “Their behaviour is self-expressive. It is consistent with their self-concepts and is primarily motivated by components of the self-concepts such as values and identities rather than by calculations or expected benefits. One implication of behaving in a self-expressive manner is that authentic leaders are likely to seek self-verification more than self-enhancement in their interactions with others, including followers. According to self-verification theory and related findings (Swann, 1990[37]; Swann & Schroeder, 1995[38]), the more people rely on their actual selves to guide their behaviour, the higher their striving for self-verification. Furthermore, the more people have a coherent and stable self-concept, the more they derive a sense of prediction and control. This implies that authentic leaders do not seek the most admiring followers but rather followers who increase the leader’s sense of authenticity by confirming his or her self-concept”[39].

To summarize, a definition of authentic leaders implies that authentic leaders can be distinguished from less authentic or inauthentic leaders by four self-related characteristics:

- 1) The degree of person-role merger i.e. the salience of the leadership role in their self-concept,
- 2) The level of self-concept clarity and the extent to which this clarity centers around strongly held values and convictions,
- 3) The extent to which their goals are self-concordant, and
- 4) The degree to which their behaviour is consistent with their self-concept.

This definitions do look quite a like some earlier presented by some philosophers. So we might say with Aristotle, “There is seldom anything new under the Sun”.

Anyhow, we continue to have a look at authentic leadership and what it contains, and why does authenticity in leadership matter at all?

In the article, Authentic Leadership (2003)[40], Bill George argues that being yourself; being the person you were *created* to be rather than developing the image or persona of a leader is the way to restore confidence in business organizations after Enron and Arthur Andersen. The philosophical problem remains, because through the notion used, created, we can not define what we fully are after all.

They may be about as alike as chalk and cheese, but General Electric's magisterial manager and Apple's mercurial mythmaker came out number one and two, respectively, when asked among 1,665 respondents to a Fast Track Leadership Survey to name the person who most exemplifies great leadership[41]. Rounding out the top

five are **Nelson Mandela, Colin Powell** -and, in a three-way tie for fifth place, **Mahatma Gandhi, Bill Gates, and George W. Bush.**

The good news: By an overwhelming margin 95% to 5%- our survey takers said the ethics of the CEO play a meaningful role in the way business gets done. Leadership, they said, starts at the top, and ethical leadership filters throughout the organization. Good ethics is also good business, many said: It builds brands, draws customers, and saves money in the long run. "Integrity matters a lot to respondents," says Sean Meehan, professor of marketing and director of IMD's MBA program. "They're emphatic-'This is an issue, and I've got something to say about it.' "

The bad news:

The informants were asked to rate leaders in various types of organizations, most got middle to poor grades on integrity. On a scale of zero to five (five being the best), people gave their own organizations the highest score for integrity, a healthy average of 3.87. But things go downhill from there, with leaders in small companies coming in at 3.53, large corporations at 2.81, and government at 2.20. Dead last on integrity: the media (ouch), at a dismal 1.90.

Here are the attributes for which leaders in each sector got the highest and lowest scores:

Large Corporations	Small Companies	Government	The Media	My Own Company
An international mind-set / 4.28	Passionate about work / 4.46	Empathetic / 2.75	Ruthless for success / 3.82	Passionate about work / 4.05
Unselfish, altruistic / 2.03	An international mind-set / 2.62	Can admit mistakes / 1.45	Unselfish, altruistic / 1.63	Unselfish, altruistic / 3.01

Summary

I will give a short brief summary.

- Story telling creates someone who can be referred to when we ask: 'Who has done this?', 'Who has behaved in this way?', or 'To whom did such a thing happen?'
- Stories describe people who act and suffer.
- “The story relates to the individual, of the action and the identity of this whom is no other than his narrative identity”.
- The two major concepts of identity are identity as sameness (*idem*) and identity as self (*ipse*).

- *Idem* consists of four aspects each of which can be clarified in relation to its opposite:
 - 1) the re-identification of the same, opposite = plurality;
 - 2) resemblance, opposite = difference;
 - 3) the continuity of a process, opposite = discontinuity;
 - 4) permanence over time, opposite = diversity.
- The essence of *ipse*, is the 'range of responses' to the question who, as distinct from the questions of what, where, why etc.
- *Iipse* is a pole of selfhood, including trustworthiness and faithfulness to oneself, despite all the deviation and transformations which mark the path of life.
- *Iipse* may be better understood as personal integrity.
- Our *ipseity* is only captured by narratives.
- To the extent we can *tell* a life or *tell* a companies story, we do succeed in capturing the person's or the company's identity.

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PHILOSOPHICAL COUNSELING AS *POIETIC*
PHILOSOPHY

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This article¹ tries to open a new perspective for philosophical counselling. This new vision combines works of the Spanish philosopher María Zambrano and poetry in order to explain a new concept inside Philosophical Counselling. This new concept is Poietic (or poietical) philosophy.

We will investigate what has meant poiesis in Ancient Greek and in modern poets like Becquer and in a specific spirit (southern spirit).

Our work finishes with practical issues to apply in a lot of situations in our consultations.

1. Context.

This paper constitutes the basis of my PhD project, which is scheduled to be finished in several months. It is aimed at applying what I call 'Poietic Philosophy' to Philosophical Counseling, thus opening a new field of investigation that is centered around a new attitude to the counselee. With this new concept, and with a theory that would explain it, I hope to contribute to the field of Philosophical Counseling in a way that would complement certain other approaches, such as models based on critical thinking (Lebon, 2001; Raabe, 2001) or other open-ended models (Schuster, 1999).

I have developed the concept of Poietic Philosophy in the 'spirit of Southern Spain'. This can deepen the consultation in the following ways:

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1. Greater comprehension of the problems.
2. Openness to new perspectives in the philosophical process.
3. A multiplicity of answers (and maybe solutions).
4. A tendency to arouse in the counselee better feelings throughout the philosophical process.

I will base my theory on: 1) The diachronic etymology of the term “poiesis” in ancient Greece. 2) Ideas from the works of the Spanish philosopher María Zambrano. 3) Some of the spiritual meanings of the term “poetry” as it is understood in Andalucía.

2. Theory. Poiesis and Philosophy.

2.1. Poiesis.

2.1.1. Three moments, three meanings.

The term Poiesis has several different meanings in Greek, because of semantic changes through Greek history.

We can find in the Greek dictionary two pairs of words that are relevant here: *poeo* and *poieo*, *poetes* and *poietes*).

These words are related to a verb and an abstract substantive: *poieo* and *poiesis* respectively. All these terms point to three meanings:

a. Hand-made creation.

A poet is a person who produces by hand, an artisan, a craftsman. Thus, in ancient Greece the word 'poet' could refer to a shoemaker as well as to a producer of verses. *Poiesis* meant making something in general.

b. Creator of artistic elements.

A poet is a poem-writer as we understand the term today. *Poiesis* means to make poetry.

c. Moving the soul, Creating and modify emotions.

The verb *Poieo* had a third special meaning, which is less common nowadays: to celebrate. This celebration could arouse in people's soul certain emotions which could modify their perspective of reality, or which could lead them to act in new ways.

The three meanings correspond to three periods of classical Greek.

As I said, “poiesis” originally meant a making by hand. This is the oldest meaning. Homer had in mind this meaning when he used the concept in his writings. This sense of poiesis is distinct from all metaphorical, creative or newer senses, because it construes creation as dependent on specific rules (like the creation of shoes which depends on artisan rules).

In later writings, “poiesis” meant the transition from non-being to being, or creation. Of course, originally this meaning was implicit (to create a shoes is to bring something into existence — the shoes which had previously not existed). However, in the second historical period, this sense came to be emphasized. The artisan's creation is a human creation. But the poet's creation depends on the gods too, specifically on the state of “en-thusiam” (etymologically “in gods”, because it was considered a state in which the gods go into the poet's spirit, so that they can talk or write through him).

The question arises how the idea of creating by hand has turned into artistic and poetic creation. Emilio Lledó[2] contended that this transition is rooted in the field of sculpture. On the one hand, there was the idea of the manual creation of the statues, and on the other hand the movement which these images imprinted on the observers' soul. Thus, at first “poiesis” referred to the act of making the statue. Later it started referring to the inner state of arousal in the person who contemplated that statue. Finally, the two were linked because of their common connection to the statue.

2.1.2. Poesis/poema and its typologies.

The suffix $-\Phi 4\lambda$ is derived from an older suffix of a Hindu-European origin: $-\Theta 4$. Its meaning refers to actions. Thus, $\Theta\phi\Phi 4<$, the oldest term that includes this suffix, means to raise a wall.

The suffix $-\cdot\forall$ refers to the result of an action.

Therefore, if we talk about $A\cong\cdot\cdot\Theta\Phi 4\lambda$ (poiesis) as an action, the result is $B\cong 40:\forall$ (poem).

Plato's criticism of poets was based on several complaints against them. To begin with, he argued that they could corrupt society with their poems, hymns and chants. Poets were not responsible for the influence which they exerted, because a poet was understood as a tool through which the gods act. A poet is “enthused” (from enthusiasm, en-theos, “in god”) by divine inspiration.

As opposed to Plato, the Sophists contended that poetry is not the result of the gods but of human techniques, which should be taught to children as part of their education. The Sophists discovered that there were methods of influencing the human soul. Controlling these methods, skills and techniques was important to lawyers and rhetoricians. The rules for making speeches that move the soul were viewed as human rules and as belonging to the human logos. Hence, poets were regarded as essential for education and for the Greek polis.

In contrast, the essence of poetry for Plato was its relationship to the deity and its strong influence on poets. A poet is an *en-thusiastic*, someone with god inside himself. God's power is so great that it overpowers the poet's personal will and, of

course, human reason (human logos). Consequently, the poet is not the owner of his words and ideas. Human reason is overpowered by divine will. This is an unacceptable situation for a rationalist philosopher as Plato. This is why he attacked poetry in his works.

Concerning the issue of passion, poets direct their poems to passionate impulses. Thus, when we read a poem, it is our passions that are moved, not our reason. This emphasizes the importance of emotions over reason. Plato could have considered the good influence of poetry on humans, just as Aristotle did in his discussion of *catharsis*, but he did not. Since he gave such importance to logos and reason, was opposed to passions, and made the passion inferior to reason, he banished the poets out of his republic.

Moreover, a poet focuses on appearances, as opposed to reality. His words, therefore, do not represent reality but only react to reality. Indeed, Plato's painter creates a third-level reality. The first-level reality is the world of ideas; the second is our everyday world, which is a copy of the world of ideas; and the third is artistic creations that copy our everyday reality. Thus, the poet lives in a world of shadows inside the cave. Only philosophers, who have seen the sunlight, realize that what the poet writes is a mere shadow world. Plato's epistemic project (against the world of doxa and opinion) leads him to disregard poets in his works.

2.2. Poetic attitude in María Zambrano[\[3\]](#).

María Zambrano (1904-1991), a Spanish philosopher and disciple of José Ortega y Gasset, introduced in her works a new concept: *Poetic Thought*.

The aim of this poetic thought is to transcend philosophical thought through the creation of a new vision of philosophy. Before her, throughout modernity, philosophy had been associated with rationalistic (and logical) thought that pertained to the mind, not to the soul. Consequently, philosophers have sometimes disregarded certain aspects of life. For her, philosophy is a way of opening a broader and broader vision of life, thus gradually deepening it. Reason is limited in its capacity to achieve this vision and its products. She therefore uses poetic thought to comprehend reality, using means that are beyond what we commonly understand by 'reason'. She employs metaphors as ways of understanding with the heart, as ways of understanding with the human soul. In this sense, she uses a phenomenological perspective to seek knowledge (and wisdom) of the soul.

In some of her works, Zambrano explains the oppositions that exist between philosophy (as based on rationalistic processes) and poetry (as a way of accessing truths hidden from that type of philosophy). The tables below summarize the spirit of each of the two, as well as the differences between them.

When we combine philosophy and poetry, the result is María Zambrano's work. This is a philosophical work, yet written in a poetic spirit. The product of this union is a reason that "enchants" ("en-canta" means, literally, "in-song," and as a verb it becomes "to make a song"), which lives. In this way, philosophy and life walk hand in hand

again, thanks to poetic thought. As will be seen below, this is very significant for philosophical counselling. I will link this idea to my concept of “Poietic Philosophy”

The concept of *evidence* in Zambrano denotes a specific meaning. It has little intellectual and cognitive content, but its content is rich in other meanings. “Evidence” is synonymous with psychological insight. It implies a becoming aware of something that might be in front of us, but which we did not *see* before. An example is when I suddenly notice the value of my wife's kiss after she has recovered from a serious illness. Another example is when I suddenly discover the value which life had before it had been disrupted by an accident.

The metaphor “*vision of the heart or soul*”. Philosophy, according to Zambrano, looks for unity in diversity. It is blind to concrete cases, because it looks for *episteme* and not for *doxa*. Philosophy is therefore more concerned with metaphysics than with ontology, more interested in the *concept of friendship* than in our real friends and their individual identities.

It is possible to delineate the relationship between a theory of psychology and a theory of philosophical counseling. Psychology listens to patients (*doxa*) in search of a diagnosis derived from scientific and empirical studies. In this sense, the psychological endeavor is guided by a scientific theory. In contrast, Philosophical Counseling looks for the counselee's openness (*doxa*). The individual counselee is the focus of the philosophical counselor. As Achenbach contends, counselees create theories, but they do not fit into any already-existing theory. Of course, this attitude works only for a specific type of person. If the client has a psychological structure that prohibits him or her from thinking or acting freely, then this is a different story. Psychological structures can be defined in theories, not in humans, in their consciousness, or in what they freely produce.

All this suggests that a philosophy that is open and can open the individual's concrete consciousness is an ideal philosophy for Philosophical Counseling. This is Zambrano's philosophy and my *Poietic Philosophy*.

A better listening is guided, metaphorically speaking, by the heart. This kind of listening is more attuned to what is concrete and observable than to what is abstract and remote from everyday life. The individual and what he or she tells us are more important than theories about human being. As Miguel de Unamuno said, what counts is people of flesh and bones, which is to say, each one of us.

What is it that our counselee tells us?

The counselee talks about his world. This is not objective Reality. It is his reality, but this is all the reality he has. As Epictetus said, what we have is representations of reality, and it is impossible to go beyond them. Whatever we think or conceptualize or feel belongs to our world. If something is outside our representations, then it does not exist for us and therefore does not matter. Of course, my world can be broadened to other perspectives, but they would not exist for me until they enter into my world (and therefore they would become (again) part of my representations).

It is very important for the philosophical counsellor to learn to carefully listen to the counselee's representations. This means that it is not enough to understand our counselee in a conceptual or cognitive way. It is necessary to listen to our counselee's soul and look at the experiences that have touched his heart. This why listening from the heart is so important: We have to feel our counselee's words inside us. How this is done will be discussed in the third section of this paper.

2.3. *Quebra (breakdown), quejío y quejumbre (complaint).*

Poetry[4] shows the deep emotions of human beings. We are used to living a prosaic and superficial life, which is not as profound as the life of poetry. This profundity is with us in our life, and we can be aware of it or neglect it. We are always aware of this profundity when we have important problems. The resolution and/or comprehension of these problems depends on our understanding this profundity and dealing with it. Poetry or Poietic Philosophy could be a way of accessing that profundity.

When I talk here about poetry[5] (or Andalusian poetry), I do not refer only to compositions in verse, but to the *poetic spirit* that animates Andalusia and its people. This poetic spirit is expressed in culture (Holy Week in Sevilla, Carnavales of Cádiz, Féria de Huelva, Cruces de Mayo de Córdoba, and so on), in popular songs (sevillanas, verdiales, fandangos, comparsas carnavalescas, and so on) and primarily in the concept of andalucian “gracia”, an artistic way of confronting the losses that occur in life[6]. Andalusian art has created important monuments and artistic works, but it has also created a special type of people and a particular type of human being.

In this poetic sense we can go in two directions: expressing our pains (through moaning, or “quejío”) or joking ironically about pains and painful situations (through jokes that separate us from those pains and break them down to a degree).

All important misfortunes create a breaking (Ortega y Gasset talked about breaking of reliefs) which destabilizes our grounds. This breakdown might take us to the abyss[7]. Poets, “flamenco singers” or singers who write songs about profound topics are the echo of that misfortune. Therefore, we often identify ourselves with their songs and poems. The poet *knows and feels* what we *feel* in similar circumstances, because he has suffered the same pains and experienced the emotions that we have. His feelings are our feelings, so his knowledge about our painful situations is closer to us than scientific knowledge. Thus, if we want to have a more intimate knowledge of our counselees' pains and emotions, we need to work on a sentimental education of the soul, as Schiller said. Poetry can help us in this work. Science understands the *content* of he counselee's life, but it doesn't understand it in the poetic sense (to *live with* our counselee).

If a philosophical counsellor wants to *listen* to his counselee's pains, he should be, in some sense, a poet: He should try to develop the skills and abilities to experience (*vivenciar*) what the counselee lives. This poetic listening provides a broad and profound space to contain what the counselee says to us, which enables us to see it authentically.

To sum up, the important thing is not to *know the content of* our counselee's problem but to be surrounded by it.

2.4. Is Poiesis, philosophy or just poetry?

Etymologically, Philosophy is philo-sophia, love of wisdom. One of the oldest philosophical texts tries to explain the origin of the philosopher's task. Each citizen has his own activity. The shoemaker makes shoes, the king governs, and what about the philosopher? The philosopher dedicates himself to *seeing* all things. It would be interesting to ponder this activity which is allotted to the philosopher, that of *seeing*. We might also use the verb *staring* instead.

The philosopher tries to see, or stare beyond what ordinary people normally see. This means a broader and more profound perspective. We have said that *poietic philosophy* tries to see in this sense. The point is not to listen to the surface appearance of life. It implies, rather, to dive into life itself. This type of staring or listening would not give us more detailed information, but it would give us information and that is closer to life and that would be more authentic. Our work as “poietic philosophers” and as philosophical counsellors can follow the metaphor of listening from our heart, not just with our mind. This openness of the heart to reality can create:

- a. Horizontally speaking, a multiplicity of meanings.

Poietic philosophy admits (and searches) as many meanings as there are people and re-presentations of reality in the world.

- b. Vertically speaking, depth of meanings.

Poietic philosophy looks beyond the superficial meaning. This enables us to open the counselee's world. This helps the counselee to open himself to his own depth and thus to investigate the depth of reality.

- c. Transversally, *demiurgos*.

Poietic Philosophy is a tool that attempts to go beyond itself. It looks for new methods and ways that go beyond the surface and the everydayness of life, but it can accept theories that exceed it. Thus, Poietic Philosophy is not a given theory. It is an impulse and a capacity to go beyond and beyond. Its aim is getting in touch with authentic experiences, with a multiplicity of meanings, and, in philosophical counselling, diving into the counselee's world, listening to him or her, and opening to new realities.

Does all this constitute a critical philosophy? Yes, although this is not the aim of Poietic Philosophy. Let me explain.

The central idea of *Poietic Philosophy* is not critiquing but creativity and serious analysis. However, creativity sometimes contains an important element of critiquing. Poietic Philosophy does not explicitly go against the idea of philosophical systems, but its creative nature makes it a-systematic. It can serve as a complaint when a system tries to impose itself on the subject-matter. It does not recognize any system (small sense) or

System (holistic, big sense). Its aim is not to fight, but to create and to go beyond reality. This means that it may sometimes come up with ideas that happen to agree with certain systems. At other times it may disagree with those same systems. However, I think that the attempt to go against certain systems means still staying within the system. Poietic Philosophy is not concerned with any given system. The important point is delving deeply inside and, even more importantly, beyond. And it must be admitted that systems, too, sometimes do that to a certain extent.

2.5. Theoretical consequences.

We can now conclude the following theoretical consequences, to be applied to philosophical counseling:

- a. Poetic as *listening* and *staring*.
- b. Poiesis as an *action* to modify reality.
- c. Poetic poiesis that calls us to listen to, to stare at, and to create new worlds with the joy of aesthetic work of art, namely, our life. Aesthetic joy can be brought about by:
 - a. Seeing how to go beyond our worries and seeing new world of possibilities.
 - b. Living and seeing new perspectives of reality that go beyond the apparent surface.
 - c. The satisfaction of creation itself. This is like the satisfaction of a playing child. When the game ends, his satisfaction ends too.
- d. Poiesis as a creator beyond itself (demiurgos).

Poietic Philosophy is more than a theory. It is an impulse or a faculty that enables us to transcend all times and occasions, concepts and emotions.

3. Practical applications in Philosophical Counselling.

3.1. Introduction.

Practical applications of Poietic Philosophy are developed in different places in consultation. I will analyse this process in two steps: the listening stage and the problem-treatment stage.

Below, I will schematically describe the application of the above theory to practice.

3.2. Listening.

The aim is to dive into the life-experience that emerges from the counselee's narrative.

Kung-Tsé says: “Your aim should be unity! You shouldn't hear with your ear but with your awareness; you shouldn't hear with your awareness but with your soul. The ear can only hear; awareness can only understand. The soul should be empty and prepared to receive orders. Meaning is what can join that which is empty. To be empty means that the heart hasn't eaten anything.” [8]

I suggest here two points in my proposed conception of Poietic Philosophy:

1. *Attitude.*

Aim: The counselee as a poem.

We should read a poem on different occasions in order to be influenced by it. It could be useful to record the counseling conversations in order to later analyse them, either by ourselves or together with our counselee. We can then look for special moments and interesting moment. Poems have interesting verses, as well as uninteresting parts. All its elements contribute to an overall feeling, idea, or predicament, but some of them bring us there faster and deeper than others.

Let us see what these issues mean in consultation[9]:

1.1. From language and words....

- The number of words is not as important as their content and meaning.
 - We should be aware that content is manifested through the form of a text or conversation.
 - We should notice verbal language and non-verbal language.
- “Symbolic language” and its meaning are very important. We have to notice which contents are more important for our counselee, and to discover why this is so.
- We should look for the connection between words and experiences in our counselee. We should pay attention to the words he tends to repeat.
- All of these help us to dive into our counselee's *real experience* through the semantic field he uses.

1.2. ...to experience and life.

- After we have mastered (cognitively and conceptually) the counselee's linguistic and semantic field, we should proceed to his experience and its implications. Here we can be helped by “moaning words”. I call “moaning-words” those words that open us to a pain or personal conflict. These words may have little conceptual content, but a broad lived content.
- Notice (and respect) moments of silence. If we want to listen to the counselee's experiences, it is very important to understand this silence, and, of course, respect it.

Treating these silent moments as if they were 'words with important meaning and content' is a good way of knowing whether we understand our counselee's experience.

2. *Associated activities*[\[10\]](#).

It is important to give priority to non-verbal language. Metaphors can help us to acquire non-verbal information from the counselee.

1. Using texts (novels, stories, songs, etc.) through which the counselee could identify his situation. He might also suggest texts of his own. These texts may not give more *information* about the counselee's situation, but nevertheless help us to dive into his experience.
2. Asking our counselee to use drawings through which he could *explain* his situation.
3. Asking our counselee to describe all the elements involved in a particular moment of his conflict, and ask him about the tastes, smell and implications that he sees in this conflict.
4. Asking him to choose which literary character in a given story expresses most closely his feelings.
5. Playing a game of 'confessing what shouldn't be confessed'.
6. Role playing: We can play the counselee while he plays the counsellor (only in advanced phases of the consultation).

As I said, the important thing is not just to *understand the* counselee but to be moved by his experience. As Bécquer (an andalusian poet) said, the counselee must be a "*sacudimiento extraño que agita las ideas, como huracán que empuja las olas en tropel*"[\[11\]](#)

3.3. Treatment: Change or open your vision and life.

One important problem that might appear in philosophical counselling is the enchantment which might draw the counselee towards a problematic situation. Thus, on the one hand, the counselee might want to separate himself from some situation or behaviour. On the other hand, he might feel some satisfaction in remaining in that situation, or in playing that game. In this case, he might not fully want to separate from his behaviour. Psychoanalysts have studied this phenomenon. If the counselee can relate to this in a rational way, we could work on his problem together with him. However, we would need to create an opposite *enchantment* that makes the contrary behavior a satisfactory option to choose. The counselor and counselee will need to collaborate in this enchantment by means of reason.

The Greek notion of '6Z80Φ4H' (enchantment through poetry) refers to three elements: meter, rhythm and harmony. These elements should be included in the philosophical consultation in order to enchant. This includes games, irony, activities

that take beyond conceptual understanding and verbal dialogue, and activities beyond the boundaries of the consultation.

Enchantment needs to do work that goes beyond what conceptual conversations can do. Conceptual work is necessary for counselling, but it is not sufficient to enchant life[12].

Enchantment aims at making life sing through *words* and *music*. Lyrics have meaning and they *point out* to an experience. Music *is* (or creates) an experience in itself. This is the reason why “songs” and en-chantment (note that the word is derived from 'chant') should direct the counselor's attitude in the treatment stage.

Poiesis demiurgic should also be included in the problem-treatment stage. I said that one function of *poiesis* was understanding and vision, and that another was *action*. Sometimes, we only need to *understand* the conflict-laden situation in order to resolve it. On other occasions, *poiesis* might work by opening and multiplying perspectives (and realities), by *creating* new worlds. Finally, we could work on modifying our counselee's particular re-presentations or beliefs (if he wishes to do so but cannot do it by himself)[13].

Poiesis had a second meaning in Greek. It refers to the transition from inexistence to existence. Such a process might be influenced by god, or it might not (recall that the sophists held that creating an emotion through rhetoric depends on human technique, whereas Plato contended that it depends on the gods, who inspire poets)[14]. When I speak about changing perspectives in the counselee (with him), I am talking about changing his or her life from a phenomenological perspective. Our world depends on the phenomena which we perceive. I have discussed this topic in another article and would not like to discuss it here because of space limitations.

I want to finish this paper by summarizing the function of *poiesis* in treatment, in a paragraph that can now be understood.

CONCLUSION[15]

Poiesis in the problem-treatment stage brings us to the creation of new realities and personal worlds. This is done by means of an enchantment. Moreover, *poiesis* takes us to a better understanding of realities or solutions which the counselee, and possibly the counsellor as well, have not thought about before, in other words, personal ex-realities where life is enchanted by reason supported by *poiesis*.

TABLES

PHILOSOPHY	POETRY
It was liberated from appearances	Depend on appearances
Whole unity and pride of power	Incompleted unity. Humility
Just for specialist	For general public
Its object is simplified	Its object is complexed
Absolute Truth	“Truly contents”
It implies a method to access to its object	It hasn’t a method. It wanted all things simultaneously
Spirit of access to reality: to look for	Spirit to access to reality: to give reality itself (<i>don, gracia</i>)
Spirit of arrival to reality: <i>to discover</i> by violence	Spirit of arrival to reality: Reality comes to us
<i>Universal</i> human being	<i>Concrete</i> person
Try to take <i>the power</i>	Not try to take it
It acts with violence. It can’t remain waiting for an answer, it looks for it.	It remains in aristotelian admiration. It stays waiting for a revelation without violence.
Violent knowing that looks for. Will of power.	Calm and ecstatic knowledge. It <i>expect for listening</i> to reality
Look for “objectivity”	It goes to concrete. It mixes dream and reality.
<i>Unity</i>	<i>Heterogeneity</i>
<i>Questions</i>	<i>Answers</i>
<i>To break and to emancipate from concrete given</i>	<i>Co-existence</i> with concrete reality (<i>immersion</i> in concrete reality)
Being	Being as a reflex in a mirror
Word, speeches	Sentiment, feelings, to get a drunk of reality
Intellectual, <i>head, mind</i>	To live, life, <i>heart – soul</i>
It goes to <i>real objectivity</i>	It remains in <i>phantom</i> ² (from Greek concept “fainos”)

² Poetry has been devalued by philosophy. Serious knowledge is philosophy and science. If we attain ourselves to a phenomenological approach is so real a chair as a dream because both are contents of conscience.

PHILOSOPHY	POETRY
It makes decisions (ethics)	It doesn't make decisions, its aim is ec-stasis
Existencial feeling: Anguish because of its strength for going forward	Existencial feeling: Nostalgia, melancholy
It creates	It looks for recovering original nature (it look for back)
Results: <i>It looks for</i> because it feels <i>incomplete</i>	Results: It has <i>all things</i>
Image of himself: <i>Master and to hold power</i>	Image of himself: <i>Servant</i>
Reality is a problem to resolve	Reality is a mystery to contemplate
It fights against reality in order to <i>transform</i> it.	It is open to (accept) reality.
Hopeful and confidence on it sure way of making it work	<i>Evanescence</i> and phenomenon

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ZAMBRANO, M. (2004). *La razón en la sombra. Antología crítica*. Madrid: Siruela.

[1] This paper have been possible due to a research fellowship from the CSIC (reference UAC-2005-0012) granted to the author in 2005. I want to thank you Ran Lahav for helping in its translation to English.

[2] See LLEDÓ, E. (1961). *El concepto «poiesis» en la filosofía griega*. Madrid: CSIC.

[3] The ideas exposed here can be found in works (below) by María Zambrano:

ZAMBRANO, M. (1992). *El pensamiento vivo de Séneca*. Madrid: Cátedra.

ZAMBRANO, M. (1993). *El hombre y lo divino*. FCE: Madrid.

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[4] It was interesting for me to discover the semantic family of poetry words in German. *Dichtung* means a poem and *dichter* means a poet. Both come from the root “dicht” which means dense, trick. This spirit is different from the andalusian spirit of poetry (in the general sense). German poetry tells us many things in a few of words. The important thing in andalusian poetry is to open a world of emotions, a world that had been hidden before the poetry was written. I suppose that each of the two expresses a specific way of understanding by different human beings. The Andalusian tends to be more emotional, whereas the German tends to be more dense and conceptual.

[5] Here I will talk about the andalusian spirit in poetry. This is not to say that other kinds of poetry are worse. Each one has its own peculiarities. My work focuses on andalusian poetry because it is closer to my heart, and I can talk about it with greater certainty.

[6] This spirit means to experience life with a sort of Seneca-like attitude of distancing oneself from one's problems with ironic comedy or tragic complaints. A real example: In 1992, several days before the international exposition in Sevilla, an important

pavilion, the Pavilion of Discovery, started to burn down. One teenager from a group of students that visited Expo'92 that day said, "Look at that! Fire is being discovered!" Another real example: Sevilla now suffers from many public construction works because of the building of a subway system. We can complain about it (as often we do it), but we often say: "Oh! How many years will our mayor need to dig Seville and discover the treasure hat is hidden under it?".

[7] See ARANOVICH, R. (2000) *Psicoterapia y razón vital*. Buenos Aires: Edición de autor; ARANOVICH, R.(2002): *Autenticidad y vida*, Buenos Aires: Edición del Autor.

[8] Zambrano, M. (2004). *La Confesión: Género Literario*. Madrid: Siruela.

[9] I am not trying to talk here about *all* the implications of understanding our counselee as a poem, just about some of them.

[10] I offer here some activities that I have put to practice in some of my consultations. Not all of them are recommended for all counsees or situations.

[11] BÉCQUER, G.A.(1996) *Rimas y Leyendas*. Madrid: Ediciones Ruda. Pages 39-41.

[12] Sometimes rational work has been sufficient to enchant my counsees. It is important that this enchantment be present in all the stages of the philosophical process.

[13] For applications of this theory to some of my counsees, see the following articles in my website www.josebarrientos.net: BARRIENTOS RASTROJO, J.: "Orientación Racional: Una aplicación real del *Critical Thinking* a la Orientación Filosófica" (*1st National Portuguese Conference on Philosophical Practice*, Lisboa, 2005); "Violencia de Género y Orientación Filosófica" (*1st Nacional spanish Meeting on "Violencia"*, Sevilla, 2005); "Del pensar zambranista a la Filosofía Poiética en la consulta filosófica".

[14] Both ideas are interesting for Philosophical Counselling if we change 'god' for 'art'. *Critical Thinking* can be seen as a philosophical process designed to move souls through human techniques. Sometimes, however, we create changes in people without any specific technique. The latter is a sort of philosophical counselling as an art that has no specific way of having. Experience and life (and luck) help us in the treatment.

[15] You can read more about poetic philosophy in some of my articles. Some of them are listed below:

BARRIENTOS RASTROJO, J. (2003). "De la estética hedónica a la estética demiúrgico. El fundamento ético del tercer entorno" en *Actas del I congreso Iberoamericano de Ética y Filosofía Política*. Madrid, 2003.

BARRIENTOS RASTROJO, J. (2003) "La estetización poiética de la historia del hombre" en *Actas del XXIX Congreso de Filósofos Jóvenes*. Gijón: Asociación Wenceslao Roces. (read it at <http://www.wenceslaoroces.org/cfj> – last access January 2005).

BARRIENTOS RASTROJO, J. (2003). "La insurrección de lo poiético en el asesoramiento filosófico" in *Revista ETOR* N°1. Sevilla: Ediciones X-XI. Pages 45-60.

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BARRIENTOS RASTROJO, J. (2005). “Del Critical Thinking a la razón poiética”, *Curso “Filosofía y su Aplicación a la sociedad III”*, Universidad de Sevilla (not edited).

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BARRIENTOS RASTROJO, J. (2005) “Workshop on Poietic Philosophy” in *1st Internacional “Sophia” Retreat of Contemplative Philosophy*, Chipiona (Cádiz) (not edited).

[16] Poetry has been devalued by philosophy. Serious knowledge is philosophy and science. If we attain ourselves to a phenomenological approach is so real a chair as a dream because both are contents of conscience.



PHILOSOPHY AS A PRACTICE

Oscar Brenifier

1. Materiality as otherness

The concept of practice is generally foreign to the philosopher, who is almost exclusively a theoretician. As a professor, his teaching bears principally on a number of written texts, the knowledge and understanding of which he has to communicate to his students. If he does any writing, his main area of inquiry will be the history of ideas. A smaller minority of teachers will engage in some kind or other of philosophical speculations. In this context, over the recent period, somewhat in rupture with the tradition, a relatively new kind of occupation has appeared, called philosophical consulting, in general vividly contested by the philosophical institution. This situation poses the following two questions: what is philosophical and what is not? Is philosophy only a discourse, or does it have a practice?

A practice can be defined as an activity which confronts a given theory to some kind of materiality, or otherness. Matter can here be defined as what offers a resistance to our will or actions. Therefore the most obvious materiality for philosophizing is first the all-encompassing world, inclusive of human existence, through the representations we have of it. Thus a world we know in the form of the mythos, of the narration of daily events, or in the scattered form of cultural, scientific and technical informations. Secondly, materiality is for each one of us the « other », the individual with whom we can enter in a dialogue and a confrontation. Thirdly, materiality is coherency, or the presupposed unity of our own speech, whose flaws and incompleteness oblige us to confront and reach higher or more complete orders of mental architecture.

With those principles in mind, and much inspired by Plato, the author has developed a practice which consists in exercises challenging the individual thinking, both in a private and group situation, inside or outside of school. The basic functioning of it is, through dialogue, first to identify the presuppositions on which functions our own thinking, secondly enter in a critical analysis of it, thirdly formulate a concept capturing the global idea thus enriched. In this process, one has to become conscious of his own apprehension of the world and of himself, deliberate on the possibility of other

schemes, and engage in an anagogic path where he will trespass his own opinion, a trespassing which is the heart of philosophizing. Of course, in this practice, the knowledge of classical authors is very useful, but not an absolute prerequisite. Whatever the tools used, the overall and main challenge remains the constitutive activity of the singular mind.

2. Otherness as mythos and logos

How to verify given ideas on all the little mythos of daily life, on the more or less scattered bits and pieces of logos which constitute our thinking? The only problem with philosophy, compared to other practices, is that the thinking subject does not really check its own efficiency on true otherness, but on himself. Although one might say as well that the physicist, the chemist and even more so the mathematician, are very much susceptible to disguise their subjectivity under the cloak of an objective statement of fact. But let us admit it is more of a problem in philosophical practice, since the idea which is supposed to check itself on the personal mythos and logos is itself directly engendered by this personal mythos and logos, intimately intricately with it. Furthermore, as with the hard scientist, who sometimes change reality, either by acting upon it through innovative and efficient hypothesis, or simply by transforming the thinking we have of it, the given new idea of the philosopher might alter the mythos or the logos which occupy his mind. The problem posed by these two processes is that there will be a natural tendency by the individual mind to overextend itself in order to reconcile the specific idea with the general framework it operates into, by thwarting either this specific idea or the general mythos and logos, or by creating a barrier between them, thus avoiding the clash. This last option being the most common, since it apparently avoids all the work of the confrontation, phenomenon which explains the badly fitted mosaic, the unequal patchwork aspect of the individual mind, to use Montaigne's expression. Luckily enough, or unluckily enough, the pain provoked in the absence of coherency or harmony of the mind, (similarly to the pain provoked by the disease which signify the disharmony of the body) forces us either to work through this painful dissension, or to split ourselves, trying to forget the problem in order to forget the pain. Of course this forgetting has all the efficiency of a pain killer, but as well the drawbacks of a pain killer. The disease is still there, getting harder and stronger since we do not deal with it.

3. Otherness as the other

This is where the second type of otherness intervenes : the other, in the form of another singular mind. His advantage upon us, as a spectator rather than an actor we are, is that ruptures and discrepancies in our own thought system a priori do not cause him any pain; unlike us, he does not suffer from our incoherencies, at least not in a direct way, except at most through some kind of empathy. For this reason, he is better placed than us to identify the conflicts and contradictions operating within us, although his is not a pure mind, and his responses and analysis will be affected as well by his own bugs and viruses, by his own insufficiencies. In spite of this, being less implicated than us will allow him to lay a distant eye upon our thought processes, a definite advantage in terms of examining in a critical and inquisitive, non-defensive, non-protecting perspective. Although one should not attribute an all-empowering quality to this given situation, since like all perspectives this particular one suffers from weaknesses and drawbacks. One of them can be the lack of understanding of the other's

thought, another being the sentiment of feeling threatened by the other, a third being simply the indulging induced by a lack of interest for the other.

