

Successful Transition: From Philosophy Professor to Philosophical Counsellor

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Introduction

Philosophical counselling is establishing itself as an accredited professional alternative for philosophers who are considering making the move from academic philosophy to practical philosophy. This paper discusses how professors of analytic philosophy can make the successful transition from teaching to counselling.

One might be tempted to say that there are enough counsellors already, that there is no need for philosophers to also enter the profession since there is a glut of counsellors. However, philosophers in all their diversity offer unique perspectives—after all they have a 2500-year legacy of thought about how life should be understood and lived. No one can doubt that philosophy is a part of many psychological theories—but the pure philosophy of original philosophers has been diluted to such a degree that the modified versions lack the punch and insight of the original thinkers. Philosophers can bring the philosophical approach back into the culture in a way that other professionally trained counsellors cannot, and very importantly philosophers can contribute the skill of philosophising.

Philosophers can increase their contribution to the culture by doing practical philosophy—understanding that what philosophers are doing by such a move is reclaiming their rightful place in the society from which they departed. Philosophers would argue that they never left, that they retained their place by holding academic posts, by writing and so on. This just simply isn't enough, the people need them back in the way they had them in ancient times, as active, contributing members, rubbing elbows with and commiserating with ordinary people. What philosophy has done in fact, for the most part, is to have removed itself too far from the mainstream culture. The culture has forgotten the useful purpose that philosophers once served. The exceptions might be seen to be applied ethics. However, philosopher Amelie Rorty makes the point that “unfortunately, with some exceptions in medical ethics, the co-workers and the audience for applied ethics tend to be fellow philosophers” (Rorty, 1989, p. 275), in other words she is suggesting that philosophers write papers that are typically only read by other philosophers, even when they're not purposely theoretical.

Anthropologists claim that the world's oldest profession is the “shaman”; ordinary people claim that it is the “prostitute”. I would claim that as long as there were men whose sexual needs weren't being met there probably would have been prostitutes to serve them; and as long as people had a belief in something greater than themselves there would have been a shaman or priest who gave them insight; and as long as two or more people came together to dialogue there would have been a philosopher amongst them, and as long as people had troubles there would have been a counsellor who would hear them.

There have always been those unique individuals whose skills have set them apart from their social grouping as having particular value to the group at large, because of what they offered to the group. It is naïve to presume that their positions would have become redundant. Philosophers need to come back into the mainstream culture where they've always been needed. And they need to do it in a greater capacity than just as academics or ethicists. Some notable philosophers themselves, such as Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Dewey amongst others have said that the value of philosophy lies in its application to real life (Raabe, 2000). Philosophical counselling is just one more avenue now beginning to open up for them; philosophical cafes are another, and so on. What was true 2000 years ago is still true today when Roman Stoic, Seneca (4 BC- AD 65) wrote, "Shall I tell you what philosophy holds out to humanity? Counsel." (Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, §48, cited in Raabe, 2001).

Philosophical Counselling—The Practice of Philosophy

There is consensus amongst philosophical counsellors that the modern form of philosophical counselling was first introduced in 1981, when German philosopher Gerd B. Achenbach opened the first philosophical counselling centre in Gergisch Gladbach, near Cologne, Germany (LaHav & Tillmans, 1995). Hence, philosophical counselling had its origins in the continental philosophy tradition. By the 1990s there were numerous philosophical counselling associations, organizations, conferences, cafes, discussion groups, etc. throughout the world. In 2000, Peter B. Raabe was the first person in Canada to be awarded a doctorate based on his theoretical and practical work in philosophical counselling from the University of British Columbia.

