

Virtue-Based Feminist Philosophical Counselling

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Introduction

The primary objective of this paper is to show the relevance of the revival of the ethics of virtue, as well as the development of feminist philosophies, for philosophical counselling and practice. Its subsidiary objective is to assist counsellors in other disciplines to understand how philosophical counselling differs from psychological counselling, and how virtue-based and feminist philosophical approaches to counselling can serve to enrich and to expand existing counselling modalities. The central thesis for which I shall argue is that virtue ethics suggests a variety of useful approaches through which philosophical counsellors can assist clients in understanding and resolving their life problems, but that virtue issues must be explored in terms of various feminist teaching if virtue ethics is to be useful in counselling women clients.¹

Part One of my paper will be devoted to theoretical issues. The first section will provide a capsule summary of the recent revival of virtue ethics suggesting how virtue-based counselling (i.e., counselling which focuses on exploring issues associated with traditional and contemporary virtue ethics) might enrich philosophical counselling. The second section will discuss the gender coding and biases of traditional and contemporary virtue theory, indicating why virtue must be explored from the perspective of feminist traditions when counselling women clients. The third section will outline my general counselling methodology indicating how virtue issues can be integrated into each of its four phases. Finally, the fourth section will outline my methodology for feminist philosophical counselling, indicate how it differs both from traditional philosophical and psychological counselling, and

discuss its similarities with, and dissimilarities from, feminist psychotherapy.

Part Two of my paper consists of case studies illustrating the nature of virtue-based counselling from a variety of feminist traditions. Each of the case studies will illustrate how the life problems of a woman client are based upon a virtue conflict which is understood and resolved by considering it in terms of feminist traditions.

In concluding this brief introduction, two points must be added. First, this is a paper designed primarily for counselling practitioners. There are numerous related theoretical issues which are beyond the scope of this paper to discuss. Suffice it to say that, in general, both as theoretician and practitioner, I tend to be very eclectic in my approach and very sceptical either that all ethical issues can be reduced to one model, or that one counselling methodology will suffice for all clients.

Second, I would like both the theoretical and practical issues I do discuss to be understood merely as provisional attempts to begin weaving together the strands of diverse narratives in such a manner as to illustrate the ways in which virtue conflicts mar the fabric of women's lives, as well as the fabric of just societies. Some of the narratives are personal narratives - the stories of women both in the social mainstream and on the margins of society. Some of the narratives are philosophical meta-narratives - the stories philosophers tell about human virtue or about why women are subordinated and oppressed. Still other narratives are vernacular philosophies (i.e., untutored philosophies of life) or popular meta-narratives - stories circulated by the general public or the media about the tales told by philosophers, such as those told about feminism, its supposed excesses, or its allegedly diminished relevance to women's lives. This paper is only a first step in expanding existing discourse about virtue and counselling. It is my hope that as other philosophical counsellors enrich their craft by incorporating virtue-based feminist techniques into their own practices, they will hear new stories, discern new patterns, and

¹ I thank the anonymous referees and editor, Tim LeBon, for their very helpful suggestions. Two issues they raised deserve separate papers: a) the relationship between psychological problems and poor critical reasoning, and b) the criteria for deciding which philosophical approaches should be used in counselling particular clients or groups.

forge new approaches to unravelling the damaging effects of social oppression. Thanks to thousands of years of patriarchy, theories which accommodate women's perspectives are still in their infancy in every discipline, and those doing the theorising have yet to hear the voices of many of the women they are theorising about. Per force, in this area of philosophy, philosophical theory must be informed by philosophical practice.

Part One: Virtue-Based And Feminist Philosophical Counselling: Theory And Methodology

1. *The Revival of Virtue Ethics and Its Implications for Philosophical Counselling*

How can the revival of virtue ethics enrich philosophical practice? To answer this question, we need to briefly survey the reasons for the revival of philosophical interest in virtue ethics theory.

The credit for reviving interest in virtue ethics is usually ascribed primarily to Elizabeth Anscombe and Alasdair MacIntyre. In her widely-admired 1958 essay, 'Modern Moral Philosophy', Anscombe argued that modern ethics 'should relinquish its preoccupation with moral rules and moral obligation and instead concern itself with a philosophical-psychological investigation of what it is to be human.' Her argument was that 'there is a huge gap in ethical theory ...which needs to be filled by an account of human nature, human action, the type of characteristic a virtue is, and above all of human flourishing.' (Anscombe, 1958, p.18). Her recommendation, therefore, was for 'banishing ethics totally from our minds' until we had become clear about concepts associated with moral psychology, e.g., desire, action, intention, etc. and only when clear about these issues, to eventually consider virtues which, for her, are conceived of as prerequisites for, or aspects of, a fully developed human life.

MacIntyre in *After Virtue*, like Anscombe, criticises modern ethics and believes that moral concepts have become abrogated from the traditions which gave them life and meaning. He argues that the consequences of this are a loss of rationality in ethics (which makes most fundamental moral disputes undecidable) and a loss of even the possibility of a genuinely moral self - a self which tends to seek goods which are internal rather than external to

practices. This double loss converts morality into what MacIntyre calls 'emotivism' where morality becomes a matter of purely individual choice based upon purely individual feeling. In place of emotivism, MacIntyre wishes to substitute a return to the Aristotelian/Thomistic tradition of the virtues.

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre argues that virtue is a learned quality necessary for achieving various goods internal to practices. Practices are human activities, rooted in the social tradition, which have standards and goods which are internal to them. Human life is made up of such practices, virtues are essential to such practices, and so, without the virtues, we would not enjoy a fully human life. MacIntyre also argues that only a certain type of human self is compatible with such virtues; it is 'a concept of self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end.' (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 91). What gives narrative unity to human life is the quest for the good. MacIntyre then goes on to say that:

The virtues, therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter and which will furnish us with increasing self knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good. (MacIntyre, p. 191)

Finally MacIntyre emphasises that the individual's quest for the good is historically situated within some particular moral tradition where there must ultimately be some shared conception of human good.

Anscombe's and MacIntyre's criticism of modern ethics and MacIntyre's critical discussion of the history of virtue theory has led to a renaissance of interest in historical treatments of virtue and, in particular, in classical ethics and in what MacIntyre regards as the four core questions of Greek ethics:

What makes a particular human quality a virtue? How is the knowledge of what the virtues are related to the possession of the virtues? Are the several virtues aspects of a single virtue, or are they otherwise connected? And how are the virtues exercised in achieving the specifically human good or goods? (MacIntyre, 1992, p. 127)

There are, now, numerous collections of essays devoted to these types of questions, as well as to questions concerning the legitimacy of Anscombe's and MacIntyre's critiques of Kantianism and

Utilitarianism. The revival of interest in virtue ethics has also led to explorations of: the nature of moral emotions, alternative approaches to virtue and its foundations, the relationship of virtues to principles, the nature of moral character, the relationship between virtue and social justice, the role of virtue in moral education, etc. - issues too numerous and too complex to be discussed here (Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Vol XII; Kruschwitz and Robert, 1987; Flanagan and Rorty, 1990; Crisp and Slote, 1997).

Even this very brief survey of the revival of virtue ethics. however, provides a basis for suggesting how a virtue-based approach to philosophical counselling might proceed. In providing the brief outline which follows, I shall assume, without argument, that the respect for autonomy incumbent upon any counsellor requires the counsellor to adopt the stance of moral pluralist during the counselling process. As Mike Martin, author of *Love's Virtues* points out, moral pluralism is not to be confused with moral relativism (Martin,1996). Nor is it to be confused with moral neutrality. All that moral pluralism requires is that while the counsellor, as philosopher, may think there is some canonical view of virtue and the good life, as philosophical counsellor, she must respect her client's right to decide these issues for herself and to recognise that, within certain limits, there are a variety of rational perspectives on these issues.

