

Situational Philosophy

*Towards a theory of philosophical practice*¹

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Abstract

This essay is a revised and expanded version of the text which was the basis for the author's Masterclass at the 11th International Conference on Philosophical Practice (ICPP), the 18th of July 2012 at the Humanities Institute, Kangwon National University in Chuncheon, Republic of Korea.

The main goal of the essay is, to contribute to a theory of philosophical practice. To do this, the author develops a criticism of reductionist practices in philosophy. The theoretical point of departure is an abridged survey of the two paradigmatic changes in European philosophy in the 20th century, i.e., Husserl's phenomenology, and Wittgenstein's language game analysis. The line of thinking is illustrated by a case story of the author.

Part I discusses the phenomenological and linguistic turns in European philosophy. Part II describes and discusses a case story. Part III criticizes two forms of reductionism in philosophical practice, namely psychological and conceptual reductionism. Part IV gives an initial impetus to a theory of philosophical practice beyond any reductionism.

In the present essay, the author is dealing with Western philosophy only, as the origins of post-Modern philosophical practice are rooted in Western philosophy. Lately, Eastern philosophy has been an inspiration for philosophical practice as well.

Keywords. European philosophy, paradigmatic shifts, Husserl, Wittgenstein, reductionism, psychologism, conceptualism, situational philosophy, philosophical encounter, philosophical dialogue.

Introduction

An original motivation for philosophical practice is a definite distance from theoretical approaches of philosophy. Another motivation is a definite distance from psychology and psychotherapy. The identity of philosophical practice is above all a negative identity, it is *not* theory and *not* psychotherapy; it promises to be an alternative to both. As a consequence of the anti-theoretical perspective, we hardly find theoretical researches on philosophical practice. At best, there are some legitimations or grounding theories, like Rhee's and Lindseth's (Rhee 2011; Lindseth 2005, 2010). Most essays which look like theories of philosophical practice, are descriptions of methods and techniques (like, e.g., the essays in Staude 2010; see Lindseth 2010). This judgment will not be explained and researched in the present essay. The hypothesis to be defended here, is (a) that leading examples of philosophical practice are guilty of psychological and conceptualistic reductionism; (b) that they, by doing so, ignore the phenomenological and linguistic turns of philosophy; and (c) that, by consequence, philosophical practice has to incorporate these paradigmatic shifts, which I suggest in so-called 'situational philosophy'.

A popular view on philosophical practice says, it is *applied* philosophy. However, being the consequence of the above mentioned paradigmatic turns, philosophical practice is itself philosophy. We cannot make a distinction like theoretical psychology and applied or clinical psychology. Philosophy *is* practice (Hadot 1995). On the one hand, philosophical practice implies theory; on the other hand, it needs a theory of philosophical practice. That it implies theory, is to say that theoretical work is part of the practice (proposals for understanding the guest's story, and for conceptual research, etc.). That it needs a theory of itself, is to say that we must be clear about the grounds, goals and methods of the practice.

Philosophical practice is, first of all, not a service but the philosophizing person's life practice. Only if the

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philosopher has integrated practicing philosophy within his daily life practice, he or she is able to help other people to incorporate philosophy into their lives as well. This statement implies a definite positioning of the author's opinion about philosophy and practice. In my master class at the 11th International Conference on Philosophical Practice, I improvised a presentation of this position, using a case history of myself. In the present essay, I will re-construct that presentation, and complete it with reflections on my philosophical position.

I. Philosophy and Practice

What is theory in relation to philosophy? Maybe not all (as Hadot states), but anyway much of ancient Greek and Roman philosophy was not primarily aimed at developing theories on the essence of reality, existence and truth. They were practices to deal with existence, i.e., one's own life. Cynic philosophy is an extreme example of philosophy as life practice and exercise, without theorizing words. Stoic and Platonic philosophies are examples of philosophy as the practice of 'the care of the self' and 'the care of the other' (Hadot; Foucault), with theorizing explanations and legitimations.

Already in ancient Greece, beginning with Aristotle, Plato's scriptures became sources of theorizing philosophy. Here, theory is not meant as explanation and legitimation of philosophical practice, but as revelation and explanation of the essence of reality. The goal and task of this kind of philosophy is to develop theories of the essence of being, and of truth, beauty and virtue. While the places of philosophy as life practice are the places of everyday life, the places of philosophy as revealing and explaining theory are the Ivory Tower and its annexes.

Despite some revival of philosophy as life practice in Renaissance (Michel de Montaigne), Modern philosophy refined its theorizing capabilities. Ever since Leibniz, Descartes and Spinoza, philosophy developed as a series of competitive, comprehensive theories of reality, knowledge, ethics, esthetics, and politics. That was mainstream of philosophy in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In the 19th century, however, some 'outsiders' in academic philosophy, related philosophy to life practice. To them, philosophy was not developing the mentioned general theories, but the reflection upon life. Philosophical reflection and living one's life slid into one another. We are talking about, Søren Kierkegaard, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Karl Marx can be mentioned here as well.

In the 20th century, the practical life view of these philosophers outside the Ivory Tower of academic philosophy was continued by phenomenological philosophers (like Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir) and by neo-Nietzschean philosophers like George Bataille, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. In all these contemporary approaches, however, practice is above all present as a theoretical issue. When some action is involved in their philosophy, is it as esthetic practice (Sartre; Bataille) or as a kind of political activism (Sartre; Foucault). When we can understand the philosophy of practice as a description or testimony of a real life practice (as with Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas), then the text looks nevertheless like an theory of the essence of human life.