As philosophical counselling started to gain an active following, there sprung up almost as many different ways of doing philosophical counselling as there were of doing psychological counselling. It is generally agreed that the main business of philosophical counselling is:

The enhancement of the client's autonomy

The empowering of the client to avoid or solve future problems for oneself

I would also add that the main business of philosophical counselling is *the resolution of personal problems*. Not all would agree. Lahav (2001) argues that using philosophy to resolve problems reduces it to acting merely as a means towards achieving the end of making the client feel better. However, resolving a personal problem does not always result in making one feel better. Sometimes knowing which actions are best to take causes great internal discomfort. Philosophy is not meant as a panacea when it is used to help resolve personal problems. Rather, I see philosophy offering a unique means of exploring problems. One way would be that it can be used to acknowledge the hidden assumptions a client may hold that may be fundamental to the problem. It is this type of philosophical critical reflection that also examines a client's actions and circumstances. Such an examination brings greater understanding of the factors that may be contributing to problems. This awareness enables the client to make wiser choices, which ultimately assist in resolving immediate problems (Raabe, 2001, p. 120).

Another criticism that Lahav wields against using philosophy to resolve problems is that it suggests that philosophy, used this way, is not a whole lot different from various cognitive psychotherapies in use. He writes:

Such an approach, as beneficial as it may be for other purposes, betrays the distinctive nature of philosophy as a search for wisdom for its own sake. In fact, I would rather not call it philosophical counselling but instead 'philosophy-therapy,' on a par with dance-therapy, biblio-therapy, drama-therapy, etc.

(Lahav, 2001, p. 8).

I would agree that all of these objectives are ones that counselling/psychotherapy also tries to meet. One might then wonder why not instead train professional counsellors in the art of philosophy rather than encourage philosophers to take up counselling? Philosophical counsellor, Ran LaHav makes an excellent point when he argues:

that although psychologists may be excellent therapists in their own domain, it is hard to believe that they can conduct serious philosophical counselling with little or no philosophical training

(Lahav, 1995, p. 14)

He is absolutely right! It takes years to develop the skill of a philosopher i.e. critical thinking, reasoned argument, firm knowledge base and understanding of what philosophers from the past said, wrote and meant. This gives philosophers the unique ability to philosophise at an expert level. Philosopher Karl Pfeifer explains:

After years of philosophical training, one develops certain philosophical sensitivities that needn't always involve self-conscious philosophical deliberation in their exercise. Philosophically trained individuals have increased sensitivity to fallacies, evidential weakness, or bad faith: they become better detectors of hypocrisy, cynicism, and rationalization: they are more discerning as to what's possible or plausible

(Pfeifer, 1994, p. 60)

It takes a trained philosopher with the sensitivity to spot these kinds of problems in a client's thinking. Nevertheless, the best philosophical counsellor would be one who

exemplifies a certain interdisciplinary expertise, for the counselee's needs may lead in the direction of literature, religion, art, sociology, psychology, philosophy, biology, mythology etc.

(Mijuskovic, 1995, p. 96)

I would suggest that philosophical counselling, as a humanistic, non-behavioural, 'talk therapy' is normal therapeutic counselling *plus* philosophy. Tim LeBon (2000)

makes this distinction clearer when he states that “philosophical counselling is an approach to counselling that uses philosophical insights and techniques to help clients think about their life”. Philosophical counselling can have all the goals of ordinary therapy plus the goals which philosophy allows it to achieve. For the purposes of this paper, which is addressed to academic philosophers in the analytic tradition, we can assume that analytic philosophy aims at the goal of clarifying concepts and ways of thinking. Therefore, philosophical counselling comes out to have the normal goals of counselling, which is to promote change, enriched by a concern for clarity of thought while at the same time promoting openness and honesty in the client. It should however, be noted that Gerd Achenbach’s stated position is that a philosophical counsellor should “never attempt to change his client but avoid all preconceived goals and intentions” (Raabe, 2001, p. 57). This position should be seen as Achenbach recommending a less aggressive approach, one that is not so confrontational or demanding of change. However, this should not be interpreted as meaning that he does not encourage the process of change which will result naturally from philosophical counselling.

The question of whether this combination of therapeutic counselling and philosophy can prove useful has already been indirectly answered when we look at the success of psychotherapy. Recent empirical research has settled the issue of whether psychotherapy is generally effective: the evidence strongly suggests that it is.