4. Otherness as unity

The third idea of otherness, its third form and encounter, laying as well the basis for a practical philosophy, is the unity of the discourse, the unity of speech. Here of course, a number of fundamental questions arise, since we are dealing with a presence of a «anhypothetical» kind, as Plato says, an inevitable hypothesis of which we can say nothing about, an internal God we totally ignore in itself although his effects impose themselves on our senses and understanding. This unity does not appear to us as such, as a blunt and evident entity, but through the intuition of coherency and logic, a multiplicity of appearances which nevertheless guide our thinking and stand vividly as a permanent source of crucial experiment for our own mind and the one of others, saving our minds from falling in the dark and chaotic abysses of indefinite multiplicity and pure chaos which too often characterize the thinking process of our fellowmen. Opinions, thought associations, mere feelings and impressions, each one ruling on their own immediate little world, rapidly forgotten when crossing the narrow borders of space and time which bind them to a microscopic territory. Poor and pathetic ephemerals, which as valid as they might be, stand impotent and powerless amongst the hustling and the bustling of disconnected thought processes, trying powerlessly to get themselves heard, while the echo remains desperately silent and mute. Unless the given specific idea rings some kind of chord in this mysterious, generous and substantial unity, chances are it is condemned to a premature and sudden death, revealing to whomever would remain conscious of it the emptiness of its existence. The only problem here is precisely that this conscience is tragically absent, for its presence would already have radically transformed the setting of the game.

To summarize, if a practical activity means confronting theory to otherness, we have defined here three modes of this confrontation: to representations we have of the world, in a narrative or conceptual form, to the other, as someone I can engage in a dialogue and confrontation with, to the unity of thought, as logic, dialectic or coherency of speech.

6. What is philosophy ?

Now what is philosophy, if we cruelly and arbitrarily take away from it its pompous, frivolous and decorative costumes, what is left of its naked self once we daringly strip it from its a priori authoritative, overloaded and too serious self? I would propose the following formulation, which might sound as a sad and impoverished rehash of Hegel, but for one the usage of this thought operator will be the determining factor of its quality, and secondly let us not hesitate in actively plucking the peacock, no matter how ridiculous, fleshless and weak will seem the frail body of the animal. I will define philosophical activity as an activity of the self determined by three conditions: identification, criticism, and conceptualization. If we accept these three terms, at least in a temporary way, only in order to test its substance, let us see what this means and how it can imply and need otherness, in order to be or become a practical activity.

6. Identity

How can the I which I am can become conscious of itself unless faced with the other. I need the Thou to recognize the I. Just as much as I need the Thou to recognize the I. I need the pear to know the apple, because before being an apple, an apple is necessarily a not-pear. Just as a pear is before all a not-apple. If not, why would I bother naming it? A name, as proper name, is before all the recognizing of a different existence, although the common name is as well the recognizing of a community. To identify is therefore to know the difference, a difference which elaborates itself by comparing itself with others, others which I therefore have to know. The world, in all its forms, thus become the way to know myself, just like all entities which compose this world, knowledge rendered accessible by measuring and comparing these entities between themselves.

7. Criticism

If what is other, and myself, are objects of thinking in the defining of identity, they become subjects in the activity of criticism. In other words, to submit any given idea of mine to the the practice of criticism is to become other than myself. It is therefore to alienate or estrange me from myself, a distortion which explains the pain and difficulties felt in this activity, just like the ones of a gymnast imposing upon his body movements which are in a way unnatural to it, although in a second moment they can be considered to become natural. In the process of identifying, I think the other in order to think myself, in the process of criticism, I think through the other, I think as the other, as a mean for myself to think adequately. In order to engage this practice, I need him effectively, as a quasi-physical presence, to the extent I ignore him. For if I know him well enough, I can think through him by momentarily becoming his living image. This is were we connect to the first part: the identity. To the extent I know the world, I can think through the world in order to think myself, an activity which distinguishes itself from thinking the world through myself, since the first of these offer an indispensable self-reflexive quality the second one does not provide. But of course the possible drawback of this posture, typical of the bad student we often are, is that we get caught in the thinking of the other, which we make ours without confronting it to our own thinking. This is the source of opinion, as the mere repeating, conscious or unconscious, of the the other's speech, be it the professor, the television or the neighbor. To summarize this criticism, let us say it boils down to thinking the unthinkable, or pure otherness. But in order to fully do this, I will have to always remember that no matter how I giggle and dance, I will always be caught in my own pants, and never will I be able to fully spare the effective, unpredictable and alien presence of the the actual other, be it the world, a thing or any given being.

8. Concept

If identity is to think from the inside of myself and criticism is to think from the outside of myself, the concept is to think both simultaneously, from inside and outside of myself. Although this eminently dialectical perspective has to beware of holding itself all powerful and remain conscious that it will always be caught inside given premises, a site necessarily bounded by given limits and definitions. In other words, no matter how I will think the totality or the contradiction of perspectives, I will always think it from a

reduced, biased and reductionist perspective. Never will I be able to pretend holding the «eye of God» on any given reality. Although I can pretend gaining access to such a vision to the extent I can envisage the shallowness of my own perspective, a waiting attitude which allows me to be receptive to otherness and even profoundly desire it. A concept has therefore necessarily to adopt the form of a problematic enunciation, giving to the resolution more of an inquisitive and interrogative form than an affirmative one. This is maybe where we somewhat depart with Hegel to revert to Plato, since more than a definite synthesis of the momentary speech, this apparent conclusion leads us to aporetic and paradoxical articulations, opening the speech more than finishing it. Although in spite of this problematic nature, or thanks to it, it still is a more appropriate and efficient response or idea than the one we original had.

9. An exemple of practice : individual consultation

Over the years, I have tried to develop a number of exercizes, both inside and outside of the classroom, to put into practice the principles just described. Mutual questioning, where through a formal procedure participants are invited to question each other's hypotheses on a given theme ; text study, where we compare and confront different readings of a given text ; narration exercize, where the study of a question uses the telling of a story, real or ficticious. Along with some colleagues, we have created in french an international journal of philosophy, entirely dedicated to didactics, *Diotime l' Agora*, which publishes every trimester this kind or articles. But for now I will present a brief summary of the functioning of individual consultation, following the guidelines indicated.

Individual consultation

The basic principle of this exercize is for the counsellor to help someone workthrough a global interrogation, in order to give it some philosophical rigor. It starts either with a definite question brought by the subject (person coming for a consultation) or seized as it comes by the counsellor. Whatever the theme brought up, the subject will be asked to risk himself on a given proposition, answer or definition, in order that this particular formulation be submitted to an exercize of criticism. To do this, the counsellor will interrogate him, so that he precises his own thinking and become conscious of the implications and presuppositions of his speech. The key role of the counsellor is therefore to interrogate, but also to underline, to act as a mirror by sending back to the subject his own speech, especially when he notices some formulation loaded with unforeseen consequences or when he detects some possible contradictions between two affirmations of the subject.

In this part, the difficulty for the subject is to listen to himself and recognize what he is saying and envisage the unsaid of what he said. Very readily, many will deny their own words or say they have badly expressed themselves, rather than admit what they have in their mind and how it functions. This is why the counsellor has to be very attentive, in order to quote as much as possible the precise words of the subject, since in the most natural way the subject will try to escape the interrogation and the recognition of possible contradictions.

In a second moment, once the subject has identified some proposal which to him seems fundamental, he will be asked to engage in a criticism of it. «What is the best argument you can imagine which could be held against such a conception?» A strong resistance will be offered just to understand the exercize, a fortiori to actualize it. And

once the subject tries, he will quickly fall back on his own previous position, declaring himself incapable of leading this process all the way. Or he will give very weak proofs, which himself will declare very poor. It often takes a while and many different tries before he comes up with a decent argument, and at that point he is starting to really consider the position adverse to his. Thus he can actually start considering the stakes of his own thinking and conceptualize what until then was a mere opinion. Sometimes, this will even oblige him to change his mind on such or such a question.

In this exercise, the subject has to identify his thinking, and through the questioning lead an analogical path in order to identify the presupposition and unities of his own thinking, he has to get involved in a critical perspective, and conceptualize the paradoxical nature of the adequate formulation, in spite of the particular existential and intellectual choices that will be his. We find here the otherness of the world, as informations and opinions, rather than as narration, although sometimes an anecdote sets in, which will be analyzed. Then the otherness of the alter ego who acts as a mirror and an interrogator. And finally a strong emphasis on the otherness of coherency, since the counsellor constantly weighs words and expressions in order to confront them to words and expressions already used by the subject.

10. Conclusion : « in-betweenness »

The exercises which were presented here are a couple among a few, and on each basic pattern there can be many variations on the theme. Whatever the version used and the transformations accomplished, the basic principle maintain itself: a confrontation between the self, the world and the other, a tripartite operation that constitutes the heart of any practice. We know so many things we do not know how to use, we think so many thoughts we do not know what they are, we meet so many people of which we fail to see the interest. We speak so many speeches, which are there simply as the expressions of opinions, feelings, release, convictions and pretensions. Philosophy as a practice tries to make us identify the nature of those speeches, question their truth or legitimacy, teaching us this in-betweenness which is the substance and reality conditioning any given speech, confronting us in the widest and ruthless way to the complex field of being.

“THOUGHT WORK” AS PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE CLASSROOM

Drew Chastain

Introduction

Working as a teacher of college level introductory philosophy courses, I’ve used Thought Work as a project in place of a formal academic paper. I believe it’s been rather effective, and the students seem to genuinely get a lot out of it. Thought Work helps the student to think about her own issues in her own way. Thought Work can assist in thinking and working through various sorts of issues, relating to: Personal Accomplishment and Growth, Determining Beliefs or Reasons for Beliefs, Decision-Making, Social Relationships, and Traumas. But I believe the key to the success of Thought Work is that it encourages the student to come up, on her own, with specific and tangible ways of carrying out her thought, called *resources*. Suggested resources used for performing Thought Work include but are not limited to: Talking to other people (for example: friends, families, clergy, professionals), Engaging in thought provoking experiences, Entering into meditative or healthful practices, Keeping a journal, Creating expressive works, and Considering studies, theories and opinions.

The Thought Work process is as follows:

- (i) *First*, the student identifies a personally relevant issue, a direction for thought work;
- (ii) *Second*, the student decides upon intellectual, creative, interactive, experiential or other sorts of resources to aid in the thought work;
- (iii) *Third*, the student makes use of these resources;
- (iv) *Fourth*, the student assesses the usefulness of the resources;
- (v) *Fifth*, the student reassesses the direction of thought work. As an assignment, the student is first asked to hand in a proposal for a direction of thought work and resources, then later in the course submits a review describing the use of the resources and the significant reflections which came out of their use. I’ve found that students come up with thoughts ground-breaking for their own lives

while learning how to think more philosophically, i.e., more deeply, and with more focus and deliberation. Students also report a feeling of personal empowerment for being able to think and work through these issues on their own. All of this recommends Thought Work as a form of practical philosophy in the classroom, and as a form of student-directed philosophical counseling.

“Thought Work” as Practical Philosophy in the Classroom

David O’Donaghue and I together came up with the designation “Thought Work” in an effort to find an evocative phrasing that expresses something basic about philosophical counseling.^[1] I went on to use the name “Thought Work” for a project I developed for introductory level philosophy courses. The project is a sort of do-it-yourself philosophical counseling for students. In this article, I’ll talk about my experience with bringing philosophical counseling into the classroom, rendering the academic experience of philosophy more “practical.” I believe the Thought Work project is extremely effective in many ways, and students seem to genuinely get a lot out of it. In the spirit of the practical pursuit of philosophy, I’ll start with a fairly “nuts-and-bolts” account of how the project works, then address some basic questions at the end.

Coming right down to it, Thought Work can assist the student in thinking and working through various sorts of issues in her own way. Types of issues include but are not limited to:

- Personal Accomplishment and Growth
- Determining Beliefs or Reasons for Beliefs
- Decision-Making
- Social Relationships
- Traumas

But I believe the key to the success of Thought Work is that it encourages the student to develop, on her own, specific and tangible ways of carrying out her thought, called *resources*. Suggested resources for performing Thought Work include but are not limited to:

- Talking to other people (for example: friends, families, clergy, professionals)
- Engaging in thought provoking experiences
- Entering into meditative or healthful practices
- Keeping a journal
- Creating expressive works
- Considering studies, theories and opinions

I implement Thought Work in the classroom by breaking the project into two assignments: a Thought Work Proposal and a Thought Work Review. In the proposal, which is 3-5 double-spaced pages (900-1500 words), the student presents the direction of Thought Work she's chosen and the resources she's going to try out. I require use of at least three resources, each sufficiently different in kind, in order to diversify the student's approach to the Thought Work.^[2] The student should explain why it's important for her to pursue the direction of Thought Work proposed and how she believes the resources will be useful. The proposal will typically include autobiographical background to help convey the importance of the Thought Work direction and to ensure that the project will be personally significant. I highly recommend that instructors provide a worksheet to help students come up with a proposal.

Before talking about what's involved with the Thought Work Review which completes the project, it would be helpful to bring in an example, which I've put together as a generic form of Thought Work, drawn from no student in particular. I'll call the hypothetical student Pat. In the proposal, Pat says that he would like to know if he really has enough affection for his girlfriend to justify their continued long distance relationship, and would also like to think about how he can know if he is in love in the first place. Providing some background, he explains that he had been in a comfortable and fulfilling relationship with his girlfriend for almost two years in high school, but that things changed when the two of them enrolled in different colleges at opposite ends of the country. It's not that he has no feelings for his girlfriend, but he finds himself thinking about her less, and he's noticed that their daily phone calls are less energized than their interactions had been in high school. He's also noticed some interest in other girls on campus, but still isn't sure he'd be able to form as close a relationship with them as he had with his high school girlfriend. He wonders whether he should persevere through the long distance relationship until he can be with her again, or instead keep his life open to forming other intimate relationships.

After spending a page or so presenting the direction of his Thought Work and why he's chosen it, Pat goes directly into discussing his three proposed resources. He says that, first, he would like to talk to his sister, who graduated college a year ago and who also had a long distance relationship which she stuck with, which led to her marrying her high school sweetheart. He'd also like to find some articles on long distance relationships and on "knowing when you're in love," which he'll look for in the school library and online. He'll do this to see if he can find any illuminating discussions by professionals and by those who have been through it themselves. In thinking about this second resource, he happens across another intellectual question: what obligations does one have to someone one loves? He says he will also try to research and think about this if he gets a chance. His third resource is to let a friendly relationship that's been developing with a girl on campus turn into something a little more, and monitor his own feelings about it with journal entries. That satisfies the requirement of three resources significantly different in kind, but he says he might also schedule an appointment with a campus counselor and give his parents a call to talk to them about the situation.

If my semester schedule permits, I try to meet with all students for 15 minutes each after receiving the proposals. If the schedule doesn't permit, I only meet with those who need more assistance in finding an appropriate direction of Thought Work or

resources, while, for those whose proposal is already largely on target, I provide only a written response. Over three semesters of assigning this project, I've found that most students write a great proposal given only the original instruction sheet, a worksheet, and a 15-20 minute presentation in class explaining the project. In the introductory presentation delivered when I hand out the instructions and worksheet (usually in the first or second week of class), I typically explain less than what is included in this article. As for Pat, I would say he has a great proposal and would also suggest that, if he thinks he's ready, he attempt to talk to his girlfriend about his direction of Thought Work, but only if he's comfortable doing so.

In a typical 12-13 week course, I expect a proposal to be turned in by the fourth or fifth week, then give the students about six weeks to use the proposed resources and write a Thought Work Review. I like the review to be submitted a week or two before the last day of class so that I'll have plenty of time to hand the assignment back. I've found that a month is more than enough time for students to use most resources that would be proposed and to gain some significant perspectives on the direction of Thought Work.^[3] In the review, which is 6-8 pages, double-spaced (1800-2400 words), a page is spent restating the proposal, explaining any changes made to it. The student should spend 4-6 pages describing the experience of using the resources and the insights derived from their use. Finally, a closing paragraph or two should discuss what changes if any would be made to the project if the student were to attempt it again, and also what further Thought Work the student might perform if given the opportunity.

Returning to our hypothetical student Pat, the following are some imagined results I might expect from his work, though I've found that each student's review is largely unique and unpredictable, even if several students approach a similar general topic, like romantic relationships. The following imagined results are of course highly abbreviated to fit the space available for this article, but it should be kept in mind that a central strength of Thought Work is that the student can utilize it to reflect on personal issues in a fairly detailed manner. In talking to his sister on the phone, Pat is surprised first of all that she does not automatically assume he should stick with his relationship, even though that's what she did in her own relationship. His sister even encouraged him to meet with other girls, and gave a number of reasons why he should do things differently than she did in her life. Though surprised and excited by his sister's advice, Pat reports being a little disappointed at first with his sister's indefinite response to his more intellectual question of how to know when one is in love.

When he went on a "date" with a girl on campus, he battled with feelings of betrayal, but his sister advised him to anticipate these feelings and instead just look at what it is he likes or doesn't like about this girl, using judgment not so clouded by guilt feelings. With this advice, he was able to learn more than he would have from the experience. After doing some research in professional books and periodicals, Pat said it was enlightening that he was also unable to elicit from those learned discourses any definite way of knowing when one is in love. Based on what he read and was reflectively experiencing for himself, he decided on his own that readiness to commit in various ways to a relationship is a good sign that one is in love, but that there may be no more direct evidence than that. He concludes that the decision whether he should stick to a relationship with his high school girlfriend can't be made right away, and that, given the uncertainty of the future, he shouldn't feel guilty about exploring other options. He also expressed very articulately a sense of control over his own romantic

destiny which he had never felt the likes of before, and was amazed to discover that this sense of control originated simply from his own ability to experience and reflect.

Very briefly, I'll consider some basic questions about Thought Work.

Question: Can we say that Pat really came to the right conclusions or best conclusions?

Reply: To respond indirectly, most students come out of a Thought Work project with the sense that questions are never wrapped up once and for all, and from this they learn to remain vigilant about one's life questions. I should say, though, that I've been extremely impressed with how deep and authentic most Thought Work Reviews are.

Question: Are Pat's discoveries and conclusions innovative?

Reply: Perhaps Pat's thoughts are not new thoughts, but what's new is that Pat sees clearly how the thoughts relate closely to his own life. If not innovative, Pat, like most students, certainly can be credited with arriving at many thoughts on his own.

Question: How does one evaluate Pat's Thought Work, if it is to be a graded assignment?

Reply: I grade on three bases: following instructions, clarity of expression, and authenticity. Most students take to Thought Work so well that they are able to pursue the Thought Work earnestly and with amazing clarity. I've also found that students write much more clearly about difficult thought processes than I had come to expect from introductory philosophy students writing a typical academic paper. I divide A students from B students based mainly on clarity and following instructions, and I occasionally reward less than a B. Because of this, Thought Work becomes an "easy" part of the course, but at the same time a great deal is learned from it. To prevent the course from being too easy overall, I don't count the Thought Work Project as more than 25% of the course grade. I've also found that there is little need to provide commentary on the Thought Work Review, because by that time the student already has a good sense of how valuable her insights are and for what reasons, making my remarks a bit superfluous. So, there is no need to become some great guru before one is able to assign Thought Work.

Question: Is Thought Work really counseling?

Response: The way the project is set up, students figure out a lot on their own, or by consulting persons or documents they choose, using a process already in place. A decently perceptive teacher can help guide the student in choosing direction and resources, but much of the benefit of Thought Work derives from self-direction. If a counseling situation is understood as a space in which the querent is able to open up to advice and personal growth, Thought Work most definitely provides this space. In fact, in their reviews, many students report how exciting experiences and interactions become in the space of Thought Work, which transforms all encounters into an opportunity for advice, new perspective, and self growth. It might be said that Thought Work can't be a form of counseling if it lacks a traditional primary counselor, but it may be more accurate to say that Thought Work provides a space for an indefinite number of

counselors and counseling situations. The clear formulation of a thought work direction and the establishment of a definite plan of reflective action makes this ongoing revelatory experience possible. Of course, the process used in Thought Work could conceivably make more use of a primary external guide or helper, and could also be used outside of the classroom.

Question: What if a student brings up an issue that may require more serious attention than the instructor is prepared to give it?

Response: Not being a certified counselor myself, I established a relationship with the campus counseling center based on this concern. Any students who seems to require closer professional attention can be referred to the counseling center, and, after writing a proposal for Thought Work, the student will likely be more open to the idea. The campus counselors, typically psychologists, were happy to hear that I had developed such a project. Incidentally, I have yet to feel that a student required a strong referral, though students often tackle difficult personal matters.

Question: Is Pat's Thought Work really philosophical?

Response: In this project, I shy away from asking students to "apply" philosophical or other style theories to their own situation, which I've found to be less successful in encouraging the student to think for herself (though some students do opt to consider this or that philosophical view as a resource). Interpreting, critically assessing and applying philosophical belief systems are extremely important philosophical skills, but the development of these skills is not the main point of this project. Thought Work is not philosophy in this sense, but it most certainly is encouragement to reflect with more focus and deliberation, which is how the great philosophers developed their belief systems in the first place. As distinct from critical thinking, *deep thinking* on a personal issue is the philosophical skill developed through Thought Work, the sort of thinking required to meet the philosophical demand to "know thyself." By design, Thought Work isn't "armchair" philosophy, because students are expected to use resources which propel them into new experiences, interpersonal interactions, or creative enterprises. For those students who are discouraged by the task of reading obscure or highly analytical texts, the Thought Work project helps to adjust the beginner to a more comfortably philosophical state of mind, which then gives the student steadier footing in approaching more critical tasks. In all of these ways, philosophy is made much more practical by Thought Work.

[1] O'Donaghue and I both find the phrasing valuable, but I take full responsibility for any further ideas about Thought Work and my use of it discussed in this article.

[2] I divide resources into four basic kinds: (i) interactive, or interactions with other people; (ii) experiential, or experiences designed to inspire reflection; (iii) creative, or projects like performances, writings, paintings, etc.; and (iv) intellectual, involving more typical academic research. In my instructions for the project, I warn against making too heavy use of intellectual resources, because the personal direction of the project may tempt students into overly subjective assessment of philosophical systems, which makes for poor philosophy, whether critical or practical. Assessment of theory

may be an important part of a particular project, but more important is integrating this assessment with the personally relevant direction of thought work.

[3] I've also used a Thought Work Project in a six week Ethics course for non-traditional adult students, with great results.

TEACHING APHORISMS: AN ACADEMIC LABORATORY OF
PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE.

Ioannis S. Christodoulou

It is well-known that in the text between 342d4 and 343c3 of the *Protagoras* Plato stresses that the laconic brevity of philosophical speech is extremely advantageous in philosophy and education. That is the way in which the “old men of philosophy”, that is to say, the Seven Sages, philosophised. Their speech was both apophthegmatic and aphoristic.

That is the case with the beginning of philosophical thought, at least as it is posited in *Protagoras*. But what is this beginning all about? My opinion is that this is not only the historical beginning of philosophical thought, which finds, let's say, its fulfilment en route. I believe that the aphorism is a characteristic form of philosophical thought itself. In fact, I conjecture that philosophy is primarily aphoristic, not only in the cases where philosophical thought preserves its aphoristic forms, but indeed in every case, even when we have to do with long philosophical texts, which have big philosophical systems, and even when we have a first conception or a first principle which is to become a philosophical system.

Moreover, philosophical thought which is in the form of an aphorism, is, I believe, a kind of philosophical principle which has, first of all, an aesthetic dimension, and it is conditioned directly by the words that are used, and by the way in which they are used. What I hypothesise is that that dimension, of the aesthetics of philosophical thought, determines, in a crucial way, the philosophy itself. If that is true, what could be the nature of such aesthetics in a philosophical text? What elements could it consist of?

In order to give some answers to these questions, I'm going to refer, first of all, to Konstantinos Tsatsos (1899 - 1987), a Greek philosopher, a Professor of the Philosophy of Right and a very capable writer of aphorisms, who is also a former President of the Hellenic Republic. Tsatsos believes, that with regard to aphorisms, there are three important elements which need to be mentioned. [1] First of all, he presupposes that, behind an aphorism, behind this peculiar kind of expression, a peculiar kind of thought is found. [2] Secondly, he stresses that aphorisms are little phrases, short sayings, which are full of meaning even though they may look inadequate when compared to big philosophical texts and systems. Moreover, aphorisms stand by themselves and open up wide horizons. Finally, these thoughts leave their readers surprised and they make them think. [3]

Concerning the first of the three parts of Tsatsos' definition of aphorisms, I have an objection. I think that the thought which “produces” an aphorism is a philosophical one and is the same as the thought which produces a principle which unfolds into a big philosophical system. From this point of view, I do not agree with the idea that the thought in an aphorism is not a philosophical thought, nor that it is a philosophical thought but different from the philosophical thought which produces bigger texts. Nevertheless, I fully agree with the other two parts of Tsatsos' definition. Indeed, aphoristic thought is autonomous in its brevity, and becomes productive when, in this particular form, it leaves a strong impression on the mind of its hearer or reader.

Those who have contributed most to research into the nature of philosophical thought, in the form of aphorisms, are some French moralists who have written a lot of aphorisms. La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère, Vauvenargues and Pascal have written some interesting thoughts concerning the way a philosopher thinks when he writes aphorisms and not only aphorisms. Thus, in Pascal's (1620 - 1662) “Thoughts” we find a crucial remark regarding the order of thoughts, according to which, philosophical thought must begin with itself, with the person who philosophises and with his or her purpose. Seen from this point of view, philosophical thought is differentiated from common thought, which is the thought of those who imagine a lot of things without thinking what exactly the one or the other thing is, or, for example, what it is to be a human being. [4]

According to Pascal, the order of thoughts is the necessary pre-condition for the development of sound reasoning. But this is not a presupposition which definitely leads to the discovery of a thought, or to the construction of its content. Discoveries in the area of thought are not, a priori, determined. They are germinated in secret. Thus, the philosophical idea is uncovered suddenly, exactly like an artistic inspiration, without any principles or rules of an “art of thought” being presupposed. Certainly, there is no certain way of acquiring or preserving an idea. The “coming” as well as the “slipping away” of an idea are accidental. From this point of view, according to Pascal, it is important to write down a thought which has been produced, but also to indicate that it has escaped, in cases when that has occurred. [5] What it is also important to stress here is that the development of the thought is based on a principle. So, according to Pascal, just as a seed becomes productive, when it is sown in fertile ground, so does a principle become productive when found in a good mind. [6] This is most important from the point of view of philosophical counselling also.

In addition, the remarks of Vauvenargues (1715 - 1747) are equally important. According to him, the philosopher looks for an unknown truth, which nevertheless exists eternally, and strives to combine it with another truth in order to construct a principle. Vauvenargues believes that this is the way to produce the most important works of philosophy and imagination. [7] The power of thought is combined directly with simplicity of expression. Only a very weak thought cannot be expressed by a simple expression. [8]

Also, according to La Bruyère (1645 - 1696), such a simple expression is unique and powerful. Any other expression, even though there are a lot of them which seem to express the same thought, sounds weak in comparison with the first one. [9] The purpose of the philosopher is to reveal the truth about human life and human passions. In order to achieve that purpose, the philosopher consumes his whole life. And when he tries to express his thoughts properly, he does not do so in order to satisfy his own vanity, but in order to reveal the truth he has found, and create in the mind of his readers the impression he desires. [10]

Finally, La Rochefoucauld (1613 - 1680) thinks that great minds can say a lot of things in a few words. On the other hand, small minds say a lot of things without saying anything at all. [11] According to La Rochefoucauld, penetration of the spirit and clarity of perception are not the result of exercise or education. Thanks to some kinds of intuition, some things are present in our minds very clearly, but, if it weren't for that intuition, they would never have been so clear, even though we might try very hard. This subtle feeling is a kind of special capacity which also has to do with the health of our soul. [12] Thus we could say that wisdom is to our soul what health is to our body. [13]

Now when I teach philosophical ideas expressed in the form of aphorisms, I feel that the first sentiment most of my students come up with is the sentiment of wonder, to a lesser or greater degree. In the first place, some of them feel as though what they hear they could easily have said themselves, but at the same time, they also feel it is difficult to say something like the aphorism they hear with such ease. So, they expect to hear something more. Others, with another kind of temperament, wonder whether to reject the idea they hear. But there are also some students who already have a place ready for the aphorisms they hear. Clearly, there are three stands which a typical audience of philosophical aphorisms can take. The first is a stand of doubt, the second is a stand of readiness to deny, and the third is a stand of readiness to approve. All three of these stands in the audience have to be considered seriously by the teacher.

First of all, I have to bear in mind that the most difficult section of the audience are those who are ready to reject the aphorism, because they can't tolerate the fact that someone has said something for the purpose of its being accepted without doubt by all those who read or hear this aphorism. From this point of view, the teacher sometimes has the feeling that those students reject him, although the only thing he wants is to convince them that the aphorisms he teaches are at least worth considering. That's why his attitude towards "his own aphorisms", I mean the aphorisms he chooses to teach, because his choice is not casual at all, must, in the first instance, be as strict and non-sentimental as possible.

The teacher also has to remember, that he must keep the interest of the students, who are ready to be impressed by his lessons, alive. So, he must show from the beginning that he believes he is teaching something important, but, in the first place, not from the point of view of its practical effects, but from the point of view of the importance "his" aphorisms have as pieces of philosophical thought. He must stress that it is not easy for a thought to be expressed like this, but also that behind this thought there is a serious amount of experience as well as dialectic reasoning.

So, I must present an aphorism as a scientist, as a surgeon who wants to see the way the "organs" of that aphorism work. I must convince all my students that we will learn together if something goes wrong with the aphorism. Thus, I unfold step by step the secret meaning of the aphorism, which may still remain secret in the end, but that is not a problem. First of all I indicate the main word(s) and the main meaning of the aphorism. That will keep the interest of all the students alive, because all of them are going to follow a strict dialectical process, and all this without having to bear in mind that they have to be convinced about matters in their lives. This is most helpful with regard to those who maintain a negative stand, the reason for this being that they forget to deny or reject so long as they become engaged in the process of thinking dialectically. And those who do not need to be convinced will have their positive attitude towards the aphorisms in question reinforced.

So, our aim should be to transfer the aphorisms, which means transporting the philosophical axioms we teach, as deep into the mind of our students as we can, not because we believe that they must live with every aphorism we teach, but because we are sure that there is a point in our students' learning to think in a philosophical way, and, as I said earlier, I believe that, in the first place, philosophy expresses itself aphoristically, even though later it takes the form of a strict dialectic philosophical process. If we manage to achieve this, then the students will have the opportunity to see if the aphorism fits into their lives. The point here is that, gradually, the philosophical axioms become autonomous in the minds of the students, and they form a steady point of departure for every relevant thought the students are going to make in the future. They may confirm the philosophical axioms they have heard or they may reject them. In any case, they will already have formed a basis for thought, instead of being confused.

Now, from the point of view of philosophical practice, there is a complete correspondence between the teaching of aphorisms and philosophical counselling, as long as the philosopher - counselor, in order to communicate with those who ask for his advice, does as much as the teacher of aphorisms does, in order to communicate with his students. So, a philosopher - counselor always encounters people who have conscious or unconscious prejudices regarding the procedure of counseling or regarding philosophy itself, even though they themselves have chosen to visit the counselor. They may seem to be those students who have a negative disposition towards the axioms we present to them. But we meet some others, too, who have an a priori positive disposition towards hearing what the counselor has to propose to them, and they seem to be the students who have a need to be impressed by philosophical thought. In both of these cases, the counselor must be presented, in the first place, as a scientist of reason and not as a prophet.[14] I think this is a crucial presupposition for a climate of psychological balance which must be established in relation to those who seek the philosopher's advice, without even knowing, in the first place, what a philosopher really is.

Perhaps this sounds like a contradiction of the method of Socrates, but this is not the case. Socrates himself talks from the point of view of a man who knows, at least, what is false. Even though he pretends that he doesn't know anything at all, he is sure about what is not morally right. Furthermore, it is not difficult for the philosopher - readers of the platonic dialogues to see exactly what the moral attitude of Socrates was. Even though he is not a typical moralist and he does not pretend to have the authority to give concrete advice about matters of moral order, we cannot have any doubt about his moral standards.

Nevertheless, I do not think that the Socratic method is a full method of philosophical teaching or philosophical consultation. Socrates' method must be only a part of the procedure of teaching philosophical theories or providing philosophical consultation using philosophical axioms. What I mean is that the philosopher - teacher and the philosopher - counselor have to be very careful about the impression they give when deliberating about what is true and what is false, and in any case we have to bear in mind that our students and the people who seek our philosophical advice are expecting to learn from us something that they do not know, and they want to see if we really have an idea that could prove useful to them when dealing with their problems. [15] From this point of view, we have to be sure ourselves about our profession and about the value of the principles we teach or use in our philosophical counselling. Furthermore, we must test our capacity to make our students sure about the truthfulness

of the principles they learn, at the end of our lesson or our conversation. That was also one of Socrates' aims.

So, the philosopher - teacher of aphorisms and the philosopher - counselor are equally responsible for the choice of the philosophical axioms they use.[16] If their choice is right then they will convince their listeners that the philosophical principles they hear are something different and much better than the casual thoughts they form themselves. From this point of view, I do think that philosophical teaching of aphorisms as well as philosophical counselling are two procedures of the same rank. Nevertheless, in philosophical counselling, the one who determines the kind of aphorisms we are going to use is the man or the woman who visits us in order to find out what their problem really is. Our task is to find the proper aphorism in order to form a basis for our conversation with our client. In a sense, the aphorisms here play the role of medicines. That reminds us of Plato's *Protagoras*. In *Protagoras*, Socrates tells a young man that the health of his soul depends on the lessons he takes.

In this paper, I tried to show that philosophical practice may profit a lot from the study of philosophical teaching. I think that the philosophical teaching of aphorisms is very close to philosophical counselling, because, as we showed, a philosopher - teacher of aphorisms and a philosopher - counsellor face similar challenges and they may use similar techniques.[17] So, I thought it useful to refer to the main characteristics of philosophical aphorisms. Furthermore, from the beginning of my paper, I have argued that philosophical inspiration, whatever the dialectical development of philosophical thought might be, produces aphoristic ideas, and the best way to understand this very nature of philosophical thought is to study philosophical aphorisms. But this hypothesis constitutes work in progress, and I have to work further on it, for the sake of philosophical teaching and philosophical practice.

References - notes

1. See the foreword of the second volume of Tsatsos' "Aphorisms and Thoughts", Estia, Athens, 1991.
2. Tsatsos refers to this peculiarity of aphoristic thought mainly in the first chapter of the second volume of his "Aphorisms and Thoughts".
3. See K. Tsatsos, *Aphorisms and Thoughts*, 2, op. cit., p. 9.
4. See Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, Garnier Flammarion, Paris, 1976, fr. 146, p. 92.
5. See Pascal, *Pensées*, op. cit., fr. 370, p. 153.
6. See Pascal, *Pensées*, op. cit., fr. 119, p. 84.
7. See Vauvenargues, *Maximes*, Librairie Larousse, Paris, 1937, p. 55.
8. See Vauvenargues, *Maximes*, op. cit., p. 13.
9. La Bruyère, *Les Caractères* 1, Librairie Larousse, Paris, 1934, p. 13.
10. La Bruyère, *Les Caractères*, op. cit., p. 16.
11. La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes*, Paris, Garnier Flammarion, 1977, max. 142, p. 57.
12. La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes*, op. cit., max. 67, p. 51.
13. La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes*, op. cit., max. 42, p. 105.
14. From this point of view, I disagree with Shlomit C. Schuster, according to whom "in philosophical counseling empathetic understanding replaces the scientific method of

diagnosing people's hardships and questions.” See Shlomit C. Schuster, “What do I mean when I say Philosophical Counseling”, *Perspectives in Philosophical Practice*, Doorwerth, Vereniging Filosofische Praktijk, 1977, p. 21. In my opinion, a philosopher always has in mind some theories, as solid grounds for interpretation.

15. Regarding this subject, Shlomit C. Schuster makes an interesting reference to an article of Seymon Hersh entitled “The Counseling Philosopher” (1980). Moreover he states that Hersh proposes a type of counseling which somewhat resembles Achenbach's idea of philosophical counseling. According to Schuster “Hersh compares the counseling philosopher to a coach and a field-engineer. He found that his clients did not view themselves as sick people, or neurotics in search of a cure or of consultation, but rather as “intelligent investors” who want to get increasingly greater returns on their investment in living.” See Shlomit C. Schuster, “What do I mean when I say Philosophical Counseling”, op. cit., p. 20.

16. Tim Le Bon argues that “the extent to which philosophical counsellors use the history of philosophy to provide answers varies between counsellors... But just as a philosophical discussion should not end with citing Aristotle, neither should a philosophical counselling session.” See Tim Le Bon, “What is philosophical about philosophical counselling”, <http://members.aol.com/timlebon/philcouns.htm#press>. I agree with him but I also believe that we have to give serious thought to the role that the use of the history of philosophy plays in the procedure of philosophical counselling. For the time being, I can only say that it is a matter of principle whether or not to use ideas from the history of philosophy. I will deal with this subject at greater length in the future.

17. See, also, Warren Shibles, “Philosophical Counseling, Philosophical Education and Emotion”, *International Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 12:1, 1998.



«RENÉ DESCARTES, PHILOSOPHICAL
COUNSELLOR OF ELISABETH»

Jorge Humberto Dias

CONSULTING DESCARTES

The Letters of Elisabeth

Preface

I will begin this paper with a commentary of Alfredo Diniz about the actuality of Descartes, saying that is justifying it by the similarity (huge) between the cultural context of the French philosopher and our time. Descartes was born in 1596, when a cultural change is happening, and which has marked the origin of modernity^[1], in a very uncertain world, with a great confusion – this is the analysis of Alexandre Koyré, too.

The critics of the past have destroyed everything and nothing new was done. So, without his traditional norms of judgment and decision, man feels lost. And doubt is installed. Seeing the French philosopher as a peregrine of truth, I think we could consider Descartes as a contemporary philosophical counsellor. The case of Elisabeth will be a proof. The same has happened with some of my clients.

Rafael Alvira establishes the difference between Socratic method and Cartesian method. Socrates applied his method to ethics. “Descartes is secure (sure) about the method, with his application to the medicine, which permit dominate the objective nature, and make him free.”^[2] The ulterior reflection of this author is about *philosophical practice*: “For Socrates, love is who opens the memory and gives him the key to interiority; for Descartes, freedom is who opens the creativity and gives him the key of dominium.”^[3]

Otherwise, Luis Araújo refers the fundament of the Cartesian ethics: “the progressive dominium of the human and rational autonomy oriented to an ideal of perfection, based on prudence, wisdom and generosity.”^[4]

In my practical work with clients, I think, with Luis Araújo, that Descartes has an ethical thought, with a great pragmatic character which called provisional moral. In the *Les Principes de la Philosophie*, Descartes said that is necessary make decisions, to cross conflicts, to do a personal effort to be a moral person.[5]

1. Philosophizing by Regular Mail

I consider that the letters are not less important philosophical documents; they are the only way that we have to access to the global thought of any author. The letters, not only in Descartes, but also in Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, in Heidegger, etc., show us the clarity of the thought, where we can see some obvious answers and some direct references. In the formal works of the philosopher, I think we could not see so easily the practical role of some topics and issues. So, the letter is the place where thought and life interact. In these letters, is revealed the concrete man of Descartes, living in a space and habiting one body. The interiority, subjectivity and the frontal character are very clear in this correspondence. And these elements are very precious to the reader, so we can entry in the systematic thought of the philosopher.