From the 19th century on, Marxist philosophy has been copied and developed as a social and political philosophy. It had its primes in the first three decades of 20th century, and had a revival in the 1960ties and 70ties. The basis of this so-called historic-materialistic dialectics was the class struggle, of which its theory was the guide and the legitimation.

When, in the early '80ties of the 20th century, Gert Achenbach introduced 'philosophical practice', philosophy as life or political practice was hardly an issue anymore. Besides, academic philosophy had lost its central academic position as the Mother of the Alma Mater.

The crisis of Western philosophy

Philosophical counseling, as developed in the 1980's en 1990's, is a post-Modern phenomenon. It came on in a time that Modern Western philosophy had lost one's way.

The explosive growth of physical and social sciences in the 19th and 20th centuries robbed philosophy of exclusive rights concerning ontology, epistemology, logic, ethics, and esthetics. Statistically and empirically

controlled drawing up and testing of hypotheses became the new acknowledged standard of true and applicable knowledge of reality ('ontology'). Epistemology and formal logic separated from the systems of Modern philosophy, and became, as research and legitimation of the foundations of science, part of scientific industry. Ethics became applied ethics in the contexts of medical and political practices. Esthetics prospered mainly as the sociology and history of arts.

Modern philosophy remained in crisis (Husserl 2012b and Heidegger 2000). Husserl and Wittgenstein draw conclusions from this crisis; the first in the line of Western metaphysics, the second in the line of modern logic. In both cases, Modern philosophy's practice of speculative, generalizing and reductionist presumptions and universally valid knowledge lost its grounds. And in both cases, method, not theory, was the answer; phenomenological reduction and description, and language game description respectively. Heidegger continued Husserl's reflections, and so did, in his wake, Levinas and Derrida. Wittgenstein's critical investigations of Western philosophy found no followers; this kind of research watered down to formal linguistic analysis of all kinds of concepts.

In the years of post-War cultural and social upheavals, from the 1950's, french Nietzschean thinkers explored alternative ways out of the swamps and dead ends of Modern philosophy's crisis. Here, thinking the Identity of the Subject was criticized, and new ways of thinking the 'not identical', 'organic' body, interwoven into networks, were developed (Deleuze; Foucault).

After the creative period of these Nietzschean philosophers, about 1980, some Western students of philosophy looked for new ways to find a living as a philosopher. They ignored the dilemmatic social and cultural situation of Western philosophy, - i.e. *either* productive science oriented philosophy *or* marginalized speculative metaphysics, - and pretended to be able to re-invent so-called 'Socratic dialogue' from scratch. The price they had to pay for this frivolity was an ambiguous genuflection to psychology and psychotherapy. While presenting itself as the counterpart and proper alternative to psychology and psychotherapy, philosophical counseling copied their client setting and therapeutic targets. Only the practice of quoting philosophers from all Western and non-Western history reminds of the philosophical heritage. Doing so, these philosophical counselors contribute to the contemporary fashion of individualism and Self-development, including the use of pseudo-psychological categories and diagnoses.

Let us take a look at those paradigmatic shifts, which were ignored by the post-Modern philosophical practitioners.

The phenomenological turn

In 1913, Edmund Husserl published his 'Ideas' ('Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie'; Husserl 2009). In line with René Descartes, Husserl distinguished a person's consciousness and the objects of this consciousness. Eighteenth and nineteenth century academic philosophy has yielded a good many philosophical theories and a huge jargon. Husserl established the fact, that philosophers were going round in their own circles of artificial language, and had lost any connection with reality and real life experiences. The first thing to do, was to clean the philosopher's mind from all pre-conceived ideas of the world, including everyday beliefs. He revived the ancient Greek notion of '*epoché*', the procedure of 'bracketing' all assumptions about the existence of an external world. This *epoché* resulted in the reduction of all kinds of pre-conceived notions of the world out of the philosopher's consciousness. Husserl used the word 'reduction' in the sense of cleansing, sweeping. This cleansing enables the philosopher to observe and experience the world as it is. Husserl's main efforts were not to know the essence of the world, but to know the essence of the human ability to know the world. The aim of his cleansing the human mind was to survey our consciousness. The phenomena Husserl was talking about, were the phenomena in our consciousness, the world as it appears in our consciousness, in our mind. He showed the untenability of both the Cartesian absolute doubt and the Kantian *a priori* structure of our mind, and looked for a non-preconceived basis of philosophy. This basis cannot be a conceptual construction; it is a specific kind of experiences. Philosophy is *primarily* not the development of theories, but a practice, i.e., the practice of experiencing one's experiences of the world. He called the philosopher's domain an *exclusively own field of experience* (Husserl 2009, "Nachwort", p. 141). The phenomena Husserl was investigating, were those

experiences of the world as they appear to our *transcendental* or 'pure' mind, as he called the mind cleansed of all pre-conceived ideas. So, his phenomenology is the description of 'pure mind' and of the efforts to cleanse this mind. *He described the practice of 'pure mind'*. Once pure mind is cleansed, we are ready to experience the world as she appears to us, and we can try to understand her as she is by herself (in stead of knowing her in accordance with our pre-conceived ideas).

Since Husserl unmasked biased philosophy, no self-respecting philosopher can philosophize from whatever bias. Unfortunately, a lot of philosophers did and do, not in the least philosophical practitioners, as we will see further on.

The linguistic turn

Some decades after Husserl's 'Ideas', Ludwig Wittgenstein created a comparable but different paradigmatic shift. Probably inspired by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, maybe also by Husserl, but explicitly working from the philosophy of logic, mathematics and language in the 1910's and '20s, Wittgenstein developed a unique criticism of Modern philosophy (Wittgenstein 2009). By means of a explicitly non-theorizing method of description, he showed how philosophical problems result from grammatical and logical errors philosophers make by giving fictional meanings to ordinary words and sentences. To show that, he developed his method of describing so-called 'language games' as they were practiced in so-called 'forms of life'. While in philosophical theories the meanings of words are created in the philosopher's studio, in his head and at his desk, in ordinary life words get their meanings in the practice of everyday life. So, to know the meaning of an expression, is to describe its use in situations of human life.