Consider some provocative findings of researcher Gene Glass that non-behavioural therapies—in other words, ‘talk’ therapies, such as client-centred, existential-humanist, and so on—produce initially smaller effects which increase over time. The suggestion is that although humanist therapies—which may not initially have a profound impact—over the (limited) follow-up times do appear to show positive behavioural outcomes. Unfortunately, it is difficult to infer from these results whether the effects imply pervasive and enduring changes since the follow-ups are not sufficiently long-term. However, the results are provocative enough to merit serious consideration that may be more ‘life-affecting’ than initially believed (Glass, 2001).

Note the humanistic approach places the most emphasis on the person as the author of his or her own life. The person is considered to be free to shape and reshape his or her own life. The personality is viewed as a dynamic process, it is not so much something that is built up inside from experiences as it is something that the person actively maintains through choices. Many of the approaches within the humanistic perspective either trace their origins to existentialism or reflect ideas compatible with this philosophical movement (Bohart & Todd, 1994). In contrast, behavioural therapies (e.g. systematic desensitisation, behaviour modification, broad spectrum, cognitive-behavioural, etc.) which produce overt and striking short-term effects, nevertheless are more superficial and decay in strength over time; although, as noted above, the graphs still show them to have superior outcomes over the (limited) follow-up times

A plausible explanation for Glass’s findings may come from examining any system that would normally be called a control system, in which modifications in the instruction set appear near the bottom or near the top. Cognitive science describes the cognitive system as organized hierarchically, in which the most basic ‘perceptual’ systems are located at the bottom of the hierarchy, and the most

complex cognitive systems (e.g. memory, problem solving, etc.) are located at the top of the hierarchy. Information can flow both from the bottom of the system to the top of the system and from the top of the system to the bottom of the system. When information flows from the top of the system to the bottom of the system it is known as 'top-down' processing, and when the information flow is reversed it is called 'bottom-up' processing. Lower level systems categorize and describe incoming perceptual information and pass this descriptive information onto higher levels for more complex processing. Modifications near the top take longer to surface but are more pervasive and stable: that is, affect more elements in a deeper way (e.g., memory, attention, organization of knowledge, pattern recognition, language, problem solving and reasoning). Modifications near the bottom are immediately evident and more marked, as in the case of behavioural therapies (e.g. behaviour modification), but these modifications are less stable and less pervasive. Therefore, 'talk' therapy—which aims modifications at the top of the cognitive system, affecting more complex systems like reasoning, etc.—although less likely to be overtly displayed—is nevertheless more pervasive and more stable than competing therapies such as behaviour therapies which aim nearer the bottom of the cognitive system (i.e. perceptual systems).

Philosophical counselling aims at changing fundamental aspects in a person's way of life, i.e. attitudes, values, beliefs, meanings, worldview, etc., which is tantamount to changes near the top—changes that are deeper, more fundamental. Philosophical counselling, as akin to non-behavioural counselling, offers a significant opportunity for philosophers to contribute to and improve non-behavioural counselling, having noteworthy advantages over other schools of therapy because of their training and experience in reasoned and rational argument. The implicit claim here is that there is reason to believe that philosophical counselling—in other words, counselling that is fortified with the tools of philosophy—will outperform other forms of talk-therapy.

Still there are some fundamental things a philosopher/professor beginning a practice as a philosophical counsellor must know if he or she is hoping to establish a successful practice. These points are relevant for anyone whose education and training is in philosophy—at either the PhD or at the Masters level.

The important difference between these two degrees, for our purposes, is that the higher degree simply involves more experience in an academic environment and suggests that the influence of academia will be stronger in the philosopher's approach. At the PhD level the academic approach will have become absolutely second nature—which will be a problem if the philosopher then wants to become a philosophical counsellor.

The difficulty lies in the fact that what has worked well in an academic environment may not necessarily work well outside of it.

The academic world offers only a microcosmic existence that contains its own subculture, attitudes, values and approaches. Unfortunately, it is not the world that the majority of the population inhabits; in other words, this is not likely to be the world of the average client. To make matters worse, the ordinary person also develops a misperception of philosophy and philosophers in general. In *Philosophy for Counselling & Psychotherapy: Pythagoras to Postmodernism* (2000, p.vii), Alex Howard makes the observation that "Philosophers have a reputation for being incomprehensible, irrelevant and naïve". If we are not very careful we may have a case of the blind leading the blind. However, even though there may be such

striking differences in perspectives, philosophers can indeed make the successful transition from academia into practical philosophy and can use their particular philosophical skills in novel ways within the counselling context.