My inspiration for this paper was found in another article. Luis Machado de Abreu, from University of Aveiro, writes about *As Paixões Racionalistas de Descartes e Espinosa*, and referes this important orientation to my article: “*The introduction of the topic of the passion gives to any philosophical system a note of intervene to some chaotic realities, irrationals. When the system wants to realize with method, a rational reading, complete, about the universe of the human experience, it is much more disturbing the intellectual challenge represented by the phenomenology of the passion and with the wish of finding a proper logic.*”[6]

Isaiah Berlin in his work *Introduction to Philosophy* says that the great philosophies talk to everybody, and the stranger mode and difficulties of the people, are in the technical language and closed words of them.[7] I think that the correspondence between philosophers and non-specialists constitute a very good opportunity to prove that idea.

The letters between Descartes and Princess Elisabeth, are a opened way to a very actual reflection: and a marked one: the role of the women as an interlocutor. And it is La Bruyère who writes some words about this feminine vocation, when she considers the woman as very good correspondents.[8]

2. Feminine Philosophizing

I have my all body with some of the great weakness of my sex, which feels it very easely in the afflictions of my soul... [Elisabeth to Descartes, May 24, 1645]

I refer two women who have produced a lot in philosophy: Mary Warnock[9] and Geneviève Lloyd[10]. To the first one, the women do philosophy, but she doesn't believe in a specific feminine philosophy. Warnock characterizes the requirements of a philosophical thought: rationality, capacity to generalize, argumentative character and abstract grade. Different is the position of Lloyd, she considers that occidental reason

was made very masculine, and with that it looks for another way of thought the real, not only the rationality, but the imagination and the affectivity. That's the true: the worldviews with not reason work, they has been identified as feminine perspectives.

I consider that it is possible to find in the letters of Elisabeth some “constants” that may characterize her as women: the concrete way of thought. I think that all the issues are referenced to a being which defines itself as women. She assumes her body in its particularity and differences. To the abstract being identified by the thought (Descartes), she opposes (Elisabeth), the concrete being which is very afflictive with the pain of the body. The disturbance that Elisabeth refers, but support, forward us to a dialectic thought/live, to a thought that emerges from the daily life. “*Since I write this letter I was interrupted more than seven times by uncomfortable visits...*”^[11]

I think it is very clear, when we read the letters that Elisabeth has the habit of following the method, to thinking rationally, to argument with agility and efficacy, to be rigorous in the intellectual course, to conceptualizing and theorizing. Talking with Descartes about the body, she forces the philosopher being cartesian and accepting the body, because the Princess refuses his statute of machine.

Based on his intimate experience of his body, in the vividness of his proper-body, “*which be so disturbed, that I need some months to put him well again*”^[12], it interests her to know the role it has in the passions of the soul.

3. A melancholic Princess

Elisabeth is an erring Princess, in spite of her material and social tranquillity. She leaves Prague with two years old and stay in some countries. The correspondence with Descartes was in a period of politic agitation, which will be revealed in her personal life.

Her close relatives caused her some problems. The ups and downs of her brothers bring her some physique and psychic unbalance, a discomfort and put in her body some physical signs as fevers, disturbs and other sufferings which she complaints to Descartes.

The responsibilities of the Court, as refers in the letter of June 20, 1643, aggravate the melancholic tendency of a depressive temperament. Distrusting in the doctors, Elisabeth will trust in Descartes to help her solving her problems. Besides the moral dilemmas and anthropological problems, the letters will design, one by one, an authentic treatise of philosophical counseling.

But which is the complaint of the Princess?

In the first letters, Elisabeth refers that she has a weak spirit, referring her stupidity and deficient reasoning,^[13] the ignorance and imprudence.^[14] Descartes set oppose and eulogy the physical and spiritual beauty of the Princess.

There is a break on the correspondence between August 1644 and May 1645. They retake the topic of the disease, assuming Descartes the role of philosophical counsellor,^[15] referring to the role of the passions in the origin of some corporeal

sufferings. The counsel of Descartes is philosophical: try to satisfy the soul, besides the troubles of the fortune. Besides recognizing the difficulties of his counsel, Descartes believes in the capacity of the Princess, with his great spirit, of dominating the passion through the reasoning.

In the letter of June 22, we have a reference to the melancholia, which is aggravated with the obstacles of life. Here too, the counsels of Descartes follow the same rule: treating the body, distracting the mind.

Elisabeth recognizes her improvements, accepting that are the results of the philosophical counselling, but the efficacy of the method is under doubt always she has a difficulty: the caring to of her family – a worry which follows her – destroys a weak balance, obtained with very control of herself.

In a letter of November 30, 1645, Elisabeth refers to the madness of his brother as one of the worst incident of his life, and which brings her very unhappiness. “*I have all the difficulties of the world to live me from the hands of the doctors, to do not pay for those ignorance*” – say Descartes in a letter of November 29, 1646. Elisabeth continues her complaints: the abscess in February 21 of 1647, the inflame in June 30 of 1648.

The philosophical counselling is a reality in this correspondence, where the philosophical dialogue is a very good way to make some changes in the thought of the Princess. But the most interesting are the changes of the counsellor too. We will see this later.

On the 28th June of 1643, Descartes counsels Elisabeth to relax the spirit and to rest the sense by moderating the studies. Elisabeth is attracted by the debate of ideas. Descartes refers that he only study Metaphysics a few hours by year, because is too hard for the bodily brain.

After counselling the Princess to read Séneca, and she did not like, the dialogue takes the direction of the Ethics, as it understands Descartes in his *Passions of the Soul*.[\[16\]](#)

It is the difficulties of the thought of Descartes that contribute to the Princess forget his problems, giving to her some spiritual tranquillity and giving peace to his bodily suffering. The big question is right here: the medicaments don't have the power to help the princess putting an end to her melancholia, and the princess only feels good when studying philosophy.

4. By the hand of Elisabeth: Another Descartes

But one critic was made by Jean-Marie Beyssade: Descartes has lucky with the correspondent which did not made any trick.[\[17\]](#) To this author, the objective of the princess was carrying Descartes to his revelation, and that Elisabeth utilized some strategies to affect Descartes. So, in this sense, the letters end with a very natural appeasement.

In a letter of May or June of 1645, Descartes refers his mother and it presented to us some details of a Descartes very weak at his birth, marked by the disease of his mother and by the diagnostic of a premature death. Thus, we understand better why Descartes

has dedicated so strongly to the topic of the health. In September 1 of 1645, Descartes reveals his fear of the unbalance of the body.

In September of 1646 we know that Descartes gives a saint statute to the friendship and that value the respect for the compromises, the dignity, the privacy and the firmness.

These letters don't permit us to classify the moral of Descartes like provisional. But show us a hedonist dimension, biological and with some voluntarism. Fit to the will maintain the health, find the happiness and manage with responsibility all the passions.

On the 15th September, Descartes list the concepts which permit to the man to fortify the understanding and to aging correctly. Elisabeth, with her doubts, carries Descartes to show his humanism and his pedagogy of the passions.

Maria do Céu Patrão Neves in her article *O «Homem Verdadeiro», Segundo Descartes*, analyze two aspects of the unity of man: the sensible data and the capacity of error. “The sensibility, in particular, the affectivity, which is caused in the soul by the body, and the capacity of error, which is caused by the imperfection of man, because he has a body, they reveal the co-existence of body and soul in man.”[\[18\]](#)

In the *IV Meditation*, Descartes said the origin of the error is in the limitation of the human understanding, when facing will and freedom. So, in the *Les Passions de l'Âme*, Descartes assumed the moral implications of human freedom as a real, practical and philosophical question to think about. And in this sense, Moral is wisdom of the concrete man, which possession realizes man as a «true man».

5. The counsel of the Philosopher: To take care and to cogitate

First of all, we could not forget what Maria José Cantista said in her article: *O cogito de Descartes na gênese do pensar transcendental. Evidência cartesiana e vivência fenomenológica*: “The ego cogito of Descartes was one of the most important inspirations to the philosophy of the transcendental consciousness, when this one has been transformed in perceptive consciousness, as existence or co-existence in Merleau-Ponty or as *in-der-welt-sein* in Heidegger.”[\[19\]](#) In this sense, the cogito is temporality, meaning, bodily vividness, affectivity, love to happiness[\[20\]](#) – with this proceeds, Merleau-Ponty finishes the *Phenomenologie de la Perception* with Saint Exupery:

Your son is imprisoned in a fire, you will save him... If there is an obstacle, you will sell your hand for a help. You live in your act. Your act is you... You will be transformed... This is your duty, your anger, your love, your fidelity, your invention... Men is just a bow of relations, only relations count to man.[\[21\]](#)

Although, Joaquim Cerqueira Gonçalves, in his article *A Obra cartesiana e as hodiernas questões ecológicas*, considered the reflection of Descartes as very actual, especially, because he doesn't start from a world already done, but from an infinite horizon of possibilities.[\[22\]](#) This justifies why Descartes was interested in scientific and technical progress, especially in a sort of “medicine of the soul”, that we call: Philosophical Counselling.

Cogitare, a latin word. It is very interesting how the etymology is so common to both words which we refer the medical act and the philosophical thought. In the *Dialogues of Love*,^[23] Leão Hebreu, with a neoplatonic anthropology, the cogitation is in all the semantic. With an hierarchy: body-soul-intellect, the cogitation is an union from the soul with the intellect. Some commentators agree with this position: a confused thought because of the double concern between the body and the soul.^[24]

The health is an important objective of the cogitation. In the order of the good values, Leão Hebreu distinguishes: useful, agreeable, and honest. The first ones constitute the moral regulated by the principle of the mean-just; the last one is in the spirituality, which the proper *ethos* is an excess.

The health has a relation with these three goods, because it goes toward the all man while an integrative unity. Health is the fundament of all other “goods”, we could have in this life,^[25] and which conservation Descartes promote with his studies.^[26] Descartes takes care and cogitate, in which the same act recover both operations. Galeno has already said: *the perfect philosopher is doctor too*.^[27]

As it will be seen, the case of Elisabeth appeals to a “new medicine”, which implicates a renovation of the Cartesianism. To help the Princess, Descartes has to leave the exact sciences and to use the philosophical counselling in the soul of Elisabeth. Here we have a personal method, dealing with some concepts, values, thought experiments and beliefs, using the critical thinking and some counselling skills, using only some communication skills, because all of the sessions were by regular mail.

Descartes and Elisabeth related each other in 1642 (eight years before Descartes’s death. Elisabeth died in 1680), one year after the publication of the *Meditations*. Descartes was writing the *Principes de la Philosophie*. Elisabeth, with 24 years old, is interested in the very had questions of philosophy, finding an orientation, to get a cure on her scepticism.

Descartes decided to have a personal relation, through Pollot^[28], a common friend. They became friends. And the correct questions of Elisabeth, promote a reformulation of the thought of Descartes.

In the first letter, Elisabeth considers Descartes as the “best doctor of her soul”. Again, we have here the philosophy as a therapy of the soul, like it happens with Socrates. Doing so, Descartes was a Philosophical Counsellor, who has treated the vulnerability of Elisabeth to the scepticism^[29], and who regenerate and fortify her mind with intelligible principles and who treated too her affections of the body. Moral and counselling approach each other in the work of Descartes: here is the beginning of Descartes as Philosophical Counsellor.

In the preface, dedicated to Picot, in the *Principia*, it puts the Physique as the common trunk. In this article, as I said, I could not agree with this, because I think the way is more the human counselling, dealing with spiritual values and passions...

6. The dense enigma: the paradoxical nature of man

In the *Traité de l'Homme*, from 1633, Descartes has the guide of mechanics. The question is if that is a correct approach to develop the philosophical help that Elisabeth needs or if he requires a new point of view.

The controversy with Regius increases in two letters, one of December of 1641 and another of January of 1642. To Regius, the man is an accidental being without true reality, affirming an anthropological dualism. Descartes criticizes Regius, affirming the substantiality of the composite body and soul, because those real union.

Later, Regius develops his system to a monist thesis, saying that soul is a simple mode of being body, without proper reality. Descartes signs the difference with Regius.

For Descartes, the only way to conceive the union is considerer the soul as material.[\[30\]](#) And it was the way of Regius: the material reductionism, as a coherent and rational solution to explicate the human composite.

In the first letter, Elisabeth asked to Descartes: how the soul, being a simple intellectual substance, could determinate the spirits in the body doing voluntary actions? The answer of Descartes takes us to the principle of the union, which gains the statute of primitive notion, irreducible of any other.

In the end of the life, Descartes, in a letter to the neoplatonic Morus, considers a functional dualism in the soul, to which correspond distinct principles: a corporeal soul and an intellective soul. The Philosophical Counselling and Practice exercised by the philosopher in the treatment of Elisabeth send us, I think, to this new Anthropology.

José Carrascoso in his article about *Subjectividad racional y “cogito” cartesiano*, said that we recognize a finality in the human action and a behavioral dimension in the perception. So, the subject doesn't live in the immanence of an ideal consciousness. There is a great relation between the ideas of subjectivity, perception, feeling and finality.[\[31\]](#) For José Carrascoso, the feeling is a psychic function, which requires the efficacy of the intelligence. So, subject has a centrifugal dimension and operator intentionality. The same said Merleau-Ponty.[\[32\]](#)

Otherwise, the study of affectivity, takes Descartes to Moral – says Maria do Céu Patrão Neves. In the moral point of view, the question of passions is in the equilibrium between spontaneous movements and voluntary movements (actions): ones could take us to error, but are important to survivor; the others are a great contribute to the good use of passions (without repress them). The natural perspective of Descartes says that we have to accept and live with passions as a human way of being man. In this sense, Moral is defined as science of the human behaviour or aims; or art of being happy, with an equilibrium between will and passions.[\[33\]](#) So, the good use of the free will affirms man in his singularity.

7. The philosophical help: Cartesian Method

Maria do Céu Patrão Neves considers a great evolution in the work of Descartes: from irreducible subjectivity, Descartes bet in man; from the metaphysical project, Descartes constitute a moral. And here, «true man» is defined by his *ethos*.[\[34\]](#)

The Elisabeth's case is one of those in which the influence of the “bad thoughts” on the physic is evident. Personal and familiar misfortune provoke in her very affections. So, could we say that Elisabeth is sick? Descartes said that the origin of the fever is an emotion caused by a weak reasoning – a philosophical problem.[\[35\]](#)

Descartes proposes to Elisabeth a radical cure, which did not have the limit of only solve the symptoms, but goes to the causes of the evil. With no doubt the diet and the physical exercise helps the health of the Princess to being well, but is necessary to act on the soul, put it in a good way of reasoning, and with that, take a good influence on the body. Descartes says: (...) *the soul is very strong with the body, as we could see the great changes anger, fear and other passions excite in it*.[\[36\]](#)

After the stay of Elisabeth in Berlin, Descartes demarcates from the clinical practice, in which the treatment of the affections was treated with chemicals, with the presupposition that the disease is originated by an external and pathogenic agent.[\[37\]](#)

For me, it is here a real mark and relevant fact for the philosophical counselling of Descartes, which could be seen in this answer: how could we impress the soul, in which point we could touch her? For Descartes, the soul is a unitary reality, but with a plurality of functions organized in a hierarchy: sensations (feelings), imagination, understanding and will. The question is to know which function of the Elisabeth's soul, may her will be stimulated to cure her sadness, melancholia and apprehension. The answer of the philosophical counsellor is very precise: the imagination is the potency with which the soul could influence the body. Descartes clarify: *but when the soul use the will to make any thought which is not intelligible, but imaginable, that thought produce a new impression in the brain, that isn't passion, but an action, which calls properly imagination*”[\[38\]](#) The imagination is a very positive function of the soul, co-relative of the passion, defined this one as the internal feeling the soul experiment when connected to the body.

Thus, *the remedy to the sadness which origins physical affections it is not in the study of philosophy or metaphysics, but in the exercise on the imagination. (It is necessary) to regenerate the body by the power of the joy*.[\[39\]](#)

It demonstrated that life it is not a simple event of an extensive body with physical and geometrical properties, but a subjective experience with an affective tonality. *The joy expresses an adhesion to life (...) and the sadness expresses the discomfort of the soul in her corporeal habitation, and is a factor of mental weakness*.[\[40\]](#) Descartes refers this when expresses the genesis of the passion, in the letter to Chanut, on February 1st 1647.[\[41\]](#)

Rui Magalhães in his article about *Método e Moral: Descartes, a Modernidade e a Filosofia*, said that the French philosopher uses the metaphor of the “road to the truth and good”. The author refers the critics of the proper system of Descartes, in which the method needs to prove his validity. The reference is the first rule of *Les Regles pour la Direction de L’Esprit*. One more time, reason is the main criteria against empirical sensations. “The method is the process to approach the action of the thought to the essential nature of things.”^[42] Philosophy is the method supported in the *mathesis universalis* as an interface between metaphysics and the subject, who applies it. The peculiar analysis of Rui Magalhães says that the method is already a truth, which exists before the Truth that Descartes is in search of.

Descartes is looking for a method, says him, in his *Discours de la Method*: “the desire of learning to distinguish true from false, to see clear in my actions and to proceed with security.” Rui Magalhães says that the Cartesian critic is a rational simulation, an orthopaedic therapy and is an ascetic philosophy.” Here, we see the contrary of moral, e.g., the ethics.^[43] Thus, Moral is the norm for those who are out of truth. The Cartesian system, based on the method, doesn’t need an expressed moral, because the process is ascetic, but needs a provisional moral, which is not a theoretical element of the system, but an imperative of the practical life. So, it seems a contradiction when we find in the correspondence with Elisabeth, that provisional moral is the definitive moral, and returned being an element of the system.

8. A non-intellectualist moral: an art of decision

Luis Araujo said that subject disciplines his will, by moderating his passions and desires, experimenting happiness, without possessing all truth, but in a real art of living oriented for a pragmatic security.^[44]

As we could see, the moral action is the rational action, and rationality is similar to cogito. Here we have the theory of passions and the resignation attitude. It is an appeal to virtue.^[45] All of this is in the ascetic process. The *beatitude* is the final aim of the subject free from passions, and it is a “perfect and interior satisfaction of the spirit, and happiness is dependent of the external things.”^[46] So, the Wisdom teaches us how to become a master of myself.

Passions are the space where we could insert moral, as an answer to freedom. “Be moral is to follow virtue, using well the free-will, doing what we think it is better for our rational thought.”^[47]

Rui Magalhães said that Descartes never broach the ethics plan, excepting in the *Les Passions de l’Âme*, with the description of the subjective scene, in which it is possible the constitution of a methodical process as an ascetic proceed.^[48]

The joy is a lasting satisfaction, where we live the experience of happiness.^[49] The question posed by the case of Elisabeth is this one: can we be happy when everything goes wrong? The way of this question remember us the moral of the stoics, which had a very important vogue in the Europe of the Renaissance: happiness gets by the capacity of resistance on those situations of “bad whether”. The Stoicism is a moral that it is not accessible to anyone, requiring a great wisdom. Wise is that one who learns to support all bad things in life, without being affected in his innermost. It is the ideal of *apatheia*.

Philosophical Counselling practiced by Descartes has a stoic mark: contrarities belong to the economy of happiness, only accessible to the best souls, who can find consolation in everything it happens to them and feel good with the those victory against the pain.[\[50\]](#)

Descartes suggests Elisabeth to read the *De Vita Beata (The happy life)* from Séneca. Stimulated by the difficulties and proposes of Elisabeth, Descartes demarks from the Stoicism, affirming that he doesn't defends the insensibility of the wise.[\[51\]](#)

The Cartesian moral is a moral of the passions, of the good use of the passions, very useful to life, to give it the meaning; the moral is directed to the whole man, and is this sense, the confession of Descartes to Chanut, saying that he has passions; it is not the recognition of a weakness, but of the human way to perfection and to happiness.[\[52\]](#)

This Moral is a way of interiority, but it isn't a code of universal conduct. It is an art of living, which we could learn by doing some practical exercise.

The first point of the Cartesian moral it is not an evident truth and universally valid, but the urgency of action. In the *Discours de la Methode* and in the *Principes de la Philosophie*, the moral is retired from the order of reasons, because of that urgency: in the daily life, the decision could not wait by a correct and infallible judgment, based in the analysis of the positive and the negative of each possible option.[\[53\]](#)

The most interesting point in the Cartesian moral is to understand that the error of the judgment, when accomplished by a correct intention, doesn't produce a moral imperfection.[\[54\]](#)

It is not possible to typify the situations and to give rules of conduct, because the vividness of the situation, it belongs to the same thing: the feelings grow in us and give the form of our life in the situations.[\[55\]](#)

Elisabeth says that our passions are created without sensibility, so they escape to the control of the consciousness – in a letter of September, 30 from 1645.

For a conclusion, the moral could be seen as an art of decision, with an objective: to growth and to give more perfection to the interior capacity of the subject. The subjective criterion is this: is good what increase the perfection of the subject; is bad what reduces it. The moral is a way to happiness too, because this one requires the moral perfection of the agent.

In my practical work with individual clients, I had some months ago, a person very similar with Elisabeth. The problem was about “destiny”, and she could not get a boyfriend to love and to live together. Why? Because she thinks wrong and that “bad thought” affects her action and her choices in life. She never gives a second opportunity to men. Why? Because she has some principles about an ideal man, that does not exists. And the great problem is in the fact that she didn't believe in love as a construction and discover in time: a real adventure of good and bad feelings. So, like the Elisabeth's case, we have the classical and basic concept of philosophical counselling: first, we have to make an approach to the common fallacies. And sometimes, some problems are just in that simple question: a logical misunderstanding.

The *ethos* of the Cartesian moral it is not that one of a submissive ego to the norm, refraining his force, but the excited state of an ego who lives in an excess of goods.

The Cartesian excess^[56] proposes an ideal of perfection similar of the lover who is transformed in the loved thing. As the lover goes in ecstasy with the image of his sweetheart, the man morally perfect affirms the infinite in his life.

Conclusion

I could conclude this paper with Luis Araújo, saying this: the ideal of love and generosity has begun the construction of a new humanity, a politics with moral and a new utility to philosophy. Descartes said that philosophical formation gives value to a civilization. So, to civilize the human being as the great task of philosophy seems to us as the most important ethical vocation. Thus, we think Descartes as our contemporaneous, and a very good alternative to do philosophical counselling, in an empty time. That's why I have my proper method entitled «Project Method» applied in my Philosophical Practice, with clients and with participants on my Courses. The method is based on the existential phenomenology: Merleau-Ponty and all Philosophical Systems which developed the question of project: Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Kierkegaard, Sartre, Agostinho da Silva, Julián Marías, Peter Singer, Gilles Lipovetsky, etc. The objective is to study if people have some life project and if so, try to understand it, try to find his values, cognitions, beliefs and concepts. The meaning is always the project of the person, and all of other questions and problems are involved on it.

Like Elisabeth, I had a client who was very sad because he could not live with the problems of his family. In some consults, I knew that he has a project of love which was incompatible with the problems of his family. In his first visit to my office, he said he believes on destiny and that God will help him. After some sessions, my client has changed his way of thinking. He was reading a book I suggested. His arguments turned more rational, clear, solid and positive. My client decided for his project, which gave him very happiness, while his family tries to solve the problems. He understands that he cannot solve those problems and he was not responsible of them. The provisional moral was very important at the moment, but the ascetic ethics was the great motive to solve his philosophical problem.

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[2] Rafael Alvira, Op. Cit., p. 65.

[3] Rafael Alvira, Op. Cit., p. 67.

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[27] Galeno, *Opera Omnia*, I, pp. 53-63.

[28] Letter of October 6, 1642.

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[30] Letter of June 26, 1643. Elisabeth has made the question on the letter of June, 20 1643.

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[33] Maria do Céu Patrão Neves, Op. Cit., p. 359.

[34] Maria do Céu Patrão Neves, Op. Cit., p. 361.

[35] Letter of Maio, 18 1645.

[36] Letter of July 1644.

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[38] Letter of October 6 from 1645. Descartes explicit the meaning of these words, feeling and passion. Passion is all thought excited in the soul, without the intervention of the will, by the simple impressions in the brain, because if it is not action, otherwise it is passion. Everything that origins from the exterior things or from interior dispositions of the body, like perception of the colors, sounds, hungry, pain, we call feelings.

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- [54] See Letter of October 6 1645.
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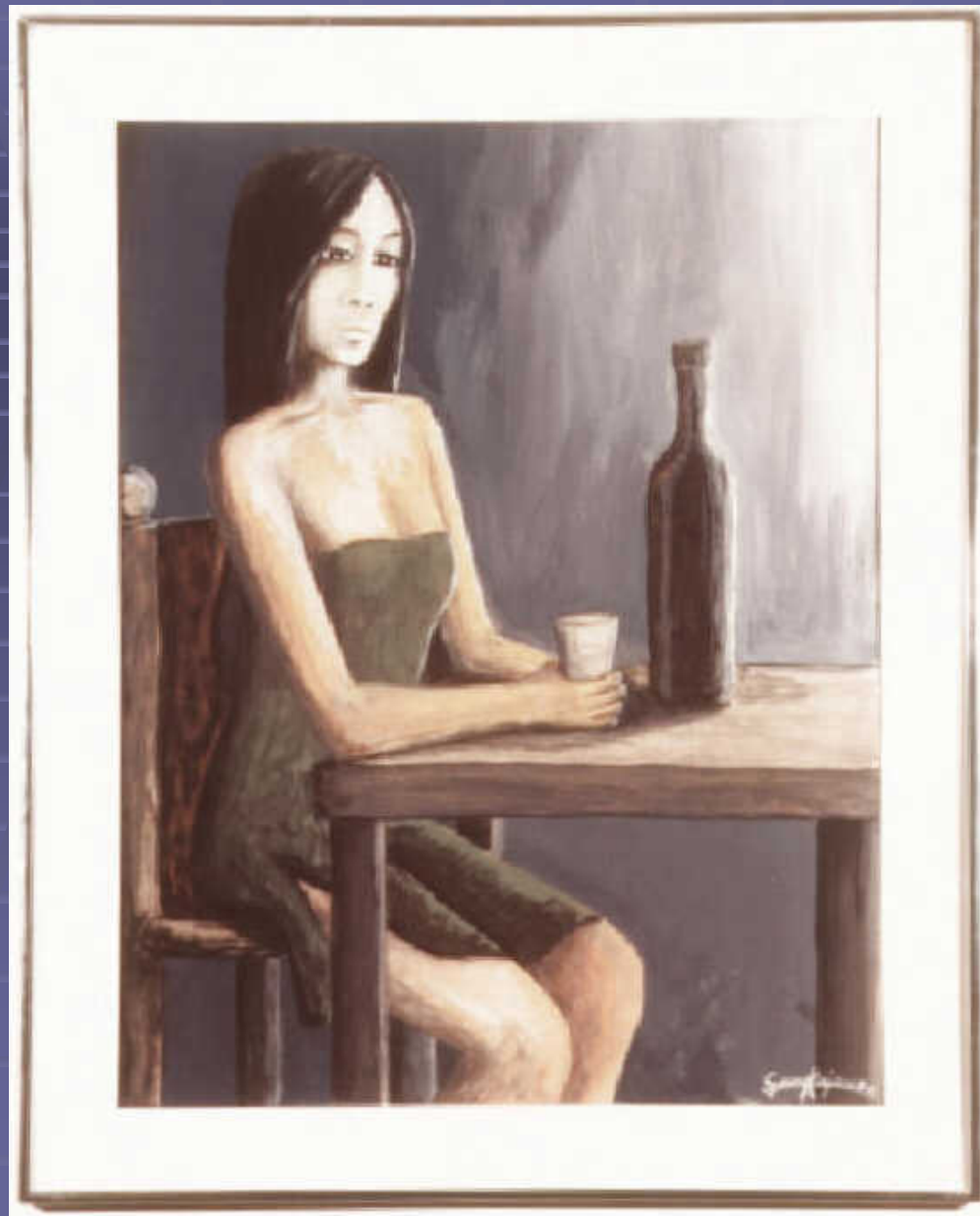
Some Art about Melancholy...



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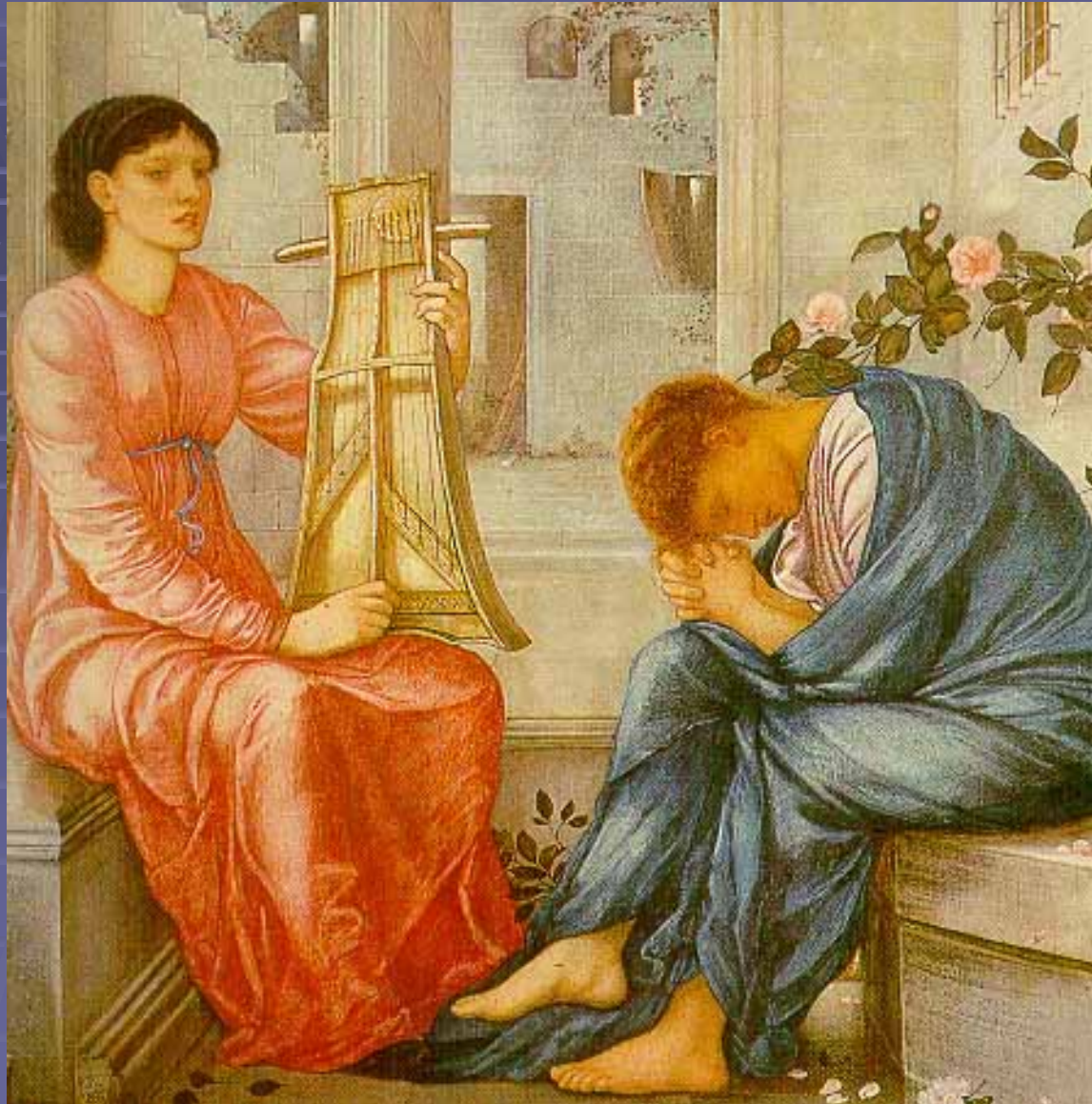
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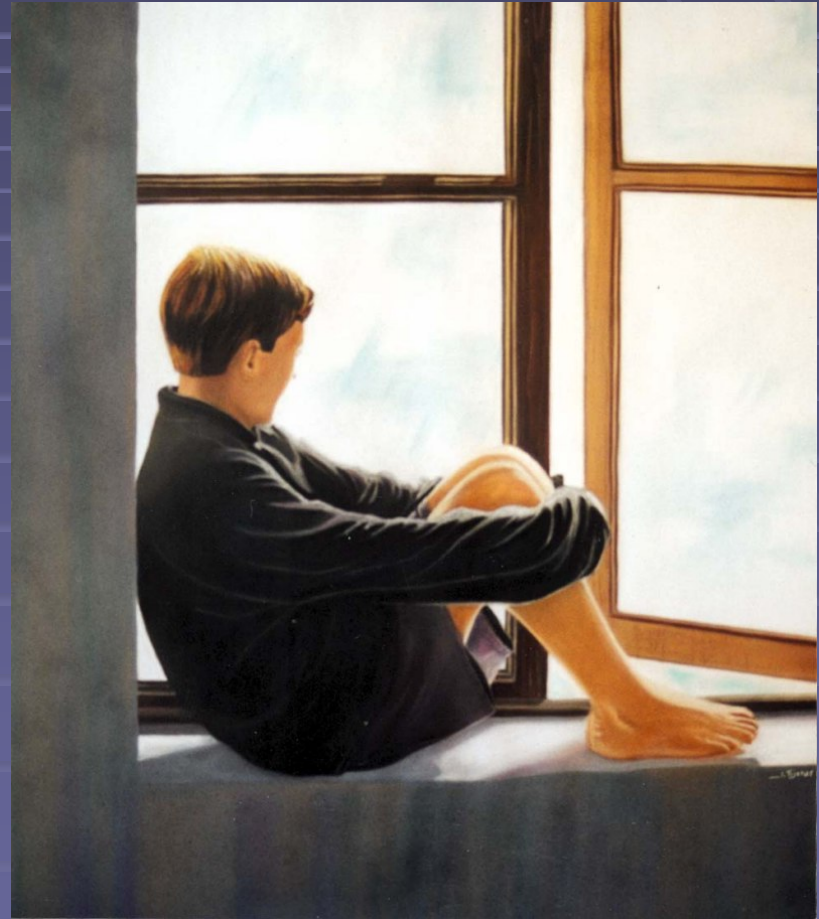
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CONSULTING DESCARTES

The Letters of Elisabeth

1. Philosophizing by regular mail





2. Philosophizing on feminine

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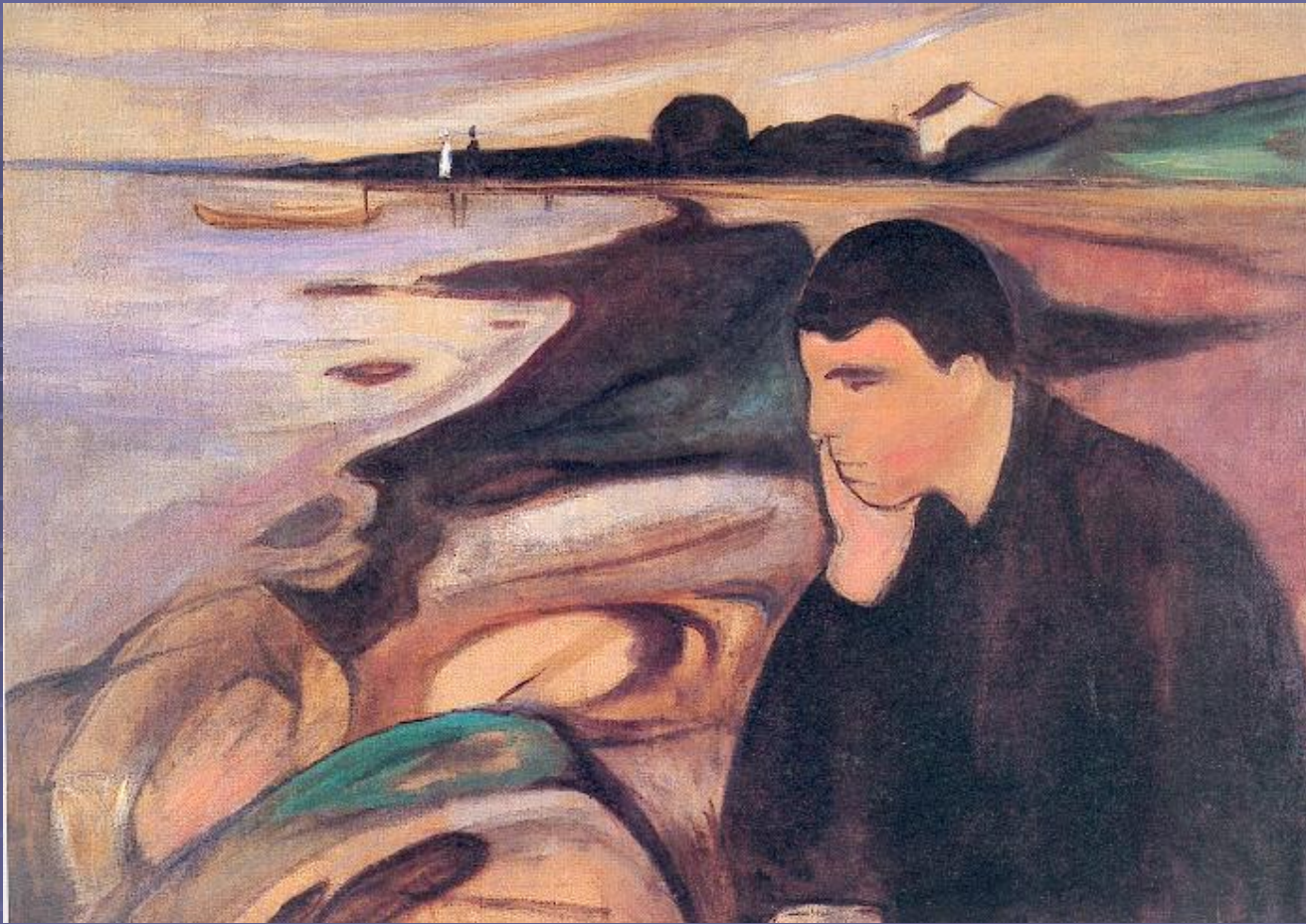
3. A melancholic Princess

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4. By the hand of Elisabeth
we meet another Descartes



5. The counsel of the Philosopher: To take care and to cogitate



6. The dense enigma: the paradoxical nature of man



7. The philosophical help: Cartesian method



8. A non-intellectualist Moral: an art of decision

A photograph of a man and a woman sitting at a table in a restaurant. The man, wearing glasses and a suit, is smoking a cigarette and looking thoughtful. The woman is seen from the back, looking towards him. The scene is dimly lit with warm tones. The text "Conclusion..." is overlaid in the upper center.