Virtue-based counselling, presumably, would have the following characteristics. First, virtue-based philosophical counselling will focus on the client as a moral agent and upon the whole fabric of the client's life, rather than upon specific moral dilemmas about how to act or choose in particular problematic situations. The counsellor will attempt to help the client see specific issues within the context of the client's entire life, character, and values, and to consider not merely questions about what she should do to resolve a specific problem, but also deeper questions about how she should live and the kind of person she wishes to be. Second, it will focus upon helping the client to develop her individual vision of the good life and the virtues/excellences (both moral and non moral) essential for this particular individual's conception of human flourishing. As Michael Slote has emphasised, virtue ethics constitutes a remedy for the asymmetry implicit in principled approaches by directing attention to the good of the agent as well as the good of others (Slote, 1992). Third, it will focus on aretaic as opposed to deontic concepts, which may serve to clarify not

merely our reasons for decisions and actions, but also our ideals about people and relationships. As aretaic concepts may be more appropriate for understanding some human relationships (e.g., family, love, and friendship), they should serve to enrich the moral language of the client. Fourth, as Anscombe recognised, we cannot be clear about virtue without being clear about moral psychology, so the counsellor will encourage the client to explore her beliefs about specific virtues central to her worldview, how they connect with her desires, feelings, intentions, etc. and how they serve, or fail to serve, her well-being and the well-being of others. Fifth, the counsellor will encourage the client to consider the kinds of practices in which she is already enmeshed, or in which she chooses to engage, to consider whether these practices contribute to fulfilling her telos, or her 'success' (however the client conceives of success) and to consider the instrumental and internal value of specific virtues to such practices. The counsellor will also encourage clients to examine the relationship between different practices and their different virtues, to identify potential virtue conflicts, and to develop strategies for resolving them. Through examining real and hypothetical situations with the client, the counsellor will attempt to assist her in developing the practical wisdom (*phronesis*) which results in the genuinely virtuous action which is conducive to human flourishing. Sixth, the counsellor will continually challenge the client to compare her philosophy of virtue with various philosophical theories of virtue, thus encouraging her to deepen and enrich her vision in light of a variety of philosophical traditions.

In sum, the current philosophical literature associated with the revival of virtue ethics suggests a number of ways for enriching philosophical practice. Indeed practitioners like Gerd B. Achenbach, Anette Prins and others already have provided us with some paradigms for counselling on this model (Achenbach, Prins, 1995). Virtue counselling can, of course, be conducted in a more limited form than that described above, e.g., limited forms of virtue-based ethics training are already successfully being employed in corporate contexts by Dutch and American practitioners. In such contexts, of course, the real client is the corporation. Only the professional dimensions of individuals' lives are explored with employees, together with the practices, virtues, and virtue conflicts which are germane to life within the corporation. The more extensive form of virtue-based counselling, outlined

above, is appropriate for individuals (and small groups of individuals) who feel deep puzzles, disquietudes, or frustrations about their lives, wish to subject them to extended philosophical examination, and are willing to undertake a real commitment to leading the examined life. In my practice, the individuals who most frequently satisfy this description are women so, in theory, virtue-based counselling should be extremely useful in counselling women. Ironically, however, as we shall see in the next section there is no area of philosophy as rampant with gender prejudice as the history of virtue ethics theory.

2. Women In the History of Virtue Ethics

With dismal regularity and few exceptions, the giants of the western philosophical tradition have uniformly harped on the same three themes in discussing women and virtue: women are incapable of, or deficient in, the ability to reason morally and hence also in moral virtue (especially justice); women cannot, or should not, develop the same non-moral virtues (excellences) as men; the virtues women can and should develop are those which make them useful to men. A lightning survey of the western tradition will be enough to substantiate this claim.

Plato, one of the least hostile philosophers to women, does argue in the *Republic* (454CE) that some women do have the virtues requisite for being guardians, that they should be inducted into that class (albeit, in part, so as to be available to male guardians as breeders), and that they should be accorded the appropriate education for that class. As Nancy Tuana notes, however, Plato says explicitly in the *Laws* (781b) that 'women's native disposition is inferior to men's' (Tuana, 1992, p.22).

Aristotle, one of the most hostile philosophers to women, sets the tone for Thomistic approaches to women and virtue by referring to woman as 'mutilated man' 'monstrosities' and as a 'departure from form' in *The Generation of Animals* (737a 27-28, 767b 8-9). In the *Politics* (1260a, 2-14, 1254b, 6-14, and 1277b 26-27) as Tuana also points out, Aristotle argues that free women are inferior in their 'deliberative faculty' to free men, that women slaves have no deliberative faculty whatever, that 'the male is by nature superior and the female inferior . . . the one rules, the other is ruled, implies that women lack practical wisdom (the virtue of those qualified to rule) and that the only moral virtue of women is

obedience to men by whom they are consigned to the domestic realm with its peculiar non-moral virtues (Tuana, p. 22). As if this were not enough, Aristotle is also responsible in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1150b 12-16), as Tuana further notes, for the idea that women lack control over their passions (e.g., carnal lusts), an idea taken over by Aquinas, and later used as a justification for witchcraft trials (Tuana, p. 29, p. 39).

Skipping over a great deal more of the same, we come to Rousseau, the target of Mary Wollstonecraft's attack. As Rosemarie Tong notes, Rousseau believed that women were incapable of developing autonomy - in part because they lacked the economic independence for developing it - and therefore were incapable of developing moral virtue. According to Rousseau, they could, but shouldn't, develop the same non-moral excellences as men ('A brilliant wife is plague to her husband, her children, her friends, her valets, everyone') and, therefore, as Tong says dryly, 'Emile is schooled in moral virtues such as temperance, justice and fortitude, while Sophie is schooled, not in moral virtues, but in non-moral virtues, specifically the feminine psychological traits of patience, docility, good humour, and flexibility (Tong, 1993, p. 31).

And the beat goes on! Hume's major contribution to discussions of feminine virtue was to recommend a double sexual standard of ethical conduct. This recommendation was based upon considerations about women's especial tendencies to succumb to sexual temptation conjoined with considerations of social utility. As a consequence, Hume insists that women's main virtues are modesty and chastity. Kant 'hardly believes that the fair sex is capable of principles...'; as a consequence they are incapable of acting from duty or displaying the 'noble' moral virtues which men display. Women are moved by feelings and hence: 'the virtue of woman is beautiful virtue' which seems to amount to a 'charm' (which, he adds, can only be marred by 'laborious learning or painful pondering') (Kant, p. 131 and p. 133). Hegel, in discussing women's moral development, compares women to plants; he seems to have had houseplants in mind, because he goes on to argue that 'In the family the wife has her full substantive place and in the feeling of family piety realises her ethical disposition (Hegel p. 166-7). Women can be educated, but not in moral philosophy because women lack the 'universal faculty' demanded by philosophy, science, etc. Schopenhauer, of course, thought that women lacked all moral virtues,

especially justice, due to their inferior reasoning abilities. This was sufficient to convince him that women need lords and masters: 'if she is young, it will be lover; if she is old, it will be a priest (Schopenhauer, p.206). Finally, Nietzsche, pretty much summing up the entire tradition, seems to concede that women have one moral virtue worthy of note, 'dignity' adding, by way of admonition to women: 'however let this be your dignity; that at all times you love more than you are loved, and that you are never second in this (Nietzsche, p. 206).

Given this history of the place of women in the ethics of virtue, and its impact upon vernacular philosophies and social practices, the recent revival of interest in the ethics of virtue has been greeted by feminist philosophers with considerable ambivalence. For the most part they seem united on two points. First, most feminist philosophers agree that there are no simple ways of patching up gender-biased traditional virtue theories because not only are such theories gender-coded, the virtues associated with masculinity are privileged, a sharp division is made between public and private spheres, and virtues tied to femininity are relegated entirely to the private sphere (Tong, 1993). As a consequence, many feminist theorists have devoted a great deal of effort to resolving such problems. Some argue that virtues traditionally coded to femininity, or other feminist virtues (like Gilligan and Noddings's caring or Sara Ruddick's maternal virtues) should be extended to the public sphere. (Noddings, 1984; Gilligan, 1982, Ruddick, 1989). Some, like Susan Moller Orkin in *Justice, Gender and the Family*, have argued that virtues traditionally associated with masculinity (like justice) should be extended to the private sphere of the family (Okin, 1989). Some, like Grace Clement, have argued that traditionally masculine virtues like justice and autonomy can be reconciled with feminist virtues like caring (Clement, 1996). Still others, like Annette Baier, have argued for the centrality of other virtues like trust (Baier, 1994).

Second, there is widespread recognition that the revival of virtue ethics by MacIntyre and others springs from a distrust (common to feminist philosophies as well) of modern ethics which focuses on principles, as well as on an isolated autonomous asocial self. Virtue ethics, like most feminist theory, emphasises the importance of context, relationships, and a self embodied in a social context. As a consequence some feminists, at least, are receptive to virtue ethics and to MacIntyre's emphasis on practice and tradition (Frazer and Lacey, 1994). As the

preceding summary of the role of women in the history of virtue ethics demonstrates, however, the philosophical tradition has reflected and reinforced practices and traditions inimical to women's flourishing and some theorists, such as Elizabeth Frazer, Nicola Lacey and especially Susan Moller Okin, are sceptical about whether MacIntyre's version of virtue ethics in *After Virtue* provides any basis for criticising evil practices. MacIntyre has attempted to refute such charges in later books and articles, but many critics remain sceptical (MacIntyre, 1998).