Wittgenstein answered questions about generalizations, by describing '*family resemblances*' of language expressions, and (in Wittgenstein 2010) by pointing out obvious '*certainties*' in everyday life, the doubt of which is useless.

As a consequence of Wittgenstein's sobering way of thinking about alleged 'philosophical' concerns like truth and meaning, and like ethical and esthetic questions, to think those issues means to participate in real life situations, practically or virtually (in our *narrative* mind; see De Haas 2011b). Because of Wittgenstein's philosophical investigations, the use of philosophical jargon and generalizations brings a brush to the philosopher's cheeks (at least, it should). This jargon deprives the living words from their 'organic' meanings in ordinary 'forms of life', while the corresponding generalizations and partiality reduce real life situations from their irreducible richness and concreteness of meanings.

Since Wittgenstein unmasked the reductionist effects of philosophical jargon, no self-respecting philosopher can recede from everyday life situations and the language used there, and invent and process an own jargon with corresponding problems. But again, most philosophers did and do, including many a philosophical practitioner.

Towards a theory of philosophical practice

Although we can distinguish a few known views on philosophical practice (like, e.g., Achenbach, Brenifier, Lahav, Lindseth, Marinoff, Raabe, Schuster), we cannot say, philosophical practice is based on one or more paradigms. There are just some explicit views. Up to now, objective or shared criteria for judging the quality or value of philosophical practice are not available (De Haas 2011c). Like in philosophy in general, in the world of philosophical practice many different - sometimes each other excluding - ways of practice are active. It seems impossible and not fruitful to try to construct one general theory of philosophical practice. The least a philosophical practitioner can do, is to make his own practice explicit, both in terms of intention and focus, and in terms of explicitation and explication of his background of philosophical tradition(s) (De Haas 2011c).

In meeting his guest, a philosophical practitioner has, explicitly or not, an intention and a focus. The intention can be to help his guest to clear his mind, or to find his own real motives or inner self, or to take a heartfelt moral decision, etcetera etcetera. This intention is accompanied with a specific focus on aspects of the guest's question, story, and answers.

It is shameful to say, but unfortunately quite a few colleagues in philosophical practice are vague, and even

not capable, in making explicit both their own way of philosophizing and their roots in philosophical tradition. The professional community of philosophical practitioners should not allow this situation, and promote the transparency of the philosophical quality of practices.

In the next section of this essay, I will contribute to the explicitation and explication of my way of practicing philosophy, illustrated by a case of my own.

II. A Case Story

In the winter of 2003-2004, my wife and I had a short holiday on the isle of Texel, in the Dutch Waddenzee. We had hired a holiday cottage, and walked a lot on the beach and in the dunes with our Briard dog. I was there, but my attention was not. Almost all the time, my thoughts were with my job. I checked my e-mail inbox, answered e-mails, called my assistant to consult on specific tasks, read reports and e-mailed my commentary. The wonderful island of Texel, my wife, my dog - they were just the background of my 'remote control management'.

A couple of weeks later, back home, my wife and I were having breakfast, when, as usual, I complained about being tired and having slept badly. And, as usual, my wife told me to visit the family doctor. As the tiredness and the headache were not deniable, I called the doctor to make an appointment. The next day I was in his practice, and he listened to my list of inconveniences, from sleepless nights and headache to backache and palpitation. He referred me to a physiotherapist, send me to the hospital to have taken blood, and advised me to take a sick leave, and rest; his medicine was called relaxation. So I did.

But to take a sick leave, meant to be subject to the Dutch Health Law. My employer had to arrange a re-integration process for me. I became a patient of occupational doctors, who diagnosed my condition a burn-out. They referred me to re-integration psychologists, assertiveness trainers and fitness groups. They all observed me as some category in their burn-out personality diagrams. They treated me likewise. My condition, identified as a burn-out disease, was supposed to be the consequence of my personal bad habits. They said, I drank too much coffee, had a bad posture, did need more physical exercise, and suffered a low degree of assertiveness. When I wanted to speak about the bad conditions at work, they told me, that those were not the cause of my disease, but my personal bad habits were. Or at least, I could not change those conditions at work, while I could change my own personal conditions.

In between the therapeutic and training sessions, I had a monthly meeting with my team manager. She tried to treat me like the re-integration-specialists did, i.e., as a sick person who had to overcome his personal weaknesses. However, in my opinion it was all about the atmosphere and power relations and lack of cooperation within the company. I wanted to talk about these conditions, but she refused and turned the conversation back to my individual disease and re-integration process. At that time, I was too vulnerable to resist her organizational power.

That summer, my wife and I visited Slovakia. While I was quite depressive since I took the sick leave, this holiday with my wife cheered me up somewhat. But nonetheless, I kept washed-out and without energy. One day, in the mountains of the High Tatra, I hiked into the mountains on my own. Being an amateur alpinist, my body recognized the free atmosphere of space and breath in thin air immediately. My legs jumped across the rocks, my attention was nothing but breathing, moving, walking and jumping; I was the mountain. No tiredness at all. Up there, at some rock near a pass, I was happy, I laughed loudly, my mind was clear, and I knew there was nothing wrong with my energy. Like with fresh blood, I jumped down the mountain. In a renewed spirit, I joined my wife at a terrace, and told her my experience of that hike into the mountains. From that day on, I found my way out of the blind alley of my so-called 'burn-out'. This way was far away from the psychological and individualizing therapies in the burn-out and re-integration industry. I focused on the situations at the office, and tried to change those situations, of which my personal habits and possibilities were part. Of course, I couldn't change those situations on my own, as I shared them with colleagues and managers. But focusing on the situations in stead of one-sided on my state of mind, I succeeded in finding and creating other situations where I could be more 'by myself', and where my possibilities and those of the other people in the situation did fit better. On the one hand, I could, as the

chairman of the employees' council, play a creative and mediating role in a difficult re-organizational process in the company. On the other hand, I started a process of re-starting my own philosophical practice.