Conclusion...

**FROM REPRESSION TO PERVERSION: A
PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH**

António Fragoso Fernández



The following paper deals with two interpretations of a famous Myth that began with Sophocles and ends with Freud. After comparing those two interpretations we underlined some consequences for philosophical Counselling.

The plot of Sophocles tragedy Oedipus-rex is well known. The town of Thebas is in deep trouble because a mysterious plague destroys all means of subsistence. Everybody hopes for Oedipus to solve this affair since he had previously taken care of a similar situation.

Anxious to find the reason behind this curse, King Oedipus began an investigation whose results were most unfortunate. It became obvious that Oedipus himself had murdered the former King and married his widow. To make it worse it was found that those were his parents. The play ends with the suicide of Jocasta, Oedipus mother and wife, and at last with Oedipus exile after blinding himself. Two and a half millenniums afterwards Freud made the myth of Oedipus the cornerstone of his psychoanalytic science. In fact he took for granted that the male child wishes his fathers death to take possession of his mother.

The repression of this conflicting feelings during the so called oedipian phase disappeared through what Freud call the childish amnesia but the drives and the desires repressed in the unconscious, by being inaccessible make difficult the subject adaptation and giving way to neurotic disturbs. In fact Freud's in his metapsychology tried to put together a set of concepts that look so far from experience and commonsense that he needed this abstract frame in order to give consistence to the whole theories of psychoanalysis. This metapsychological approach has repression as his nuclear concept since Freud had postulated the concept of unconscious and without the mechanism of repression the thinking apparatus makes no sense.

And yet a more careful reading of the play shows something that can not fail to attract our attention. In fact the speeches of the Chorus, old Tiresias prophetic regrets and the clear statements of the messenger and the shepherd make it impossible not to think that not only the main characters but also the crowd are already sure that Oedipus himself is guilty. Therefore it is absurd to believe that the real meaning of facts did not come out.

Thus from now on we shall have to accept two things:

- 1- Oedipus had not made an inquiry. As a matter of fact he was trying to cover the facts.
- 2- Everybody, not only the main characters but the entire crowd, was aware of those facts and yet they tried to ignore them.

To avoid the charge of inconsistency against what was said above in (1) and (2) an alternative model is required that opposes the psychoanalytical interpretation of the oedipian myth, by explaining how the mind can be aware of something and simultaneously ignore all about it. This model runs along a philosophical purpose.

In fact the fundamental principles of this model are already present in Edmunds Husserl's "Logical investigations"[\[i\]](#) in 1905 and in 1934 in Sartre's essay "La transcendance de l'ego"[\[ii\]](#). We shall say a couple of words about this. The ground of Phenomenology is given by the concept of intentionality, meaning that conscience is always conscience of something. The exercise of conscience according to Husserl makes it a unified process that doesn't require the presence of an ego. Sartre on his side defines conscience as being pre-reflexive and reflexive. The first concept of conscience means the basic intentionality of a conscience pre-reflexive and non-positional. The second means that conscience is exclusively busy on observing itself. By doing so it is engaged in his activity by constructing his contents which of course can be valid but may also represent mere beliefs that can mean no more than self illusions. This can happen because pre-reflexive conscience can be object of consult since it deals with basic intentionality while that doesn't happen in the case of reflexive conscience.

According with the workings of this model one can understand the emergency of mental settings giving place to a connection between basic intentionality and reflexive construction where this connection is simultaneous denied and confirmed. As it would be the case if the contents given through basic intentionality were subjected to two opposite states of reflexive conscience.

In order to make clear what has been said we would like propose a short metaphor. There is a topological concept known as a Möebius band. Suppose you got a band a long, thin, flat, narrow piece of paper and that you fold it but only once. Now you proceed to glue together both hands. The resulting band, though apparently composed of two surfaces, would allow a small insect, for instance an ant to move along to follow the surface. The ant would pass over the fold without noticing it and it could be said that it went simultaneously on both side, though of course it would use only one.

Now if we compare conscience with this band, the ant with a content of conscience and the fold with the frontier between pre-reflexive conscience and reflexive conscience

we can understand how the pre-reflexive conscience can be tied both to something belonging the field of basic intentionality and yet, remaining part of the same process, to participate in the reflexive activity of conscience.

From now on we go back to the central problem stated in this paper. After presenting what we called an alternative model it is now possible to explain how Oedipus could give two different answers to a unique situation. In fact he could attain a mental state where reality was simultaneously accepted and denied. But where in the development of an Oedipus complex the inner conflict is explained by the repressive functioning of the psychic apparatus by following the alternative model a structure is brought to light whose ground is not repression. We gave this entirely different metapsycological set of concepts the name of *perversion*.

In fact, dynamic psychologists nowadays have a tendency to enlarge the concept of perversion which means that perversions are behaviour disorders where reality is neither completely accepted nor refused. But maybe we could go further and suggest that conscience itself is always self-deceiving by nature. It seems that man is perverse and by nature a liar.

But I won't finish this paper without presenting a case:

A man looked me up asking for advice. He was in his middle thirties, had a higher education and now was a free enterpriser. His life had become more and more chaotic and empty. Though he had a family, every night he went out with his friends, had a lot to drink and worked less and less. When he looked me up he was already highly indebted.

He had undergone psychotherapy with no apparent results. His therapist had told him his trouble was due to the relationship he had kept with his mother deceased a few years ago. The therapist had tried to find a link between his actual life with his wife and his oedipian beginnings. Together we tried to revive the way he had interacted with his mother and the setting of her death during this session he told me that when he kept vigil to his mother after her death he had noticed she was breathing though, of course, he knew perfectly she had died. From there on the therapeutic process ran smoothly. All we had to do was to go back to the moments when he built some very important beliefs and concepts, like death and fate, sorrow and mourning, exile and the meaning of life.

It seems now really advisable to finish those lines with a reference to our main topic, the philosophical counselling.

If History in his present paradigm can be called perverse since man lies more than ever to himself, then a helping hand by a specialist on teaching others how to detect and denounce all forms of self-deceiving is certainly welcome.

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OPENING NEW HORIZONS

Ora Gruengard

I was asked to review a book. The book presented the worldview of some famous philosopher as a truth that should direct our everyday life, and the authors tried to illustrate the practical meaning of that worldview by examples from his own experience. I do not share the author's admiration for that philosopher, and do not agree with his interpretation, but what bothered me in particular was the presentation itself, which was probably addressed to non-professional readers. The book presents the conception as if it were a revealed truth that should be first transmitted *verbatim*, in the holy language of the "prophet", and than illustrated by the exemplary acts of the disciple. It does not tell the readers that the presentation is a personal interpretation of some messages of an ambiguous and controversial author whose opinions (and deeds) are a matter of debate. The presentation seemed to me closer to preaching than to discussing practical philosophy, and incompatible with my conception of philosophical counseling. The editor, however, did not like my criticism; he admitted that I was "entitled to have my own approach", but he preferred book reviews that "described the application of philosophical intuitions". I do not think that philosophical life is an application of philosophical intuitions; and the job of philosophical counselors does not consist in such applications. My paper is about that.

I tend to identify philosophy with the Socratic dialectical tradition of confrontation and examination of opposing views. A text can be, stylistically, a monologue, and yet dialectical and dialogical, if the author's reasoning invites the addressee to examine the evidence and the arguments and reflect about his own views. Declarations that are claimed to be based on "intuition", "insight" or special capacity to decipher "unconscious" and otherwise hidden truths remind me, on the other hand, of religious announcements of truths revealed to prophets, or, when the announcer speaks in the name of a venerated philosopher, of a priestly interpretation of holy text. "Prophetic" messages are not always unreasonable, and being impressed by an opinion of a "prophet" is sometimes helpful. But the propagation of philosophical opinions as if they were "prophecies" is not philosophical. In fact, having opinions about philosophical matters was never specific to philosophers, nor is the attempt to persuade others to abandon their "wrong" or "harmful" opinions in such matters and adopt

“right” philosophical view. As far as persuasion as such is concerned, religious leaders and psychotherapists, publicists and salesmen, painters and films makers – who do not limit their persuasive tools to philosophical dialogues - are probably much more successful. A critical philosopher should however be more self-restrained, and leave the addressee a room for critical thinking.

As a critical philosopher I presuppose that all beliefs are fallible, and assume that false beliefs that interfere with our capacity to overcome difficulties should be abandoned. But I cannot know in advance which opinion, if any, should be changed *in a particular situation*. I cannot allow myself to adopt the “prophetic” dogma (which is common to many psychotherapists and religious guides), according to which a person having coping- difficulties means necessarily that *that* person is having something disturbing “in her mind” (or “soul”), and therefore she, rather than people in her environment, has to change her opinions, aims and attitudes. I cannot, moreover, allow myself the pretension that my own opinions, or those borrowed from others that are even wiser than me, are necessarily truer, or more useful than the initial opinions of my addressee, for coping with her problem. That is why I chose to do *philosophical* counseling: I have my presuppositions, of course, but do not come, against my critical consciousness, with any specific “prophetic” philosophical message. My philosophical message is that philosophy is critical: It offers a “Socratic” opportunity to examine tacit dogmas, including the dogma just mentioned, and realize that there are alternative possibilities. I therefore do not plan ahead an attempt to change other people’s mind. If I estimate that such a change can help them, I do not try to do that by the non-philosophical persuading tools. I use the Socratic way; i.e., invite an addressee that seems to be stuck in seemingly insolvable impasse, to examine whether relevant beliefs, i.e., beliefs that *to my mind* are presupposed by the *addressee’s* interpretation of the situation as an “insolvable impasse”, are, *according to the addressee*, true, relevant and exclusive, and if so, whether they are *necessarily* so. My assumption is that the realization that there is a room for *doubt* or at least a possibility to suspend judgment, creates *a space* in which the addressee can attend to alternative ideas and examine them. That might, first of all, help him realize that the problem can be seen, and perhaps better coped with, from other perspectives. *Perhaps* it will eventually lead him to change some of his criteria, rules, beliefs or scales of values. Changes of his attitudes, plans mood or behavior are *possible* consequence of such a transformation.

In need all my professional knowledge - and in particular my acquaintance with philosophical controversies and my training in the identification or illustration of general philosophical themes in particular situations, that some other persons have dealt with the same *type* of issues in other ways – in order to help to create such a space. If the addressee is interested I suggest to think on some of those alternatives, and invite the addressee to examine views that are, in one sense or other, the opposite of the addressee’s initial position. I hope that in this way I contribute to the enlargement of the addressee’s horizon or the opening of new ones, in which the former unsolvable dilemmas, conflicts or confusions might be solved, resolved or dissolved. I avoid as much as possible “user unfriendly” philosophical terminology.

I am not afraid of the conclusion that philosophers are not the only one who can do such a job. Although my first conscious encounter with dialectical methods took place in the context of philosophical discussions, I was also inspired by analyses of revolutionary problem-solving by scientists. I also found that I could learn a lot from

methods that are used in jurisprudence, including the tricky ways by which interpreters that are not allowed to express any criticism against the sanctified religious or political laws, nor offer explicitly their slightest improvement, try to overcome practical or moral “impasses” by changing tacitly some of the presuppositions of the dominant interpretation of those laws. The parables about the wise that solves by “re-framing” seemingly insolvable dilemmas were another source. And so were workshops in movement-therapy and family-therapy that invited the participants to attend to the movements or opinions of the other participants and learn that their problem can be seen and dealt with from other perspectives. “Horizon-opening”, is briefly, not a philosophical invention. But philosophers can contribute more when the problem is an initial, though latent, inability to solve confusions, dilemmas and contradictions that are basically philosophical, and I believe that that is the problem in the case of many personal impasses and so-called psychological or social problems.

Some “horizon-openers” do it by chance, just like the child in Anderson’s story. They perceive the king as naked (and dare to say it), precisely because they are inexperienced outsiders. I believe, however, that the inventive and insightful ability of most of the wise “horizon-openers” develop precisely because they participate actively and frequently in the on-going discourse in their respective field of expertise, are well acquainted with its specific problems and with the usual and sometimes unsatisfactory ways to deal with them, and took part in debates with supporters of opposite approaches. I believe that the ability of philosophers to be “horizon-openers” is similarly related to their philosophical knowledge and skills. Critical philosophers - those who are ready to exercise discursive thinking and argumentative discussions and pay attention to difficulties - in contrast to those who prefer to indulge in “revelations” and look for hints in “prophetic” texts – can be the most relevant “horizons-openers” in the case of philosophical counseling – provided they have the other requisite abilities for counseling. Philosophers, like scientists and jurists, do not usually demonstrate such abilities in their professional presentations and debates. But philosophers that have the traits that are needed for humane philosophical talks with “laymen”, are more successful “horizon-openers” the larger is their philosophical knowledge and the richer is their inventory of philosophical skills - the better, in fact, is their acquaintance with the variety of critical tools that help them to be professionally so “nasty” with each other.

That is why I believe that philosophical counseling should be done by very erudite and experienced philosophers. It is obviously not a job for young logicians, who, with all their brilliancy, know nothing, as yet, about philosophical problems and the attempts to deal with them, and are not even aware of the fact that systems of formal logic are most often insufficient tools for practical reasoning, let alone practical problem-solving. Their “counseling” might consist in arrogant attempts to convince their counselees that they are illogical if not stupid, and create in some naïve minds the illusion that improvement of their own calculative abilities, or counting on those of the logician, will solve their difficulties. They might, moreover, be unaware of the logician tacit controversial premises, and be easily misled by his manipulations.

It is also not a job for psychotherapists that heard that one should deal not only with “psychological problems” but also with “existential issues”, and have acquired a specific method to deal with those issues. Those therapists are not aware that there are many philosophical ways to deal with such issues, and, like the methods to deal with “psychological problems”, none is independent of prior presuppositions and

preferences. The “existential” therapists are often unaware of they latter, and do not understand that the method recommended by their philosophical “guru” is, just like those learnt from their psychological trainer, are not necessarily appropriate. A psychotherapist that has learned that one should talk with patients about, say, their fear of death, has probably been impressed by an existentialist that thinks that thinking about one’s own death is not only something that happens, but something that one *should* do, as if it were a virtue or a duty. They do not know that other philosophers, among them the stoics or Spinoza suggested an opposite approach. With their professional tendency to assume that the refusal of patients to deal with “important subjects” is a neurotic “denial” or “repression”, their ignorance of alternative philosophical views might lead them to the attempt to impose the subject on the their patients against their will, and thereby reduce unnecessarily their ability to cope with their situation.

Existentialists, despite their talking about individualism, liberty, and authentic choices, come with very specific agendas, and despite their disdain for the cognitive aspects of our existence, have very definite opinions about our existence in the world, and do not look for discussions where their views might be criticized. They therefore tend to belong, in the company of some other kinds of subversive and therefore seemingly critical philosophers, to the category of the non-Socratic “prophets”. “Prophets”, as Nietzsche taught us, can be “horizon-changers”, or, as some of those who took Nietzsche himself for a “prophet” have demonstrated, they can also be “horizon-reducers or even “blockers”. Following single rayon of light may be sometimes helpful; but the new horizon is dogmatic and therefore narrower.

While “prophets” offer sometimes new insights and perspectives, their “groupie” does not offer even that. The “kit-philosopher”, who is not even a “groupies”, is philosophically still worse. Such a “philosopher” may have his PhD, and be considered as an expert in the “philosophy of” some specific domain; but his “philosophical” formation is limited to domain-specific issues and to a specific package of texts that seem to corroborate the ideology that is presently dominant in that domain, or at least among “its philosophers”. Such an ideology is often based on part of the writings of one or several thinkers, and those texts are venerated as if they were Divine revelations. The “corroborating” texts in the “kit” are often just paragraphs of, or about, other thinkers that were taken out of their original context. Any alternative interpretation of the “prophecies” and any reservations or disagreements that the “corroborating” authors actually have are thereby ignored. There are many domains and many fashionable ideologies, and therefore many “kits”, and many “kit-philosophers” that might like to preach their message. We find them in the domains of media studies, art, literary and culture critic, social work and psychoanalysis, Black- or Women-studies, and hear them propagating their respective ideologies in the name of the respective “prophets, with the help of “corroborating kits”. I do not think that they have an adequate preparation for philosophical counseling.

The book that I have mentioned in the beginning (Carey, 2003) was written by a “kit-philosopher”, and I shall use it as a case study. The dominant ideology in his domain - “the family” – is the duty to foster the “whole child”. The “kit” contains texts of various authors for the cause of “wholeness“, and their variety represents its ambiguity: One can find among them little-known partisans of holistic medicine, teaching through movement or tactile awareness as well as the famous Jung, Alice Miller, Winnicutt and Heidegger. The author, who has chosen Heidegger as his guiding

“prophet”, interprets his “prophecy” in the mood of Heidegger, 1953, in accordance with his own “green” taste and the current vogue among some American philosophers to mobilize Heidegger to their own “anti-technologist” campaigns. The author’s simplistic interpretation does not reflect any acquaintance with the complexity and richness of Heidegger’s multi-facet analyses, or awareness to their being contested, or at least differently interpreted, by philosophers who see other colors. The “intuition” to which the editor referred is probably the idea that our salvation depends on our return to “pre-technological wholeness”. The author seems to live his own life according to his convictions, but the “practical application” that the editor mentioned consists in giving pedagogical counsels to others. Those counsels are allegedly based on Heidegger’s “re-discovery” of Philosophy in its “true sense” - as if the unmentioned philosophers, who shared Heidegger’s premises about science being always “secondary” and “partial”, the impossibility to reduce persons, inter-personal relations and Nature to mathematical formulas and technologically manipulated objects etc., but arrived at completely different conclusions with regard to science, mathematics and/or “technology”, were negligible “false philosophers”. The counsels are presented as “corroborated” by Jung (who would agree with Heidegger only partially), Miller (who would stay indifferent) and Winnicott (who would disagree with him almost completely). The fact that I judge that the author’s “synthesis” in the name of wholeness is “partial”, and does not “overcomes” the “oppositions” but rather “represses” them, does not mean that the author has to abandon his worldview and adopt mine. But the author acting as a “philosophical counselor” for parents in confusion or conflict about the aims and ways of education is an attempt to persuade them to abandon their initial world views and adopt his own. Telling them not to foster intellectual abilities, mathematic skills and scientific thinking and encourage instead the alleged “pre-technological” attitudes to “Being” and “being Existences” is a deceptive advocating of an “antithetic “partial” education under the guise of a “synthetic” “wholeness”. It uses the name of Heidegger and those of the other “Wholeness- kit” participants, as an *authority* that supports unanimously a controversial view. It means narrowing of the horizon of the “counselees” by presenting his view as a *necessarily* true “intuition”, instead of helping them to be aware of alternatives, examine them, create their own syntheses, and make more rationally their own choices.

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**TOWARD PHILOSOPHY OF THE PRACTICE OF
PHILOSOPHY. AN INVITATION TO PHILOSOPHICAL
DIALOGUE AMONG PRACTITIONERS OF PHILOSOPHY
ABOUT THE NATURE OF THEIR WORK.**

Thomas Gutknecht



1.

In joining celebrations of the 25th anniversary of Gerd Achenbach's foundational work in the Practice of Philosophy I have to note nonetheless that the practice of Philosophy still suffers from a great theoretical deficit, beside other deficits. I am of course far from belittling Achenbach's merits.

There are many open questions which it is the mandate of the IGPP to address in order to overcome those deficits. The questions include the following:

What makes the Practice of Philosophy philosophical in its diverse manifestation such as Counselling, Education, Philosophy cafes etc.? What is the connection between extra-academic work in Philosophy and academic Philosophy? What is characteristic of the culture of dialogical thinking?

Although the Practice of Philosophy is not identical with the academic study of Philosophy it must nonetheless integrate theory without being captivated by it. It must support academic research and teaching in Philosophy as well as be nurtured by academic research and teaching.

The horizon of the Practice of Philosophy is Logos. We know that Logos unifies language, sense, activity and potential.

Do we agree that Philosophical Practice is not equivalent to therapeutic activity? It clearly is not a therapy among therapies. Rather it is an alternative to therapies. We do not apply, let alone sell philosophical ideas and methods. Rather we call on them and transform them as appropriate to concrete contemporary life situations and thus open the

space of freedom and responsibilities among individuals in philosophical dialogue, - that is, in human community.

The primary mandate of the IGPP consists in recognition and pursuit of theoretical aspects of the Practice of Philosophy on the experiential basis of lived experience where philosophical questions originate.

2.

Evidently, at the end of the last century the need for the Practice of Philosophy became a matter of global Zeitgeist. Around the time when Gerd Achenbach initiated the Practice of Philosophy in German speaking countries there were comparable initiatives across Europe, USA, Canada, Latin America, Israel and far Eastern countries.

It hardly needs saying that a cognitively and morally adequate development of globalisation in our work is a major challenge. To be sure, the IGPP has not yet succeeded in establishing an open organic community of international Philosophical Practitioners. It is not yet what it will have to become: a place of free dialogical meetings of diverse ideas, a place for integrating diversity without levelling it out, a place for balancing the dynamic of individuality and community.

Gerd Achenbach, my much esteemed predecessor as President of the IGPP, has as yet neglected the tasks of theoretical work and of dialogical integration. Instead it was political processes of strategies and divisions which obscured the nature of the work we are committed to.

Philosophers have to be autonomous thinkers. I point out the obvious when I say that philosophical dialogue in theory and practice is to further, not undermine, an individual's originality and self-sufficiency. With this in mind we need to counteract strategies and divisions and, instead, build bridges, cultivate mutual understanding through the hard work of explorative dialogue, aim at mutual understanding and the transformation of our ideas, make conflicts productive, work as teams - with that mixture of respect and critique which is characteristic of true collegiality and friendship. We need to recognize and develop theoretical aspects inherent in our work through a web of dialogue. We need to be a community which entails and can hold and nurture diversity.

This points to a set of obvious moral requirements: co-operation; pleasure and interest in team-work; suspension of self-serving interests; collegial exchange in transparency and mutual trust. We must avoid working against each other. I may emphasize that work with each other does not mean: thinking and working in the same way as each other. The will to dialogue goes hand in hand with the will to authenticity and transformation; it precludes conformism.

Thus our main professional goal is the organic development of the organisation of practicing philosophers. This is vital for the professionalism of a practicing philosopher.

3.

Requirements of professionalism raise the question of appropriate courses of study to lead to the attainment of relevant professional qualifications. There are various, so far one-sided and unintegrated, offerings of such courses of study, tied to individual initiators, for instance in the USA and in Germany. In Italy a few universities now offer Master Programmes for future Philosophical Counsellors, following an academic degree in Philosophy. In such programmes I see, among others, the danger, that philosophy gets instrumentalized for frameworks of purposes, and that philosophical methods and ideas get applied rather than explored in union with lived experiences. Philosophy, however, does not apply methods and ideas, but explores them. Philosophical Practice explores them as they emerge in varied life situations. Philosophy does not justify ends, but investigates the ends we set. Philosophy precludes reductionism.

Co-operation, teamwork, dialogue and the willingness, in trust and respect to be open to collegial criticism are necessary for a culture of learning in community. Really, we as practicing philosophers need to learn and work in the context of the whole of human existence.

The vital necessity of the Practice of Philosophy stems from the severe disorientation which characterizes our contemporary ways of living with contemporary developments in nature, politics, society, technology. The disorientation shows itself in four major ways:

1. - the decrease of awareness of oneself as a subject
2. - the loss of intellectual and spiritual energy
3. - the renunciation of autonomy in the face of the sciences
4. - fundamentalism, beside nihilism and relativism

It is to overcome these that the Practice of Philosophy is vitally necessary.

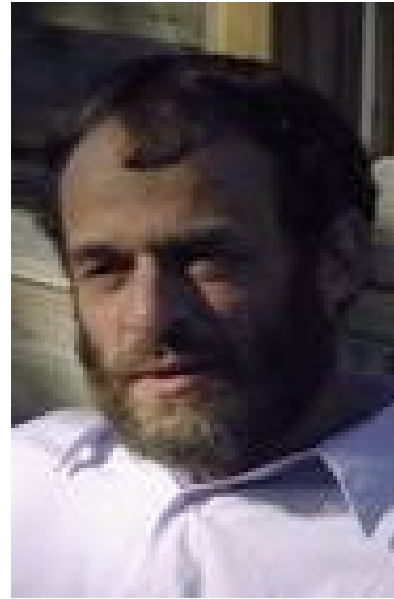
4.

It may be considered morally problematic to require fees for professional help in re-orientation in our “Lebenswelt”. We don’t sell anything, we do not offer the fulfilment of objective ends. Rather, we aim to further persons as ends-in-themselves. We cannot offer courses of study for future Philosophical Practitioners and at the same time hold any promise of a profession which may earn them a living. A Philosophical Practitioner who refrains from betraying Philosophy by instrumentalizing it in systems of ends may need to have another profession as well to sustain her or his profession of Philosophical Practitioner. And yet it will have to be required that a Philosophical Counsellor is also academically at home in historical and contemporary methods of philosophical enquiry.

Translation: Petra von Morstein

SMALL PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE AND GRAND
PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

Ran Lahav



The title of my presentation today is ‘Small Philosophical Practice and Grand Philosophical Practice’. But contrary to what this title might seem to suggest, I do not intend to propose any new concept or theoretical distinction. My purpose is not to theorize but to remind ourselves of a vision that is often being ignored, to re-awaken in us a dormant source of inspiration, to reconnect to an often-forgotten hope of making philosophical practice greater than it tends to be nowadays.

In the earlier days of philosophical practice, when I joined this new field some fourteen years ago, there was, it seems to me, a certain vision hovering in the air. It was usually somewhat vague and unarticulated, but it was in the atmosphere, and it inspired us. This was the vision that philosophical practice can make a fundamental difference to life, that it can make life deeper and greater. The idea was that philosophy can transform the basic coordinates of life – the individual’s basic needs, hopes, anxieties, attitudes – and raise them to a higher plane. Philosophy, it was felt, can create an inner revolution.

I call this a vision of Grand Philosophical Practice, because it gives a tremendous task to philosophy, and also because it seeks to raise life to great heights. I use the word ‘grand’ intentionally, because ‘grand’ is almost ‘grandiose’ – wonderfully grandiose.

However, as time went by, most of us philosophical practitioners found ourselves doing philosophy on a much smaller scale. For the most part we found ourselves counseling counselees for very mundane problems: how to deal with the boss, how to find a more satisfying job, what to do about one’s lack of self-confidence, or about the fights with the husband or the wife. This kind of philosophy no longer attempts to elevate life, because it accepts life for what it is and tries to deal with problems *within* life. It does not seek to transform the foundations of life, but to address specific needs or difficulties and to fix problems. Indeed, the philosophical counselor’s aim is that at the end of the counseling, after two or five or twenty meetings, the counselee would deal

more efficiently with her problem, and get back to everyday life with greater satisfaction.

This kind of philosophy is therefore basically a normalizer, a problem-solver, and a satisfaction-provider. I imagine that it has been inspired by those types of psychotherapy, quite common in our contemporary world, which have similar aims. I call it Small Philosophical Practice because it gives philosophy a limited task – to deal with specific elements within life, and also because its aspirations are small: It aims mainly at producing satisfaction.

In terms of Plato's allegory of the cave, we could say that Small Philosophical Practice deals with problems *within* the cave in which we live, trying to improve the shadows and make them more manageable. Grand Philosophical Practice, on the other hand, seeks to help us leave the cave altogether towards a broader reality. Its goal is, therefore, not to solve and satisfy, but rather to awaken forgotten dissatisfactions and yearnings, to help us go beyond our everyday needs, to create wonder, awe, even confusion, and in this way to open for us new doors towards a greater life.

I should emphasize that I do not wish to reject Small Philosophical Practice, including problem-solving philosophical counseling. If philosophy can be used to make people happier, then that's very nice. My worry is not about the *existence* of Small Philosophical Practice, but about the *monopoly* that it has gained in the philosophical practice world. For it seems to me that to a large extent we have forgotten the possibility of Grand Philosophical Practice, and that we now behave as if philosophical practice cannot but be small.

This, by the way, was one major reason why I left the philosophical practice world, shortly after I had organized with Lou Marinoff the First International Conference of Philosophical Practice. At that time it seemed to me that the actual goals of philosophical practice were too small for the yearnings of the human spirit. It was only recently that I returned to the field, when I realized that philosophical practice need not be small.

At this point someone might interrupt and ask: But what exactly is Grand Philosophical Practice? Can you define more clearly what you mean by it, and explain where the boundary passes between the Small and the Grand?

This is a difficult question. It is very hard to squeeze the entire scope of philosophical practices into this dichotomy. Consider, for example, a philosophical counseling that deals with counselees' personal problems, but which at the same time also encourages them to address some fundamental life-issues. To what extent is it Grand and to what extent is it Small?

I will not attempt to answer such questions, since I do not wish to indulge myself in definitions. As I said, my aim is to re-awaken a vision, not to theorize. Nevertheless, in order to give more substance to that vision, let me mention here, instead of a definition, four themes which I think should be involved in any philosophical practice that wishes to be grand.

First, it seems to me that in Grand Philosophical Practice the main issue is how to understand and live life more deeply, more truly, with greater wisdom. In other words, its aim is to transform life's basic coordinates and elevate it, not to solve problems *within* life.

This leads to the second theme: Philosophical practice is relevant to all aspects of life, and must infiltrate the person's entire way of being. Grand philosophy is not limited to two one-hour-sessions a week, or to solving some specific problem. It does not go on a holiday once the problem has been solved. Grand Philosophical Practice is inseparable from life. It implies a philosophical way of living.

From this follows the third theme: If philosophical practice is a way of life, then it must deal primarily with the practitioner's own life, not with the lives of clients. Because who among us, philosophical practitioners, has already attained wisdom, so that he can now allow himself to focus only on the lives of others? If I wish to be a philosophical practitioner then my own life is at issue, and I must attempt to live my own life philosophically. As a philosophical practitioner I am a seeker on an ongoing journey.

Here we can recall the Stoics, the Epicureans, the Neo-Platonists and other philosophers who sought to live philosophically. And it surprises me that we, in the philosophical practice movement, have never tried to follow their example. Instead, from the very beginning we have adopted the framework of psychotherapy: meeting clients for a pre-arranged session and talking with them about their personal problems. I confess that I don't understand why we have gone in this direction, and why we have chosen to sell our philosophical services to clients instead of working on our own lives. Was it because we were too eager to join the job market?

All this means, fourthly, that Grand Philosophical Practice is not a profession. It is not an activity *within* life, it is not an expertise in which we master some basic know-how, and it does not focus on selling our services to whomever wishes to pay. Therefore, our relationship to other practitioners cannot be that of colleagues. When professionals – medical doctors, scientists, engineers – meet as colleagues, they talk about some objective, impersonal topic: about a case study, about some theory or a new discovery. But if philosophical practice is a way of life, then we practitioners are companions, not colleagues. The topic of our meetings should first and foremost be ourselves, our own life-journeys. As companions to a journey we can share with each other our personal experience, help one another in making sense of personal issues and difficulties, enrich each other's journey, and thus weave together the personal and the philosophical. Again, when I think of the short history of philosophical practice, I am astonished that this has never been explored before.

To sum up, it seems to me that if philosophical practice is to be more than small, it should see itself as a way of life, as a personal journey in which the practitioner seeks to understand and live life philosophically, in the companionship of fellow philosophical seekers.

One might wonder what such a philosophical way of life would be like. How exactly do we practice this kind of philosophical practice?

However, I do not want to be more specific here. Any definitive answer would inevitably become a doctrine. And philosophy, by its very nature, is an open search which cannot be enclosed in a dogma. Indeed, my hope is that fellow philosophical practitioners would start exploring the philosophical life in different ways, each one according to his or her own personality, life-experiences, ideas and yearnings. Individual differences are necessary for the free philosophical spirit and for mutual enrichment.

Obviously, then, I cannot seriously try to determine once and for all what philosophical practice should be like. All I can do is describe my own personal way of searching at this stage of my life – which is what I call ‘contemplative philosophy’: This is a form of philosophizing in which we, philosophers, seek to understand human reality not just with our abstract thinking, but with our entire being. Instead of examining reality ‘from the outside’, as uninvolved observers, we seek to understand reality as full human being who are involved in the world. Instead of using only a very small portion of ourselves – our logical reasoning, we open our entire selves to deeper understandings that may arise in our inner depths, and thus we attend to a broader scope of meanings of human reality. It is because of this attitude of inner attentiveness that I call it ‘contemplative philosophy’.

These scanty remarks call for a much more detailed explanation, but the nature of contemplative philosophy is already outside the scope of the present presentation. (For more details about contemplative philosophy, see www.ranlahav.net.) My purpose today is not to discuss my specific explorations in the contemplative direction, but much more generally – to remind ourselves that philosophical practice can be greater than it currently is. The paths of Grand Philosophical Practice are of course numerous, and they are waiting to be explored.



COLLEAGUE GUIDANCE

Roger Larsen

Introduction

In this paper I want to present a concept of colleague guidance, developed in Aetat – that is, *the Norwegian Public Employment Service*. I work at Aetat in Oslo, and it is here that I have developed this method over the last months.^[1] Colleague guidance is a dialogue process where a problem is examined through an investigation of a concrete example, given by one of the participants. In this way the colleagues can guide each other, and thereby empower each other. The purpose of the process is not to give the right answer to a concrete problem, but rather to develop several perspectives regarding the problem. In addition the process aims at making the participants more aware of their own role in counselling, and to put focus on how a dialogue is structured.

Background

I started my work at Aetat in the spring of 2003. I soon discovered that almost every one of my colleagues gave counselling to unemployed, every day. At the same time there was no attempt to work with, or improve, the colleagues counselling skills.

What we needed was an opportunity to discuss our problems with counselling, both to learn from each other and to share frustrations due to the counselling.

Twice a year the unemployed is asked what they think about Aetat. The answers have never been very positive for Aetat. One out of four experiences lack of respect in the meeting with Aetat. Of course this is a topic in Aetat, and the speculations concerning this are always going on. I think that we can do a lot about this through colleague guidance, because it is in our actual meetings with the unemployed that we show our respect (if there is any). The Norwegian psychiatrist Tom Andersen once said: “*We all become who we are in meetings with others.*” I think that Aetat becomes what Aetat is in our meetings with the unemployed.

Colleague Guidance

In the autumn of 2005 I was asked to start a colleague guidance group.^[2] Together with the local leaders we chose ten participants for the group. We mixed the group so that both experienced and recently employed colleagues joined in. During the autumn of 2005 we had ten meetings, each meeting lasting one and a half hour.

The mandate of the group was to function as support for the colleagues in their daily work. In addition we were supposed to develop the high ethical standard that Aetat want to have in the meetings with the unemployed. In particular we were asked to work with the situations where we had to demand something from the unemployed, so that we learned to do this with respect for the individual and in a way that made it easier for us to deal with the reactions from the individual.

From the beginning it was most important for me that the focus of this guidance should be the actual experiences of the participants. My thought was that all guidance in the group should be based upon one concrete counselling situation that one of the participants had experienced, which he or she thought to be troubling in some way.

In the guidance the participants should express their own reflections, based on actual experience. My role was to lead the process, in addition to asking questions as we went along. I was never to be the expert who could give the right answers to the problems guided on. At this point I was very clear about my role; I wanted to act as a philosophical practitioner, not as an expert or coach.

In the first meeting I presented the balint method, as I had worked it out. In short this is the balint method:

1. The participants give examples from their own counselling experience.
2. The group chooses one example for guidance.
3. The chosen example is presented in greater detail.
4. The participants ask questions to clarify the example.
-
5. The participants *fantasize* about the dialogue (how it was experienced at the moment).
6. The person guided comments briefly.
7. The participants *fantasize* about other ways to handle the dialogue.
8. The person guided comments.

9. The group summarises the guidance.[3]

I underlined that the balint method, through the use of fantasies, could work creatively by opening up for new ideas. At the same time the use of fantasies would function as protection for the person guided upon. The fantasies do not have to stick to reality, or to whatever is a good solution to a specific problem. Through fantasy we can suggest other solutions and thereby expand our possibilities. The use of fantasies will protect the person guided, because it is *only fantasies* – we do not have to take them seriously, and they are not personal attacks.

Once we had established that this guidance should build on the participants own experiences, I proposed that each and everyone should have at least one example from his or her own counselling experience, and that these examples should be brought to our meetings. In each meeting we chose one example for guidance.[4]

Colleague guidance and philosophical practice

I have to underline the importance of being as short and concrete as possible, both when giving examples and when giving guidance. One point is the use of time giving examples. We were ten participants in the group, so if each participant were to use three minutes to present an example we would spend half an hour on this. So, for this reason, we had to keep it short. Another point is that a short, to the point, presentation of the example, will make the rest of the guidance process easier, due to a better understanding of the problem at hand. It is not necessary to spend time clarifying the problem, if it is presented short and precisely in the first place. In step three and four in the balint method, we get to examine the example more carefully, so that everybody gets a good and fulfilling grip of the situation at hand. Again, it is wise to keep it as short and concrete as possible. Here we are only formulating the basis for the guidance; we are not doing actual guidance.

By using the balint method the group gets to do three main things:

-we get to work out a number of possible (and impossible) ways of handling the problem at hand

-we get to reflect beyond the limits of the concrete problem, but then with the example as starting point and focus point for the reflections

-we get to put words on frustrations we have due to this, or similar, situations

As I see it, it is the explicit use of *imagination* in the guidance that creates a *room* for all these three aspects. The use of imagination gives us an opportunity to take a step backward, away from the problem described in the example. This step backward creates a room, a space, where new perspectives can emerge and where emotions can flow out into the open. This again is a good starting-point for reflecting beyond the actual problem at hand, and then we can get even more new creative ideas. One of the

male participants mentioned an example where he met, what he described as, a very pretty female unemployed. During the counselling the female behaved very charmingly, and our male colleague was charmed indeed. Because of this he experienced that he lost track of the counselling, and he wondered if he made the wrong decisions because of that. In the guidance we used the imagination as usual, and took the necessary step backward so that we could examine the situations. Through this the male participant also got to look at the situation from a distance, so that he could consider the way he had acted – and he also could consider the other ways to act proposed in the groups fantasies.