I would argue that the conclusion to be drawn from this brief survey of the role of women in virtue ethics theory is that any virtue-based counselling which focuses exclusively upon assisting women to explore their confusions and conflicts about virtue in terms of most traditional theories is likely to be gender biased. If virtue-based counselling is to be helpful in resolving women's life problems, then virtue must be considered in terms of feminist concerns, and in terms of feminist traditions which provide accounts of why women's virtue conflicts are not merely personal problems but also political problems (i.e., problems resulting from the evil social practices and traditions which have influenced the history of philosophy).

3. Philosophical Counselling - An Outline of My General Methodology

In this section, I will attempt to outline my own general method indicating how a consideration of virtue issues might enrich each of its four stages.

My own counselling interests centre on the philosophical problems of clients who also have serious psychological problems which result in unproductive feelings, behaviours, and relationships. My clients include women's groups in women's centres, psychiatric patients, offenders and ex-offenders, substance abusers, women in shelters, etc. I am especially interested in the philosophical problems of women and others who are likely to harm themselves or others, as well as in the philosophical dimensions of the problems psychologists find most intractable: borderline and sociopathic personality disorders, paedophilia, substance abuse, self mutilation, etc. As a consequence, I make no claims that my methodology is appropriate for all clients seeking philosophical counselling. In fact, it may be quite inappropriate for clients with relatively specific philosophical

problems which cause them no significant emotional distress.

A great deal of my counselling has been done in correctional settings because prisons provide the best opportunity for working with multi-disciplinary teams: psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and substance abuse counsellors, each with their own expertise on different dimensions of the life problems of clients. Another advantage of counselling in such settings is that I can dispense with elaborate initial interview questions and screening procedures because, at least in theory, my clients are seen by professionals in other disciplines.

My general method of philosophical counselling involves four phases: the analytic, the synthetic, the critical, and the comparative. In theory the phases are sequential, but in practice I may choose to skip around from one phase to another depending upon the nature and complexity of the presenting problem, the personality of the client(s), etc. In some cases, it may be useful to take a dimension of the problem and work through all four phases if only to demonstrate what sorts of expectations the client(s) can have from working with me. In other cases, where the problem seems to be exclusively a philosophical problem I may skip from the first to the fourth phase. In doing virtue-based counselling with women clients, the third and fourth phases are usually combined.

A. The Analytic Phase of Counselling

In the first phase of counselling I attempt to understand the initial life problem the client wants to resolve, or the deeper problem which often underlies it, to assess what, if any, dimensions of the problem are amenable to philosophical counselling techniques at this time, and to determine whether the client is likely to respond to philosophical counselling which is after all, a cognitive approach unsuitable for some clients especially those in acute psychological crisis. Frequently, I ask clients about their priorities and make referrals accordingly, e.g., I may say 'You say you want to understand your addictions, but you are still drinking - you need to work with a substance abuse counsellor first.' To accomplish this work, clients must be encouraged to tell their stories in their own way.

In assessing the problem, I want to understand the client's beliefs about the problem and the connections between those beliefs and her emotions, behaviour, and relationships with others. I will always use

techniques of conceptual analysis, critical reasoning, and logic to clarify what the client means by various key concepts she uses, e.g., love, marriage, pain, etc. and what reasons she gives for holding various beliefs about her situation. I may also try to ascertain whether the client demonstrates any barriers to critical thinking (denial, projection, introjection, etc. or emotions such as anger, guilt, shame, anxiety, depression, etc. likely to impair critical thinking), or poor thinking patterns (e.g., poor means/ends or consequential reasoning, cognitive rigidity, egocentricity, or fallacious reasoning) which ultimately need to be challenged.² I try to identify irrational beliefs, or contingent beliefs or perspectives which seem to have adverse emotional and behavioural consequences, or to impact negatively on the client's relationships.

In the case of virtue-based counselling, I listen for evidence of virtue conflicts and ask questions designed to help me begin understanding my client's beliefs about the good life and the person she wants to be.

B. The Synthetic Phase

In the synthetic phase, I work with a client to look at what she said about her beliefs, emotions, behaviour and relationships and to begin, based upon that evidence, to help her construct or make explicit her philosophy of life or, at least, that part of her worldview which is relevant to her problem. Through reflecting, reframing, and questioning, my objective is to help the client develop the best and most systematic philosophical vision possible with the materials she has already supplied or wishes to supply. At this stage philosophical counselling is very much like literary criticism. From the available text from the counselling session, the story of the client, we collaborate in constructing her philosophy of life much as a literary critic might try to analyse the text of *Othello* to clarify Desdemona's philosophy of life. Where virtue-based counselling seems appropriate, the themes associated with virtue ethics theory are given special emphasis.

It is important here that the counsellor does not go outside the text during this phase of counselling because the emerging worldview must be the client's

² Usually these 'barriers' and emotions are regarded as psychological problems. They can also impair critical reasoning because they often can distort facts about self, others, and world which serve as the basis for making good judgements.

own. If the counsellor makes philosophical suggestions at this juncture, she will have little understanding of her client's original worldview, and hence be less likely to recognise inevitable regressions to unproductive thinking patterns, irrational beliefs, emotional reactions, behavioural responses, etc. which may be deeply rooted as habitual responses to life problems, but wholly inappropriate when fundamental beliefs change.

C. The Critical Phase

The critical phase of counselling occurs when the counsellor invites the client to subject her philosophy of life to logical scrutiny by clearing up any conceptual confusions and by examining the logic of the arguments she has for her fundamental beliefs. Where virtue-based counselling seems appropriate the critical activities focus on confusions, conflicts, and false beliefs about virtue and the good life. Incoherence and inconsistencies in her world view are identified, and the client is invited to look at the sorts of justifications she can provide, given her belief system, for emotions, behaviour, and relationships. At this stage, clients are also encouraged to look at the truth, as well as the consequences, of their beliefs.

At the critical phase, helping the client to have new philosophical insights is not enough; many beliefs are deeply ingrained and insights are often not transferred to new contexts. Counsellors must use a variety of cognitive techniques to reinforce rational beliefs in new contexts and to extirpate old irrational thinking. A discussion of such techniques is a subject for another paper. Suffice it to say, here, that philosophers should be aware of the power of habitual emotional and behavioural responses to events and keep encouraging clients to ask themselves whether those responses are justifiable or appropriate when fundamental beliefs have changed.

Completion of the critical phase of counselling can be therapeutic and may resolve the client's life problem, but worldviews may consist of true or at least relatively plausible beliefs, and the belief system may be coherent and consistent and yet, nevertheless, be unsatisfactory, unduly limiting, or unproductive for the client. More may be required to resolve the presenting problem. This is especially the case for women clients for whom, as we shall see, the personal is also the political, and for whom examination of their views of virtue and the good life

from feminist perspectives may be very productive indeed.

D. The Comparative Phase

During the comparative phase the client is invited to compare her refined philosophy of life to other philosophical theories, and to understand her problem and its possible solutions in terms of various philosophical theories. The importance of philosophical counselling as a counselling modality is underscored in this phase of the counselling process by the fact that it serves not merely to suggest alternative ways of resolving life problems, but also to suggest alternative ways of formulating them. It is at this phase of the counselling process that the gender biases of traditional philosophical theories about virtue makes the efficacy of virtue-based counselling for women very problematic. Virtue based counselling must become feminist counselling as well. This is not to suggest that non-feminist accounts of virtue, as well as deontic and utilitarian ethical theories, cannot serve to enrich a clients' vernacular philosophies in some ways as well.³

4. Feminism and Feminist Philosophical Counselling

What is feminist philosophical counselling? Per force any description must begin with some account of feminism. Despite all sorts of disagreements about feminist philosophy among feminists themselves, there seem to be a core set of assumptions about which most feminists agree.

For me, at least, feminism means recognising that historically women have been subordinated, oppressed, marginalised, and silenced. It means recognising that we must further expand the discourse, to listen to the voices of all women, including the voices of women behind bars, if we are to understand how gender, race, class and ethnicity still condition all of our lives. It means recognising that despite the advances some women have made in

³ The specifics of the invitation to consider other philosophical perspectives will depend upon which theories are most likely to help the client: a) to resolve her most urgent presenting problems (given her circumstances, personality, relationships, intelligence, and philosophical orientation) and b) to maximise her potential for autonomy and well-being, while simultaneously respecting the prima facie equal rights of others to autonomy and well-being.

liberating and empowering themselves, all women, in varying degrees, are still suffering from the damaging effects of centuries of second class citizenship where feminine thought, work, and values have been denigrated and discounted. It means recognising that we have obligations to work for the liberation of all, not only all women, but all those people who, like women, have existed on the margins and who continue to be oppressed by powerful institutions, theories, and social practices which do not as yet embody feminine and multi-cultural perspectives and which do not, as yet, contribute to truly **human** flourishing.