Words, feelings, and competences

Texts and conversations play a decisive role in the management of employees who fall out of the working process.

One day during my 'burn-out' year, two representatives of my employer visited me at my home. I intended to use the meeting to tell my story of the bad conditions at the office. I thought, the two men would be prepared to listen to me, and to understand my point of view. But I experienced a rude awakening. They did not deny the abuses I pointed out, but immediately they made it clear to me, that, although I was a program manager and those abuses affected my program and my functioning as a manager, those abuses were not my concern; I had to leave them to the higher ranked managers in the organization.

What happened in that conversation was a reduction of the situations in my story to just some aspects. The representatives of the company disregarded the relations between my functioning as a program manager on the one hand, and the functioning of other manager on the other hand, in combination with certain power conditions in the organization. They reduced the situation to my psychic condition. This reduction was itself an act of power. Because of the power relations in the company, in combination with my vulnerability at the time, I gave up.

I told my story in the company - a story partly shared by my guests, the two men who represented my employer. Instead of sharing my story, and in stead of participating in telling this shared story, they declared themselves outsiders, and hold the power to decide the truth of my story, being the story of a overwrought man who bites off more than he can chew. Telling my story, I revealed some organizational problems and abuses, which higher ranked managers did not want to be mentioned. So, they used their ranks to impose silence upon me.

Within the logic of an hierarchically organized company, it makes sense to allocate power and authority, and to take control of communication processes and personal expression - without saying that it is fair to exercise repression in those organizations. Actually, such organizations are in flagrant contradiction to human relations in a democratic society. All the worse, when physical and psychological counselors exert the same reductions in their practices. And when philosophers reveal as reductionist counselors, Socrates would turn in his grave.

In a nutshell, the structure of those reducing conversations can be sketched as follows.

1. In the conversation, there is a strict and severe division of roles; the one (manager; counselor) has the direction, and possesses the knowledge of the other's condition and possibilities; the other is supposed to be the object of the process, and follows the instructions. Let's us call the first 'the producer' and the second 'the performer'.
2. The performer has a theme he or she wants to discuss with the producer. The producer determines the way it will be discussed, and watches over the process of the conversation.
3. The producer's interventions are focused on reducing the performer's story to the dimensions he, the producer, wants to admit and control. Mostly, these are aspects of organizational and psychological functioning.

Actually, these kinds of conversations are managerial control processes.

Experiences and situations

The two representatives of my employer came to me, in my house and home. They were my guests, but they did not behave as such. They behaved as executors of my employer's procedures. They turned my home situation into an interrogation and instruction room. Two executors and one victim - that was their idea of our relation. Mentally, they brought in the unspoken knowledge - the three of us knew that - that I was financially dependent on my employer's goodness to keep me as an employee. They had the power to define

this situation.

Dependency also characterized the situations with the physicians and psychologists. They were commissioned by my employer and paid by my employer's insurance company. Moreover, they assumed that they, as professionals, possessed the truth about my condition. And also in this situation, we both knew that, actually, I had no choice than to follow their diagnoses and treatments. I had the interest to create the impression that I accepted their role-play. That is not to say, that I really did, but I had to give the impression for the sake of my future in our company.

Strange to say that the physician and the psychologists defined the situations of our meetings from their point of view and not mine. The occupational doctor did not ask me about my situations and experiences at work and at home; he just asked me the questions from his form. He did not look me into the eyes; his eyes were focused on the computer screen all the time. The psychologists started putting me behind a computer screen where I had to fill in assessment forms for about four hours. With that information they constructed an image of mine. My life experience was reduced to their preconceived categories. They never asked me to tell my story as I experienced it, in my own words. They were not interested into my life and work situations. They reduced my experiences to answers to their preconceived questions.

My manager and her representatives did the same in another language.

In those situations, over-determined by those who had the social power to do so, I had to play a double role. On the one hand, I joined in their game play (I was their cast member); on the other hand and at the same time, I tried to define those situations my way, from my experiences and dignity. I think, this doubles was an important part of my way out of the dead end I had been ended up. Despite the managers', doctors' and psychologists' structural power to define and determine the situations and conversations of our meetings, I had the mental power to create my own presence, my own perspective of the situation. This changed the situation we shared. Now, a meeting was a complex situation of their managerial perspective and my existential perspective. As I was, because of the power relation, not able to ignore their definitions of the situation, they ignored mine vehemently. They answered my attempts to tell my points of view, i.e., the story of my acts and experiences, by reducing the events at stake to my feelings, values, errors, misunderstandings etc.

I tried to focus our attention to the situations in the organizations. After all, they were situations we had shared a lot. We could have shared our experiences in and with those situations. We could have mentioned and valued our behavior as well as the organizational conditions. Although the manager's representatives were guests in my home, and were, so to say, free to arrange this situation as an encounter and a dialogue, they did not. They did not take the chance to respect their own experiences as well as mine, and to enter a free, uncontrollable encounter.