This step backward also creates a distance from the person giving the example, and the guidance given by the group. This distance makes it easier to receive guidance, without having to experience this as a personal attack. In the example mentioned above this was important, because the male colleague felt vulnerable giving the example. The example created a lot of laughter in the group, but not on the behalf of the male giving the example, but out of the fantasies created by the group. Here the room created by the step backward made it easier, and not so frightening, to be guided upon.

When we are thinking through the imagination, we are actually doing philosophical practice, at least in some ways. The main process that is going on in the group is the movement from the concrete problem at hand, given by one of the participants, to more abstract reflections based on the problem or on ideas or emotions triggered by the problem. This movement goes from the concrete, to the abstract, and then back to the concrete again, and so on. As a philosophical practitioner I have good training in being *in* this movement.[5] It is especially important to be able to make the move up from the concrete when necessary, and down from the abstract when this is necessary. My experience is that this constant movement is quite effective, both for the concrete problem at hand and for the more philosophical reflections. What we are doing then, is a combination of concrete guidance and philosophizing.

When we are working this way, it is important to be able to pinpoint and question main topics that emerge during the guidance. Again it is good to be a trained philosophical practitioner. During our guidance process over these last months, we have discovered several main problems in dialogues in Aetat. It is interesting to notice that many of these problems are problems that also emerged through my own training as a philosophical practitioner.

Of course the question of role was brought up. How are we to mix the private and personal with the distanced and objectiveness in the dialogues? One of the counsellors experienced a very personal counselling, where she and the unemployed connected from the first moment. The unemployed revealed a lot about his personal life, and the counsellor started to reveal her own personal life as well. After the counselling the counsellor hesitated to make notes of the counselling, as we usually do in Aetat. She wanted to keep the counselling private, as a personal conversation. She reported to the guidance group that she stopped being a counsellor, and started being a private person in the counselling. This example started our discussion about our role in counselling, and this discussion continued throughout our meetings.

Then we have the problem of handling information that we really do not want to hear, whether it is too personal or it is illegal. One of the counsellors got to know that

one of the unemployed drove without a driver's licence, and the counsellor did not want to know this – and he did not know how to handle the information. We discussed this in the guidance group, and the group suggested that the counsellor should tell the unemployed to stop driving – or it would be reported to the police.

The latest problem we worked with was whether it is wise to go along with the unemployed, even if it is not relevant what he is talking about, or if it is wiser to stop the unemployed and to put him on the right track. One of the counsellors reported about a meeting with an unemployed, who gave a very good first impression. He seemed quite “down to earth” to begin with, but during the counselling he became more and more talkative. He started repeating himself, and he analysed everything and had a good answer to everything. He talked fast and loud, and did not allow any interruption. The counsellor tried to ask some questions at first, but soon resigned because the unemployed avoided every question with even more talk. The counsellor reported that she dropped out of the dialogue, and started analysing the unemployed. Of course, this counselling did not result in anything. In the guidance we discussed whether the counsellor should interrupt more, and how this could be done without making the unemployed feel disrespected.

What I experienced, and pointed out to the group, was that these main problems can be found in almost every example that is given, and that they probably therefore is central to all dialogues.

Some reflections at the end

Some times it was hard for the participants to formulate precise problems. They experienced that they had some bad feelings from a dialogue, but they didn't know why. In these cases we used step three and four in the balint method to work out the problem, so that we could get a formulation we could work with. I think that this process of putting words to the problem, are really philosophical in itself. It was interesting to notice that these kinds of examples were given more and more often as we went along with our meetings. I think the participants used the opportunity they had to get help putting words to situations they found disturbing. Or to put it in another way, the participants became more and more philosophical as they adjusted to this way of working.

When I asked the participants what effect they experienced after the guidance process was over, they pointed at two main aspects. First, they pointed out that the guidance gave them concrete help in solving concrete problems. Working with the balint method had given them several new perspectives on how to give counselling, and they had stopped focusing on the need to give the right solutions to problems. They had become aware that there always exist several ways to solve a problem, and they had stopped searching for the *one* right way. Second, they all reported that they, through the guidance process, had become more aware of their own role in counselling. Now they both gave counselling and reflected upon the counselling they gave, at the same time. This lead to a more dynamic counselling, and they felt more secure in the counselling setting than before. I think that this awareness also makes it easier to adjust the counselling as it goes along, instead of being caught up in the dialogue. For me, this

effect was most satisfactory, because I think it gave the participants a new way of doing counselling. I think that this new way of doing counselling is more of a philosophical way. This philosophical way is a more efficient way of doing counselling, compared to the way the participants were doing counselling before joining the group.

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Herrestad, Svare *Filosofi for livet*, Unipub, Oslo, 2004.

Sartre, Jean Paul *Imagination, a psychological critique*, University of Michigan Press, 1972

Recourses:

www.balint.co.uk

www.filo.no

www.nsf.no

Attachment nr. I:

The Balint Method:

1. Each member of the group presents one example for guidance. The presentation has to be short (3-4 sentences), and it should present both the problem and emotions following the problem.
2. The group chooses one example for guidance.
3. The person chosen presents the example in greater detail:
 - who took part in the dialogue?
 - what was the dialogue about?
 - what did I do in the concrete situation?
 - what happened then...?
 - other relevant points...

Try to be short, and to the point!

4. The group gets to ask questions to clarify the example.

This should be questions about facts in the situations, not hypothetical questions!

5. Now the group gets to *fantasize* about the dialogue:

First about the unemployed:

How did he/she experience the dialogue?

How did this experience effect the dialogue?

Then about the colleague:

How did he/she experience the dialogue?

How did this experience effect the dialogue?

The person guided on does not get to say anything, he/she should just listen and take notes!

6. The person guided, comments briefly.
7. Now the group *fantasizes* about other ways to handle the dialogue:
 - the point is not that one method is better/worse than other methods, but rather to use this opportunity to create new and alternative methods (the person guided can choose for him/herself which methods to learn from...)
8. The person guided, comments.
-
9. The group summarises the guidance.

Attachment nr. II:

Some rules for the guidance group

1. *Present your own thinking!!*
 - use your own thoughts and experience (avoid namedropping, ref. to theories, books and so on)
 - express real doubt (not rhetorical)
2. *Listen to others!*
 - ...as you would like others to listen to you...
 - keep the focus on the words used by others, avoid interpretation
 - try not to think about the next thing you will say yourself
3. *Avoid making speeches!*
 - be short and to the point (do not say more than you have to)
 - talk about the case, not other things
4. *Avoid hypothetical questions!!*
 - do not create imaginary situations
 - do not start discussions beside the point of our dialogue
 - do not leave the example to talk in general terms

5. *Show respect!*

- for the others in the group, and for those presented in the examples
- remember that we work together, not against each other
- keep personal information inside the group

[1] The method is an adjusted version of the “Balint method,” first developed by doctor Michael Balint. Balint wanted to develop the doctor’s skills in talking with the patients, both to treat them better as human being and to get the right information to set the right diagnosis. Henning Herrestad used this method working with volunteers, who worked with people in crises. Herrestad also used it in philosophical practice training, and that is where I first meet the method.

[2] I developed the method in the spring of 2004, when Aetat started the first colleague guidance group. I did not lead or join his group. Now, in January of 2006, we are planning ten new meetings with at new guidance group.

[3] Attachment I gives the balint method in greater detail, as I used it in the guidance.

[4] It is quite interesting to note that everyone thought this to be difficult to start with, but that these difficulties disappeared as we went along with our meetings.

[5] That is, in starting this movement, in pointing out this movement in itself and in pointing out important points during this movement.

IMPROVISATION. A “METHOD” OF
PHILOSOPHICAL CONSULTATION

Neri Pollastri



The most frequently discussed theme in the field of philosophical practice is probably the method issue. Personally, I gave up the idea a long time ago that both philosophical practice and philosophy have a method, because the critics to the method concept in philosophy elaborated by philosophers as Thomas Kuhn, Imre Lakatos, Paul Feyerabend and, before them, by Hegel, are extremely convincing. This doesn't mean that the method issue in philosophical practice could be disregarded, because it is very important for the *identity* of the discipline and for the possibility *to teach* it to apprentice practitioners.

If you look at philosophical practice, you can see that it is a *practical* activity, but it is connected with a subject, philosophy, specifically *theoretically*. Such an apparent contrast explains why the methodological problem has in itself a strong urgency: how can you be *practical*, by using only *theories*? Such a question once again reconnects the method issue in philosophical practice to the relation between this discipline and philosophy. My view on this matter is that philosophical practice is nothing but philosophy: “philosophical practice”, actually, means “practice of philosophy”. Obviously, you can “practice” philosophy in an academic way - reading and writing essays and books, dealing only with “abstract” problems - or in other ways, as the philosophical practitioners are doing. What are the differences?

Practicing philosophy in not an academic way means philosophizing: a) with not philosophers; b) dealing with (and starting from) concrete, individual everyday problems. Looking better at the various types of philosophical practices, you can see that some of them have partially definite methodologies. Nevertheless it happens because they include also aims and goals, which are not specifically philosophical. Philosophy is love of “Sophia”, and its aims are only knowledge and understanding; on the contrary, for example, *Philosophy for Children* has also a pedagogic purpose, and the “Socratic Dialogue” has the pursuit to reach a positive and shared result at the end of the sessions. These goals are the sources of their own methodologies, which have thereby their roots in other fields - pedagogy and psychology, in general. Obviously, they include also philosophical tools and competencies, and therefore they have fully

philosophical dignity; nevertheless, they are “hybrid” practices (as already Shlomit Schuster wrote in his first book, *Philosophy Practice*).

But, I think, philosophical consultation is indeed a “purely philosophical” practice, namely it is “pure philosophy”. Therefore it cannot have a specific methodology¹.

A practical theory

The consultation acting, being *philosophical*, is essentially *theoretical*. It is dialogical, made of concepts and words, involved in stories, worldviews, understandings of problems, theories, conceptions of life, sense networks, systems of values. All these theoretical elements are introduced in consultation dialogue not by the consultant, but by the counselee, because they are what, by means of which he narrates, explains and justifies his problematic situation, the reason that has induced him to come to the consultant. The philosopher looks at them as elements of a *text* - a living text, responding and reacting to his analysis and suggestions.

This points out the modes of the relation between theory and practice in philosophical consultation: what happens between consultant and counselee is really *theoretical*, but it has already concrete results on both dialoguing partners' life, because philosophical consultation is a “practical theory”², that is, in Gerd Achenbach's words, «a practitioner meta-theory, building itself only as a reflecting and practice process»³. In such a way philosophical consultation (and the other “purely philosophical” practices, as for example *Café Philo* and some types of seminars) have to be seen in the light of the philosophical current starting from Plato. In *Phaedro* and *VII letter* he was criticizing “written” philosophy, which in his opinion solidifies the thinking process *in motion*, reducing it in doctrinal and dogmatic shapes of knowledge. This doesn't occur, said Plato, in the oral practice of philosophy, which is an acting, a process, always including change. Several thinkers during the ages have worked according to this platonic line. Indeed all of them are worthy of the name of “philosopher”: they wrote books and systems, but every time doubting more and more about their conclusions, questioning, correcting and sometimes rejecting them. In other words, they used writing as a way to communicate to other philosophers and men the provisory results of their speculation.

On this line of thought is the Italian philosopher Carlo Sini, who says that if man follows philosophy in its written shape, he «will acquire culture, but he will lose philosophy», because «culture distracts man from thinking and from pursuing truth. It deceives him to be philosopher because he reads books of philosophy (as the publisher grants), but having entirely forgotten, or never known, what really the exercise of philosophy and of thinking is: the philosophical *ethos*»⁴.

So, philosophy is not simply identifiable in a *corpus* of books and knows, but it requires something else - an *ethos*. What is it? Fundamentally, a way to look at the world and at its problems, a way to act dialogically, a way of life.

¹ I have argued this thesis in my book *Il pensiero e la vita. Guida alla consulenza e alle pratiche filosofiche*, Milano, Apogeo, 2004.

² Cf. Neri Pollastri, *Teoria pratica e palle di biliardo. La consulenza filosofica come mappatura dell'esistenza*, in Walter Bernardi e Domenico Massaro (Eds.), *La cura degli altri. La filosofia come terapia dell'anima*, Arezzo, Dipartimento di Studi Storico-Sociali e Filosofici, 2005.

³ Gerd Achenbach, *Philosophische Praxis*, Köln, Dinter, 1984, p. 59.

⁴ Carlo Sini, *Filosofia e scrittura*, Laterza, Bari, 1994, p. 47.

Philosophy as a reflective and transcendental acting

The first characteristic of this way of life is its *intention*: it is *reflective*. This is an important difference from the majority of the other human behaviors, which aim to have effect directly on the surrounding reality. Such behaviors are of technical-strategic type, they use the “means-to-goals” logic, and therefore define methodology, to obtain their pre-defined purposes. Their direction goes *from* man *to* reality. On the contrary, philosophy has for its goals only understanding and knowing; it doesn’t include the aim of having direct effect on reality. The only effect it has, is on the man himself, which is philosophizing. So, it is reflective.

How can philosophy affect the philosopher himself? Just because, by philosophizing, he changes his way of thinking the world (and himself), and so changing also his way of reacting to it. In such a way it is a “practical theory”: one changes his theory and, immediately, also his entire being changes, including his emotional sphere, his decisional aptitude, his way of acting in the world.

In my Italian book, I have explained how this philosophical way of life is connected, in its core, to the Socratic approach to philosophy, as it is interpreted by Gregory Vlastos in his important Socratic studies⁵. I show there some other characteristics of philosophy, intrinsically connected with it, as: *critics*, issues from Socratic disavowing of knowledge; *analysis*, fundamental part of understanding; *improvement* of the knowledge available to the philosopher; *systematic re-construction*, rationally guided, of knowledge itself. But in such a frame the problem arises of how joining the “static” possession of these competencies with the “dynamic” element of philosophizing, its “know how”.

From method to improvisation as a method

In order to have an answer to the last question, it is spontaneous to think of a method. But we have seen that a unified method in philosophy is impossible. An Italian philosopher, Franca D’Agostini, says: «Philosophy has several methods: it is a multi-methodological activity»⁶. And what is valued for philosophy, it is also valued for “pure philosophical” practices. In fact, as a lot of practitioners affirm, there is not a method of philosophical consultation, and also the methods some of them have described seem to be more general schemes, useful to understand what happens during a session and to have in it an orientation, rather than something similar to a traditional “method”. This happens because, if consultation is really philosophical, like philosophy it has several methods, not a specific one.

Thus, the problem becomes: how is it possible to link and to organize the plurality of philosophical methods and competencies in a general frame, which can give them a sense, a philosophical identity, and, at the same time, to help philosophers to practice consultation? To answer this question I am working on a particular concept, suitable to function as a flexible and open “method”: *improvisation*.

In philosophical practice literature some practitioners have already spoken about improvisation: Catherine McCall, who affirms «the practical philosopher working with

⁵ Cf. Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991; Gregory Vlastos, *Socratic Studies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

⁶ Franca D’Agostini, *Metodi e tecniche filosofiche*, in “La società degli individui”, 21, 2004, pp.129-130 (now in Franca D’Agostini, *Nel chiuso di una stanza con la testa in vacanza*, Roma, Carocci, 2005).

people is always and in every instance improvising»⁷; Marc Sautet, who came up with the idea of improvisation while speaking about *Café Philo*, which is, in my opinion, the philosophical practice most similar to consultation; Ran Lahav, who indicates it as a type of method, describing it on the analogy of the way in which musicians operate: «*a basis of variations, (...) a procedure which one is supposed to approximate in a rough manner, but not necessarily to follow exactly*»⁸.

Trying to go more deeply in the same way and joining these reflections with my knowledge of jazz music, I am now persuaded that this concept of method is very important to understand what happens in philosophy and philosophical consultation. Musical improvisation is in fact, as philosophy, a multi-methodological activity: an improvising musician must have a large range of theoretical knowledge and practical competencies, thanks to he obtains, when required, a multiplicity of possible and different methods to express his musical ideas. So, for example, he must: 1) know musical notation, theory of harmony, structures of several compositions; 2) possess quite a specific knowledge of the history of musical styles; 3) master very well the field to which he refers his music; 4) have listened carefully to and studied analytically the masters of his instrument. Besides, he must have a good command of his instrument and know all of its secrets, but he must also have competence on the instruments of his music partners. Again, he must know how to listen to his partners, the public, the surroundings. Finally, he must have a serene aptitude to stage presence.

But all of these qualities are not sufficient, yet: as the Italian philosopher Davide Sparti observes, the improviser must also belong to a «community of practice»⁹, because «relevant knowledge aspects of the improviser can be learnt “without teaching”, that is in interaction contexts, without requiring explicit linguistic transmission and translation»¹⁰. This means that improvisation is «a practice organized in the context of specific communities, according to their traditions and norms»¹¹; nevertheless, presupposing «a socialization and the decisive role of a tradition»¹², it allows a *transformation* of all what is produced during the practice. Indeed, its characteristic lineament is just «the transformation of a sonorous texts *corpus* (...), that is their re-connotation or signification or re-contextualization»¹³.

This short description of improvising practice is sufficient enough to understand to what an extent it requires great and continuous study, exercise and attention to the matter, and therefore how far it is from being a trivial or superficial activity.

In this “improvisation method” two elements have important roles: *practice skills* (a “know how” in the field in which one want to act) and the *reference to a corpus of tradition*. The first element has some theoretical aspects (in learning skills you usually also need to know their theory), but above all it is characterized by the personal, psychophysical undertaking of “habits” and ways of being. This allows that the “knowledge” of skills and competencies one possesses, could become an “operative mastering”, a control of them without a direct mental employment of theory. Instead,

⁷ Catherine McCall, *Job for Philosophers: Philosophical Inquiry - Origin and Development*, in Wim Van Der Vlist (ed.), *Perspectives in Philosophical Practice*, Leusden, Vereniging voor Filosofische Practijk, 1996, p. 71.

⁸ Ran Lahav, *Is Philosophical Counseling that different from Psychotherapy?*, in “Zeitschrift für Philosophische Praxis”, I, 1994, p. 34.

⁹ Cf. Davide Sparti, *Suoni inauditi. L'improvvisazione nel jazz e nella vita quotidiana*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2005, pp. 128 e sg.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 129.

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 130.

¹² *Op. cit.*, pp. 130-131.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, p. 132.

the second element is closely related to knowledge, because it requires the study of theory and tradition; but it is not enough that these knows remain only “known”: they must be analyzed and criticized, valued and confronted, reconsidered and modified, until they are “metabolized” and become parts of the musician “way of being”.

Shortly, in both elements the cognitive aspects appear necessary, but not sufficient: knowing which key to touch to obtain a note, remembering which notes constitute a song, knowing the great masters’ interpretations of it, all this, however, doesn’t mean being able to play music, nor to improvise. To reach these capacities, you need to “embody” those knows and competencies, in a way that fingers go directly and at the right time on the right key, the musician’s stylistic ideas spontaneously spring from his mind and his heart, producing the “right” sonorous form.

What we have seen, allows us to understand how and why the practice of improvisation is similar to the practice of philosophy, in all its modes. Who wants to become a philosopher cannot either limit his training to learning the great thinkers’ works, nor to knowing to list and to distinguish philosophical methodologies, argumentative modes, logic laws, thinking fallacies, nor just to giving contemporary problems answers which other people gave them in past. All these knows are essential presupposes, but they are not sufficient. It is necessary indeed having attended a community, that one defined by Matthew Lipman “research community”, the one we can more generally call the eternal community of philosophy. Only in it you can learn to philosophize, by the examples of the masters, in collaboration with other companions, and finally venturing in personal ways to answer to open questions of the community, operating some original “variations” on them, but remaining “situated” in it and receiving by the other members confirmations of his “philosopher” qualities.

Without this practice training in community, it is impossible to philosophize; you can be a good connoisseur, or expert, or teacher of philosophy, but you cannot be *philosopher*. You can be able to narrate philosophy, not to do it, because (as Sparti says about jazz music) its «stigma» is the «transforming appropriation», which produces «difference by means of repetition»¹⁴. It should be noted that this interpretation is based on a difficult and always provisory balance of tradition and innovation, in which an excess of repetition of the first nullifies the value of the (philosophical or artistic) work, and an excess of the second makes it either incomprehensible, or quackish. Just the imponderable of this balance shows why the only “method” suitable to describe it without pauperizing its creative function is “improvisation”: having all (or large part of) the knows and competencies required to be an improviser, the philosopher, as the artist, is able to dose the reference to tradition and personal suggestion, to create original and appropriate variation to the theory.

Philosophy and philosophical consultation

What is valid for philosophy, is also valid for philosophical consultation, because, as we have seen previously, there are no decisive differences between them. Obviously, the few little differences require some specific competencies. So, if philosophical consultation is usually practiced with people without a training in philosophy, it requires the philosopher to use a simpler, everyday language, which must be comprehensible. Then, being philosophical consultation usually oral, it requires the philosophical practitioner to have greater dialogical skills than an academic philosopher. Finally, if the “text” you have to do with in consultation is a “living text”, reacting

¹⁴ Cf. *Op. cit.*, p. 130: «Difference by means repetition - this transforming appropriation is the stigma of jazz».

spontaneously and unpredictably, it requires – as in musical improvisation – greater attention and openness towards this. But, generally, these competencies are implicitly included in the philosopher's baggage: he loves knowledge and searching, he wishes to learn; and *wishing to learn* means *being able to listen*. Certainly, an academically trained philosopher often lacks openness and listening skills in front of people; but he only needs to improve his implicit qualities by training, getting himself used to practicing philosophy in dialogue, in direct interpersonal relationships, in public discussions, in his own difficulties in everyday life. In such a way he can develop and enlarge the philosophical aptitudes to look at problems with openness, curiosity and serenity. So, it appears that philosophical consultation requires some skills different from philosophy, but just related to the original *ethos*, which characterises philosophy. Improving them from theoretical to the wider range of life problems means to acquire an aptitude we can name “philosophical wisdom”, the same treated by authors as Achenbach (who names it *Lebenskönnerschaft*), Lahav or Ruschmann. It is similar to the capacity to be on the stage of an improviser musician, and it is indispensable to do a good philosophical work with a counselee, but also to lead personally a good life.

A simple case study as example

Now I would like to explain my conception by means of an example of my professional practice. First, a short premise. In the teaching experiences, I have been doing for five years in my Italian association, in universities, in conferences and seminars, I have never used pictures or images to explain my ideas. This is the first time I do that, and I have decided to use them to simplify the example. Later, I have also noted two singular occurrences: first, this case study has a conclusion centered just on the production of an image by the counselee; second, the general picture I have created to show the case has an interesting character, which gives a general sense to the whole consultation process. It could be exciting and useful reflecting on this role of images in this case study and, more generally, in philosophy.

The case of Daniel is one of the most linear, positive and shortest cases in my professional practice. It only took three sessions, each about two hours, and a short meeting two months later. It went on along few directions, we explored carefully, without pressure or anxiety. It ended positively, thanks to a result at which the counselee arrived by himself. Unfortunately, the consultations are not always so simple; nevertheless this case is coherent with other, more complicated situations, and it has the advantage to be easy to schematize, and therefore useful to show what happens in a consultation.

In the first picture I summarize the general scheme of the consultation, in my opinion reducible to three moments of it: *beginning*, *continuation* and *conclusion*. This reduction substitutes, in my view, the impossible method, and someone could think it too strong and therefore useless and futile, but I would like to remember that it is the same scheme Hegel used to distinguish and describe the parts of his philosophical process. It may appear “empty” but, just for this, it leaves room to every type of things, which can fill it.

In the second picture I show a scheme of an hypothetical beginning of Daniel's case. In this picture you can see, in the colored boxes along the black lines, the real beginning of consultation and, in the gray boxes along white and hatched lines, some of

the several and not realized ways from which it could start. As indicated, I started by leaving Daniel to tell his problem and his present understanding of it, as I prefer doing in almost all the cases. This is not the only possibility, and we must be ready to use other ways to begin, as anticipating counselee's story by asking him, for example, about his choice to come to a philosopher instead of a psychologist or a psychotherapist, his worldview, type and style of life, interests, and so on. It is also possible to speak about the "contract" between consultant and counselee, explaining what philosophical consultation is, defining a working plan, giving some working norms the counselee must respect to go on in the sessions. All these possibilities, and the several others you can imagine, open different courses to the dialogical relationship, which are impossible to describe, because they depend on the dialogical events occurring during the relationship, which has not happened, yet. You cannot know what could happen if the relationship went along those hypothetical courses, in the same way you cannot know which notes could play an improviser musician if he had chosen a song in place of that he has really played.

It is important to observe that we must have a wide range of competencies, skills and literary knows, if we want to remain open to several of these possibilities. We need to be attentive towards the counselee, to take, among the several options, the preferable one. In order to be able to do that, we must possess the philosophical aptitude to be peacefully in front of the problems, that is a form of wisdom, we have to transmit (not to teach!) to counselee.

In the third picture we can see the scheme of the real beginning of Daniel's case, as we have conducted it. Free to tell me his problem, Daniel spoke about his difficulties to have relationships in particular circles of people, that is in groups bond by the common interest in poetry or photography. Those were fields in which he had an interest and he desired to find a role and personal realization. But he said he found regularly difficulties in them to express himself, to speak with people and, finally, to stay there at all. He spoke about an "emptiness" he felt, a lack in his personality and a sense of worthlessness he always experienced in those situations.

The analysis and discussions we carried on about this matter is schematized in picture four. I asked him if he had a real and concrete care in these fields and if they were sheer interests for him. Then I asked him what his "life project" was and if those things had an important place in it. Interestingly, Daniel answered, he had never thought of a "life project" at all.

Shifting to the states of emptiness and worthlessness, I left apart their psychological aspects, to questioning the concept of "empty" (and the related concept of "full"), which Daniel was involved in. A careful examination was made on the symbolic meanings of the terms and on their "hidden" meanings, to understand what the conceptual use could concretely imply.

In the picture the most important moment of the various reflections is highlighted in red: the one which dealt with the life project. The lack of an explicit and conscious consideration of his life project seemed to me a relevant theme to discuss, and it strongly struck Daniel.

The fifth picture shows the passage to the second moment of the consultation, the *continuation*, consisting of two stages: my hypothesis to differently understand Daniel's problematic condition, and also the reflections conducted on life project. As

illustrated in the sixth picture, this was the most complex stage of the dialogical relationship, producing a large series of reflections and argumentations.

Picture six is therefore not easy to appreciate, because its intricacy. Nevertheless I have preferred to leave it so: in such a way, we can understand that complexity is a fundamental characteristic of a consultation, also when it is rather simple, as in Daniel's case. I have omitted to indicate the several other available possibilities to proceed in the dialogical analysis, to avoid a complexity increase. But, I want to remember, also in these stages you could operate in other ways, as I have shown in my illustration of the first stage, the *beginning*.

The first step of continuation was an hypothesis on the possibility that poetry and photography were not interesting "for themselves". I suggested Daniel was running toward them only because his old friends, growing, were leaving him alone. We discussed here the meaning of the age passages in man's life and, again, the need and importance of a conscious and structured life project. This brought us back to this theme, and pushed us to a reflection on it.

We came in such a way to the first of four complex reflections which constitute the second step of the continuation (their concepts in picture six are colored in blue). We confronted the adolescent life project (consisting in having a nice time to spend with friends in various, light activities) with mature, adult life projects, in particular with the most frequent of them: the project of a family, based on a sentimental relationship and on a good profession. Here Daniel gave me clear answers: he was no more satisfied with his adolescent project, but he was not ready for the traditional adult project, yet. Before to begin a serious sentimental relationship, he desired to become autonomously a person, filling his emptiness.

We proceeded then on the theme of Daniel's interests, poetry and photography, exploring two hypothesis: were they peripheral or central for his identity? About the latter option, we considered the difficulties in facing the "risk", the anxiety not to be appreciated, and we questioned the idea of "lack in personality". This led us to distinguish and to understand the people circles Daniel was associating with: old friends, poets and photographers. We clarified in a short time that Daniel had difficulties because he needed a recognition by people, he had already had by his old friends but, on the contrary, he had to gain by poets and photographers. Besides, we clarified Daniel's difficulties were connected to the importance of things the people were doing in the circles: if things had little importance, as in old friends' circles, then he had few difficulties; if things had great importance, he consequently had strong difficulties. Our reflections went therefore on the things Daniel felt important.

Just this feeling was relevant, because it was the sign that those things could "fill" Daniel's emptiness. Then we observed, poetry and photography were both creative activities: by producing poems or photographs, Daniel could leave his "footprints", or "tracks", on the world, because they were autonomous from him, but at the same time "his" creation, or concrete expressions of his "abstract" interior. They were a sort of "his self outside himself", an "objective" self exposed to people's judgement. In such a way they satisfied Daniel's need to show himself and to be recognized. Daniel said, he had already felt to have creative needs, but he had never seen the relation we had pointed out. I underlined the importance of creative activities, and their analogy with the traditional life project, centered on the "creation" of children's life. It was the most important moment of this stage of discussion, and I have therefore highlighted it in red in the picture.

We ended here our second meeting and, as I saw later, we had already entered the final stage, the *conclusion*.

The third meeting Daniel arrived calmer, almost satisfied. He said to have thought an image, which had been very useful when, during the time between our sessions, he had had the opportunity to take part in some meetings with poets and photographers. He had imagined to have a bucket to send down in the well of his interior, to draw ideas and feelings inspiring his creativity. He had recalled this image during the meetings, discovering it gave him serenity and self-assurance. He was able therefore to attend the meetings and to have relations with people. It was always hard, because emptiness and worthlessness still arose, but the image helped him to fight them off. He was really relieved, hoping he could employ it again.

I explained to him the image gave concrete shape to the understanding we had gained by our reflections. It showed him, according to an Aristotelian terminology, his abstract “potence” to create something by his own, by drawing his ideas and feelings; giving them a clear and concrete frame of himself, the image helped him to put in “act” his “potence”.

We concluded our meeting and, formally, our consultation, with a suggestion of mine: Daniel had to continue to use his image, until he had gone over his relational difficulties. We decided to meet again only if he had not been able to do it, or when he had arrived to a clear improvement.

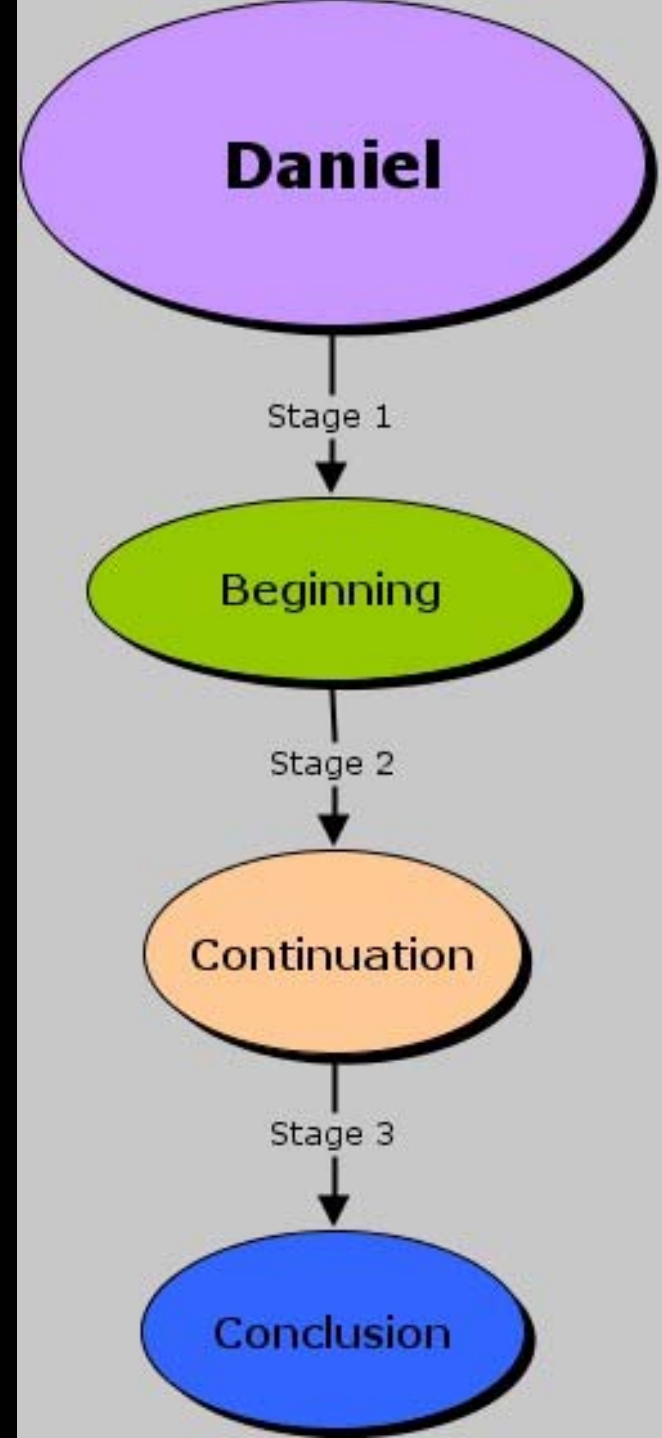
We met indeed two months later, when Daniel told me he was continuously improving and he was meeting a lot of people in those circles he was interested. I had some other contacts with him, by mail and by phone, eight months later: he confirmed me his improvement, affirming conclusively: «When we met, it was a difficult period of my life, but it was sufficient to speak a little about it, to raise the blockade of my mental way, which was revolving around itself. Now my maturation has grown, and I see that, when I use my will, I realize my desires. To, first of all, my great satisfaction».

Concluding my exposition, I want to point out an exciting suggestion for the general interpretation of philosophical consultation, which can be seen in the last, eighth picture. It shows the complete scheme of Daniel’s case, which I have composed and colored. Daniel is on the top, in a sky-blue background; our dialogue and its complex series of reflections and discussions is under him, in a brown background. It wants to symbolize this interpretation of mine.

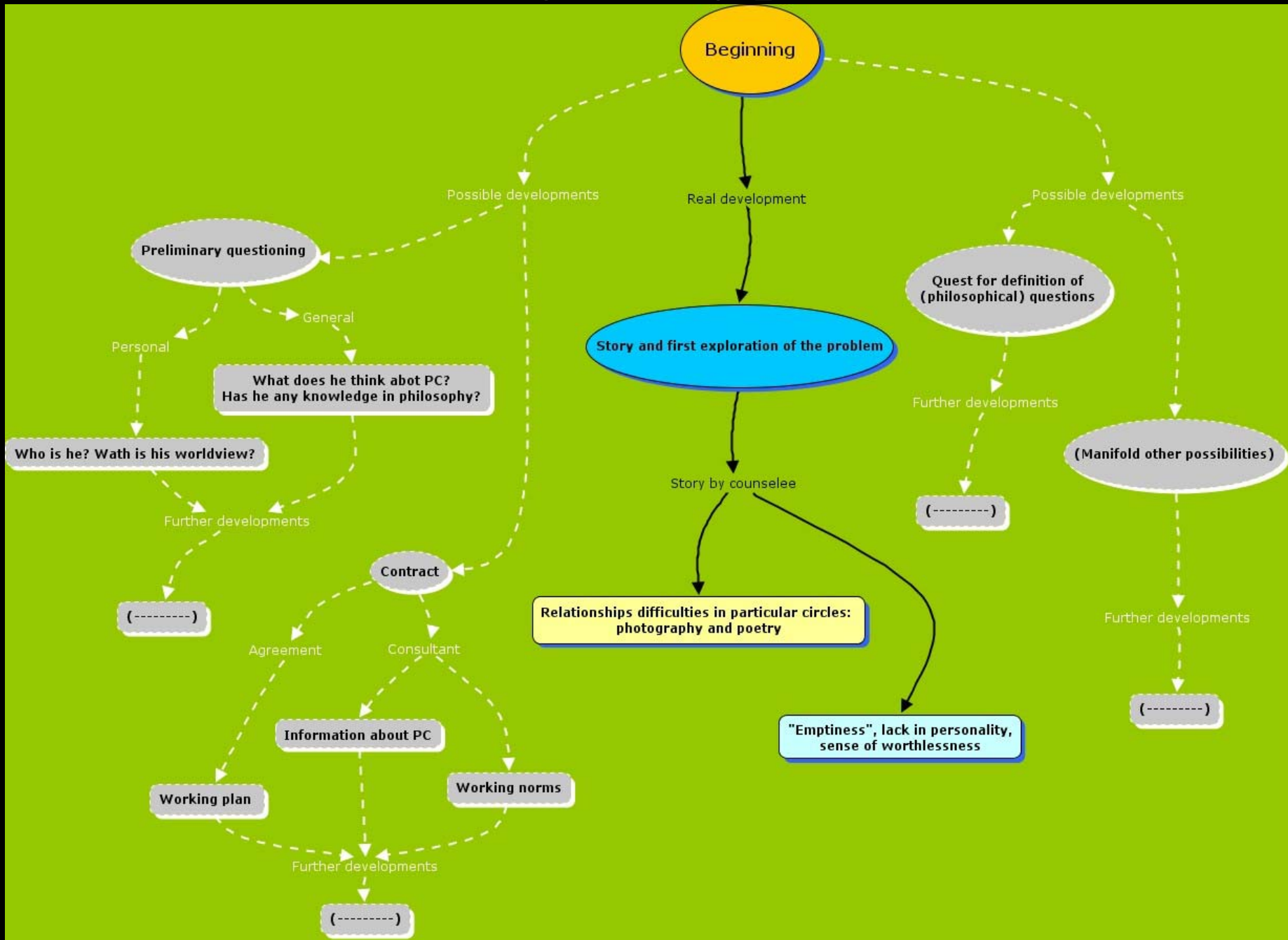
Daniel, as every person, lives on the surface of the world; there, he meets problems and difficulties he must deal with, by his thinking. To explore thinking means to dig the ground on which one lives. A conceptual and emotional ground, and by digging it you can discover the complex network of your own *roots*. Digging more deeply, you can arrive to find out your real understanding of self and world: in fact, the deepest root Daniel found is the image useful to help him in his life difficulties.

If we take this frame as an interpretation of philosophical consultation, it is not so important having a “method” to do it, but it is just important to *dig deeply*, in every way we are able to do it. Philosophically spoken, it is important *searching a new, complex, deeper and deeper understanding*. Mind you, we will never know the complete network of our roots, because we will never dig as far as the end of the ground, but nevertheless, knowing that we always have the possibility, by digging and searching, to find out a lot of things we need.