Finally, for me (unlike some feminists), feminism involves a commitment to a feminist ethic of caring, as part of my counselling ethics with all clients, and especially with women clients. From my perspective, there is no logical conflict, for a counsellor, between caring and respect for autonomy; indeed respect for a client's right to autonomy is one way of demonstrating caring. Caring, however, is not simply reducible to respect for autonomy. Respect for autonomy merely prohibits counsellors from engaging in any techniques which discourage clients from making their own reflective choices. By contrast caring requires counsellors to use the sorts of techniques which enable clients to gain the capacities, skills, power, and resources to make and implement their own decisions about how to reduce their pain. As Grace Clement points out, given the effects of socialisation in patriarchal societies, the decisions of women are frequently not autonomous decisions and therefore those doing caring work have an obligation not merely to accept women's decisions, but also, as care givers, to challenge them in ways conducive to promoting genuine autonomy (Clement, 1996).

As the feminist philosopher Nel Noddings describes it, caring is an expansion of the relatedness in which a mother stands to a child. Caring involves an attempt to understand the reality of others - their ways of life, their needs, and their desires for, as Noddings says,

When we see the other's reality, we must act so as to eliminate the intolerable, to reduce the pain, to fill the need, to actualise the dream. (Noddings, p. 14)

I am a feminist in the sense just described and my feminism influences my general counselling

methodology in so far as it fosters both a commitment to caring and a concern with the social context in which life problems arise. My feminist methodology, however, differs from my general methodology because the former is based upon certain additional feminist assumptions which it shares with feminist psychotherapy, as well as upon certain considerations about the shortcomings of both traditional psychotherapy and feminist psychotherapy as counselling modalities for women.

What assumptions does my feminist approach share with feminist psychotherapy? (Gilligan, Rodgers, and Talman, 1991; Greenspan, 1983; Burstow, 1992; Worrell and Remer, 1992) Perhaps because I am a feminist, but not a feminist philosopher, unlike many of psychology's more radical feminist critics, I believe that traditional psychotherapy does help many women successfully overcome a variety of psychological problems which have little, if anything, to do with gender and that non-feminist psychotherapy and philosophical counselling can successfully and simultaneously address many different dimensions of women's life problems. However, like many other feminists and feminist psychotherapists, I also believe that a great deal of traditional psychological counselling neglects both the social context in which the life problems of women arise, and the extent to which many of women's life problems are the result of social oppression. Traditional psychotherapy has purported to be value-neutral and apolitical, but in fact has often inadvertently contributed to the oppression of women by treating a woman's unhappiness on the medical model as a quasi-disease which can be resolved by psychotherapy, and as if her unhappiness is exclusively her problem which can be wholly resolved through individual as opposed to collective efforts.

The result of this individualising and medicalising of various causes of women's unhappiness has been to encourage women to become society's most enthusiastic consumers both of therapy and of popular self-help approaches which are designed to help women survive and adjust to the status quo. Worse yet, as Janice Raymond pointed out in her book, *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection*, traditional psychotherapy's failure to help women understand the social sources of many of their problems has encouraged some women to pursue and prolong the supposedly 'healing' process so that, for too many, therapy becomes a way of life (Raymond, 1986). And therapy

as a way of life can be a very attenuated life indeed! It is a life narrowly focused on feeling and self to the exclusion of thought and the wider world. Finally, as feminist philosopher, Mary Daly, points out, this individualising psychotherapy can encourage women to focus on static man-made feelings she calls 'plastic passions' (guilt, anxiety, depression, hostility, bitterness, resentment, frustration, boredom, resignation, fulfilment) which 'function to hide the agents of her oppression - [and] serve the mechanisms of 'blaming the victim,' and ultimately preclude the 'real passions' which lead to action (Daly, p. 197, p. 215-6).

In the last three decades, feminist philosophers and psychologists have done much to illuminate the life problems of women, but, like feminist psychotherapists, I agree that many women are still silenced and many effects of centuries of oppression have yet to be eradicated. As a result the applicability of established philosophical and psychological theories are both very problematic for women's lives. Like feminist psychotherapists, therefore, I believe that narrative approaches to investigating women's issues are important because women must tell their stories, and it is in terms of those stories that the legitimacy of philosophical and psychological meta-narratives, which purport to be universally applicable, must be assessed.

As Jeffrey Murphy remarked in an essay on punishment, good philosophical theories must satisfy two conditions: they must be formally and materially adequate. (Murphy, 1995). Many philosophical theories which satisfy the first condition (i.e. they have no logical difficulties) fail the second (i.e. they are based upon factual assumptions about individuals and the world which are simply untrue). Counselling sessions with women, therefore, must involve an exploration of women's life problems with the hope of broadening our concepts, expanding the reasons we give in support of behaviour, illuminating the ways in which relationships have traditionally been conceived, and enriching our theories. Feminist counselling is not merely the application of theory to practice. Instead, like Socratic Dialogue, it affords the opportunity to test the legitimacy of philosophical theories on the crucible of personal experience.

While feminist psychotherapy and feminist philosophical counselling share certain assumptions, there are marked differences between their methods. Feminist psychotherapy is based upon themes in

feminist philosophy, but there are many feminist traditions, each of which offers a different account of the causes of women's oppression, the nature of genuine liberation, and the methods for achieving it. Feminist psychologists would have us believe that a psychotherapist, neutral between these rival philosophies, merely leads women through a series of stages which involve: telling their stories, expressing their sadness and helplessness, recognising the causes of their problems in social oppression through the use of leading questions and information provided by the counsellor, and finally instituting individual change and a commitment to collective action. The difficulty with all this, however, is that the specific feminist theoretical assumptions of the psychotherapist, however neutral she may try to be, are never deliberately subjected to examination by the client. Hence the client does not have an opportunity to examine and decide for herself which sorts of feminist traditions, if any, serve to illuminate her particular life problems, or to suggest how they might be resolved, as she does in the fourth phase of feminist philosophical counselling.

Indeed, feminist philosophical counselling seems to be the only form of counselling which avoids the serious objections about value issues which have been raised in connection with both traditional psychotherapy and feminist psychotherapy. As we have already seen, the feminist objection to traditional psychotherapy for women is that it purports to be value-neutral but isn't and should not be. Now even many non-feminist psychotherapists are increasingly doubtful about the degree to which psychotherapists can be effective with any clients when therapists refuse to challenge their clients' beliefs about values, or to acknowledge injustices in their clients' lives (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Krasner, 1986; Weiner, 1993; Doherty, 1995). As William Doherty points out in his book, *Soul Searching: Why Psychotherapy Must Promote Moral Responsibility*, the supposed value-neutrality of traditional psychotherapy masks a set of suppressed and inconsistent values: commitments to autonomy (as if it were the only value), cultural relativism, and egoism. Traditional psychotherapists, however, object to feminist psychotherapy because its abandonment of value neutrality seems to them, quite rightly, to jeopardise respect for individual autonomy by imposing the values of the therapist on the client. Feminist philosophical counselling seems to avoid both of these difficulties.

Another marked difference between my method of feminist philosophical counselling and feminist psychotherapy is that the latter, like all forms of psychotherapy, usually focuses upon feelings, acknowledging and working through feelings, and understanding the causes of feelings. Psychological work of this sort is undoubtedly helpful and necessary, but it leaves numerous issues untouched. The psychological view is that clients have perceptions of their circumstances, and feelings about them, which must be accepted as givens for which causal explanations must be provided. By contrast, my assumption, as a philosophical counsellor, is that the beliefs and worldviews of all clients are as important as their feelings in understanding their life problems and that the oppression of women has encouraged women clients to have a variety of false and confused beliefs about themselves, their world, and their place in the world. The philosophical counsellor has no privileged position from which to decide how the oppression of women may have affected a particular woman's life; this is something she must decide for herself. The expertise of the philosopher consists in her knowledge of a variety of alternative feminist frameworks, which she can deploy in counselling sessions, to challenge women's beliefs systems and to suggest alternative ways women might choose to understand and resolve their problems.