Let us take an example of a therapeutic situation and contrast the likely responses, first from a clinically trained psychologist and then a response from an academically trained philosopher who, we shall assume, knows very little about counselling. Let us suppose then that the client presents as claiming that part of his problem is that his boss seems to hate him.

The clinical psychologist might ask (in a non-challenging way), "What is it that makes you think that?"

The purely academically trained philosopher on the other hand might ask (in a somewhat challenging way), "What evidence do you have for believing that?"

The differences between these two responses are telling:

a) The philosopher is targeting the belief, and is already preparing to judge whether the belief is justified and whether, accordingly, it is likely to be true, with the aim to then inform the client, if necessary, that the belief is false, or worse, 'irrational'. The psychologist on the other hand, is asking because he or she wants to 'hear more,' that is, wants to encourage the client to just continue disclosing and talking—not with a view to checking up on the veracity of the client's belief, but with a view to grasping the larger context of this belief, so that some insight can be achieved into the nature and state of the mind of the person holding the belief.

The philosopher is looking to check up on a belief, while the psychologist is trying to gain an understanding of the whole mind, which holds the belief. More than this, the philosopher is assuming that the client is significantly troubled by the fact that 'the boss hates him', or that this fact, if it is a fact, has an important place in the issues which bring the client to therapy. In fact, the belief may be entirely tangential to the real difficulties, which lie below the surface of the client's self-presentation.

b) The philosopher is assuming and treating the client as if he or she is a rational calculator, that is, as someone who if it were shown to him or her that a belief is not justified, would then cease to hold the belief. By contrast, the psychologist is not making any assumptions about the client's ability to think and judge such matters rationally. Rather she prefers to explore the client's attitudes and approaches to his or her issues, and leaving open, for the moment, the issue of whether the person before her is particularly 'rational'. The psychologist would defend this view by pointing out that she routinely meets and helps people whom the philosopher would deem 'deeply irrational'. In fact, it would not be too much to say that when a philosopher finds that he or she is talking to someone who is deeply irrational this might well be treated as a sign that there is no point in continuing the discussion! Such is the tradition in philosophy: it pulls no punches about its aims: to resolve difficulties rationally.

c) The philosopher believes that the only right way to dispel a belief is to show that it is not justified; the only right way to encourage a belief is to show that it is justified. The psychologist by contrast believes that most important beliefs are

resistant to reasoning and that one needs to get to the 'cause' of the belief if it is to be either encouraged or discouraged. ('Cause' is being used here in a sense quite distinct from justification.)

d) The philosopher believes that the *client* has to accept the responsibility, as does any rational arguer, to talk about and discuss; only those things, which he or she deems are relevant to his or her concern and to decline to discuss things of secondary or only peripheral interest. Hence, the philosopher feels justified in assuming that the client knows that the belief in question really matters to the client, that it is relevant to the issues that bring the client into therapy. Beyond this, the philosopher talks to colleagues and students utilising the adversarial model, which involves assuming that the best hope for determining the truth involves each person taking a different side of the dispute where each accepts the responsibility to offer the strongest possible criticisms of the claims of the other party. But nothing could be less promising in the context of a counselling session where 'positions' are not clear, and where, indeed, neither the counsellor nor the client are able to take clear positions—each for their own reason. For example, the client may not yet have made the associations between disparate thoughts on the matter at issue. He or she is more likely initially to be confused, conflicted and unsure of feelings and thoughts that are being generated through the counselling process. A psychologist is likely to engage with the client in a mutual voyage of discovery in making those thoughts and feelings transparent. Until that is done the client will not know which things are truly relevant and therefore, need to be focused on in discussion. Finally, it will be clear that the client cannot take any kind of an objective stance towards something which apparently troubles him or her deeply. In a counselling session the attempt to use a model of intellectual dispute quickly collapses into absurdity or chaos.

e) The philosopher assumes that getting at the truth regarding all the relevant matters is the best way to alleviate the client's pain or distress. The psychologist may well view such an assumption as hazardous. He or she might judge that each of us can bear only so much truth and judge from experience that some self-deceptions, and some errors, are best left alone. The psychologist might advise us that one would do well not to change anything in the client's mind until one had thought very carefully of the extent of the likely effect.