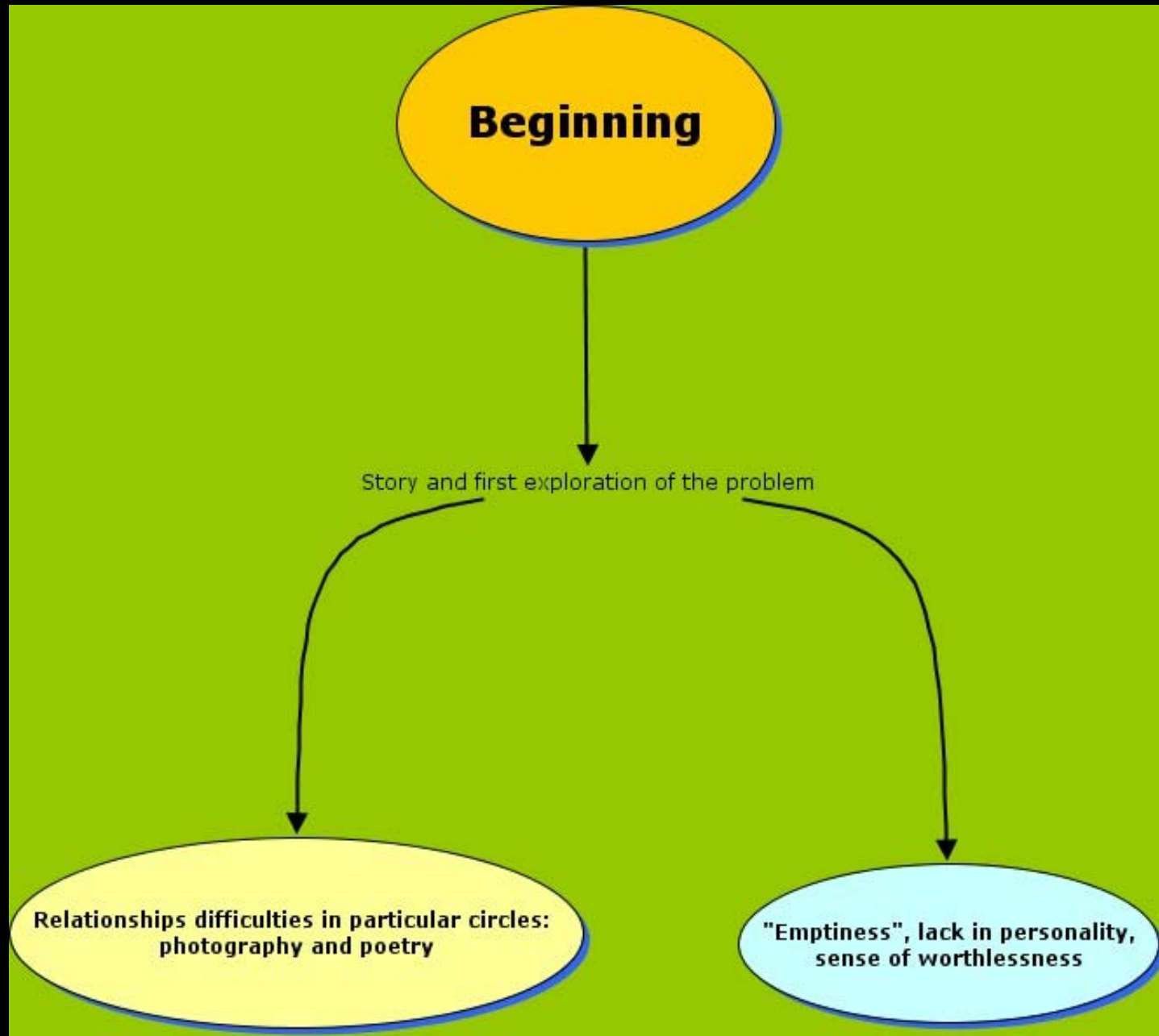
A general scheme
(a “method”?)



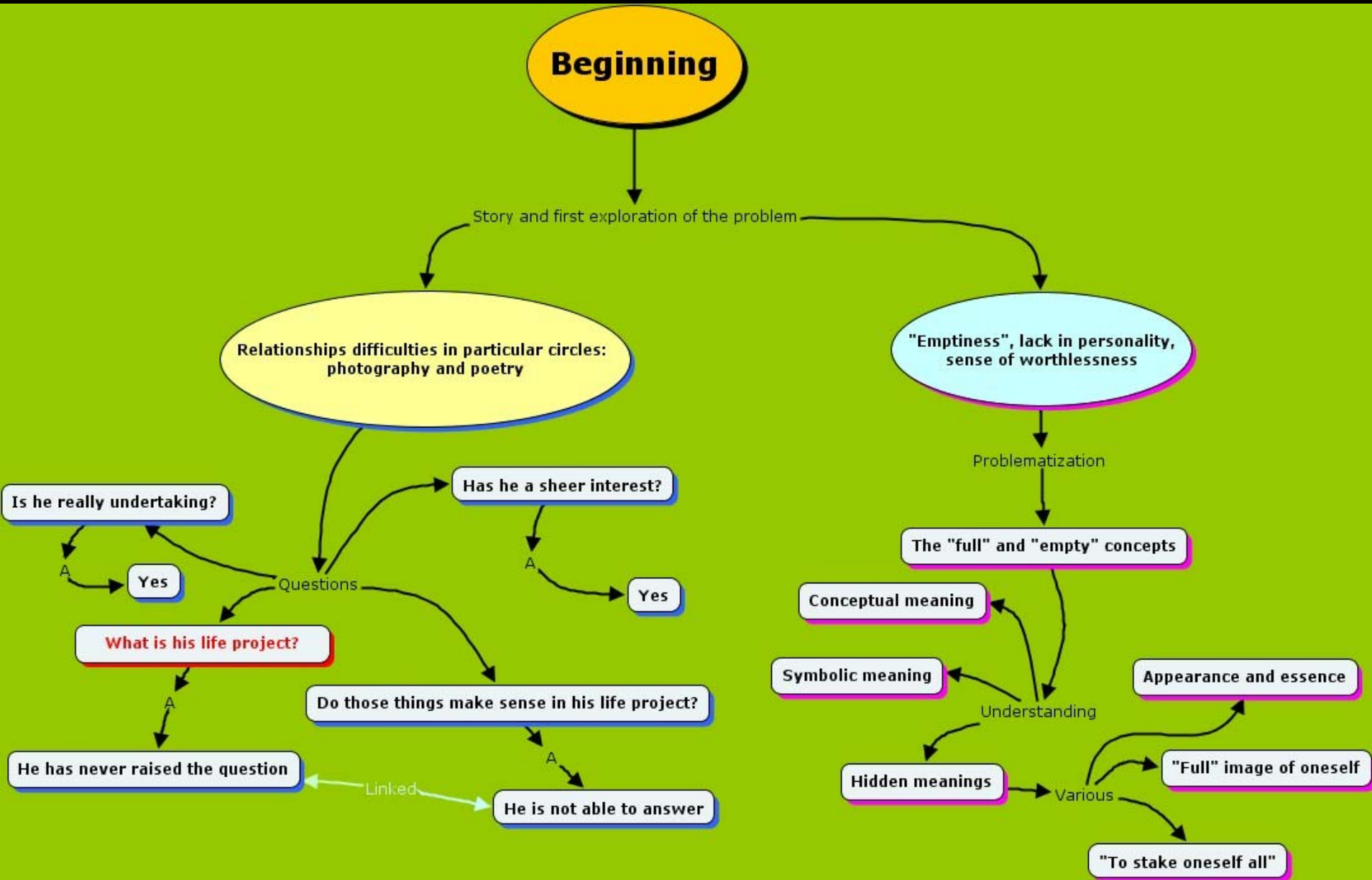
Manifold beginning possibilities



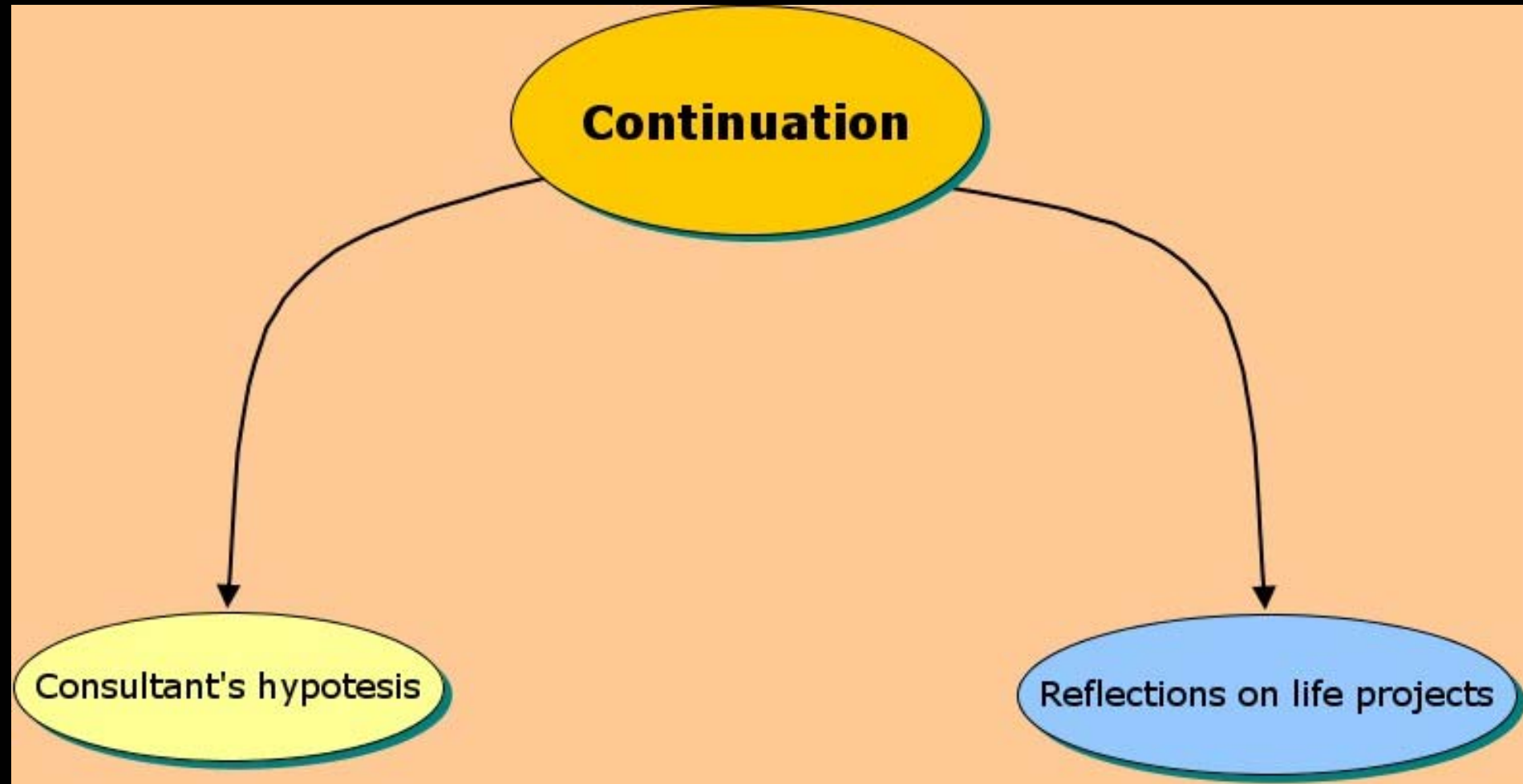
The real beginning



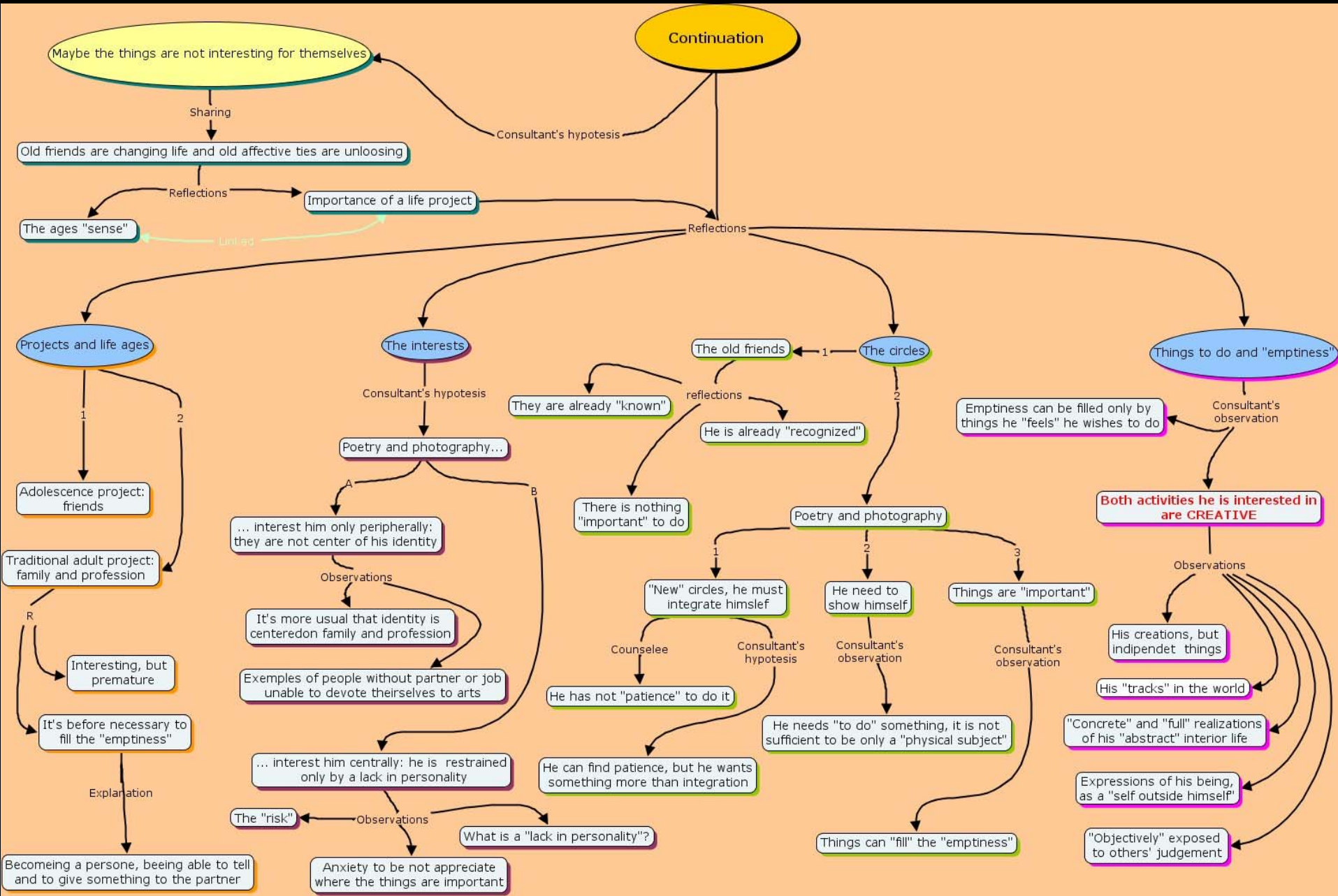
Development of beginning



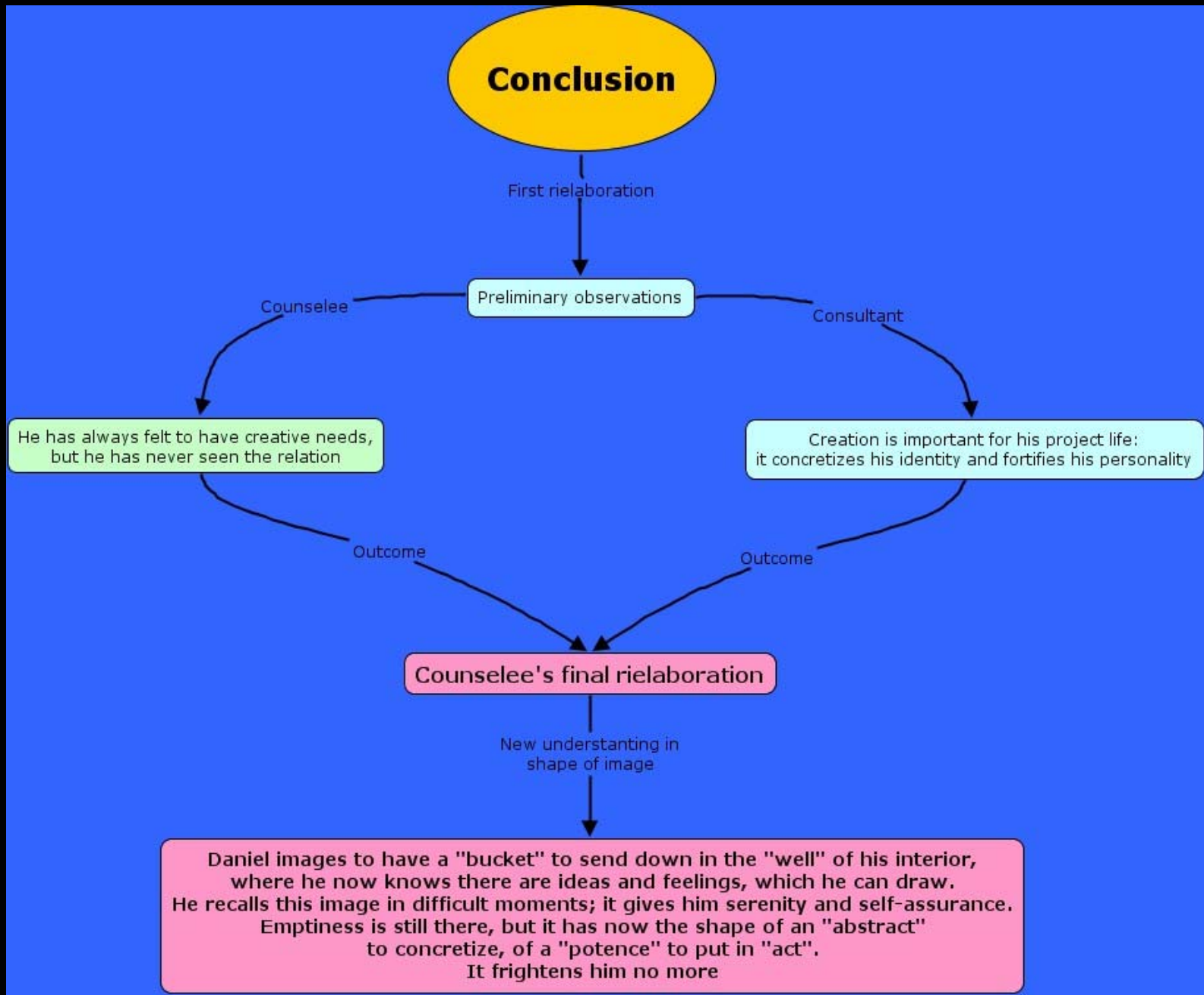
The continuation



The whole continuation



The (always provisional) conclusion



**CATASTROPHIC PHILOSOPHY: CAN
PHILOSOPHY SPEAK OR MUST IT
REMAIN SILENT?**

David O'Donaghue



The story goes that Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote his first masterwork, *The Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, literally in the trenches of the First World War. As a philosophy student, I was captivated by this bit of legend, imagining the 29-year-old Ludwig filthy, exhausted and frightened, surrounded by dead and dying soldiers, with the strong odor of nerve gas and decaying flesh in the air, completing his rigorous logical analysis with what Jacob Needleman considers the most famous words of the twentieth century, "Whereof one cannot speak, therefore one must be silent." This statement did not directly arise out of Wittgenstein's efforts to existentially grapple with the reality of his situation but was referring theoretically to the limits of language in articulating sensible statements. Philosophers are often parodied for being so absorbed in intellectual contemplation that they are oblivious to what's going on in front of them, as in Swift's Laputans, who have one eye turned inward and one eye turned to the sky. We know from the many biographies of Wittgenstein that he was deeply affected by the catastrophe of the First World War, as much as he tried to inhabit a world of immaculate logic. The question I want to raise in this paper is earthy and pragmatic to its core: Can philosophy be of any use or value to those who have experienced a disaster in their lives? If not, why not? And if so, what kind of philosophy best addresses the needs of recovery.

I wish to add a personal dimension to this investigation, since, on August 27, 2005 my life was turned upside down with effects of Hurricane Katrina on my home and school in New Orleans. I would like to use this event as a testing ground for some of the ideas I am going to present. I was in close contact with many people who experienced this disaster and have gathered their stories, reactions, feelings, and ideas in order to flesh out and concretize a field that tends to pride itself on hovering serenely above specifics. I will be differentiating two forms of catastrophe and then examining in what ways they are different and similar in terms of psychological response and the search for meaning. Next I will review some philosophical works that address the place of reason and rationality in the face of devastation. From this review certain patterns and stances will become evident. Throughout the paper I will give some consideration as to how these ideas and concepts reflect the actual experiences of those affected by Katrina.

The United States has experienced two major catastrophes in the past five years. The difference between them is illustrative of two categories of events that should be kept distinct. The terrorist acts which occurred on 9/11 were a result of human choice and were seen as an attack upon the country and a violation of the rules governing humane coexistence. It was a result of human hatred, aggression, desperation, madness or whatever and could have been prevented had other choices been made. After the initial shock, the reaction was one of retaliation and hostility toward the perpetrators and the countries that might be harboring them. We went to war. The hurricane known as Katrina, on the other hand, was a result of a natural process. Hurricanes are common in the Caribbean and are known to be devastatingly powerful. We all knew in New Orleans that at any time the Big One could hit and we also knew what the consequences would be. Many said it was just a matter of time. The national response could not be to declare war. War on what? Nature? God? Such thoughts are absurd. The nation had to deal with its powerlessness and its vulnerability to the vicissitudes of living on this planet.

Forgive me if I am presenting an overly simplified version of distinction here but, for the purposes of analysis, it will suffice. Lets look more closely at the immediate reaction to both tragedies. Both speak to a world out of control. The powerlessness of a nation in the face of hurricanes is the same powerlessness faced by all the nations of the world in the face of terrorism, which can come, as the Gospels tell us, "as a thief in the night." Interesting in that metaphor that an experience of the Other, be it God or the Devil, is symbolized by the thief, a human agent capable of making free decisions. My point is that, from the perspective of ground zero, from the place of those experiencing the disaster most directly, it makes no difference if it's a terrorist bomb or a hurricane or a drive by shooting or an earthquake. The later attribution of blame and responsibility is a secondary elaboration. It is, I think, a defensive structure that is implemented quickly to seal over the utter anguish produced by the event. I was struck most powerfully by this in hearing the response of the media to the news of the Twin Towers: that of immediately ascribing responsibility for the event. It is as if knowing who is responsible of something helps us cope with (or defend against) the reality that threatens us at a very core level. In Lacanian terms this is the experience of the Real which is foreign and psychically indigestible and it is symbolization (i.e., made accessible) through the social network of language. The psychologically relevant question of the difference between a healthy coping mechanism and a pathological defensive response in this regard will be addressed later in this paper.

I don't mean to lose sight of the differences in these two types of disasters. I think the distinction is important on the level of secondary elaboration but not on the level of primary response. The question of the nature of human character and what such atrocities as 9/11 and the Holocaust say about whom we are as a species is very important in our discourse but I don't think it is of much relevance to the immediate recovery process. Also, it seems that questions of human culpability come up centrally after natural disasters as well, in which someone is found to blame, be it in policy making which did not sufficiently take into consideration ecological concerns, or negligence in levee construction, or in slowness and inadequacy of response to the immediate crisis. People cope with their powerlessness and fear through anger and blame. We all know that. I am interested in looking at the primary perception and response to the disaster, taking the disaster itself as a sort of primal scene. I contend that at that level disaster, both manmade and natural, can be examined under the same

categories of psychological experience. Secondary elaborations would be fruitful follow-ups to this study.

Let us move into a review of some of the philosophical sources. I have not done much research into the contributions of ancient philosophies but believe that especially the Stoics: Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, and Seneca, have a great deal of interesting things to say on this topic. Theirs was a time of great insecurity and social upheaval due to the dismantling of the Alexandrian empire and the rise of Rome. Boethius (480-524) is a transitional figure in the Christianization of philosophy. He picked up the existential theme of Job's challenge to God in the light of the suffering of a righteous man, in his work *The Consolation of Philosophy*, written as a means of dealing with his own imprisonment. The argument revolves around establishing the transitoriness and ultimate unreality of things of the earth, especially human achievement, and the superiority of the life of the mind, which can connect one to the eternal truths. God is goodness itself. God governs all things. Therefore all things act toward ultimate goodness, even if we, from our limited mortal perspectives, are not able to see it. He says, interestingly with regard to natural disasters, that, "There is nothing then which following nature, endeavoureth to resist God." God is protected from any attribution of evil or powerlessness in the face of human tragedy. Therefore, the fault falls on humanity, as well as the burden of holding in check one's anger and anguish, in order to pull oneself together and not raise a fist at the divine all-powerful governor of the universe.

This view was maintained in various forms until it came under heavy attack in Voltaire's brilliant satire, *Candide* of 1758. Voltaire wrote the work in response to the devastating earthquakes that hit Lima in 1746 and Lisbon in 1755. As you might remember, Voltaire describes how, despite his endless travails, the young man, Candide, maintains his loyalty to the Leibnizian derived optimism of his teacher Pangloss, that everything is made for the best purpose and they cannot be but the way they are. "Pangloss" literally means an attractive superficial appearance over everything. The sheer magnitude of Candide's bad luck humorously demonstrates the ludicrousness of this position. Significantly Voltaire makes the additional point that, even after a great deal of suffering, when given the chance at an Eldorado of a life of peace and plenty, our protagonist choses against it in favor of adventure and the pursuit of his idealized love and throws himself once again into the arms of misfortune. Martin, one of Candide's fellow adventures, concludes, "man was made to suffer from the restlessness of anxiety or from the lethargy of boredom," and finally offers the solution, "We must work without arguing, that is the only way to make life bearable."

The turn toward the practical, active life as opposed to contemplation is taken up again nearly two hundred years later by Voltaire's countryman, Albert Camus, in his philosophical novel *The Plague* (1947). The Plague is the portrayal of various characteristic responses to powerlessness in the face of an on going disaster. In some ways it is analogous to the situation in New Orleans, where the crisis conditions of the city were prolonged over many weeks as opposed to the Mississippi Coast, where the devastation occurred in one blow. We, who were fortunate enough to get out of the city in time, watched the constant news coverage of the deteriorating situation with shock and horror, and felt that sense of impotence in a world out of control. Parenthetically, I think the effects of the media in processing this event are a very important contribution to the processing of the disaster. I am reminded of the impact of the television coverage

of the struggles of desegregation in Little Rock in 1955, showing angry adult racists bullying a dignified and courageous nine year old African American girl who was only attempting to get to her new school. Images of Vietnam and the Civil Rights Movement traumatized America but also helped her change. The effects of the prolongation of conditions of crisis is well described in *The Plague*. For our purposes I am going to take the liberty of replacing "Katrina" where Camus writes "plague:

By reason of their very duration great misfortunes are monotonous. In the memories of those who lived through them, the grim days of Katrina do not stand out like vivid flames, ravenous and inextinguishable, beaconing a troubled sky, but rather like the slow, deliberate progress of a some monstrous thing crushing out all upon its path...[We] had adapted themselves to the very conditions of Katrina, all the more potent for its mediocrity. None of us was capable any longer of an exalted emotion; all had trite monotonous feelings... A hurricane isn't a thing made to man's measure; therefore we tell ourselves that Katrina is a mere bogey of the mind, a bad dream that will pass away. But it doesn't pass away (P, 176).

I will be giving some thought to reasons why we are incapable of "getting our heads around" disasters later in this paper. What I would like to do now is give some descriptions of various reactions in *The Plague* because I think they help to enlighten us as to common human patterns. Some of the characters change for the better because of the disaster, some for the worse and some remain unchanged. The protagonist of the novel and its narrator is the true existential hero, Dr. Rieux, who bravely kept on fighting the disease, compassionately sitting with the dying and comforting their families. He did not need to rationalize the disaster either through pointing blame at humanity nor in raising his fist to the heavens. Among all the people he meets throughout the story, it is remarkable that he judges no one. Each has his own personal means of coping with the crisis and who can say which is the superior response? There was a price to paying for this neutrality; a sort of cold detachment, evident in his lack of much interpersonal relations and emotional reactions. The disaster had drained him of human feelings. So much tragedy dulled his senses to loss so that the news of the death of his wife hardly touched him. New Orleans papers were filled with stories of brave workers during the crisis that had breakdowns as their energies flagged. We are just learning many of the effects of the nightmare on these lives.

Rambert tried to escape the situation, wishing to distance himself from the disaster by believing that he was only really attached to his love in Paris. In the course of the story he gives up the struggle to leave and finds new grounding through joining with others in facing the needs of the city. When he is finally rejoined to his love, he is ambivalently present, since he is a different man now. This sort of reaction was common in the New Orleans diaspora, in which many reconnected with former lives and friendships as a means of confirm a continuity of an identity that had been shattered with the devastation of the city. Cottard, a near suicide before the plague, finds new life in the underworld and experiences the cataclysm as liberating. The mistakes he had made that lead him to despair have been washed away in the cataclysm but instead of working at inner self-transformation he becomes an opportunist, Since no real transformation occurred for Cottard, he dreads the return to normality and becomes psychotic when the plague has passed. New Orleans had its share of looters and price gougers that the media loved to play up. They were greatly outweighed by those who generously aided those in need. Fr. Paneloux represented a particularly rigid theological

interpretation of the plague as God's vengeance on the reprobate. We have heard this about New Orleans, that city of sin. A very striking moment in the book comes when Rieux and Paneloux are helplessly witnessing the death agonies of a child and Rieux, in a rare showing of emotions, blurts out to the priest, "Ah, that child, anyhow, was innocent - and you know it as well as I do!" The priest, who doesn't quite get it at that point, responds blandly, "That sort of thing is revolting because it passes our human understanding. But perhaps we should love what we cannot understand." As the priest is dying himself he can not bring himself to really connect with the human community. When Rieux asks if he can stay with him, Paneloux replies, "Thanks, but priest! s can have no friends." One of the most striking images I carry with me from Katrina is the attempt made to keep the premature infants alive as the medical center generators were running down. Sometimes, its the report of deaths of the innocents, babies and animals, that impact us at the deepest level.

A few other characters: Grand remained unchanged. He coped with the disaster by obsessing about small word changes in the first sentence of a great novel he was about to embark upon. He happily returned to his sentence when the plague was finished. For some, dealing with the small things over which one has some power gives a modicum of control in a chaotic world. M. Othon, on the other hand had been functioning with the details of a civil servant until his son dies of plague. This loss jarred him to such an extent that he gave up his insular government position and worked directly with those in quarantine, where he too followed his son. Perhaps the most interesting character in this novel is Tarrou, the most philosophical of the characters. He desires to understand, believing that understanding would lead to peace. He dies in stoney stoic silence, not understanding or making sense of the plague or his own death. Is this Camus ultimate message of skepticism as to the aspirations of a philosophy of catastrophe? I think Camus is not ruling out the philosophical discourse but he is illustrating, as Voltaire before him, that philosophy much be reformed to properly address individual experience.

Maurice Blanchot, best known as a literary critic, most directly confronts the question of the limits of philosophy in making sense of catastrophic events in his work, *The Writing of the Disaster*. He defines disaster as an event that breaks with every form of totality and says: "Its sudden arrival is an interruption of history or a proliferation of history in flight bounding endlessly and impassively down multiple, intersecting, contradictory streets; history as disarray, confusion (unable to trace itself back or resolve itself into a whole)." The past has disappeared. After the event, an insurmountable barrier prevents the past from being connected to the present and the future is too uncertain to have causal links with the present. I think New Orleans is a great example of this. Its rich history is suddenly irrelevant to the current situation and its future is riddled with insecurity, so people can only live day by day, taking care of the small things in their lives. Continuity will have to come much later. As Blanchot puts it, "Let there be a past, let there be a future, with nothing that would allow the passage from one to the other." We are always on the edge of disaster without being able to situate it in the future; it is rather always already past, and yet we are on the edge or under the threat which puts a stop to every arrival.

We process the disaster in two ways, according to Blanchot: the way of the day consists in taking care of the external business and hiding our affective states in the details. From this vantage point we can see progress and a sort of false unity. Many of

the characters in *The Plague* stayed solely on this level. The way of the night comes when all integration is impossible and we cannot escape the event's negations. In the day world narrative and linearity is possible, in the night world only fragments and ruins, words isolated from their contexts, like "Help us" written on the rooftops of the flooded homes. The flood waters of New Orleans ran down the streets, separating the households, trapping people. The Superdome held survivors in a hell that was the very contradiction of community. Bonds were broken. Trust was lost. Fragments and ruins also link to the archaic, to the primordial energies that have no respect for civil order. Blanchot's distinction between the day and night processes seem to map well on to the psychoanalytic distinction between primary and secondary processes, the realms of the id and the ego.

The Plague dealt principally with the secondary process response, I wish to focus the rest of this paper on the primary process experience. Blanchot maintains that the experience of the disaster is not a subjective possibility but a limit experience which means it cannot be objectified or thematized, on the contrary, it draws away our subjectivity, turns us into no one. It impoverishes all experience. Blanchot expresses this experience in the following poetic language:

The disaster watches, that is no one watches. Watching is not the power to keep watch - it is not a power, but the touch of the powerless infinite, exposure to the Other of the night, where thought renounces the rigor of vigilance, gives up worldly clearheadedness or mastery in order to deliver itself to the limitless deferral of insomnia, the wake that does not waken, nocturnal intensity. The vigil of no one. (WD, 48)

This sounds like its right out of a Sam Beckett play. This draining of subjectivity can be understood as extreme externalization in which the subject no longer filters his or her perceptions through a interpretive schema but now only passively registers the passing impressions of events. I remember this experience quite poignantly upon hearing the news that the levee had broken and the city was flooded. I was walking along the very incongruous Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley and I knew I was seeing things and negotiating the sidewalk and the traffic and what not but it was as if I was in a bubble from which I could not communicate nor could anyone communicate with me. I went into a bookstore and held up a newspaper and said to no one "that is my home," and could not receive any signs of empathy or understanding from anyone around me. This night is not the dark night of the soul, spoken of in mystical literature as a normal stage of spiritual awaking; no, this night cancels the power of the negative to limit and sublimate; it is rather the experience of nausea, as described by Sartre in the book by the same title, when the significance of events, people and things has vanished, "leaving soft, monstrous masses, all in disorder - naked, in frightful obscene nakedness (N, 127)" The disaster separates the subject from herself and reveals that the wasteland presented as an external event is actually a mirror of the internal wasteland from which there is no escape. "It thinks therefore I am." The disaster can never be concluded and is eternally recurring. Since it reveals the human condition, it exceeds historical categorization. This gives us a clue to deciphering Blanchot's cryptic saying, "The disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything in tact (WD, 120)."

Without a continuity of time, within the space of forgetfulness, Blanchot writes that we experience an ontological passivity: existence without being, space without place, time without a present, responsibility without reason, selfhood or identity. We endure "pure" time: time without event, without project and without possibility, a kind of

empty perpetuity that must be borne infinitely. Perhaps this is what Theodor Adorno means when he writes, "Disaster turns us into a specter, a piece of the world of ghosts, which our waking consciousness perceives to be nonexistent (ND, 364). Even more than Blanchot, Adorno confronts the presumptuousness of philosophy in the face of the disjunctive remainder in disaster. "Our metaphysical faculty," he writes in his masterwork, *Negative Dialectics* (1966), "is paralyzed because actual events have shattered the basis on which speculative metaphysical thought could be reconciled with experience (ND, 362)." This reaction does not mean that one is to give up philosophy, rather one is compelled to philosophize. But this path does not offer any form of salvation, transcendence or reconciliation, since it has no meaning-giving capacity which can penetrate the opacity of human suffering. We, rather, experience a shock within philosophy itself which reveals to us that the deeper we attempt to penetrate the true nature of reality, the further it alludes us, so that we suspect the very project of philosophy itself, that is, that it can show us how things really are. This shock does not reveal that there is another, truer reality beneath appearances that are hidden from our normal perceptions, but rather it "throws a glaring light on the truth itself (ND, 364)." In order for thinking to be true, in its self-reflection, it must think against itself, that is, it must think against its natural inclinations toward totalities and wholeness. It must always guard itself against conceptual closure because there is always already a remainder, that is what Sartre calls "the worm of nothingness in the core of being."

Jacques Lacan approaches this nothingness at the core of being from the psychoanalytic point of view. He writes that in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* we encounter that opaque surface which to some has seemed so obscure that it is the antimony of thought - not just biological but scientific in general - the surface that is known as the death instinct (EP, 21)." The death instinct, according to Lacan, is the vanishing point beyond which no reality can be attained. He links this to the Kantian concept of the *Ding in sich*, the thing in itself, which is always outside the reach of rational understanding. Since we are only given the conditions that make experience possible, we can never be assured of knowing the ground of those experiences. The thing, the material object apart from our conception of it, always escapes our reach. Likewise, since Kant maintains that our knowledge of ourselves is always only through the effects of the self on consciousness, we can never know the noumenal grounds of our being. So therefore, in terms of knowing, there is always an unattainable center in all reality, both internal and external. Lacan calls this *das Ding*.

Das Ding is something strange or alien in me that is at the heart of me. Its the Other within myself. Lacan notes that the reality principle is always defeated because it cannot incorporate the thing-in-itself and thus is set up the paradox that the more we try to articulate the reality principle, so as to make it dependent on the physical world, the more we isolate the subject from reality. In the seventh seminar of 1959-60, published under the title, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan explained:

Das Ding is not nothing, but literally is not. It is characterized by its absence, its strangeness. Everything about it that is articulated as good or bad divides the subject in connection to it and it does so irrepressibly, and no doubt with relation to the same Thing. There is not a good or bad object; there is good and bad and then there is the Thing... Good and bad belong to the order of symbolization - they exist there as clues to that which orients the position of the subject (EP, 61).

Here we see the recuperation of the sophist doctrine that there is no good and bad but thinking makes it so. It is a very important principle in dealing with the various reactions individuals have to things like Katrina. Katrina was not fundamentally bad. It was the Thing, das Ding, the irreconcilable blot of a disastrous event around which individuals related given their own internal states and histories. Just as we saw that the plague took on many different meanings for the characters in Camus' novel, so with all the various reactions to Katrina.