For my manager, it was more difficult to ignore the fact that both of us, and we together, had spent many hours of our life in situations of our company. It was impossible to ignore the fact that we shared many experiences. Whatever issue we raised, it was clear that we shared the situations and experiences of those issues. However, she avoided taking the meeting as a chance to encounter each other openly and freely in a dialogue about those experiences and situations. On the contrary, she used her formal organizational power to emphasize the hierarchical relationship as well as the fact that there was only one problem, i.e., me and my burn-out.

The situations with the doctors and psychologists were very awkward. For on the one hand, I would expect, that their task and duty was to help me, i.e., to help me find my way back into my job. In my naivety, I hoped to share my experiences and evaluation of the working situation. I tried to talk about the relations and conditions in the company. But those 'professionals in body and mind' turned out to be programmed to individualize and psychologize my problematic experiences and questions. Like with the managers, no encounters and dialogues were possible.

Philosophical conversations

Being faced with this reality of systematic individualization and psychologizing of the organizational issue,

I decided to visit an independent psychotherapist. I was lucky to find one, who was also, and first of all, a philosopher. He had studied both philosophy and psychotherapy. In his practice, he was a philosopher. He did not diagnose me, and there was no 'treatment'. Our meetings were dialogical encounters. The only definitions were the time (45 minutes), the place (his consulting room) and the division of roles (he was the questioner, I was the one to bring in my stories). Each time, he opened the conversation with this question, "What did you experience last week, that you want to talk about?". We talked about my life and working situations, which we tried to describe and understand. His contribution was, to help me remember and describe the situations that bothered me. And he surprised me, when I went round in circles or choked on a groundless certainty about feelings, persons, or situations. Different from the psychologists who were commissioned by my employer, this philosopher-psychotherapist did not reduce me to his diagnostic categories and treatment procedures. Nor did he reduce my experiences to so-called psychological phenomena. 'All he did', was to be there for me during those 45 minutes, to open his unprejudiced attention to me, and to follow the stories of my life critically. 'Critically' meaning here: researching the way I told my stories; he drew my attention to generalizations, vague utterances, obviously forgotten or hidden events or feelings, etcetera. His gift to me was free time and space - together with his critical ears and eyes - to explore my experiences and to find new perspectives for my working life. To me it was very important, that we broadened my so-called 'problem' - identified by the reintegration industry as a 'burn-out' - to the field of situations in the company, including the other persons (managers, colleagues, customers) with whom I shared those situations. Although it turned out, that those other persons were, at the time, not prepared to show that sharing in dialogical encounters with me, my own orientation got space, time and light. I could breathe again, and start 'to go my way'. During this process of dialogical encounters with this philosopher, I was aware of the fact that my 'cure' could not be found within the consultation room and within our conversations, but that I had to change my presence and behavior in those situations at work. It was there, that I had to muster up my courage and to practice behavioral changes. After all, those situations had to change, and if they turned out to be unchangeable, I would have to look for another working place. The real dialogical encounters must take place in the situations at stake, in the company, or at home, etcetera; the conversation with the therapist is 'just' an abstract situation to reflect upon experiences and to practice 'asceticism' and changes of perspective.

I felt acknowledged and supported by this philosopher-psychotherapist, which strengthened my self-confidence. I had taken the opportunity to find out my own way through and out that mess in my company. And I experienced the power of philosophical encounters and dialogues.

III. Reductionism in Philosophical Practice

Unfortunately, many a philosopher and philosophical practitioner is reductionist in performing his or her profession.

Psychologism in philosophical practice

Personalistic forms of psychology are rather popular in nowadays consumers' paradise. A human being is considered to be 'homo psychologicus', i.e., an individual with a 'unique', quasi-independent inner life of enclosed emotions, feelings, thoughts, dreams. The pretension is, that the assumed inner life can be observed, analyzed, defined and changed. The condition of an individual's inner life can be measured as healthy (normal, desired) or sick (abnormal, undesirable). An undesirable condition can be cured, i.e., changed into a desired condition. The diagnosis and the treatment are based upon the supposition, that the inner life of all human beings can be measured and understood in general terms of universally valid theories, of which each individual is an occurrence.

Most philosophical counselors use that same process. The only difference is, that their analytic and methodical jargon is not entirely derived from psychology, but also from philosophy (like existentialism, heuristic philosophy, ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, or non-Western sources of 'sage wisdom'). Actually, it is mostly this additional philosophical jargon that legitimates the adjective 'philosophical'. And when they do not use psychological jargon, they still follow the process of individualization and isolation of

the inner life. This might be just an aspect of the inner life, as, e.g., thinking thoughts.

Part of the copied process is the consultation setting. The place is the consultation room; the scene is that of two talking persons sitting in chairs and facing each other. The client's words are the world of diagnosis and treatment. Here, psychology or philosophy is the treatment of the client's text (non-verbal language is treated as understandable text as well). All happens in the client's head; his emotions, feelings, desires, inclinations, etc., are present as the client's words.

The mind is taken as a kind of box that exists on itself, and that can be approached, diagnosed and treated on itself in the consulting room. When the client is to do some homework, then this homework is also 'head-work', 'mind work', in the mind box.

So, the client's mind is isolated from the mind's bodily and situational contexts. And situational context is social, cultural, economic and political context, at a macro and meso as well as at a micro level. At best, there is some talk about the context, but then this is merely text about context, in the client's mind box. Here, therapeutic practice is mind practice.

By doing so, philosophical counseling ignores the 20th century philosophical criticisms of individual Identity and abstracted Mind (see above in this essay).