Of course, in practice, philosophers do regularly make a temporary transition from one milieu into the other, that is, from academia into ordinary existence. The philosopher will have family and a variety of acquaintances who take him or her—at least occasionally—outside of the academic sphere. And on a personal level these temporary transitions may not amount to much of a problem.

This shifting is a common practice for any professional who works in a specialized field. But it is likely to become a serious problem when a different approach, one that does not naturally fit, needs to be mastered and sustained. Now, in ordinary life one does not have to shift in this way because one can just leave a social gathering where one feels uncomfortable. But it is quite a different matter when one is working with a client. The therapist has no escape from a client who is not comfortable with an academic approach, so the therapist has to learn how to shed his or her academic skin temporarily.

Indeed, it may well be that many academic philosophers understand this fact and are therefore somewhat sceptical that such practical philosophy can work. It may be that many philosophers will find the necessary *sustained* transition too difficult to maintain. And—given the nature of academic training—it really is no wonder that the ordinary person often misunderstands the deliverances of philosophers. Even some philosophers themselves believe that an academic approach, with its focus on theory that is unconnected to real life or that its strongly intellectual style serves little practical value. Lou Marinoff writes:

This kind of philosophy is mostly abstract and self-referential, with little or nothing to say about the world. It is rarely applicable to life. This approach is fine for universities. ... While it is essential for any field of study to expand its theoretical frontiers, academic philosophy has lately overemphasized the theory, to the detriment of the practice. I'm here to remind you that the living wisdom of philosophy, which is concerned with real life and how to live it, predates the institutionalisation of philosophy as mental gymnastics having nothing to do with life.

(Marinoff, 1999, p. 8)

Philosophical counsellor Peter Raabe (2000) makes the point that philosophers themselves are often reluctant to claim any sort of professional skill in a practical sense (Raabe, 2000). But the truth is that even in academia philosophers do get some practical experience in counselling. It is not unreasonable to presume that throughout his or her training a philosopher will at least have counselled students, perhaps initially as a teaching assistant and later as a professor and thesis advisor. The philosopher may also have done peer counselling (that is, acted as an untrained therapist) with colleagues in which counselling was, in all likelihood, little more than well-intentioned advice-giving. The value of this experience, however, must be tempered with the thought that what has proven successful with students (and even graduates) may not work very well when doing counselling with clients, that is, with non-academics, individuals who are neither students nor peers. Clearly, the dynamics of a relationship between even a philosopher and a student, or a colleague, are going to be very different from those in a relationship that a professional counsellor will need to develop with his or her clients. Perhaps the relationship between a professor and a thesis student is more akin to a professional counselling relationship, and may offer a plausible introduction to the craft of counselling. We keep in mind, however, that what generally brings a thesis student to a philosopher is not what brings clients into counselling. These dynamics will be discussed in detail in the section on the *Differences Between a Client and a Student*.

Now, to be fair, one cannot assume that all philosophers have not had any experience with counselling outside of academia. It may be that the philosopher has been counselled by a professional, or that he or she may have discussed other people's counselling experiences with them. So the philosopher may well have some rough idea of why people seek counselling and, as well, of what is involved when it is done properly. However, this acquaintance with the field is nothing like a thorough examination of the process. In fact, most of us do not examine our own

reasons for seeking counselling; the counselling has usually been suggested by a professional like the family physician or perhaps by a family member or friend, who believes (as a guess) that counselling might prove beneficial. By the same token one may advise others to seek counselling, perhaps hoping on slight evidence that it just might be helpful. But even given all of this, the actual process of what brings and keeps people in counselling is very unlikely to have been examined closely, and therefore, the philosopher is likely to have many misconceptions on these points, too.