It is not even clear whether we should call it a trauma. I think we can, if you use the word trauma in the way Greg Mогenson, a Jungian analyst, employs it in his book, *God is a Trauma*." Just from the title, we see that the concept of trauma is raised to the level of the divine. Lacan likewise, does not demote the Thing to some precognitive mute and amorphous dead matter but sees das Ding as opening us to the center of our desire. Sublimation for Lacan is actually raising up the object to the dignity of the Thing. He uses the example of courtly love in which the unattainable love-object comes to be identified with the empty signifier that structures all experience. "We need," he says, "to know what we can do to transform the dam-age into our dame, our Lady (EP, 84)"

Access to this disjunction between the thing-in-itself, whether it be Katrina or some other personal trauma, and the positive or negative interpretations we impose on it, may be a fairly profound transformative moment. One other philosopher I would like to mention in this regard is Frederich von Schelling, a German idealist writing mostly in the early nineteenth century. Schelling says boldly and romantically that to be a philosopher one must let go of everything.

Those who want to gain command of the free and self-generating system of reason must rise to the level of spirit itself. It is necessary here to abandon everything finite, everything that is still a being. Our last attachment must disappear. We must release everything - not only, as the saying goes, wife and children, but all that is, even God himself; for from this standpoint, God, too, is a being...The maxim here is: whoever holds on to it will lose it, and whoever gives it up will find it. This applies only to one who has been *thrown into the ground of himself* and recognized the horrible seriousness of life, who has abandoned everything and been abandoned by everything, for whom everything has been swallowed up, so that he has had to stand alone before the infinite (AW, 217, italics mine).

Schelling, at points, sounds like the psychoanalyst Bion, when he writes that in order to truly philosophize one must be "stripped of all hope, all desire and all longing. He must want nothing, know nothing, feel his naked impoverishment, and be capable of surrendering everything (AW, 218). Kierkegaard studied under Schelling for a winter term and these ideas return in his writings on the need for a leap of faith into the unknown which became a hallmark of existential philosophy. One must let go of everything because the urge to bring all experience under general abstract categories is not a quest for greater understanding but is a refusal to situate understanding deep enough, in awe, in the unabashed acknowledgment of the irreducible strangeness of both self and world, i.e, the numinous core, das Ding. Disasters, or, as Schelling romantically terms, the sudden emergence of the god, illuminate this strangeness and reduces all to silence.

Schelling maintains that there is a pre-ontological dimension of the divine, a sort of unfathomable Ground of God, a not-yet-God. Psychoanalysts might call this God's unconscious. Schelling writes in the *Philosophy of Art* (1802) "The inner essence of the Absolute, that is which all resides as one, and one as all, is primal chaos itself (PA, 65)." The Absolute is not accessible to reason, it is a sort of non-thinking at the core of thinking itself. It can not be encompassed within reason but is more akin to the rudiments of life itself: open, spontaneous, brute and savage being, untamed by cultural acquisitions. The Absolute is the wild being, wild levity, wild truth, wild goodness, wild beauty as the germinal seed in all things.

The unruly lies ever in the depths as though it might again break through. This is the incomprehensible basis of reality in things, the irreducible remainder which cannot be resolved into reason, by the greatest exertion but always remains in the depth. Out of this which is unreasonable, reason in the true sense is born. Without this preceding gloom, creation should have no reality; darkness is its necessary heritage (PUW, 360).

This wild unpredictable core of reality was understood more profoundly by ancient mythologies which recounted stories of human cataclysm (the Trojan war, for example) brought about through the whims and vanities of the gods. And further, what could be more wild and dynamic than a hurricane? I would agree with Schelling that when we look directly at the wild power of disasters we are facing, in a very deep sense, the core of reality.

Voltaire, Camus, Kant, Blachot, Adorno, Schelling, Lacan all seem to be speaking of a core of reality that is not reconcilable to reason or the adaptive structures of the ego. This abyss or the worm of nothingness at the core of being (as Sartre calls it) is generally ignored or repressed in our normal day to day functioning. We are mostly involved with things and projects and people that are very tangible and concrete. We pride ourselves on our progress. Moving this rock up that hill until we have a history of accomplishments. All's well until disaster strikes. All of a sudden the veil of reality is torn and we see that what we have taken as foundational has only been an artifice of habits and opinions. With disaster, we have the opportunity to open ourselves to the silence, the nothingness, the wild being, that underlies the pretexts of our lives. Questions of how we do this for ourselves or for our clients and whether it is even a good thing to look so directly at the sun will have to wait for another paper.

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PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE AND ENTREPRENEURS - ON CREATIVITY AND SELF-BILDUNG AMONG CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURS

Dorte Odde Sørensen

Introduction

I see philosophical practice as a practice that enable the individual person practicing it to better understand his or her own creativity and possibility of self-Bildung. Philosophical practice is an open-ended dialogue focusing on self practices and life as it is experienced and lived in time. The cultural entrepreneurs and their creativity is an interesting focus for philosophical practice since their self-Bildung project represents what we all – to some extent – will have to do in order to live modern life.

A cultural entrepreneur is not an ordinary entrepreneur. Many cultural entrepreneurs have a background and education in the arts or handicraft, or have an academic background and degree. But basically a cultural entrepreneur can work with whatever content; it is the whole attitude to being an entrepreneur that counts. A cultural entrepreneur is not – as is usually the case with entrepreneurs – driven by an economic incitement (the classic theory on innovation and entrepreneurship one can find in Schumpeter (1912)). For the cultural entrepreneur it is a matter of involvement and commitment, to be able to do exactly that which is most important, exciting and creative to the person in question. There is an expectation to be able to develop personally qua the work one does. For cultural entrepreneurs to be artist and creative entrepreneurs and do their business is also a project of *self-fulfilment*. Through expressing oneself artistically and in terms of creativity, through the process of creating works of art and products, they experience themselves as being more themselves. Following from this, to the cultural entrepreneur to do their art/handicraft and business is a *conduct of life*: the private life and work life goes hand-in-hand and should go hand-in-hand in their worldview. Another important feature of what is driving cultural entrepreneurs is, that they want to make a differens: to contribute to highten the quality of products forexample or to do business in a more ethical or socially responsible way. They are, however, not primarily driven by ethics. Rather what drives them is aesthetics: they want their lives to be more beautiful, they want the world to be more beautiful and therefore they want themselves and people in general to behave socially responsible. Cultural entrepreneurs are creative. Creative in the ordinary sense of producing works of art and handicraft, but also creative in the sense of being able to think and act differently from not only other entrepreneurs, but also other artists and people from

their line of business; they are usually very inventive and good at transferring their creativity from one area to another. They are also creative in the sense of being and wanting to be original: in their way of conducting a business, in the physical, mental and/or emotional style they express themselves and in the way they conceive of themselves.

In the so-called 'knowledge society' worklife has become humanised. It has become a 'Bildung-project' to work, whereas before Bildung was a project connected to education and civil or private life. There has been written quite a lot about what happens to employees and their worksituation under these circumstances (forexample Bovbjerg (2005)): work tends to be a self-disciplinary project. Focusing on the cultural entrepreneurs, I would like to emphasize the processes of self-Bildung involved among them; or the possibility of self-Bildung being a cultural entrepreneur.

Bildung and self-Bildung

The notion *Bildung* has again been actualized. This is a promising development, because in the theories of Bildung one finds a perspective on being a late-modern human being, a perspective that have been missed for a long time. Theories of Bildung offers on the one side an understanding of how the late-modern human being can see and understand him- or herself in a broader context in spite of the development of radical individualisation. And on the other side it offers an understanding of the importance of the project of creating oneself as a uniq person, giving ones life a particular style.

The notion of Bildung (at least in the neo humanistic tradition) contained a normative aspect: a utopia regarding the development of the human being as a whole in harmonie with the world. We are talking about something one is striving at, knowing that it will never be completed. One can also say – in a more adequate post-metaphysical way – that in the theories of Bildung one finds a will to be human or a will to insist on being human; or maybe only: an idea of what it means to be human. And it is exactly this – this 'humanism' and its normativity: not what is a good person, but rather what is the true life for me – that makes theories of Bildung so interesting today. Even though we don't know for sure what it means to be human today; or we might – very likely – disagree on it.

But what does Bildung mean today? Put simply Bildung meant to subordinate and adapt to the world, whereas today Bildung is rather a question of going beyond socialisation, to give oneself form and style, to Bild ones personality. Bildung has typically been associated with a person being able to behave (oneself) or it has been associated with something decent, but today Bildung – I believe – has to do with being, maybe not indecent, but shameless – it has to do with transgressing. The person being Bild is the one who dare say and do something different, something beyond the common. The Bild person dares to go new and different ways instead of imitating the common style. The Bild person knows her time and what is required of her, but at the same time she puts a distance to the world.

The reason *Bildung* has come on the agenda again is: individualization. Today nobody can fall back on family, class or other social elements, but is forced to be oneself and take care of life as such. This is resulting in a problematization of existence and self (self-relation) relating to everybody and to a much higher extent than what was the case in early modernity. Consequently in late modernity *Bildung* becomes self-*Bildung* (Schmidt 1999; Hammershøj 2003). On the one side this is a question of 1) forming a self or giving oneself an original form; and on the other side a question of 2) *Bildung* becoming something one does by oneself.

Self and creativity

The notion *self* is rather disputed and discussed in philosophy, existential philosophies, the social sciences and the humanities among others. Does a self exist? What does it mean? Does it have a core to it or does it only exist as a possibility?

I basically understand self as a temporal being, a process of becoming, rather than objects in the world. Kierkegaard sees self as a synthesis of paradoxical tensions – the paradoxical relation of the finite and the infinite. Heidegger does not believe there is any self, but only a continual connection to the world – ‘*Dasein*’ is the notion for being-in-the-world. Self in this existential version is the exact opposite of an understanding of self as a substance or something solid – a core self. In Deurzen et al. (2005) they write: “What we experience as our self or our identity is always a process of becoming and transformation. Selfhood might be best defined as the dynamic and ever-changing experience of being at the narrative centre of gravity of one’s particular world experiencing” (pp.160).

The Danish philosopher Lars-Henrik Schmidt (for example 1999) has developed what he calls a ‘social analytics’, a philosophy on self and sociality, among other things. He is not in his own opinion an existential philosopher, yet he shares some of the concerns with those philosophers, understanding self as something different from an object and a core entity. In his understanding self is a *limit*.

“Self is a limit in sociality. To be self is the event/occurrence to experience (*Erfahrung*) oneself as different from ‘*gemenheden*’ “ (Hammershøj 2003). ‘*Gemen*’ is the notion one finds in Schmidt’s philosophy. It can hardly be translated to English, but does literally mean ‘common’. Yet the notion has strong affiliations to the concept of crowd and masses, in the sense that ‘*gemen*’ is that dimension of sociality which seems similar to Heidegger’s ‘*Man*’. One becomes self when one puts a distance to the common sociality. Yet at the same time, self is never an entity isolated from sociality. On the contrary, self is always the social self in Schmidt’s understanding.

Even though we nowadays, as von Hentig (2000) has put it ‘have high expectations to a weak concept’, and even though the word creativity is being used everywhere today about almost everything, creative classes, cities, organisations (for example the extensively quoted Florida (2005)), I find the word very important because it designates a phenomenon, processes and behaviours that point to some type of *transgression*; transgression related to situations, selves, experiences (*Erfahrung*), emotions, moods and atmospheres (see also Achton (1973), Coade (1997) and Cropley (1970) for literature on

creativity). If we relate creativity to Bildung, creativity becomes exactly transgression and self-transgression. It relates to at least the following four dimensions:

- 1) Originality. That which breaks with convention, the known; that which appear different. Repetition or imitation is the death of creativity understood as originality.
- 2) A way of thinking and processing and/or combining information. Foreexample getting new ideas and using old ones in new ways and settings.
- 3) A certain mood or condition one comes into when being creative. Time changes and one feels transgressed by working with the material, the setting or people; 'forgetting oneself', as we say.
- 4) Transgressions related to self. Creative self-Bildung: to relate non-repetitious to ones limit in sociality.

What do creativity do to 'self'? – understood as a limit in sociality. If self is a limit in sociality and if creativity is transgression, then creativity related to self is to be transgressing concerning the limit in sociality, that is the self. So what do creativity do to self – it makes it original (in Danish: det originaliserer selvet). But only when 'Erfahrung' is included, we can speak of a process of Bildung and of originality: When self experiences (Erfahrung) oneself (and the relation to the world) in a new way.

Cultural entrepreneurs: creative self-Bildung?

Even though many Cultural entrepreneurs are successful artist (in the sense of getting attention and being able to sell their works of art, sometimes even in international settings as Museum of Modern Art in N.Y.), they are not content, because they cannot make a living out of being a successful artist. Therefore they want to be cultural entrepreneurs, to make their own business and create products to a larger market, while at the same time making unique artworks.

I see part of their problem (not denying the obvious economic constraints on artists in general) as a problem related to their self-conception and understanding of sociality. In their project of self-fulfilment they seem to see a contradiction between self and sociality, between them as artists on the one hand side and them as agents on the market on the other side. Of course, it is not the same to be an artist and to be on the market selling products. It is two different modes of being. And it is not the same thing to be creative as an artist and to have a self-fulfilment project. Yet seeing these different modes of being as contradicting each other will not lead to any success, and I believe their understanding of what it means to be themselves and to relate to society at large – that is, their understanding of self-fulfilment – stands in the way. I believe philosophical practice can offer cultural entrepreneurs a setting and a practice through which they can extend their self-fulfilment project to a project of creative self-Bildung. Through this giving them a different perspective on self and sociality.

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**FROM PHILOSOPHICAL COUNSELLING TO
PHILOSOPHY FOR COUNSELLORS**

Peter B. Raabe



About fifteen years ago the Olympic winter sport of bobsledding ran into a problem that I think is similar to the one I became aware of not long ago in philosophical counselling. As you probably know, in bobsledding a team of men (and now women too) push a sled as fast as they can, and then jump on it to ride it down an icy, twisting track. The team with the fastest time wins. The men who were pushing and driving the bobsleds were athletes who joined the sport of bobsledding because they enjoyed the ride down the hill. One day there came a time when there was virtually no difference any more in the way the various countries designed and built their bobsleds. Because of this all the sleds could go down the hill at pretty well exactly the same speed. Likewise, the drivers had all perfected their skills to the point where there was very little more they could do to make their own sleds go faster and cross the finish line sooner. It finally became obvious to the coaches and trainers that the only possible way to win a race was to train their athletes to push their sled faster than the others at the very start of the hill. So they encouraged the bobsledders to practice running faster.

But the coaches found that most of their bobsledders were not runners, and it simply wasn't possible to teach them to run any faster than they were already running. At the same time many of the bobsledders were not very happy having to practice running faster when all they really wanted to do was ride down the hill on their bobsleds. And so, because the bobsledders couldn't run any faster, the sleds didn't go any faster. This made the coaches very unhappy. Until one day one of the coaches had an idea. He wondered, Why are we trying to teach bobsledders how to run faster? It just makes everybody unhappy. Why don't we find some fast runners and teach them how to ride on a bobsled? And so the coaches of the bobsledding teams found men who were willing to learn how to ride on a bobsled, and who were already national champion track stars and world-class runners able to push the bobsleds much faster at the start of the hill. Bobsledding was improved by a change in thinking: from trying to teach bobsledders how to run faster, to teaching fast runners how to ride on a bobsled.

This is very similar to what I'm now doing in Canada, and I suggest you consider doing here as well. No, I'm not talking about bobsledding in Spain. What I'm talking about, of course, is philosophical counselling.

The making of philosophical counsellors in most countries, and their certification, is still a process in which an attempt is made to turn academically trained philosophers into counsellors. This may work in some countries, but in North America it is analogous to attempting to teach bobsled riders how to be runners. I have given up trying to convince reluctant philosophy students to become philosophical counsellors, and instead what I'm doing now in Canada is I'm working with willing counselling students, and I'm teaching them how to be better philosophers.

The current approach to developing philosophical counselling in North America isn't working as well as expected. Keep in mind that the North American public visit analysts, therapists, and counsellors, more than any other people in the world. And yet most philosophical counsellors that I know can't survive on the income they are able to make from their counselling practice alone. I think this is happening for two reasons:

First, in North America having a degree in philosophy is not particularly good for business. It can even work against you. The general public and potential clients don't understand philosophy. It's often confused with theology, New Age spirituality, or the latest fad in self-help psychology. Many people believe philosophy is useless and even frightening. For example, one man who phoned me about coming for a consultation asked me, "If I come to talk with you, will I be able to understand what you say?" He wasn't joking.

Second, graduate students of philosophy are typically not well suited for counselling for one very simple reason: their 'hearing' has become so finely tuned to academic philosophy that they can't 'hear' the philosophical issues underlying an 'average' person's expressions of confusion and distress. For example, Alex, a doctoral candidate in philosophy, asked me if he could attend one of my client counselling sessions to see what philosophical counselling is like in order to decide whether this is something he might consider as a future profession for himself. With the permission of my client, Alex sat in on about a half dozen sessions, just listening and observing. Since the issues this client was discussing with me were philosophically fairly general and not at all distressing to my client, I invited Alex to lead the discussion in the seventh session. He agreed, but to my amazement Alex stumbled about, taking on a classroom lecturing style, trying to elicit specific answers from the client, and finally displaying his frustration with the entire process by telling us he didn't want to finish the session. When I spoke with him afterwards he told me that he didn't think what I had been doing during the past six weeks was really philosophy. He said he was trying to be philosophical with my client, but that she was clearly not capable of the philosophical reasoning he was expecting of her, that he was used to experiencing in a classroom. Adam decided he was not interested in philosophical counselling because, to him, it was not "real" philosophy.

A second example comes from the class in which I teach a third year course of philosophy to students who are interested in counselling, and social work who have

little if any background in philosophy. The first class deals with attempting to define and understand what philosophy is all about, learning some basic reasoning skills, and discussing an actual case study. I ask the students to identify the beliefs, values, and assumptions in a short paragraph that was written by a client about a problem he's dealing with. After this first class a student approached me with a look of grave concern on her face. She told me she was majoring in philosophy, and that she had therefore already taken an extensive array of philosophy courses as part of her undergraduate studies. But she said she was experiencing great difficulty with an exercise in my class involving an actual client case study. She said she simply didn't see the philosophical issue in it, and she was very worried that she wasn't up to the task of seeing the philosophy in any of the future case studies we may be discussing. In fact she was considering dropping the class. The other students in this class, who had little if any background in philosophy, didn't have any difficulty at all with this exercise.

These two examples illustrate a significant difference between the perception of philosophy students who have been trained to perceive and think academically, and those students from other disciplines whose perception has not yet been so narrowly focused. I think the key to the problem that exists for philosophical counselling in academic philosophy courses is that in a philosophy course students are typically presented with some individual philosopher's clearly articulated philosophy, and the student is then simply required to evaluate it, whereas in a counselling situation the client presents an existential predicament and the philosophical counsellor must then determine what the unstated philosophical issues are within that predicament. In other words, the student of philosophy is typically trained to deal only with explicit assertions of a philosophical issue, while the student of philosophical counselling must discover the unspoken philosophy that is implicit within a client's personal account.

When you add to this difference in perception the fact that most philosophy students simply aren't interested in dealing with the every-day problems of ordinary people, it should be fairly clear why I believe trying to teach philosophical counselling to philosophy students is a mistake. Furthermore, philosophy students are taught to approach philosophical discourse in the conventional academic style in which "most philosophers approach other philosophers as adversaries whose views they must attack and prove wrong."^[1] Philosophy in the classroom has been called a "blood sport" because of the viciousness with which academic philosophers often "combat" each other.^[2] Having learned this aggressive style, philosophy students typically have few of the caring attributes necessary for counselling such as compassion, patience, humility, and empathy.

In my own experience as a university professor in philosophy I've found that there are very few students of academic philosophy who are interested in pursuing a course of study or a career in philosophical counselling. This is because most students of philosophy are quite content to travel along the academic path; they're happy challenging the old established theories, and debating with each other either in person or on paper. They're simply not interested in learning how to counsel.

On the other hand, I've also found that counselling students are sadly under trained in philosophy. For example, I've spoken with a number of students who learned the method of existential therapy but were unable to tell me what existentialism actually is. There was no understanding of the ideas behind their practice.

As most of you probably already know, Freud wanted psychoanalysis to be a science. What we know today as clinical psychology, psychotherapy, and counselling all grew out of the science of psychology. But the methods that have been empirically proven to be clinically the most effective, such as Rational Emotional Behavior Therapy (R.E.B.T.), existential therapy, cognitive therapy, and Logo therapy, are largely fashioned after philosophy. Unfortunately, most clinical psychologists, therapists, and counsellors receive little if any formal training in philosophical reasoning before they offer their professional services to the public. This leaves them inadequately prepared to deal with their clients' philosophical issues such as ethical decision-making, sorting out confused reasoning, coming to terms with religious beliefs, defining reality, determining what it means to be a normal person within society, and so on.

So instead of trying to convince philosophy students to learn the gentle art of counselling, I've found it much more productive to offer philosophy to those students who are already interested in counselling. At my university I now teach philosophy to students whose home is in the psychology department, and who are majoring in clinical psychology and studying psychotherapy, counselling, and social work. And I'm hoping for an even broader development within our university in the future in which our psychology department will make the study of philosophy a requirement for students wishing to obtain their degree in psychotherapy, counselling, or social work.

But I want to make it clear that I certainly don't expect my students to be expert philosophers after they have taken a few courses in philosophy. That would be like expecting students to be expert counsellors after they have taken just a few courses in counselling. What we're doing in our university is offering our counselling students the basics of philosophy.^[3] I lead them in an overview of what philosophy is all about, I help them to develop their critical and creative thinking skills, I train them to identify the philosophical issues in ordinary life problems, I teach them how to understand and resolve moral issues, I help them to discover the many different ways we have of defining things like 'person,' 'reality,' 'normal,' and so on.

Because this philosophy for counsellors course is open only to students in their third year of study, I don't experience the same barriers to understanding I often encounter in my first year students fresh out of high school. And because these counselling students are already well educated in psychology, where they encounter terms like existential crisis, self-esteem, mental illness, and so on, they're hungry for the deeper understanding available to them through philosophy.

What sort of things should you cover in a course of philosophy for counsellors? I'd like to give you a brief outline of the way I'm teaching this course. We use two text books. The first is simply titled *Philosophy* by Manuel Velasquez^[4] and the second is my own book, *Issues in Philosophical Counselling*.^[5] Students are required to read two chapters before every class, one from each book, in preparation for discussion. And the readings are assigned so that the chapters complement each other. For example, when the chapter in the Velasquez text is on ethics, the reading from my book is on the ethics of suicide; when the Velasquez chapter discusses the metaphysics of reality, the chapter from my book is on dreams. I can't give you all the details of each class in this course, but here are some of the highlights.

I begin by helping my students understand what philosophy is all about. Remember these are mostly psychology students with little knowledge of how to apply philosophy to counselling. I tell them that philosophy in a counselling situation involves helping the client examine the reasons he has for the values he holds as good, and the beliefs he holds as true, so that he can free himself from blindly following tradition, slavishly obeying authority figures, or acting only on his feelings. I talk a little about how philosophy was adopted by psychology in North America in the 1950's when psychoanalysts discovered how useful philosophy can be. And then we get into discussing and practicing critical and creative reasoning skills which involves reality assumptions, value assumptions, fallacies, and so on. At the end of the class, the first case we discuss is about a 20-year old woman who is very shy and lonely, and worried that this is a sign of a mental illness. There is of course group work, as well as handouts, overheads, charts, and diagrams on the board in all of these classes.

In the second class we continue to focus on critical and creative thinking. We discuss the meaning of words, we do a group exercise where students discover their personal philosophies on the issue of lying and stealing, and we discuss how to find the philosophical issues in the problem a client may present. In this class we discuss two cases: the first deals with a man who loves a single mother, but he doesn't like her young son; and the second is about a client who sees reality as very strange but wants to avoid taking medication. We don't try to resolve these problems. The point of the exercise is only to recognize the philosophical issues in these two cases.

The third class deals with the issue of human nature. In this class we discuss whether there is such a thing as human nature, what it means to be normal, various ways it's possible to think of your self, and some of the important differences between how men and women experience themselves. The case we discuss is an e-mail I received from a woman in a psychiatric hospital who asks whether she should be worried about the struggles she's having with what seem like two opposing selves within her. At this time the first student essay is also due in which they've been asked to give their philosophical thoughts about a woman who worries that she is genetically determined to become addicted to drugs because her mother is a drug-addict. This assignment leads into the following week's discussion of determinism and free will within metaphysics.

In the fourth class, first of all, we discuss the essays from last class which have now been marked and returned. Then we enter into metaphysics and the issue of reality. We discuss the various kinds of reality relevant to counselling, there is an introduction to various theories such as idealism, pragmatism, anti-realism, and so on., and finally we talk about what to make of dreams. The case we discuss at the end of this class is Jung's analysis of a patient's dream found in my second book *Issues in Philosophical Counselling*.[\[6\]](#)

The next class focuses on epistemology. We examine where knowledge comes from, what it means to be rational, and various theories of truth. One of the group exercises involves coming up with arguments against the theory of multiple personalities. This time the case discussion is about a young man who wonders about the value of doing a "past life regression" with a psychic to find out why he and his girlfriend are having problems in their relationship.

In the sixth week we cover various issues in ethics and morality such as psychological egoism, subjectivism, relativism, and the various theories on how to make a moral decision. Groups discuss the question of whether suicide is moral, and the case study is about two brothers and a sister who wonder whether it is ethical to move their aging father out of his home and into a professional seniors care facility. Students then have to go home and write an essay for the following week giving a philosophical perspective on the case of a young man who has become very bitter about his family's religious beliefs. This essay assignment leads into the topic of the following week.

In class number seven discussion is all about religion and the various arguments for and against the existence of God. In their groups the students are asked to deal with the question of how religion affects even the non-believers in a community. The case we discuss in this class is that of a Catholic woman who feels guilty for, as she calls it, "living in sin" with her boyfriend.

Class eight covers the various issues that can arise when living within any human society. This is an overview of political philosophy. We discuss the relationship between morality and the law, human rights, war, education, feminism, and so on. The case study concerns a young man who agreed to meet with a woman as a potential marriage partner. In her many e-mails to him she had led him to believe that she was much prettier, and that she was much more submissive, than she actually turned out to be when he finally met her in person. This case covers a number of issues such as rights, obligations, contractual agreements, and of course deception.

Class nine deals with the meaning of life. We discuss a number of different answers that have been offered over time by various philosophers to the question "What is the meaning of life," and the groups are asked to deal with the possibility that life is simply meaningless. The case study involves using an assortment of possible approaches to a client who has been diagnosed with terminal cancer, has never been married or raised a family, and wonders whether there was any point to his life at all. A final essay is due the following week in which the students are asked to discuss the role of philosophy in psychotherapy and counselling in light of the developments in modern medications for mental illnesses.

For the last class, the students are asked to prepare by reading chapters 11, 12, and 13 in *Issues in Philosophical Counselling* dealing with psychotropic medication and the attempt to come to a definition of 'normal.' They're also required to do an on-line search of the topic 'anti-psychiatry', which will show them essays written by psychotherapists and psychoanalysts that are critical of their own practices.

There are of course many more topics and issues that could be discussed with students during a longer semester. In fact this year this course has been expanded from ten classes to thirteen. Even so, one semester isn't going to make expert philosophers out of students majoring in clinical psychology. And yet there is no doubt in my mind that this kind of philosophy course can be extremely useful to counseling students.

Now you're probably wondering, Why should we take Peter's word for it? What about the students themselves? What do they have to say about this course? Do counselling students actually find philosophy helpful?

With the permission of the students, I'd like to read you two excerpts from their final essays in this class. The first is a female student. She wrote the following:

“To relate this course to my own life, about a year ago I found it really difficult to go to school and feel comfortable. I would sit at the back of the class and pray that the teacher would not call on me or that the person next to me would not ask me a question. I have always been a rather shy person, but for some reason these feelings had escalated to the point where I was considering dropping out of school.

On TV I would see commercials about the drugs available to treat depressed and anti-social people, and eventually I was convinced that there was something chemically wrong with my body that was causing these problems; however, I was more scared to go and talk to my doctor about this so I kept these feelings to myself.

This semester I enrolled in Peter Raabe's "Philosophy for Counsellors" course, not knowing what to expect but because I needed to get more credits in order to graduate. After listening to a few lectures I began to re-evaluate myself and my judgments about myself. I realized that there could be some reason, other than biological, as to why I was feeling so depressed. I recognized that I was unmotivated about school because my now-ex-fiancé had cheated on me, and I had to move back home with my parents. I had ended up losing mutual friends that we had together, as well as having to deal with the pain of dishonesty and rejection.

This realization has brought some closure to the pain that I was feeling. Although I am not completely healed I understand that it takes time to overcome the difficulties in life. This semester I have undergone a complete transformation; I have made new friends, I have a great place to live, I am getting good grades, and I feel comfortable in the classroom. This course has helped me take control of my life. However, if I had gone to see my doctor I am convinced that I would just have been prescribed some drugs in order to mask my pain. Overcoming this hardship in my life has empowered me and has given me strength which I don't think I could have received with pharmaceutical treatments. All I needed was someone to change my outlook in order to understand the reasons why I was feeling depressed.”

The second excerpt is a little longer and was written by a male student. Here's what he wrote:

“I have always enjoyed women who dress in high-heels and leather boots. Never did I feel that it was anything to be secretive about or embarrassed over. It was just what I liked. I had always thought that while some guys like overly-large breasts, this is what turns me on—so what was the big deal? Nothing, I thought. My wife did not mind my fetish and saw it as an excuse to go shoe shopping. I started school in 2002 and promptly took my first course in psychology. During my first month I was thumbing through the text book and noticed a chapter on sexual deviancy. I took a look expecting to find pedophiles, rapists, etc. but instead was horrified to find myself instead!! The category that my fetish was listed under was paraphillia which means “towards the deviant.” Suddenly at the age of 32 I wondered if I was a pervert due to something that turned me on—a something that my psychology textbook had just

labeled as wrong and twisted. Thankfully we did not cover that chapter in that psychology class but the impact of this knowledge was becoming apparent in my life.

I became embarrassed for how I felt inside, and wondered what had happened to me in my youth to trigger such a disgusting sexual dysfunction. My whole view of life changed as I hid this new information from my wife because I was worried that she would start to see me as a sexual-deviant also if I told her what I had learned. Suddenly I had a secret to hide and this hurt. For the next two years I left my fetish alone and refused to think of it until I took the abnormal psychology course this semester. My fetish again was listed under the chapter of sexual dysfunctions. This time I took courage and read the information completely, knowing that I had been a good person who was happy with myself before I had read this information two years ago. As I was reading, an ugly thought materialized in my mind which said: “This book is saying that you have a mental illness for liking the things that you like!” I had a mental illness and there it was in the textbook for all too see. The treatment section suggested certain medications and even included electro convulsive-shock therapy! Cognitive therapy suggested pairing images of the offensive fetish with a “situation in which discovery of the fetish causes a sense of overwhelming embarrassment.” The textbook mentioned how a paraphiliac fetish was a chronic condition and that counselling would help but did little long-term good for the sufferer. The textbook also mentioned that people with my problem have often attacked people to satisfy their fetish, and that they usually attacked people they knew or those who were close to them. I felt like a monster, and that no one was safe around me. How could this be me, I wondered? After three years of dealing with this situation I spiraled into a depression. I tried to see if depression ran in my family—which it didn’t (again the professional was looking for the biological roots of my behaviour rather than the whys). Now I had depression, anxiety, stress, and self-loathing to manage which had never previously been the case in my life. I finally confessed my secret knowledge to my wife who was also shocked to see it in my textbook as a mental illness. She told me that it was “stupid” and to “forget what I had read” because it was just someone’s “opinion,” and that just because I was not the norm didn’t mean I was crazy or bizarre. I tried to follow her advice, but the thought that I was somehow “mentally-off” was lodged in my mind and felt like a sliver that I couldn’t get out of my skin. These thoughts were always there in the background irritating me. I felt labeled and stigmatized just because I was who I was.

Your course in philosophical counselling offered me a new way to think about this information in a non-threatening manner. It enabled me to reconstruct my thoughts regarding my fetish, away from the psychological approach of defining persistent feelings as symptoms of an illness, and away from the North American view of normal as defined by a handful of people. I learned that normal, or what passes as objective reality, is in fact largely a system of socially held beliefs (social relativism) into which an individual’s cognitions must fit in order to be normal. I saw that the rationale for determining what was normal or not was based on statistical data and that if enough people do the abnormal then the abnormal becomes the new norm. This is evidenced by the recent DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illnesses) revision that dropped homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses. I enjoyed the refreshing view that this tyranny I was feeling—due to the mistaken assumption that what is simply different is abnormal and therefore dangerous and intolerable—was not my fault. Philosophy gave me a way or method to view my personal issues apart from these societal and learned taboos that were causing me deep hurt and bewilderment.

The tools that I learned from philosophical counselling have helped me to redeem myself from the label of sexual deviant with a fetish, as found in the DSM, to the level of a person with individual feelings and likes that are acceptable to my wife and I. We have, and still are, undergoing the process of investigating the underlying philosophical issues to determine whether my so-called “abnormality” isn’t in fact something that is unique to me and nothing more. I have found peace from this thought process and have stopped my anti-depressants. Obviously there was no organic reason for my depression. Instead it was a *why* in my life that needed an answer. I wonder how many others have these *whys* thrust upon their lives by psychology, and how many of those individuals are on drugs when they do not really need to be. I feel fine and comfortable with myself once again—like I did before my study of psychology began. Did psychology help me to better know my self? I can certainly say “NO!” But philosophical counselling had much to offer me after psychology took my life and turned it upside down. Leaving normal was easy with psychology; getting back to normal was easy with philosophy. I disagree with Carl Jung when he says that “the normal man is a fiction.” I think the abnormal man is a fiction created today by psychological professionals and the pharmaceutical companies. Thanks Peter for giving me the gift of these tools that have greatly benefited me already in my life. As I advance to my Master’s studies in psychological counselling I now want to incorporate philosophy into my personal views and eventual practice. I feel that my efforts to help others would be empty without this knowledge.”

I have many more of these sorts of comments written by the psychology students at our university who have studied philosophy. As I said at the beginning, I have given up trying to convince reluctant philosophy students to become counsellors. It’s like trying to teach those bobsledders to become better runners. Instead, what I’m doing now in Canada is, I’m teaching willing counselling students the philosophy that will make them better counsellors.

[1] Velasquez, Manuel. *Philosophy*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005. 37.

[2] See the essay “Philosophy as a Blood Sport” by Norman Swartz, 1994. Online at http://www.sfu.ca/philosophy/swartz/blood_sport.htm

[3] University College of the Fraser Valley in Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada.

[4] Belmont, CA: ThompsonWadsworth, 2005.

[5] Westport, Con.: Praeger, 2002.

[6] Raabe, Peter. *Issues in Philosophical Counselling*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002.

**STRUCTURING A PHILOSOPHY COURSE THAT IS USEFUL TO THERAPISTS AND
COUNSELLING STUDENTS**

Peter B. Raabe

In this workshop we're going to do four things:

- 1) *Discuss what topics in philosophy are most useful to therapists and counsellors.*
- 2) *Determine the best order in which to teach them to our students.*
- 3) *Practice how to recognize philosophical issues in everyday problems*
- 4) *Discuss how to teach our therapy and counselling students to do the same.*

1) From the following list of philosophy topics

(a) discuss what each one is about,

(b) decide if each one is appropriate to be offered as part of a course in philosophy for therapists and counsellors.

- Epistemology
- Metaphysics
- Philosophy of education
- Logic
- Reasoning (critical/creative thinking)
- Feminist philosophy
- Philosophy of science

- Philosophy of language
- Philosophy of mind
- Philosophy of mathematics
- Ethical theories
- Moral philosophy
- Political philosophy
- Philosophy of sports
- Philosophy of psychology

2) In what order should they be taught to our students? Why?

3) Find the philosophical issues in the client cases presented (overheads).

4) How can we teach our students to do this?

- Epistemology
- Metaphysics
- Philosophy of education
- Logic
- Reasoning (critical/creative thinking)
- Feminist philosophy
- Philosophy of science
- Philosophy of language
- Philosophy of mind
- Philosophy of mathematics
- Ethical theories
- Moral philosophy
- Political philosophy
- Philosophy of sports
- Philosophy of psychology

METAPHYSICS

Hello, I hope you can help...

For several months I've been suffering from a strange kind of anxiety. It seemed to come out of nowhere and has persisted since. I tried to put my finger on what could be the cause with no success. There was no cause, but the feeling stayed. Eventually I began feeling strangely detached, something I have read is called- depersonalization.

The strange detached feelings have, in recent weeks, evolved into a deep astonishment, that is to say, I am constantly in disbelief of reality. I feel that I need to understand it; I am always aware of things on a huge level; my mind is constantly on the universe, eternity, consciousness..... It all seems impossible and overwhelming; our existence seems impossible. I have been evaluated twice and told that I'm not going mad but suffering from obsession and anxiety, and that antidepressants would help. I know drugs are not the answer, and I feel this as being something bigger than just anxiety and obsession. Is it possible to find peace again? All I want is to take things for granted as I once did. Can it be that I crossed a threshold of awareness or questioning from which there is no return? Is this state I'm in something you have ever heard of? I know these are pretty big questions, but I hope you can help.

ETHICS

Dr. Peter Raabe, hello.

My parents have reached what is called “The Golden Age.” They both crossed 70 some years ago. After my father had a C.V.A (cerebrovascular accident or stroke), which he's now recovering from we, his son and three daughters, started to think about making for them a new start. After the c.v.a trauma and the fact that my father didn't reached his full memory yet and left almost all his fields of interest of before the stroke, it felt like the right crossroad for moving him to a elders house which, no need to mention, is new, modern and considered as a very good place.

After making some “attitude research” of our parents, we are not sure how and if they'll really welcome this idea.

After this long preface, here is my question:

How should I deal with this general problem of Parents Houses and specifically regarding feeling rejected like—the last stop before death, having to leave home just when changes are hard to accept, a new and “hostile” surroundings, etc.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Hi Dr. Raabe,

Just a quick question. My girlfriend and I have been arguing a lot lately. I don't think the fights are all that serious, just a lot of yelling about what we think the other person ought to do, and stuff like that. But she talked me into going to see a woman who says she can see who we were in the past. This woman told us that the problems me and my girlfriend are having is because of our past lives. She said me and my girlfriend need to know who we were a long time ago. She wants us to do a past life regression. Do you think a past life regression will help me and my girlfriend know ourselves and each other better?