Finally, my feminist philosophical group counselling sessions conclude very differently from many feminist psychological group counselling sessions. While I disagree with Celia Kitzinger and Rachel Perkins when they say that the very idea of feminist psychotherapy is a mistake, I wholly agree with their insight that feminist psychology, by itself, results in psychologising the political with the result that the only emphasis is upon 'the revolution within' (Kitsinger and Perkins, 1993, p. 195). The role of the feminist philosophical counsellor, therefore, is not merely to facilitate philosophical understanding but also to suggest ways that women, through collective action, can address both the personal *and* the political dimensions of their problems.

As a result, my work with women in community centres often begins by considering the problems of marginalised women inside shelters and prisons, continues with exercises designed to illuminate common life problems, and culminates in collaborative group sessions involving both marginalised women in prisons or shelters and women from community centres or university

classes. These are followed by one to-one meetings between women from the two groups involved so that mainstream women have opportunities to serve, under my supervision, as mentors and advocates for marginalised women. During such sessions and one-to-one meetings, the personal connections are forged which lead to real political action. A woman outside teaches a homeless woman to read, which, as Paulo Friere recognised, is a political act. Another helps a welfare mother prepare a resumé. Still others lobby local politicians for an area of a local jail where women inmates can have contact visits with their children. Making action an integral part of the counselling process fosters the recognition that social action is not a denial or sublimation of women's personal problems, but rather a way of coming to terms with their political dimensions. Furthermore, in assisting marginalised women, mainstream women develop a deeper appreciation that chapters in the lives of women in shelters and prisons often are at least pages in their own.

Part Two: Virtue-Based Feminist Philosophical Counselling: The Practice

The following three case studies illustrate how virtue conflicts among six of my women clients were understood and, in varying degrees, resolved by considering them in terms of feminist traditions (Kourany, Sterba, and Tong, 1992; Donovan, 1992; Tong, 1989; Jaggar, 1978). The case studies result from a small pilot project originally involving two closed groups of women, totalling 26 in all. The first group of 12 women were women in the community, who agreed to serve as volunteers working, under my direction, as tutors, mentors, and counsellors with incarcerated women in a local jail. Ten of them completed 20 group philosophical counselling sessions with me. Two dropped out due to increased work or family commitments. The second group consisted of 14 incarcerated women for whom I ran a philosophical counselling group in the jail as part of a pre-release program. The incarcerated group completed 10 group counselling sessions with me and 10 concurrent one-on-one mentoring sessions with women from the volunteer group. Most completed the majority of the sessions, but only 8 completed all of them; 6 failed to complete all ten sessions due to transfer to state facilities. Per force, two volunteers were paired with inmates who had not as yet completed a philosophical counselling group with me. While the four women involved found their one-to-one sessions productive,

understandably, the two volunteers reported some frustration about keeping the sessions focused on cognitive issues, as opposed to feelings, because their respective clients had not had previous exposure to philosophical counselling.

Funding considerations, together with human needs requirements, stimulate creativity in working with available resources. Women affiliated with a local women's centre wanted philosophical counselling, my inmate groups needed mentors to reinforce my work with them, and there was some funding available for training criminal justice volunteers. This particular project has not been tried again because it was very labour-intensive for me. At the outset mentors had neither counselling nor philosophical experience, and they needed a great deal of support. I now have anticipated funding, and full support from the chairperson of a large psychology department, for a similar project which will involve graduate and undergraduate clinical psychology students, who will be trained by me to do rudimentary philosophical counselling, under my on-site supervision, with adult and juvenile offenders to satisfy a requirement for a practicum. This kind of support obviates the need for fund raising, recruiting, grant reporting etc. I will also be assisted by Excalibur staff. Excalibur: A Centre for Applied Ethics is a small non-profit started by former students of mine. Clearly, cutbacks in funding for the social service sectors make cost effective programmes essential. The creative use of volunteers and students is one way to offset costs and meet social needs. In the future envisioned by the Board of the American Philosophical Practitioner's Association, eventually there will be graduate programmes in philosophical practice, where each student is required to complete some kind of internship. In the meantime pilot projects, like the one discussed in this paper, can teach us a good deal about how such programmes might work. We can be grateful that clinical psychologists have been much quicker to appreciate philosophical practice than many of our own colleagues.

Counselling From The Tradition Of Liberal And Gender Feminism

Liberal feminism is historically the first of the philosophies of feminism. Its roots are in the natural law tradition of the 18th Century Enlightenment which stressed equal natural rights, and in subsequent movements to extend such rights to all regardless of gender or race. Liberal feminism stresses equal rights, to be acquired through

legislation, and equal opportunity to be achieved through a variety of ameliorative measures - childcare reforms, affirmative action, family leave, non sexist programmes and textbooks, equal attention to women's health care issues, etc. It is a reformist rather a revolutionary philosophy which attributes the oppression of women primarily to sex socialisation, traditional sex roles, and gender stereotyping (Tong, 1992).

According to vernacular philosophy, the aims of this supposedly reasonable brand of feminism are achieved. Hence, calls for an end to programmes of affirmative action, and insistence by the media that feminism is passé, is now largely irrelevant to the lives of contemporary American women, except, of course, during women's history month or when some male politician is trying to accommodate the 'woman factor' at election time.

What are the virtues associated with liberal feminism? Most liberal feminists since Mary Wollstonecraft have stressed the virtue of autonomy, both on utilitarian grounds and on the grounds that possession of this virtue is a precondition for moral thinking. The liberal assumption is that women should also be educated in the same moral and non moral virtues as men which, as Wollstonecraft (responding to criticism of masculine women) says, 'enables the human character, and ... raises females in the scale of animal being (Lindeman, 1991).

Gender Feminism (or cultural feminism - as it is sometimes called) came into its own with the publication of Carol Gilligan's, *In a Different Voice*. Gilligan, of course, argued that caring, allegedly the orientation toward moral reasoning of most women is very different from the rights and justice orientation which allegedly characterises the moral reasoning of most men. Gender feminists value traditionally feminine virtues such as caring, relatedness, connectedness, etc. which supposedly equip women with the sorts of virtues which enable them to excel in human relationships.

Vernacular philosophy is as receptive to the claims of gender feminism as it is to those of liberal feminism, treating gender feminism as a kind sentimentalised 'add-on' feminism. Once again, however, social acceptability is purchased at a price. Vernacular philosophies fail to acknowledge that liberal and gender feminism are not easily reconciled. Women are now expected to be isolated asocial selves *and* connected relational selves, to be autonomous *and*

caring, and to be tough intellectual competitors *and* patient and compassionate care givers. To fail in the first dimension is to fail oneself by being co-dependent and sick. To fail in the latter dimension is to destroy family values by being selfish, unfeminine, and morally reprehensible. Small wonder that women struggling to scale organisational ladders, with the baggage of children and ageing parents on their backs, are exhausted and feel like failures. And still less surprise that women who have ingested large doses of this brand of vernacular feminist philosophy are disillusioned with feminism. The case involving Catherine and Lucy, the inmate Catherine mentored, illustrates the virtue conflicts between autonomy and caring so typical in the lives of many women.

Catherine was a 55-year-old, upper middle-class, white woman who was referred to me by a social worker who was interested in my pilot project. According to the social worker, ordinarily Catherine would have been a poor candidate for my group because she had no interest in feminism, was in acute psychological crisis, and was too overwhelmed by her own emotional problems to be an effective mentor for anyone. However, my group was free to clients and the social worker thought Catherine might make faster progress in 'working through her feelings' by having group as well as individual counselling. According to the social worker, Catherine had severe psychological problems: severe depression, co-dependency, hypochondria, and minimal self-esteem. She also had anger issues because she was in the middle of a divorce, as well as continuing grief and separation issues as the result of having institutionalised a child two years ago. Catherine's child, Brian, had severe Downs syndrome. He had lived at home until age 22 when he became unmanageable. He now lived in a half-way house which provided assisted living for Downs clients. The therapist also warned me that Catherine was very resistant to individual therapy, skipped appointments, refused to take ownership for any her problems, declined to participate in a support group for parents of children with Downs syndrome, and did not follow recommendations to secure psychiatric help for her depression. The therapist added that she thought it might also be useful for Catherine to join my group because she was 'very Catholic' and a philosopher might be able to help her with her religious problems.

The analytic phase of counselling began when Catherine arrived for the individual two hour session

I hold with clients before forming a group. She was nearly an hour late. I allowed the session to last for three hours because I was anxious to hear Catherine's story and it was interrupted by long bouts of uncontrollable weeping, plus numerous digressions about a bewildering array of ailments, but of course, the ailments were part of the story, too. In a society that discounts women's emotional stress, it is rational to convert emotional distress into physical distress because only the latter is recognised as a legitimate excuse for the inability to continue care giving activities.