Phenomenological therapy in philosophical practice

Anders Lindseth has documented his phenomenological approach in philosophical counseling (Lindseth 2005 en 2010). In my view, his use of the fundamental phenomenological concepts *epoché*, *eidetic reduction* and *transcendental reduction* deviate from Husserl's use of those concepts. Lindseth applies them to individuals, whereas Husserl's concepts refer to the super-individual field of transcendental experiences and subjectivity.

For Lindseth, the *epoché* is part of the practitioner's self-reflection. By 'bracketing' his pre-conceived ideas and opinions etc., the practitioner has his own ideas and opinions - his 'pre-knowledge' - as his object. By doing this, the practitioner opens his mind to his guest; he is able to get an unprejudiced impression of the guest's expression. With this open mind, the practitioner is ready to research the phenomenon the guest is expressing and to dig up to essence (*eidos*) of the phenomenon. And to dig up the essence of the guest's existential issue, is to lead this issue to the guest's 'life themes'.

In Lindseth's approach, the practitioner abstains from interpreting the guest's expressions, but, nevertheless, he reduces the guest's expressions to inner psychic phenomena. He does so by his definition of the counseling situation and by his focus. The philosophical dialogue between the practitioner and his guest is isolated from the guest's real life situations. The phenomena of the *epoché* and of the eidetic and transcendental reductions are the personal inner psychic and mental phenomena. The guest is taken as a psychic, mental, thinking and speaking phenomenon, not as a situated, acting, interacting person in social contexts. And if he is, then by way of thoughts about it. The process at stake is an individual psychological process.

Husserl himself has warned against the psychological interpretations of his phenomenology. Emphatically, he distinguishes between transcendental and psychological subjectivity (Husserl 2009, "Nachwort", p. 144-146). The latter concerns the natural-psychological attitude of personal feelings, thoughts, inclinations etcetera, while the former transcends from this 'natural' attitude. The 'phenomenological subject' emerges, through phenomenological reduction, from this natural attitude, to experience his daily, natural, personal experiences in a 'pure', impersonal way, as 'phenomena'. This change of attitude is the heart of Husserl's phenomenology.

So, transcendental subjectivity is *exactly* not the field of concrete personal feelings, thoughts etcetera. However, in Lindseth's so-called phenomenological approach of philosophical counseling, there is no change of attitudes in Husserl's sense, and the philosophical activity happens as the understanding of the guest's most personal feelings, thoughts etcetera. Lindseth's philosophical counseling turns out to be the description and interpretation of the guest's inner-psychic events. Even though he does not use psychological concepts, he supports his guest to see himself as an inner-psychic event. Here, philosophy reduces the guest

to a bundle of psychic phenomena. Husserl's phenomenological technique of *epoché* is just used to create an open mind to start a process of individualizing and psychologizing.

Conceptualism in philosophical counseling

Besides hermeneutic and phenomenological approaches of philosophical counseling, there are approaches with more analytic and conceptual backgrounds. Here, the philosophical activity focuses on *concepts* the guest uses. The counselor aims either at the construction of the most fitting concept, or, on the contrary, at the research and undermining of the guest's concepts. Let us look at two examples.

Neo-Socratic conceptualism

In the tradition of Leonard Nelson (1882-1927) and Gustav Heckmann (1898-1996), some contemporary philosophers and non-philosophers practice what is called the neo-Socratic method of group conversation. Although there are various variations of this method, a common structure can be discerned. The group is monitored by a moderator who does not participate in the conversation itself, but watches over the application of the explicit and strict rules of the conversation. Indeed, the conversation is guided by a rigorous procedure, and the moderator is not involved in the content of the conversation. At the beginning of a meeting, the participants are asked to bring in possible themes for the conversation. By means of personal examples of and experiences with the themes, the group chooses the theme to discuss. Then, a process of sampling concepts and definitions unrolls. In this process, one or some opinions about the theme develop. The conversation ends up with possibly the most supported opinion.

This neo-Socratic method of group conversation might serve as a useful technique of opinion building, but its philosophical quality is questionable. In the context of this essay, it suffices to indicate the implications of the conceptualization. (De Haas 2011a contains the report of the author's experience with neo-Socratic moderators in one of his workshops.) Assuming that the participants' utterances about the theme are somehow related to their life experiences, the neo-Socratic process of filtering and defining concepts consists of reducing those various and hardly shared experiences to the few concepts the moderator chooses out of the many words which cross the conversation room. In the process, the participants' attention is drawn to exclusively the concepts under construction. Experience is reduced to the conceptual labor in the conversation. The theme - originally filled with a wealth of experiences, perspectives, memories and thoughts - is narrowed down to one or a few concepts and their definitions. At the end, some generalizations replace the rich variety of life experiences and perspectives, that are not shared, but reduced.

Brenifier's martial version of neo-Socratic conceptualism

Oscar Brenifier's approach of philosophical counseling is one of a kind. He has been called the contemporary Socrates and a Zen teacher or samurai, but also a charlatan and even a risk for his guests. Interesting here is his way of working, i.e., his research of the guest's concepts. A public session at the 11th ICPP in 2012 serves as an example.

Wednesday night, the 18th of July, Brenifier demonstrated a philosophical conversation with a Korean woman. It took place in a small theatre hall at the Kangwon National University in Chuncheon, South Korea. The hall was partly filled with participants of the 11th International Conference on Philosophical Practice. On stage were sitting Oscar Brenifier and his guest, a Korean female philosopher. In between them sat a Korean interpreter; Brenifier spoke English, his guest Korean.