Signed X

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Dear Dr,

I was looking for someone to talk to on the net. I have analyzed myself, consulted with doctors, confided in them and read self-help psychology books but to no avail. I am still lost, depressed and anxious. I am Catholic and suffer from scruples. My predominant faults are living with my boyfriend and lethargy. I have dreams of helping suffering people like Jesus did, but I don't feel I can live up to that. I'm always examining my motives. I guess I am a perfectionist, and want the world to fit my mental map. So I don't do anything at all. I guess I'm the perfect example of the imperfect, sinful woman. Hope you can help

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Dear Dr. Peter Raabe

I am from India. I am 37 years old, single, and presently working in the Middle-East. I am engaged to a woman and we are about to get married. We were introduced to each other few months ago through our parents (in the line of arranged marriage).

We were to try to get to know each other and then decide if we could be partners for life. And it so happened that right from the very first moment we 'talked' to each other, we seemed to develop a sense of mutual bonding and took little time to become close friends (with full awareness that the relationship thus resulted would culminate into marriage.) The initial conversations happened only by phone for around 10 days. We had the mutual compatibility to talk for hours which we did on a daily basis. And I was quite sure I liked her.

But when we finally met, she looked very different from her photographs that were given to me in the beginning. Somehow she never fit my idea of 'womanly beauty' or the idea of beauty that I expected. So I was left in a dilemma. I could no longer exercise my natural way of expression. I felt restricted. I knew I liked her qualities, I liked the way we respond to each other (so-called interpersonal chemistry) etc. My question to myself at that moment was: Do I go for external beauty or do I go for the inner beauty. At that stage I couldn't help recollecting many of the words of wisdom like "Beauty is merely skin deep", "Don't judge a book by the cover", "The real self is what lies beneath the surface" etc. Eventually I somehow felt compelled to go for the inner beauty of the person, and in the process I said goodbye to my previous notions of external beauty. So I said "yes". She also said "yes". Our marriage is on the cards now.

In the meantime, we met as often as possible and I tried my best to get used to her physical presence. Soon I was completely natural in front her, and have in fact begun to like how she looks from the outside. So I began to think that there's nothing to worry about.

Now let me come to the problem that I am facing at the moment: I am back in the Middle-East and she and I keep in touch through e-mails and telephone. And of late,

I have begun to feel that she has an imposing personality in the sense I feel controlled by her. I just can't help feeling that I am heading for a personality clash. I do not have any specific or concrete evidence for such an assumption, but here and there in our conversations and mails, I feel that she has too many ideas, too many opinions, too many advices to offer at the drop of a hat. I can't say that's a human fallibility, but it's having an unhealthy impact on me, as if she is trying to snatch the steering wheel away from my hand. I am left feeling there are rough times ahead. Also, one day I went to her office and I saw how she worked. She is in fact the boss and I saw her ordering around people, supervising programs and people looking up to her and things like that. But I truly don't think my attitude towards her has been affected by that. So I want to know the exact nature of the problem that I am going through. Hoping to hear from you soon. Regards, G. H.



Ran Lahav (1992, 1995) in his well known attempt to give a general definition of philosophical counseling used the term “world-view-interpretation”. As a basic approach this definition seems to give a good orientation, yet the process of describing *philosophical* counseling (as a special approach, compared for instance with other forms of counseling like psychological or pastoral counseling) is still in its very beginning. Lahav tried to discriminate between philosophical and psychological topics and thus to give each discipline a certain ‘object’ for the counseling-approach. As I see it however a psychologist or a clerical counselor is also dealing with the world view of his/her client, because that’s what the client is presenting. They are just using different tools, have a different background, and thus will deal in a different way with the issues and topics presented by the client.

Each person has its own world view; it is the world as perceived and (partial) symbolized/described by this concrete person. I don’t think that we as philosophical counselors should try to separate philosophical and psychological aspects in a certain world view, but instead take it as a whole and try with our philosophical perspective to facilitate a constructive change in this given world view, thus solving actual problems and – hopefully – the way of dealing with the world in general, with oneself and other people, with the personal ‘way of life’, to refer to the English title of Hadot’s well known book (1995).

But how can this happen? Philosophy is a theoretical discipline, and if it really wants to touch praxis as a concrete ‘way of life’, we need some explanation about the possible relationship between philosophical theories and the life world (*Lebenswelt*) of a concrete person.

In the ancient greek and roman philosophy theory and praxis of life had a close connection. This is getting more and more attention; it started with Pierre Hadot and his mentioned book ‘Philosophy as a way of life’, providing an important source for the ‘movement’ of philosophical practice.

Life praxis was an essential part in antique philosophy, the question how to lead a good life was in the centre of the teachings (especially in epicurean and stoic tradition).

We cannot however simply take over the approach used there, because the fundamentals were some basic assumptions, connected to a coherent world view. The epicurean “psycho-therapy” could only work if you took over the presented *weltanschauung* : the world including man is formed by small elements (*a-tomos*, undividable) which dissolve after death. Epicurus knew already what psychotherapists discovered quite late, that negative thoughts produce negative feelings (if you think that after death you will certainly suffer in Hades, you will feel bad as a consequence of this thought, this thought pattern or habitual thinking). If you stop believing that you possess an immortal soul which means that you have a personal existence after death and then you will have to move to Hades, (“knowing” what kind of existence is waiting for you there) then you can free yourself from the negative consequences of this thought form, that is the negative feeling right now, you will gain energy to look for a good life in this moment of your existence, because that’s all you have anyway.

This procedure may still be effective in our times, just look how religious sects or political groups work – they offer a certain set of theories, which guarantees you a coherent world-view with all the advantage of coherence, but you have to pay the price of rigidity, and you must defend against ideas (and people who proclaim those ideas) which are in contradiction to your own opinions. We see how Fundamentalists do have some success in keeping their rigid level of coherence alive. (Rigid concepts may even recommend suicide as the best ‘solution’ to enter into a world where your concepts will remain unchanged for eternity.)

But all this is just possible because coherence is a high value for us human beings, and there is nothing wrong with this. If it is true that coherence is healthy, why should it be impossible to come to a good form of coherence? Only a very pessimistic world view will come to the conclusion that coherence and contentedness (or happiness) followed by this cannot be reached by human beings.

But what can philosophy offer at all? Philosophy of the last 50-100 years (after ‘the end of the great systems’) tends to a rather pessimistic view of the possibility of coherence, especially if there is still the goal of general truth, general statements.

But if “anything goes”, if there are only different interpretations of men and world (nothing to say about god), i.e. if a philosopher has such an epistemological point of view, than it is almost impossible to offer counseling.

Some philosophers even claim that philosophy is not able to make life easier, but the contrary, the reflected life – according to them – is more difficult. Truth seems to be unfriendly in this perspective. So – is harmony an illusion, disharmony the truth? For me this is a very weak and poor position, also from the point of view of philosophy of science. But I don’t want to argue with these positions, with extreme relativism and a rather pessimistic view of man and world, a position which often is based on a world view of reductionism and refusal of other metaphysical viewpoints except their own.

Let me jump right into my own point of view: My personal philosophical ‘credo’ and my foundation of philosophical counseling, put into some statements, is the following:

1) It is important for us human beings to bring some coherence into our world view, otherwise life is hard in an unnecessary way. Coherence is necessary because it is healthy, it contributes to psychological and physical health, is a primary salutogenetic factor.

This concept of ‘coherence’ is not meant just as an external view, as for instance in the philosophical conception of coherence as a criterion for truth – it is more connected to the “sense of coherence”, defined by Antonovsky, which can be judged and emotionally ‘felt’ and sensed by the individual himself /herself, even in the body.

2) Coherence in the world-view of an individual is possible. If it is not present, it can be achieved.

Coherence of a world-view should be accompanied by congruence.

- Coherence: The world, as I see and understand it (my theories about man, the world and god), fits for me, the personal worldview forms a coherent, meaningful whole.
- Congruence: My concepts (cognitions) and my feelings fit to the way I behave in the world, I am perceived as authentic, congruent. In the process of self-perception this quality is deeply connected with my ability to be aware of my feelings, my motives and of a deeper level of values.

3) Coherence maybe of different quality.

Coherence on a low level shows rigidity, attitude of defensiveness, inability to accept different views, different opinions. In most cases this is connected with incongruence.

Coherence on a high level is reflective, dynamic, in a continuous process of change and development.

The positive effects of coherence are there, coherence is “working” on every level, but the price of coherence on a low level is high, and new problems and also new sources of incoherence are created all the time.

People with a high level of coherence are able to deal with discrepancies, to face contradictions. They have their own convictions, their point of view and yet are able to understand other people, even with extreme different or contradicting world views.

(Such people are much appreciated counselors, even if that’s not their profession, and they are often called ‘wise’.)

4) The question of ‘coherence of world-views’ is a philosophical topic.

Thus philosophers should be able to help people in the process of gaining more coherence and/or improving their level of complexity. Through philosophical counseling people may gain more coherence and thus improve their life enhancing attitude, their salutogenetic faculties.

If a person realises some basic discrepancies in his/her world-view and is suffering from the consequences of these discrepancies – to whom should he/she go if seeking

counseling? A psychologist? A psychotherapist? Usually these professionals are not trained in dealing with complex concepts regarding aspects of ethics (values), metaphysical or anthropological basic assumptions etc. Thus philosophy comes into play.

If these assumptions are true and you are able to work in this direction, you may offer philosophical counseling in a successful way. As stated above: Through philosophical counseling people will gain more coherence and thus improve their life enhancing attitude, their salutogenetic faculties.

But how can this happen and how can we bring philosophical theories (that's what we studied, that's our expertise) first in connection to the concepts (the world view) of an individual, i.e. an individual 'philosophy of life' and the life praxis (way of life) of a person?

Thus the first task is to bring philosophy (as a 'scientific' discipline, as it is taught at universities) and individual world views in some kind of connection.

The first step into this direction is the assumption or claim that philosophy in its systematic form represents the same structure as we find in an individual: Certain assumptions about world, men and god (= cosmology/philosophy of nature – anthropology – metaphysics/ philosophical theology) play an essential part, and also the personal value system as individual morality (= ethics). Even epistemology is part of an individual world-view, as (yet often unreflected) assumptions about knowledge and belief, truth and reality etc.

Thus the theory-praxis relationship needs two steps:

- First philosophical theories, methods and approaches will be related to individual 'theories', the personal world-view, concepts, assumptions etc. (In the practical counseling work this means especially: serving as a guide in reconstructing the personal concepts and assumptions.) In this process the (internal) coherence of the individual personal world view may be investigated, we can deal with discrepancies and try to improve the level of coherence and at the same time the level of complexity.
- In a second step the individual 'philosophy' will be put into relation to the personal experiences, based on the fact that personal concepts and concrete experience (decisions and actions) are in a complex way interrelated. Thus we look for (or "check") coherence and congruence, namely the coherence of theories (world-view) and congruence of life praxis. (This is important because congruence can be judged from outside, it has to do with authenticity or truthfulness.)

This process can serve as an instrument to bring an individual world view in coherence within its own theoretical context and with the person's praxis of life. Antonovsky, who developed the now well known concept of „Salutogenesis“, describes the „sense of coherence“ as a main factor of health.

For this purpose also the reflection of the larger 'frame' of the personal philosophy is of importance, which has to do with meaning and goals.

All these aspects - the search for coherence, for congruence and for meaning/goals - are essential means of a 'good life'. Thus Philosophical Counseling may play an important role in the process of establishing coherence and meaningfulness in the world-view of an individual.

In a second part I would like to illustrate the principles just presented. To each aspect of an individual world view structured in correspondence to the philosophical disciplines I will give some explanations about possible contents of the client and possible strategies of the philosophic counselor.

Epistemology:

The presented approach of philosophical counseling maybe called "epistemological". We reconstruct the world-view of an individual, with the structural knowledge, that the "elements" of a world-view are the epistemic faculties of

- *perception* (interrelated with *emotions*) and
- *cognition* (concepts, theories, statements etc.) and *emotions* "produced" by thinking (as in the example: The thought "I am afraid to suffer in Hades after my death" produces bad feelings right now).

Lack of discrimination between concepts and concrete experience (based on perception) is the main source of suffering, i.e. of self produced and therefore unnecessary suffering. (Suffering in concrete experience happens; it is part of human existence and has to be dealt with.)

As I said before, each personal "philosophy of life" is structured like systematic philosophy (of course more the other way round, systematic philosophy is shaped like individual world-views, because that's where philosophy comes from).

But usually you find little differentiation, little consciousness about the power of thinking to 'produce' reality, to distort concrete experience, to influence our behaviour and even our perception.

So philosophical counseling may teach to take responsibility also for ones concepts, ones theories, ones beliefs and convictions. Knowledge or belief, *episteme* or *doxa*, we know today that there is no sharp distinction, that every knowledge is shaped and determined by central and basic beliefs, the world-view behind the 'stage' of the experienced life-world. The world is at least partly what we think it to be. We cannot change the world (only in very slow steps), but we can check our theories, drop or modify those which do not fit to our concrete experience and thus come to more coherence.

We help the client to improve his 'epistemology' and use it for discrimination, thus improving coherence and complexity of his/her world-view.

Ethics

Each person has its own value system, an individual ethics. What we do or avoid is based on our values. Philosophical main stream ethics is deontological, an ethics of duty, and tries to regulate or give reasons for what has to be done or should not to be done. It is a cognitive approach; values are treated as theories about good and not good. In individual ethics this procedure is only one of several ways to deal with personal values.

Another important aspect which is rarely treated in philosophical ethics is the generation of values, how a person develops its personal value system.

I cannot go into details right now, just some hints:

Individual ethics look more like an integration of all types of ethics known in philosophy (on a less elaborated level however):

- Theories which claim that values can be perceived (as ideal ‘objects’ as Platon believed, or as structural qualities in objects or actions as Max Scheler or - in contemporary thought - von Kutschera claims)
- Theories that see a basic connection between values and emotions (cf. Hume and emotivism).

I claim that all these theories or approaches are right and show aspects of the complex ‘system’ of individual ethics.

But my personal conviction is the following:

Without the assumption of a deeper level of values in us human beings you will not be able to differentiate between values as judgment or attraction (emotional preference) and a sense of ‘rightness for me’.

Without such a deeper level (which is an anthropological assumption, part of our ‘model’ or image of man) you will not be able to explain, why people sometimes do things against their ‘surface-feelings’ or their thinking, with the conviction of following an inner voice, a deeper judgment of rightness. We need a new philosophy of conscience, and I think this is possible.

Metaphysics

Just a few remarks:

In every individual world-view or philosophy of life you will find some kind of metaphysics in the sense of relationship to a transcendent level or to God.

There is no way to be without metaphysics; even its negation is using this frame.

Dilthey described two major types of world-view, of ‘*weltanschauung*’:

- Materialism or Naturalism and
- Idealism

Today we could say: Either you find some kind of relation to a transcendent dimension (religious, spiritual, philosophical) or not, which means to develop a world-view situated within the limitations of space and time.

Both world views create some kind of coherence in the personal world view, but a person may switch from one perspective to the other, from time to time, or from one life span to the other.

As I see it without some underlying transcendent principle (for instance transcendence of space and time as a way of deeper connectedness) it is hardly possible to bring coherence into a world view, facing the wonderful and deep things on one hand and the terrible aspects and events in our world on the other hand.

Each person has its own way to deal with these aspects, in both types of world-views you find complex and rich solutions or poor and rigid ones.

What counts for counseling are 'life-sustaining assumptions' (Otto Muck), convictions which really 'carry' a person through difficult periods of life.

Belief systems which are superficially taken over don't really work, they have little or no effect of 'salutogenesis', as empirical evidence shows.

Philosophical counseling may help to explore the personal metaphysics, without prejudice pro or contra from the side of the counselor. This needs an open mind; unfortunately many philosophers have quite rigid concepts about metaphysics and would not be able to be good counselors in this respect.

Anthropology

What is the clients 'image of man' – a positive one (man is constructive on a deeper level, even if he/she is doing destructive things), or a more negative one (like for instance in the early phases of psychoanalysis – man as a destructive, egoistic being, which has to be tamed by culture).

Personal goals and also the attitude towards other people will be influenced by the personal anthropology remarkably. Thus the image of man has a power to create reality, for the person in question and for the behaviour of others around this person.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutic as the 'art of understanding' is an essential quality, for every person, and of course especially for a counselor. Unfortunately the philosophical concepts of understanding philosophical (or poetic) texts are only partly adequate for the process of dealing with the 'texts' of an individual person.

I think that Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Buber are the best guides in this respect.

My own concept of understanding is a kind of 'epistemological hermeneutic' which I have presented already in some central aspects.

In the process of understanding I try to reconstruct both the theories and the praxis of life and also try to make explicit the given relationship between theory = thinking, cognitive level and praxis of life, as given in a narrative form, as 'tales of life', based on concrete experience, i.e. perception and feeling belonging to it.

Based on Schleiermacher a first step of reconstruction (understanding = hermeneutics [*Verstehen*]) is followed by a second of critique (*Kritik*).

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PHILOSOPHICAL COUNSELLING AND AESTHETIC
EXPERIENCE [1]

Gry Orfei Solbraa

The purpose of this paper is to discuss a supplementary method in philosophical counselling using aesthetic theory. First I will investigate similarities between an aesthetic experience and the philosophical counselling conversation. To be aware of the aesthetic dimension in life is, I will argue, a way to enlarge our mentality and improve our moral capacities. It is a way to acknowledge the Other as a complex human being and to help him or her to become aware of the positive in the apparently negative. Finally I shortly reflect about how an aesthetic attitude may help explore the symmetry in the relation between the counselee and the counsellor.

I treat an aesthetic approach separately from a phenomenological approach or an existential approach because of its direct focus on our senses and feelings and how they intermingle and react to their surroundings. Modern aesthetic theory has the tools necessary to make an analysis of human lives and relations in our post-modern epoch. More precisely I think aesthetic theory can help us to understand how to gain positive energy from hopeless and dramatic life-situations. Aesthetics must not be understood as only dealing with superficial aspects of life!

1. Philosophical counselling as an aesthetic experience

My hypothesis is that the concept of aesthetic experience, as it has been developed both in the continental and in the analytical/pragmatic tradition, is useful to enhance our perspective on the potential of the conversation. An aesthetic perspective can strengthen the idea of the uniqueness of the dialogue by stressing certain traditional characteristics of the aesthetic experience. Let me briefly mention Monroe Beardsley's five characteristics of the aesthetic experience: *object directedness* (could be called a *phenomenological regard*), *felt freedom* (felt release from antecedent concerns about past and future), *detached effect* (emotional distance from usual interests), *active discovery* (a sense of actively exercising constructive powers of mind) and *wholeness* (a sense of integration as a person..) (the first and three of the four other are necessary). The German philosopher Martin Seel extracts three of these points which I think are interesting for our concerns:

* **Presence:** An experience of presence where the subject is concerned with sensing his or her own presence while being open to the presence of the other. What

happens when we try to let our senses and feelings influence our thinking? “A momentary play of appearances, an awareness of a here and now that encompasses my here and now..We become aware a moment in our own presence. But in this awareness there is also an abstention, a distance from all actions in which we are absorbed..(Seel, 2005. p 32)

* **Existential liberty:** An experience of relief and distance from pressing daily activities. Unlike the traditional concept of aesthetic experience, this has instrumental value in the counselling situation, at best resulting in a capacity to discern alternative ways of dealing with circumstances of life.

***Conceptual indeterminacy:** A shift in attitude where the counselee is able to ignore the normal conceptual fixation. Life, aesthetically regarded, unfolds itself as an experimental reality that goes beyond what we can ascertain epistemologically.

1.1 Presence

I will concentrate on the presence-aspect of the aesthetic experience. How does it feel to be present in the situation? What happens with us?

I think this is an important point because as I see it, it is a difficult task for many of us post-modern, post-industrial humans. We are in general seldom fully present in the situation; we are stretched between our past and future. Even when we are in a therapy-situation, it is difficult for many of us to be fully present. Maybe it is not even clear what it means to be fully present?

To reflect upon *presence*, I want to take as a point of departure John Dewey’s concept of *an experience*. His concept is relevant for philosophical counselling, because he has a radical conception of how it involves a genuine openness on the part of the subject. In a genuine experience we *interact* with the environment and have a real potential of being transformed in this experience.

But let us first see how Dewey understands *an experience* and how we can understand the philosophical counselling situation as an aesthetic experience: If we ask: What is it like to really have an experience, Dewey stresses the flow and unity of it. For Dewey this signifies an experience with aesthetic qualities: In the experience *every successive part flows freely, the flow is from something to something*. He writes

“ ..because of continuous merging, there are no holes, mechanical junctions, and dead centers when we have an experience. There are pauses, places of rest, but they punctuate and define the quality of movement...An experience has a unity that gives it its name, that meal, that storm, that rupture of friendship. The existence of this unity is constituted by a single quality that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts. The unity is neither emotional, practical, nor intellectual, for these terms name distinctions that reflection can make within it”. (Dewey, 1980, p 36-37)

Not every experience is an experience in the Deweyan sense. For an experience to stand out as an experience it needs to have some specific qualities that together make up the unity of the experience. And maybe feeling this sort of unity is a condition for being present in the situation?

I think this understanding of experience can help us understand both the actual philosophical counselling situation and its objective; namely experiences of life. Does not unity relate to both the act of telling a story and creating a meaning in life? His understanding of the aesthetic dimension as something deeper or more general which floats through the entire experience could be our point of departure when we want to stimulate philosophical reflections. What gives the dialogue its unity (and presence) is neither something intellectual, practical nor purely emotional; it is a complexity of different factors that can best be described as the aesthetic dimension of the dialogue. To be aware of this dimension is to be aware of the complexity of the counselee's situation and life. Too much focus on the intellectual aspects of the dialogue can create a mechanical flow or dead centres.

Do we not have the intention to make the counselling session *an experience* for both the counselee and the philosopher? Our professional empathy and capacity to familiarize ourselves with the counselee are necessary tools, but they alone cannot make the conversation an experience without the counsellor being sensitive to the aesthetic dimension of the dialogue.

If we manage to be fully present in the situation, having an aesthetic experience according to Dewey's conception of it, we also dispose ourselves to a radical openness, for a transformation in this experience. We interact with the environment and the other persons: Dewey writes:

“The self acts as well as undergoes, and its undergoing are not impressions stamped upon an inert wax but depend upon the way the organism reacts and responds” (Dewey (1980), p. 246)

This interaction with the environment and the philosophical counselling situation depends upon an aesthetic experience which speaks to both our rationality and sensibility.

Dewey's concept of the experience and how the subject can be transformed in her experience of the presence, makes me think about an experience I had where I managed to regard my situation differently:

Example: I have recently moved to a new neighbourhood. My one and a half year old son is going to a new kindergarten. I thought the kindergarten was a few minutes walk from our home, but getting there I realized that it was more than a kilometre. I was disappointed. Then I talked on the phone with a good friend of mine. When I told her about the distance she burst out: “What a perfect distance to the kindergarten! This way you and Valdemar can have a lot of experiences on your way! You can have nice meetings with people, you can stop and watch the flowers and the trees and you can eat something on your way! You will see that you are just going to love your way to the kindergarten!” By saying this my friend managed to transform my experience and let me understand how to experience this distance aesthetically. I understood deep within my body that this distance was a perfect possibility for making our daily walk *an experience* in the Deweyan sense of the word.

This example is meant to illustrate how it is possible to change our view on daily experiences by regarding them aesthetically. We are ourselves transformed in this experience- because the aesthetic view *makes us open and malleable for a real*

experience. The philosophical counselling situation can be understood as an aesthetic experience or at least as a potential aesthetic experience. More than the specific words that are said, it is the aesthetic wholeness and the presence of the dialogue that can introduce a dynamic process into the counselee's understanding of his or her situation.

1.2 Existential liberty

As the good work of art can set us free in our perception of it, the philosophical conversation can be understood as a situation of **existential liberty** where one experiences a sense of relief and distance from pressing daily activities. This is related to the concept of disinterestedness that is deeply rooted in our Western understanding of aesthetic experience. The existential liberty or disinterestedness has indirectly instrumental value in the counselling situation because it gives the counselee a "room" to discern and explore alternative ways of dealing with the circumstances of life. But, in the situation, the whole attention and perception of the counselee is directed towards this existential liberty for its own sake. A goal in the philosophical dialogue may be to reach a sort of "free reflection upon life" that is felt as valuable in itself.

To reach this stadium of free reflection we often use imagination as a dialogue-tool: Can you imagine how you would handle this situation *if you were free* to only listen to your heart? I think this aesthetic and existential point of view is important for instance to help the counselee handle daily stressful situations.

1.3 Conceptual indeterminacy

The last aspect I want to stress regarding similarities between the aesthetic experience and the philosophical counselling conversation is the **conceptual indeterminacy** as a goal to strive for. This has to do with the above mentioned points of being present and achieving existential liberty. A conceptual indeterminacy involves a shift in attitude where the counselee is able to ignore the normal conceptual fixation. Life, aesthetically regarded, unfolds itself as an experimental reality that goes beyond what we can ascertain epistemologically. This aspect of the aesthetical experience leads back to Kant's genius concept of reflective judgement, its role in the experience of the beautiful and its constructive combination of imagination and understanding, intuition and concept. I think stimulating the counselee's reflective judgement is an important goal in philosophical counselling.

I can mention many examples where counselees achieve a different understanding of a word during our consultations. I want to mention a young woman I had frequent conversations with last autumn: She wanted to become a warmer and nicer person, to achieve a better command of human relations. She was very concerned about how she could *give more of herself* for instance to her children. In the beginning she thought about this as a demanding task, implying a certain number of hugs during the day, for instance. Then, suddenly during one of our conversations another strategy revealed itself: Namely to relax more in the presence of others, to concentrate more on just being present, to really listen to the other with an understanding of the challenging task it is to deeply understand the Other's intentions and life-conceptions. Through a process of conceptual indeterminacy, where I would say that she was aesthetically present in her own presence, and where she let her imagination illuminate her

understanding, she managed to free herself from one conception of “being kind, being emphatic” to another deeper and more philosophical understanding of it.

2. The aesthetic perspective as a way of exploring the relation and symmetry between the counsellor and the counselee

How can the aesthetic perspective be a way of exploring the relationship between the counselee and the counsellor? An aesthetic experience is something that happens *between* us. To make the counselee feel at home in the conversation, we have to be present ourselves. I think it is important that the counsellor is conscious about *giving* something of him- or herself. But how and how much can we give of ourselves and still be a professional? Here I think an aesthetic focus on the conversation will make the counsellor feel more secure about where these limits should go:

-Being aesthetically and existentially present in the conversation will help the counsellor to be a natural authority. By this I mean having judicious to let the counselee express herself when she has the need, let the silence work when that is right and also venture to introduce new perspectives when the conversation is in need of that. This last point I hold as extremely interesting: Many of us have sometimes felt that the conversation sort of stops. Maybe the counsellor wanted to go further in an analysis but the counselee moves reluctantly. To me, being conscious of the aesthetic aspect implies drawing inspiration from a wide register of expressions, picking out one expression as a starting point for a new turn into the complex material of life. Dewey tells us that even *an experience* of thinking has aesthetic qualities. Thinking is “rounded with” this aesthetic quality without which thinking is inconclusive (Dewey, p. 38). This he relates to the Greek identification of good conduct with conduct having proportion, grace and harmony, the *kalon-agathon*, an example of a distinctive aesthetic quality in moral action (p. 39). As I see it the dialogue has to be *an experience* in Dewey’s understanding of the word to really constitute a difference in his or her life. To render the dialogue an experience that stands out as such, requires that we are aware of the continuity between the intellectual and the aesthetic in the happenings of the dialogue.

- An aesthetic perspective may help to render the situation warmer and more spontaneous in order to create a confident atmosphere between the counsellor and the counselee. We have to meet our counsees as *whole human beings*, not only as thinking minds or frustrated persons. To *see* the Other as a complex human being, in whom negative factors in life also have a positive aspect, requires an aesthetic and multifaceted perspective.

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[1] Some people associates aesthetic experiences with mystical experiences. There may very well be a connection, but I think that mystical experiences, regarded aesthetically, are not so mystical after all!



**GET PEOPLE INVOLVED: ENTHUSIASM FOR
CULTURE WISDOM AND OPEN DIALOGUES BY A
TWO-YEAR PHILOSOPHY TRAINING COURSE**

Detlef Staude

Introduction

Philosophical practice has two very important aims: to clarify and to comfort. Philosophy brings enrichment to people, lets their minds brighten up and gain space. Thus clarity emerges. At the same time clarity brings comfort, because Philosophical practice connects it with life, doesn't establish dualities, but shows new connections and deepens the understanding. Comfort is the way of the heart, and comfort is therefore really something Philosophical Practice can offer today, even 1600 years after Boethius. We can understand ourselves as always questioning, searching beings. By reminding us of central questions and showing us ways how to deal with them, Philosophical Practice connects to tradition; connects to backgrounds, revitalizes the individuals and in the long run hopefully society likewise.

Society, media etc. expect a lot of philosophy, of its innovations and clarifications. They hope that it helps us to integrate into a constantly changing world by understanding our roots. Lots of today's problems are deeply rooted in philosophic history. We can become slaves of ideas if we don't recognize them and question them. So this work of consciousness is enriching, but also highly essential. If one relates consciously to one's own culture and its way to dealing with the questions of mankind, one connects to oneself, since these roots are part of one's own.

To allow all this to happen, I established in my Philosophical Practice a two-year Philosophy training course, which leads not only through the history of occidental philosophy, but also into its main topics. Additionally it offers the possibility to join two philosophical journeys to Florence and Córdoba, so that medieval and renaissance philosophy are more than theoretical. But how can a survey of occidental philosophy be Philosophical practice? - By contact with the past and its ideas one widens one's thinking, one asks profounder questions, one conducts dialogs more openly and by this becomes fitter to deal with the present and the future. This relevance in everyday life is the comfort, my Philosophy Academy can offer.

Looking or comfort

Maybe we as philosophers like to be occupied with philosophy, are enthusiastic about developing and interrogating ideas, we love to think, ask and find new areas of mind. Being practitioners we must also ask ourselves whether our enthusiasm can be shared by others and what possible clients expect from philosophy apart from clear distinctions, exact terminology and an enthusiasm for language.

If I use the word comfort to summarize what the public may be searching I will probably encounter opposition. Comfort sounds like spiritual welfare, perhaps even therapeutic, not philosophic in a sense of the 21st century. Comfort sounds not rational enough, not setting free the power of independent thinking and autonomous individuality. Comfort, so I guess many of you may think, cannot be a useful term to indicate the aim of practical philosophy. Maybe in times, when for example stoicism was widely shared, in times when the tranquillity of soul was another word for happiness, maybe in times up to the last great system, which a philosopher tried to establish and which by its internal logic could grant some comfort, maybe up to then philosophy could be seen as a source of it. But after the death of metaphysic thinking, after dictatorships and world wars, after the insights of the “Dialectic of Enlightenment” and with all the variegated truths of this postmodern age: in which sense can philosophy be a source of comfort at all?

Let’s begin with the question, what our clients and the public expect if they hear of philosophy. If it is not prejudices of the kind that everything that one doesn’t understand is likely to be philosophy or science that keep people away from philosophy – then philosophy should be able to give answers or at least helpful indications of how to understand oneself better and find orientation in the world. First as philosophers we tend to stress, that the most important thing philosophy can practice is to ask questions. This is our method of clarifying situations and terms. Nevertheless, life also wants answers, and so accurate asking maybe a good method in order to prevent prejudices or to get new insights, but we also need answers. Therefore Philosophical Practice also prepares coherent answers which are meaningful for the client and so insert themselves therefore in the root network of his identity.

What do we as philosophical practitioners do? – Let us imagine human beings as meaning hunters. Meaning is what they need to nourish themselves, and humans hunt for meaning, which they need for life, is with nets. Meaning hunting needs knowledge, experience and good information: where is it useful to look for it, which attitude makes it difficult to find the traces of meaning, which nets do we have to use for which sort of sense? – Sense in life is not a result of philosophy, it is experienced in ones own life. As long as life is rich in meaning and no bigger difficulty arises, philosophy is not needed. Because there is no deeper question. But when wondering begins, when people want to understand more deeply the coherence of human existence, then philosophy becomes vital.

Thus it seems: but in reality people in such situations rather read books, go to psychologists, pray, speak with friends, let the difficult reality be enriched by fantasy and entertainment and so forth. Who thinks that philosophy can give orientation? – Philosophy for most people is far away, they wouldn’t connect it with their ordinary life. And even those who are open to what philosophy may have to offer are astonished to hear how deeply influenced our reality is by the philosophic thoughts of the last 2 ½ millennia.

Therefore as philosophical practitioner, who tries to be this in his main profession and to earn his living with it, I am confronted with the fact, that philosophy

has the reputation of being difficult, far away from everyday life and from what really affects. There is also some sort of fascination nevertheless, one has an uncertain idea, that to philosophize and getting to know philosophy perhaps could be an interesting thing to do.

But even then the way is hard. Philosophy has its difficult aspects and to philosophize is not just to discuss opinions. So some frustrations are inevitable. For those who really begin to get into philosophy in whatever way, a good frustration management is essential. The following can be sources of frustration: one becomes aware how little one knows, even short texts are really difficult to understand, some thoughts seem to be completely alien and one doesn't get contact to them, all these terms are used in a very special way, so one also has to get into a certain language, with each new insight a bundle of new questions arises. Like that the end is difficult to see and also the sense.

At this inevitable stage of frustration – a stage of frustration not because of life and its difficulties but because of philosophy itself – it is necessary that philosophy can also offer comfort. And that the philosophical practitioner can guide to this comfort. If someone comes to philosophy searching for some sort of orientation and becomes even more confused by terminology, theories and thoughts then the prejudices against philosophy become confirmed.

The way, how philosophy can offer comfort today is by granting insight into the complex relations of human existence, to generate a conception how deeply our identity is rooted in terminology and ideas which represent the self comprehension of our culture.

Working with polarities

The development of human beings is a polar one, changing between the polarities of individual emancipation and regression into the general whole. The common whole for a small child is the mother, then the family, later the in group of friends. During the process of emancipation normally one's world view gets more and more differentiated, one stands more on own feet, is frequently less integrated into the common whole. Today a long individual emancipation process comes to an end which began with the Sophists and with Socrates. But being emancipated doesn't mean being isolated and without connection to the whole. Emancipation wins its sense exactly in relation to the whole out of which it emerged. This common whole is our culture. And therefore, we are not only full responsible, powerful and willfull persons, ready to change the world, but we also have a net of relations and a deep background, which carry us, if we want to recline or even to let us fall into it.

For me therefore one of the interesting things philosophy can do is to show, how in history philosophic thoughts became cultural patterns again and again and how the process of emancipating from these cultural patterns brings forward new philosophies. Philosophy with its methods of distinction and criticism is a power of emancipation. How can philosophy offer the other pole, regression into the common whole as well? – As I already said, the philosophers who invented great all considering systems tried to link these two poles, tried to show the common whole just like the necessary distinctions. It is the search for the cosmos, for the universal order, which was the motivation for it. Today philosophers are more modest when they think about the question what philosophy is able to do. We don't believe any more in great all referring systems or into a metaphysic given sense of the universe. Philosophical practice today

therefore has to confront itself with the fundamental difficulty, that philosophy is meanwhile convinced, that a general whole to which it is possible to refer on, doesn't exist or cannot be recognized. How can philosophy offer comfort in this situation, if there isn't a steady "common whole" to refer on?

As I already showed, there is such a common whole alive nevertheless. It is history, particular history of ideas and history of thinking. We understand ourselves and the problems of today better out of the history of ideas. – Granted all this, you may say, but learning something about the own culture and intellectual history is part of emancipation, not of regression. That's true; at least if people just hear facts, learn about concepts and ideas. It is not true, if they dive into it by sensing the atmosphere of these thoughts, by feeling into the emotional movement behind the words, by experiencing the enthusiasm and the deep existential truth behind the ideas. If this happens, philosophy and its history become a forest of human wisdom, and to walk around in its very different parts is practice as Aristotle understood it as opposed to *poesis*, an activity with a goal in itself. If this happens, the history of culture can be understood as part of one's own identity, one feels the generations of predecessors who also were searching and left markers for orientation. One feels connected to the mental ancestors and is proud of what could grow on the one hand and on the other hand one feels with the many tragic figures on this way.

For philosophical practice we need both, the path of clear distinction, criticism and logic, and the path of comfort, of enthusiasm, of diving into the atmosphere of the situation and the thoughts.

I try to guarantee this in most of the offers of my philosophical practice, but especially in the Philosophy Training Course (Philosophy Academy), in which also two philosophic journeys are integrated. These journeys are particularly suited to connect the two poles: going into another country, experiencing another culture, becoming open for the different atmosphere, open the heart for new impressions and thoughts. A journey, if too many frustrations don't make it difficult, usually allows us to open us much more and in more different ways than at home, where we are influenced by the everyday categories of our life and our way of thinking.

Experiencing certain places where the philosophic development of the past is concentrated, allows people to concentrate more easily on the thoughts behind these impressions, so deepening the experiences. Thus thoughts, distinctions and ideas become connected with impressions, with emotions, which is important to satisfy the ever searching human being. Because humans look or hunt for meaning, but meaning cannot be found or given in words and sentences or be obtained in concepts and theories. It must be experienced. Therefore, what I as a philosophical practitioner can do, is to open spaces for these experiences, to care for conditions which make such experiences probable, to provide terminology, which helps to grasp, arrange and stabilize the experiences in communication. Thus an exciting, open dialogue emerges with reference to our current challenges, desires and questions out of the occupation with one's own culture and its background of ideas.

This is an enriching path to get people interested in their own backgrounds and to understand still existing modes of thinking and difficulties. But not only the journeys to Andalusia and into the Toscana, but also the other parts of the Philosophy College, in which different tutors of *philopraxis.ch* are involved, try to connect clarity and "comfort": even if e.g. logic itself is the subject, this becomes an event. As philosophical practitioners we also stand in a sophistic tradition: first try to convince someone by good arguments, but in addition we should be able to persuade by other means, by the eloquence of our words, with our own enthusiasm, with our own maturity

and with the atmosphere we are able to create. This is more than philosophy, it is philosophical practice.