The story, in an approximation, of Catherine's words, unfolded as follows: I'm crazy. I'm a mess! My life is a mess. I don't have any problems. My husband Ed is the problem. Why am I so stupid? The lying, cheating bastard has been having an affair with his executive secretary for *five* years! And now he's moved out. He's in therapy now, 'trying to get in touch with his feelings,' and claims he wants to marry her. What makes me even crazier is that she's much younger than I am, but she isn't even pretty. You wouldn't look at her twice. What does he see in her? I hate him! He's contemptible! A totally selfish baby! I'm sick! I've been sick for the last five years! I'm too sick to cope! I'm a failure because I couldn't keep Brian at home anymore, but I tried. My other children don't understand. All of them avoid me and take their Dad's part. What did he ever do for *them*. He was never there when we really needed him. I was the one that went to the football games. The only one of them that cares about his ruining my life is my younger daughter, and all she does is nag me to get counselling with some damn woman who keeps telling me 'to get in touch with *my* feelings.' Why should I? It's too late! What I feel doesn't matter. It never has! I've wasted my life on a husband and four children who don't care whether I live or die. My life is ruined. I wish I could die. I know I don't have big money worries because Ed says he will be generous and I will never be in need, but I also know I will have to reduce my standard of living because I've never worked since putting Ed through law school and I have no job skills. No one will hire me. I don't even know how to turn on a computer. I've loved and cared about my family and done the best I could. God isn't fair. I pray and sometimes I talk to Father R, but I can't take communion because I'm not sure I love God anymore. Father R is no real help. He tried to talk to Ed about sin - and that's what adultery is, whatever you feminists may think, but Ed always manages to avoid him. Nobody understands how I feel! I lie awake and can't sleep. Then I can't stop

sleeping. This is the first time I've been out of my bathrobe in a week.

During Catherine's recitation of her story, I made hasty notes about her rational beliefs, as well as her irrational belief structures and barriers to critical thinking. During her story and at its conclusion, my first job was to care, and to make her know that I cared. This was accomplished by acknowledging her pain, assuring her that I understood the reality that she saw, acknowledging the rationality of some of her beliefs, and by filling her immediate need for affection and reassurance. As a feminist counsellor, I see no problem with providing hugs or with limited self disclosure. I assured Catherine that traumatic events in the life of an individual make philosophers of us all, by making us question fundamental truths about ourselves, others, and our world; that philosophy was scary and that it was quite normal for her to think she was crazy because she was so uncertain of everything; that philosophers, since the time of Thales, have often been regarded as crazy even though such painful questioning often results in enriched understanding; that I, like her, had gone through a divorce and had felt crazy at the time. I finally managed to elicit a laugh when I told her that Oblomov, a famous philosopher in Russian literature, had spent his entire life in his bathrobe contemplating the supreme philosophical question: Is there are reason to get up in the morning?

Deliberately using language which would not individualise her problems, and which would create some distance between herself and them, I told her that I understood that she was confronting a constellation of very serious life problems, with complicated philosophical dimensions, so it was imperative that she use good critical reasoning to think her way through them. I suggested that critical reasoning was especially important for women because society encourages women to adopt false beliefs about themselves and their world. I suggested that she was feeling overwhelmed because she was focused on the present moment and trying to solve all her immediate problems at one time; that she needed to detach and prioritise, by focusing on restoring her ability to think clearly about her present situation and her future.

I said that I could help her with the philosophical dimensions of her problems, but that I could not help with other dimensions of them because they were not within my field of expertise and that her sessions with me would be more productive if she consulted

other professionals as well. First, I suggested that effects of prolonged stress create physical and psychological problems; therefore she did need to consult a psychiatrist about her depression, physical ailments, and sleep problems, and to secure medication which would restore her capacity to think clearly and to be able to function well enough to seek, and benefit from, the help of other competent professionals, including me.

Second, I told her that strong emotions like anger, guilt, shame, anxiety, and depression are barriers to critical thinking and that the only way to transcend those barriers was to work through her feelings with her psychotherapist. I indicated to her that while philosophical counselling addressed emotions that it did so from philosophical perspectives, that she needed to explore feelings from psychological as well as philosophical perspectives, and that this kind of work could not be done in my philosophical group without converting the counselling into psychotherapy. Therefore I suggested that it was imperative for her to continue working with the social worker while she was working with me. I added that I thought this was especially important because she was expressing her feelings about her husband to her children, and that this was damaging to them, and to her relationship with them.

Third, I told her that I was concerned about the story she was telling me because it was the story she was telling herself and because some of it was illogical and false; therefore she was becoming her own worst enemy. Two illogical beliefs were of particular concern because of the damaging consequences they might have on her future. One was her inconsistent belief that her husband was 'a lying selfish bastard' *and* that he would care for her financial future. A second was the false belief that only her husband had worked during the course of their marriage. I referred her to a feminist attorney and suggested that she could reduce her legal costs, assure herself of her own value and skills, and put herself in a better position for the impending divorce, by doing some basic research on the price to her husband had he secured a nanny for three children and paid the costs of institutional care for a disabled child over a twenty-two year period.

Fourth, I told her that I understood the pain she felt as a result of questioning the religious beliefs which had sustained her in the past. I acknowledged that a crisis of faith is a philosophical problem, but pointed out that such problems can be explored from an

internal or an external point of view. Mine would be an external point of view because neither I, nor other members of the group, were Catholic. I referred her to a young priest, with whom I had worked on other projects, as someone who could not only address her crisis of faith, but who also might be better trained in marriage counselling and in addressing the problems of women than many older priests.

At the conclusion of our initial session, Catherine was still objecting strenuously to all of my suggestions. I made it clear that she was in charge of her life and at liberty to make her own choices, but that it would be frustrating and unproductive for us both, not to mention the group, to include her unless she followed my recommendations. I indicated that she could call me should she wish to discuss these matters further and that when she had secured help from a psychiatrist and was feeling sufficiently rested and energised, we could begin setting goals for following up on the other referrals and begin the group sessions scheduled for the next month. This concluded the analytic phase of counselling with Catherine.

Catherine did decide to accept my terms and became a valuable member of the group and a wonderful mentor. The synthetic, critical, and comparative phases Catherine completed in group cannot be discussed in detail here. Suffice it to say that through group examinations of life problems, Catherine concluded that the absence of equal opportunities for women of her generation, together with gender stereotyping, sex socialisation, and traditional sex coding of social roles had impaired her ability to make autonomous decisions about her own life. Given her husband's refusal to consider reconciliation, she now accepts the inevitability of divorce, has concluded that she no longer loves her husband, and sees her separation as an opportunity to exercise her own new found autonomy. She no longer feels that her life is ruined. She continues to wrestle with the problem of whether she wishes to focus on developing the traditionally masculine virtues which receive the best remuneration in the workplace, or to continue to focus on the virtues of caring and nurturing she continues to cherish.

In examining her own virtue conflicts and her own conception of the good life, Catherine developed some understanding of her husband's and children's concerns about theirs. This has resulted in some reduction in her anger and bitterness, which has allowed her to reconnect with her children. In developing her own autonomy, she has recognised

how her decision to place Brian in a group home has promoted his self-sufficiency, thus reducing her sense of failure as a mother.

A collaborative group session with women inmates in a local jail, devoted to exploring the numerous gender inequities in the prison system, enhanced Catherine's awareness that many social institutions and practices constitute analogous prisons for women outside. She was horrified to discover that, unlike male inmates, women inmates were confined to their cells 23 hours a day, that they were denied legal aides and the medical services necessary for women, and that they had no contact visits with their children. Catherine chose to mentor a woman named Lucy, who had been incarcerated for three months without seeing a gynaecologist despite having been diagnosed with cervical cancer the week before her arrest. In successfully advocating for Lucy within the prison system, and in mentoring her through the intricacies of the health system after her release, Catherine recognised that she had developed useful skills in the course of caring for Brian. She took a few computer courses and is now employed by an insurance company processing health claims. Currently, she is trying to decide whether she wishes to go back to school to get a degree in social work, or whether she wishes to pursue an administrative position in her company which will provide the kind of salary and benefits which will permit her to eventually retire with considerably more economic security. A generous property settlement, fought every step of the way by her husband, makes such options possible.

When I asked the groups at the conclusion of our sessions which virtues they most cherished, Lucy chose caring. She said that the caring Catherine had displayed in helping her secure adequate medical care had given her a chance to work on other virtues, like 'staying clean'. To my surprise, Catherine did not choose either autonomy or caring. Instead she said the virtues she thought most important were justice and truthfulness, because without justice there is no truthfulness and, without access to the truth, none of the other virtues mattered.