Differences Between a Client and a Student

Ever since an early human gestured to another with palms turned up, imploring in the universal communication “I need help”, humans have been responding to one another with various forms of assistance. Some of this assistance has taken the form of physically helping another by carrying, pushing, pulling, lifting, protecting, or defending, for example, assisting your neighbour to shovel out her driveway after a snowstorm or carrying a heavy package for a frail senior or lending an elbow to a blind person crossing a busy intersection. These are all forms of offering physical assistance or help.

Another form of assistance has been showing another how to do something, get something, find something, make something, learn something and so on. In other words, teaching another through role modelling, physical demonstrations or through written and verbal communication: for example, think of instructing your young daughter how to put together a model car or showing your teenage son how to bake bread or teaching an undergraduate student the fundamentals of logic. These are various ways of assisting—by teaching.

Yet another means of assistance has been through verbal advising, suggesting or interpreting. For example, think of suggesting to a friend that it might be a good idea to invest in a particular stock or advising your unhappy friend that he should perhaps consider applying for a better paying position elsewhere or telling your daughter that the young man she is dating is probably going to become abusive given his behaviours to date and that she should maybe reconsider her commitment to him. This form of assistance takes on the guise of offering counsel to another.

What all of these have in common of course is that they are all different ways of assisting one another. And helping or assisting one another seems to be a natural feature of the human species in that we offer aid generally to anyone who appears to be in need of it or is overtly asking for it. The responding end—that is, that of assisting others—seems to be built quite naturally into human psychology.

What we need to do now is to examine more closely what brings adults to seek assistance and in particular, what role we will adopt in response to a request for aid, since there are many we can assume: i.e. teacher, facilitator, mentor, advisor, counsellor, etc. The assumption, of course, is that, as philosophical counsellors we are expected to counsel, what we need to understand is how clients are different from students so that we can alter our perspective and approach.

So let us begin to examine the point of view of the individual who is seeking assistance by looking at some examples, to see what the differences are between students and clients. The first point to note is that both clients and students get help because they ask for help: by contrast to a case in which someone finds help

being offered. But this active 'asking for help' is very different in the two cases: the student is asking for minor corrections to his or her fund of knowledge while the client comes to the counsellor with some realization—conscious or not—that the actual modifications resulting from the counselling may well include his or her whole outlook or worldview. In a very real sense the client in counselling is making herself or himself vulnerable at a deep level while the student is looking only for assistance in achieving an objective, that is probably already chosen: for example the mastery of some aspect of knowledge to some predetermined depth. Granted that the work of a professor occasionally can have a profound effect upon the outlook of some students; still, the declared business of the professor is to convey knowledge and to let that knowledge affect the student however it may. This 'however it may' is crucial. For example, a student who is led to a Marxist view through the purely didactic assistance of a professor has not been led to this new view of life: no-one has tried to achieve this effect. The effect is just one which will often happen when intelligent students are helped to read Marx in a sympathetic way.

So the difference between what happens to a student and what happens to a client is not best measured by the depth of the actual effect; the difference lies in whether the deep effect was intended, that is, whether the profound changes which result are an intended result of the interaction with the professional. Now a very commonly-held false assumption that will get philosophers into trouble almost immediately is the mistaken notion that people seek counselling because they consciously wish to change—in fact most people seek counselling telling themselves that they would like someone else to change, or some external aspect of their world to change, that is, their circumstances to change (Taffel, 2000). They tell themselves that if these external changes were made then their lives would become more manageable, and that they would become more content or somehow more peaceful. So, despite what one is likely to believe, very few people enter counselling because they consciously wish to change themselves. Now if they remain in counselling, a good counsellor will normally encourage his or her clients to consider a change in attitude or worldview, or to change some aspect of themselves as part of the process of counselling. But such an attitude is not generally a conscious feature of the client's own motivation for entering into counselling. For the record, recall Gerd Achenbach's (1997) recommendation that a counsellor should never attempt to change his client and should avoid all preconceived goals and intentions! This is good advice for the would-be counsellor.