As usual, Brenifier started asking if she had a question. Brenifier only accepts a question as the starting point of his conversations. Not uncommon, that it took some time before the woman had pronounced a question. Then, Brenifier developed his process of interrogating the woman about her question. He took one of the concepts in her question, and asked her to define it. He took each of her answers to his questions as the object of a new interrogation. Again and again, he asked her to be specific about the words she used. He did not accept any answer he judged as vague. Mostly, he asked his guest to give an answer out of two possibilities: yes or no, black or white, good or bad, etcetera. He conducted very strict; he had the lead, he determined the process, the guest had just one choice: to follow the leader. That Wednesday night in Chuncheon, we witnessed what happens when the guest wants to quit.

At a given moment, Brenifier's guest indicated that she wanted the conversation to stop. Obviously, she felt not at ease under the pressure of his questioning and digital logic (yes/no etc.). Then, Brenifier started asking questions about this decision of her. Soon, she was carried away again by this game of questioning and answering. Her wish to stop was not discussed; Brenifier successfully seduced her to follow him again in his conceptual research.

All the time, the woman was inclined to answer his questions with personal stories, experiences, and reflections. Within Brenifier's conversations, that is forbidden. Once it was clear, that Brenifier could not undo this inclination of hers, he took a detour. He started talking about 'the average Korean child' and asked questions about this fictitious child. While answering his questions, she stopped talking about herself and supported Brenifier in re-constructing the character of such a child. Then, suddenly, he asked, "Do you recognize yourself in this Korean child?", and she said, "Yes, I do". His conclusion was, that she herself, like the child she described, wanted to be a perfectionist, and that she must not do that, because it makes her unhappy.

In the debriefing, Brenifier stated, that he just asks questions on the occasion of the guest's questions, and that he does not interpret the guest's answers. However, the detour about 'the average Korean child' turned out to be the guided confirmation of his preconceived interpretation of the woman's question. I observed the closing question ("Do you recognize yourself in this Korean child?") as a pitfall; she answered "yes", and, by saying that, she confirmed his interpretation. But did she really confirm his interpretation? In the process, as we could observe it, it was not transparent, nor logical, that it was her own conclusion.

During the conversation, Brenifier interpreted the closed eyes and the laugh of his guest - the former as a sign of her no longer participating in the conversation; the latter as a sign of agreement with his opinion. Another Korean female philosopher told me, that his interpretations were false; the laugh of a Korean woman, in such a situation, is a sign of respect and politeness, and her closed eyes are a sign of repentance and self-reflection. What bothers is not his mis-interpretation, but the fact that he did not ask his guest about the meaning of her body language; he was quite sure about his interpretations.

Brenifier's counseling is conceptual labor. He draws all attention to the definition of the concepts used by his guest. He has the lead in the game of asking and questioning, and drives his guest to obey the pressure of choosing one answer out of two. Every time the guest wants to answer by referring to her feelings, or by suggesting an answer with more than one values or with a "I don't know", Brenifier will not accept the answer, and urges his guest to choose one answer out of two. In the course of the process, the guest is beaten down, and ends up with the answer that results out of the process - or with no answer at all.

It might be, that Brenifier aims at such a Socratic *aporía*; he himself is not very clear about his aims. It might be, that he actually is a kind of Socratic samurai, who seduces his partner in the battle to follow his movements and motions. I have been his guest myself, but I did not experience any mental or spiritual enlightenment. What I did experience, and what several of his guests have told me as well, is that you lose the relation to your own experiences. It might be useful to lose, for a moment, the grip on the thoughts and opinions you cherish. But can you find your answers to your questions, when you have lost contact with your experiences (feelings, emotions, impressions, inclinations, thoughts)? If Brenifier's questioning leads to a cleansed mind, what use is it for the guest when she or he is back home, in the situations full of feelings, thoughts, inclinations, habits, etcetera. In Husserl's phenomenology, the 'cleansed mind' does not loosen from the concrete experiences; it keeps related to them, and it is exactly this relation that creates the opportunity to observe, understand and change them.

The very process of defining and choosing concepts to answer one's question reduces one's experiences - as related to the question - to the concepts and statements that survive in the question-answer game.

IV. Situational Philosophy

How can we imagine another philosophical practice, free from psychological and conceptual reductions? I suggest, that we look for an answer in relation to the two paradigmatic shifts of 20th century philosophy.

Consequence of the phenomenological and linguistic turns

Both the phenomenological and the linguistic turn of philosophy gets caught up “in the world”. Husserl showed how Cartesian and Kantian searches for the irreducible ground of knowledge fail in their own presuppositions. He pointed to where we are in this search, and when we think anyway: we are in the world, as experiencing creatures. Before we start thinking, we are sometime somewhere, and we experience this ‘sometime and somewhere’. The same is true for the ‘transcendental’ mind. The reality of ‘transcendental subjectivity’ is not a conceptual construction - as by Kant and Hegel -, but itself a special field of experience (before any thought about transcendental subjectivity, there is transcendental experience). It’s a human condition to be able to experience one’s experiences. So, all our thinking starts with being sometime somewhere, and with experiencing this situation.

Along a different path, also Wittgenstein came to this observation. When we want to free our minds out of the prison of absolute truth claiming language, we have to move to real life and observe the ways people use language in maybe related but specific situations of human life. Here, people live ‘forms of life’, within which they play ‘language games’. We are in a situation of human life and while doing this we use language. On the one hand, the language is not our private property; the language has been developed as a social-cultural phenomenon, and we learned to use it in accordance to its rules, so we could communicate. On the other hand, the way we use the words and sentences here now, is a function of what we are doing in this situation. So, all our actual usage of language starts with being sometime somewhere, and with experiencing this situation - and with following the rules of the language as suitable for this our situation.

All right, we are in real life situations now, and we know that this is the ‘ground’ where we think and try to understand life. But now what? What can we do to understand our situations of life? How can we answer the questions of our lives?