Counselling From The Tradition Of Existentialist And Socialist Feminism

Existentialist feminism is attributable to the work of the great French feminist Simone de Beauvoir, for whom the oppression of women is understood in

ontological terms (de Beauvoir, 1952). In her book, *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir begins with Jean Paul Sartre's view of human relationships as explicable in terms of rival consciousnesses, but according to de Beauvoir, it is men who appropriate freedom and the role of self for themselves. To preserve their unlimited freedom, men define woman as 'Other', relegating her to the sphere of unfreedom, immanence, the body, and, ultimately, the world of objects, a world de Beauvoir transcends through writing. Yet woman as Other is perceived as a perpetual threat to men's freedom and hence to control her, they must continue constructing myths about her nature.

For existentialists, the supreme moral virtue is authenticity and, for women, authenticity requires understanding the myths, including myths about virtue, men have constructed to control them. Only when, to invoke de Beauvoir's quotation from Rimbaud, 'the infinite bondage of woman is broken, when she will live in and for herself,' as opposed to living as Other, will she be genuinely free (de Beauvoir, p. 263).

By contrast, the core of socialist feminism is, of course, Marxist theory and the supposition that the causes for the historical oppression of women are economic causes attributable to the institution of private property, the development of class society, and capitalism. Socialist feminism, however, also emphasises that patriarchal as well as economic institutions must be subjected to radical critique. For Marx, unlike de Beauvoir, there is an organic relationship between the individual and the state. As a consequence, breaking the stranglehold of ideological myths is a collective enterprise involving the development of class consciousness and ultimately, a revolution from without rather than from within.

For Marx, virtue theory, like the rest of morality, is to be dismissed as a form of ideology, 'so many bourgeois prejudices behind which lurk just as many bourgeois interests'; by showing the relationship between morality and ideology, Marx claimed to have 'broken the staff of all morality' (Wood, 1991, p. 111-2). At the same time however, Marx has a great deal to say about the vices of capitalism and the bourgeoisie. Vice, for Marx, is alienation.

Thus, both Existentialist and Socialist feminist perspectives, despite their differences, emphasise the destructive role of myth in reinforcing existing

power relations. MacIntyre, therefore, is quite correct when he says that 'mythology ... is at the heart of things', and that 'the telling of stories has a key part in educating us into the virtues' for, he claims, 'I can only answer the question, 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question, 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part (MacIntyre, p. 201). Women, therefore, can only answer that question by understanding the myths of which we find ourselves a part: Eve and Mary, Matriarch and Jezebel, Demeter and Persephone, Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty, *Pamela* and *Moll Flanders*, *Jane Eyre* and *Anna Karenina*, Barbie and the 'angel in the house, and, of course, the Superwoman who encompasses them all (Collins, 1992).

Vernacular philosophy is quite hospitable to unpacking some myths which damage women, witness the popularity of Naomi Wolfs's, *The Beauty Myth*. Unfortunately, however, given vernacular philosophy's hostility to both Marxism and radical feminism, the enterprise is carried on only at a very superficial level.

The case study involving Carmelita, and a woman the other inmates called Jazz, illustrate women's confusions about virtue from the perspective of Existentialist and Marxist feminism. Both were women who saw themselves as Other. Both struggled with the problem of alienation within the context of public and domestic labour. Both subscribed to myths which did not contribute to human flourishing.

Carmelita and Jazz had other elements in common. Both were young women in their late twenties. Both were women of colour; Carmelita was Puerto-Rican and Jazz was African American. Both were exceptionally beautiful women. Both grew up poor. Both were adult children of alcoholic fathers. Both had strong hardworking mothers they regarded as saints, but with whom they had very troubled relationships. Both were unhappy with their situation in life. Both had substance abuse problems.

Carmelita and Jazz were also very different. Carmelita was happily married, had a very responsible job as executive secretary to a corporate vice-president, and was a leader in the Latino community. Jazz had been living with a drug dealer prior to her arrest on a drug charge, had been unemployed and on welfare, and greeted most of the inmates in lock-up as old friends. Carmelita was incredibly hardworking. Jazz had no interest in work

whatever. Carmelita described herself as feeling 'tired and empty,' claimed that her life felt meaningless, hated her job, and worried about her husband's desire to start a family when she did not feel ready. She was also worried because she had started drinking again from time to time and, on occasion, it seemed to be getting out of hand.

Jazz was unhappy because she was in jail, because she kept relapsing when she was out, and because this time she might have to serve a longer sentence. Carmelita contributed to her mothers support. Jazz's mother was dead, but Jazz did not contribute to her aunt's support, despite the fact that her aunt was raising Jazz's two year old daughter.

In the analytic phase of counselling these women, I concluded that the fact that they both came from alcoholic homes was a major clue to their belief systems. Carmelita was the classic hero child, while Jazz was the classic scapegoat, characters who emerge in alcoholic households (Beattie, 1997). Hero children keep the family going by assuming responsibility for mundane tasks and by pleasing everyone. Scapegoats reject traditional values, act out in unproductive ways in response to family chaos, and then are blamed for family problems. I also surmised that their allegiance to myths about work and family, acquired in the process of being cast in these roles, were at the base of their unhappiness and substance abuse. I also thought that Carmelita and Jazz would be a perfect match for one-to-one mentoring sessions. As it turned out, this time, I was right on all counts.

During the synthetic phase of their respective group counselling it became apparent that both women's philosophies about work and family were deeply coloured by forms of alienation. Carmelita expressed her philosophy when she complained that she hated her job because the work did not interest her. She was only working for the money. Her job paid well, but she was tired of being sexually harassed by her boss and dealing with the petty jealousies of other secretaries who envied her position and accused her of sleeping her way to the top. She loved her husband and her mother, but they both made her feel guilty. She hated to go home. She was disinterested in sex and in her husband's continual talk of starting a family. She was her mother's youngest child, her mother was elderly, and consequently living with her and her husband. She said her mother was continually nagging her about being a better housekeeper and wife, and especially

about having a baby before she was too old. She felt 'drained and empty' and complained that she couldn't even relax with a drink after work without having 'everyone on my back.' And she felt guilty because she deeply admired her mother who had worked at a very low paying job all her life, had still always looked attractive, had taken care of three kids, kept an immaculate house, and never complained. She knew her husband and mother, on some level, were proud of her for completing college and for securing a good job, but she felt like a failure.

Jazz's alienation from work and family was still more pronounced. When I asked the women in her group what kind of job they'd had at the time of their arrest and what kind of a job they wanted when they were released, Jazz snapped, 'Didn't have one - don't want one.'

'Let me guess,' I responded, 'you believe you can get everything fast and easy. But what are the consequences of believing that?' expecting to elicit the usual sullen admission: I ended up in jail.

'Oh yeah, samo song - consequences - well the consequences are, that unlike my mama, I'm havin' some highs in *my* life. Phly clothes, phly cars, phly men. Mama, she be working all day mopping floors for some honky. Then takin' care of us kids. Bitching all week - praying all Sunday - just to make rent. Miss mama, since she died. Miss her a lot. Even if she always did think I wasn't nothing, but trash. But I ain't my mama. Me? I'm gonna have a *life*.'

During the remaining phases of group counselling, and still more in the one-to-one meetings, Carmelita and Jazz came to see their life problems as stemming from the alienation resulting from their allegiance, conditioned by economic class, to myths about 'superwoman'. For them to be feminine, to be virtuous, to be the good woman, was to be the superwoman represented by their mothers, poor women, who functioned magnificently in the public and private sphere as 'Other', satisfying the wants and needs of others. Carmelita tried to live the myth. Jazz tried to run from it. Both became alienated from work, from their mothers, from their bodies, and from their own genuine needs in the process. And both tried to fill the void with substance abuse.

Through counselling, through journal writing, and through one-to-one meetings with each other, both women made substantial progress in coming to terms with the mythic dimensions of their lives and

its influence upon how they conceived of their respective quests for the good life. Carmelita decided to take the financial risks of changing jobs and found one that interested her. She no longer drinks. She has insisted upon postponing a family until she feels more secure in her new job, but eventually she wants a baby. In mentoring Jazz and trying to help her develop parenting skills, Carmelita began to see motherhood differently. Jazz is serving a long sentence in a state prison, but she hopes to eventually get her child back and is finally enrolled in a cosmetology course offered by the prison. She writes to Carmelita that she likes the work. She is also in substance abuse counselling and a prison chapter of AA.

Toward the conclusion of their one-to-one meetings, I asked both women what virtues they thought were essential to leading a good life. Carmelita said, 'realism and balance.' Perhaps Jazz, in her inimical style, came even closer to the heart of things. 'Feeling like a whole person,' she said, 'stead of a lot of pieces of garbage scattered around.'

Counselling From The Tradition Of Radical And Multicultural Feminism

Radical Feminism is the philosophy of feminism that is derided by vernacular philosophy as being especially irrelevant to the lives of 'normal' women. Just when feminism became socially acceptable, radical feminism created a backlash by laying the blame for the oppression of women squarely on men and patriarchy. Leading radicals, spearheaded by lesbian feminists, launched an angry movement designed to take back control of women's sexuality and women's bodies from men, and to attack male violence against women - rape, date rape, incest, domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and pornography. Radical feminism also asked radical questions about whether cherished institutions and practices of patriarchy are really good for women. Marriage, the culture of romance, motherhood, even free speech were all subjected to radical critique. And the critique went still deeper to question even the theoretical foundations of patriarchy - male defined conceptions of truth, morality, justice, self, and human nature.

By contrast, multicultural feminism, sometimes called post-modern feminism, rejects all monistic ideologies which attempt to explain the historical oppression of women in terms of one model.

According to this brand of feminism, women's experiences vary across class, race, ethnic background, sexual orientation, age, etc. They are generic, that is wholly different from men's experiences but, it is theorised, there are multiple inter-related systems of oppression which explain why any woman's potential is unrealised.

Vernacular philosophy, given its mistaken enthusiasm for cultural relativism, is very hospitable to the claims of multicultural feminism, but it is entirely hostile to radical feminism, witness the constant feminism bashing in the press, and attempts to portray all feminists as Dworkin clones. Radical feminism, of course, is the most radical challenge to the patriarchal power structure, a threat to be defused by ridiculing it as a product of man hating lesbian women, whining about imaginary victimisation, who want to serve as sex and thought police and undermine hallowed ideals like family values and academic freedom.

Case studies involving Sophia and Lisa illustrate counselling from radical and multicultural feminist perspectives. Due to limitations of my own, these cases left me dissatisfied, with no sense of closure. I did help Sophia clarify her philosophical choices, but she had no serious psychological issues, and her philosophical problems were simple. Counselling did not substantially enrich her philosophical perspective; she emerged from it with exactly the same reflective philosophical views she had when she began it. Lisa thought counselling helped her address her life problems. I am not so sure. There were other variables like love from her prison family, and a strong role model which probably had greater effect. Whatever beneficial effects counselling did have, they didn't last. In a structured environment like a shelter or prison, Lisa's problems subsided, but they came back as soon as she hit the street.

Sophia was around sixty years old, a Russian Jewish immigrant from the old Soviet Union, who still spoke with a thick Russian accent. The analytic phase of counselling only lasted a half an hour before she cut me off due to her busy schedule. She was interested in joining my group because she wanted to know, 'what the hell feminist philosophical counselling was all about,' and because she hoped that it might provide her a new take on feminist issues to use in her newspaper editorials. She told me right away that she was a liberal feminist activist, who had no use for psychotherapy of any kind, and no psychological problems unless, she added

sarcastically, 'being infuriated with sexist idiots blocking the bill allowing same sex marriage and the people hassling me at work because I'm lesbian and publicly support it count as psychological problems.' She was satisfied when I assured her that, like her, I saw those issues as political problems. She was less pleased that mentoring an inmate was a requirement for joining the group and that I refused to allow her other political activism to count as a substitute. She voiced a number of conservative political opinions - that the only thing to do with criminals was to lock them up and throw away the key, peppered with some very politically incorrect comments about African Americans and crime. In the end, however, she grudgingly agreed to the condition.

In later phases of the counselling process, when Sophia complained of the stress her political activism was causing, I outlined the difference between a teleological and a deontological approach to the good. I suggested that she could promote the good life for women, and especially the rights of lesbian women, by serving as role model to a lesbian inmate and that, by so doing, she could avoid the publicity and its attendant problems associated with her current utilitarian activities. She agreed to test this idea and mentored Lisa, not only for the requisite sessions, but also, sporadically, whenever Lisa contacted her, for a period of three years until Lisa's death from AIDS.

I first met Lisa, an African American girl, when she was a sixteen year old resident of a juvenile detention facility. At intake she required extensive medical treatment for infected cuts all over her body which were the result of self mutilation. She was also diagnosed HIV positive. Even before her psychological evaluation was completed, she managed to break one of her hands beating it against the cell door. I was called in to counsel her, largely as an effort on the part of staff to keep her occupied and under constant visual contact until she was transferred to a psychiatric unit. During this analytic phase of counselling, if it can be so termed, I tried to comfort her, to try to find some clues to the philosophical significance - to her - of her self abuse, and to help her set some boundaries to her actions.

Like radical counsellor Bonnie Burstow, whose insightful work in this area I read later, I discovered that self mutilation means many things (Burstow, 1992). I discovered (in this session, and in subsequent sessions) that Lisa's wounds were, indeed, intended to speak for her. And they spoke,

philosophically, as expressions of her beliefs: that she and her body deserved punishment; that her pain was proof that she was still a human being who could feel, control her body, and manipulate others scrambling to help her; that she could resist efforts to control her; that even in this dismal setting, people couldn't prevent her from getting a rush, the supreme high, I'm told, that accompanies self inflicted injuries; that she could endure any pain inflicted on her; that we would understand, and she knew from many exposures to psychiatric intervention we would understand, that she was a victim of sexual abuse. How could we not know? A Massachusetts study of women correctional inmates showed that 80% of women in that state's prisons have experienced traumatic violence in childhood - physical or sexual abuse and adult rape or battering - before their first arrest (Watterson, 1996).

Unlike radical counsellor, Bonnie Burstow, however, I vehemently disagree that rights to autonomy, together with women's rights to have control over their own bodies, precludes involuntary commitment and other types of interference with self-mutilation and suicide (Burstow, 1992). I also disagree with her in believing, unlike her, that self-mutilation is on the slippery slope toward suicide. I certainly disagree with her assumption that women should be congratulated for finding a way to survive by self-mutilating. It is my philosophical conviction that self-mutilating and suicidal clients always need a clear message that harm to self is irrational and morally wrong unless they can provide clear evidence that they are autonomous, that there are no viable alternatives, and that there are good reasons, based upon a great deal of reflection, for what they are doing. Consequently, when Lisa was returned to the detention centre, and during my subsequent work with her in her stays in jails and prisons, I worked on inculcating the virtues of autonomy, creativity in finding alternative ways to satisfy her needs, and self-control. I believe that to do less than this, would be worse than uncaring. I see doing less, in Foucauldian terms, as being complicit with her abusers - condoning the disciplinary methods used by them which she internalised (Bartley, 1992). I was aided in my work with Lisa work by Sophia, who shared my outlook, and was an especially dedicated role model for Lisa because Lisa was also gay.

During one of my counselling sessions with Lisa I asked her what qualities she thought were needed to lead a good life. At the time, Lisa was no longer self-mutilating and seemed very happy as a 'child' in a

prison family, where two women inmates served as her 'father and mother'. Lisa said that, for her, love was the essential ingredient of a happy life, adding that 'all of us girls need families and, if they're not around, we just make them with what we've got.'

I also asked Sophia what virtues she thought were most important for women. 'Same as for men,' she said instantly, 'courage and the willingness to work like hell! And by the way don't try to talk me into mentoring one of those crazy little girls of yours again. I don't care if she's gay or straight, black or white; until you change society, little girls like that don't have a shot in hell of making it.'

Conclusion

My work with virtue-based feminist philosophical counselling is still in its infancy, but the three case studies just considered suggest the sorts of virtues some women, at least, consider essential to their own lives: caring, truthfulness, justice, realism, balance, wholeness, love, courage, and the willingness to work. To this list can be added the virtues I find most essential to counselling: respect for autonomy and, once again, caring. Questions about whether these virtues are reducible to some Aristotelian or functionalist set of virtues, whether there is unity to the virtues, and whether all moral questions can be addressed in terms of virtue ethics are matters for other theorists to debate.

Virtue theory, however, has had a great deal to say about women. At last, philosophical practice provides women with a place in the conversation. I would suggest that before we return to theory, we would be well advised to listen to what women say, not only about the virtues that are important to us, but also about what those virtues mean in our own lives and in the practices in which we are engaged. Just as virtue ethics has enriched the language of theory and practice, so we can expect feminist philosophical practice to expand the moral vision of us all.

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