Second attention

Husserl called the experience of our experiences ‘transcendental experience’. From Carlos Castaneda (Castaneda 1979) I borrow the expression ‘second attention’ to refer to that kind of experience. It is the human possibility to watch one’s own presence and experiences (feelings, thoughts, inclinations, desires etcetera). As all experiences, this second attention is not a steady state, but a living, changing event that is an aspect of our bodily involvement and participation in some situation. The second attention to occur needs ‘first’ or primary attention in some situation; it is, in a manner of speaking, the *overtone* of the concrete experience. It is and keeps related to the concrete ‘primary’ experiences.

The basic philosophical activity in a situation is to activate the second attention (or second sphere of experience). From this position, the situation and one’s experiences of it are not the same they were. We can see them now in a different light and perspective, say, *free* perspective.

Encounters and dialogues

In the light of second attention, we can meet the situation and our involvement in it in a free mental space. Now, we have the opportunity to free ourselves from our prejudices and presuppositions, and to encounter ourselves and the others in the situation with an open mind. In this state of mind, nothing is defined now, and no one is intending to define anything - not the situation, not oneself, not the others. Now, to understand the situation and us is to encounter each another and to go in dialogue. In the dialogue, as intrinsic part of the situation, we possibly find some answers to our questions.

Philosophy is just a moment

As second attention is not a steady state but an event, we have to work on it again and again (Suzuki 1980). It gives us the opportunity to put the situation and our involvement in it in another light, for that moment. In this light, we might change the situation and our experience of it. This change is not philosophy, just the second attention is. Philosophy is just a moment; real life is going on and can be touched by it. (In philosophical counseling, it is important to realize, that philosophical mind is just a free moment, and that changing our life needs presence and action in the real situations of life.)

Philosophical dialogue on existential situations

When we want to develop a style of philosophical counseling that acknowledges the critical insights of 20th century philosophy (both from phenomenology, linguistic analysis, and the French 'difference'-thinking), we have to avoid the pitfalls of psychologism and conceptualism and to change our attitude, intentions and methods.

Here, I use the expression 'existential experiences and situations', meaning those experiences that affect a person's orientation in life, and intervene into his or her way of handling life's challenges and crises. In an existential situation, you are overwhelmed by such an experience; the world, at least your world, as you experience it, is no longer the world you used to live in.

Let us look at things-to-avoid and things-to-do in philosophical dialogues.

Things to avoid in philosophical dialogues

Avoid psychological interpretation of phenomena like emotion, feeling, and 'psychological problem' (depression etc). This implies mental phenomena like 'spirit', 'thoughts', 'logic', etc.

Avoid the language of properness. Don't look for the guest's 'proper Self', 'proper Desires', 'proper I', 'best competences', 'virtues', etc.

Do not stick in words, definitions, and concepts. So, do not isolate the guest's thinking from his/her living contexts outside the consulting room.

Don't take interpretation as a goal. Avoid understanding the interpretation of the guest's story as the counselor's competency.

Things to do in philosophical dialogues:

Situational focus. Observe emotions, feelings and 'psychological problems' as existential experiences, i.e., as 'non-identical', situational phenomena, which are relations in social networks.

Narrative and real life situations. Distinguish between the 'abstract' narrative situation of the philosophical dialogue, and the 'concrete' real situations of the guest's every day life (De Haas 2011b).

The guest's real life situations. Ask for the guest's own real situations, where his/her existential experiences occur.

Descriptions. Encourage the guest to describe his/her emotions, feelings, doubts, fantasies, etc., in terms of his/her situations, i.e. relations, circumstances, social networks, 'micro-politics'.

Situational fantasy. Support your guest to relate freely to his/her experiences of and involvement in his/her situations (here, 'free' means free from judgment, opinions, objectives).

Responsibility. Draw the guest's attention to his/her responsibilities in the situations he or she describes.

Structure of the dialogue

The subject of the dialogue is the guest (client, customer);

The object of the dialogue is the guest's existential experiences and situations;

The philosopher's role is to support the guest's efforts to clear his/her mind towards his/her situated existential experiences and responsibilities;

Daily life situations. The difference between narrative situation and existential situation (see De Haas 2011b) refers the dialogue to the guest's daily life situations 'out there';

The link with reality. Considered from our consciousness, experience is our link with reality. Considered from our presence in the world, experience expresses and constitutes the way we are present in the world. In narrative situations like philosophical dialogues, describing and exploring experiences is the way to relate to our real life situations;

Philosophy's place. The guest's real situations to philosophize are his/her daily life situations where he or she experiences wondering, questioning, puzzling, troubling etc.

A question is philosophical, when it supports the partner in dialogue to ...

-describe his/her experiences in the situations at stake;

-be aware of the thinking knots in his/her story;

- unknot these thinking knots;
- be aware of his/her responsibilities in those situations;
- take those responsibilities.

Technique

The counseling philosopher uses, besides dialogical techniques, the techniques of phenomenological *epoché* and reduction and of language game analysis. In these techniques, asking open and disenchanting questions is as important as observing and unknotting so-called 'thinking knots' (see De Haas 2011b).

Conclusion

Philosophical practice, as introduced in the 1980's and '90s, ignored both the phenomenological and linguistic paradigmatic shifts of Western philosophy, and the Identity-criticism of French 'difference'-philosophers. It reproduces both the individualizing and psychologizing attitude of psychotherapy, and the practice of conceptual reductionism. Philosophical practice that gives an account of the paradigmatic shifts, gives up any reductionism, and develops its practice in and from the guest's situations of life. Not isolated words and utterances but situated and transcended experiences are the 'matter' of philosophy and counseling philosophers.

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