Still, the client accepts that at some level that the intention may well be to effect profound changes while, by contrast, the student should be able to trust that the professor has no program to delve deeply into the student's character—and this difference is dramatic. In general, a student comes to the professor with the intention of being taught, while a client does not come to a counsellor with any expectation of being taught.

Perhaps one can say that a therapist carries a heavier burden of responsibility, since by actively encouraging a client to disclose personal problems, the therapist essentially takes on the troubles or the 'issues' of the client. And although the therapist must maintain a professional distance from the client, this becomes increasingly more difficult to do given the therapist has to at the same time maintain a demeanour of genuine interest, caring and empathy. It's a fine balance that is being constantly tested and adjusted. Of course, a professor could choose to

do that but the professor's responsibility in this area is constrained since, among many reasons, time and energy are limited by the demands of teaching and research.

But even having said that, one needs to add that a good professor probably understands that the process of education itself, properly conceived, involves retaining a certain distance between the educator and the student. The professor is cast in the role of a judge (e.g. judging whether the student meets the requirements of the course to get a pass, whether the student's work reflects adequate knowledge of the subject, whether the student understands the material, etc.) and that role requires a stance quite different from that of a counsellor who is expected to at least appear uncritical. In the case of a thesis advisor, the approach to a thesis student is somewhat better, since aggressive criticism is likely to cause serious self-doubt for the thesis student in completing the project. Hence, a thesis advisor tends to a more sensitive and diplomatic approach towards a thesis student.

As to objectivity, in the process of counselling, a counsellor is not expecting to get objective truth from the client, and the client is not expected to maintain strict objectivity. Indeed, the issues, which have brought the client into counselling, are generally matters of subjective perception and it is this, which may make them amenable to being 'resolved'. But the search for knowledge by contrast, in academia, is expected to produce objective knowledge, that is a kind of knowledge is being sought in which all can share, irrespective of character, problems, or personal issues—this is the ideal. Now, while students may very well have personal reasons for getting a degree—e.g. it's a family expectation, their best friend is studying the same subject, etc., still, given that the student understands what education is about, that is, the search for objective truth—then both professor and student will probably challenge one another's views in the search to get at the truth. And that 'objective' stance of the professor as educator militates against a too personal relation with students, even with thesis students.

Still, the situation becomes increasingly complex: even a counsellor knows that he or she must maintain proper boundaries with clients: that is, must retain a kind of objectivity similar to that which good educators also strive to achieve. Perhaps this much can be said: to the educator the subject is a discipline; to the therapist the client is the subject. The educator does not want to have an effect on the student except to help him or her to achieve an education: the therapist has the responsibility precisely to have an effect on the client: that is, to ameliorate the client's life to make it a little easier. Hence the therapist must 'care'—or at least make a show of caring—about the client's distress, suffering, issues, and fears in a way in which the professor need not. To put it in a nutshell, the professor might well accept that his or her teaching has made the student's psychological life harder, whereas a therapist strives directly to assist his or her client towards an easier life.

Of course, not everything is different. A common trap that both students and clients fall into, and one that is commonly encountered, is the tendency of the client or student to behave so as to win approval from the therapist or professor. The problem with this behaviour is that it is pretence: that is, neither the student nor the client has experienced anything significant within himself or herself, rather they have simply figured out what they believe will please their professor or therapist. Unfortunately, both professors and therapists alike are seduced into

believing that their students or clients have had some remarkable insights or transformations when in fact they are simply parroting what they think their professor or therapist wishes to hear. This tendency is mentioned here as a strong reminder for the would-be counsellor to be on the watch—even if it isn't unique to counselling.

Professor of Philosophy: Teacher/Thesis Advisor and Counsellor

We can say that the relationship a professor has as a thesis advisor with a graduate student as distinct from a colleague or to a regular student is probably most analogous to the kind of relationship he or she will be expected to have with a client. But there are still differences. When a professor is working in particular with a thesis student, the aim is generally narrow: that is, to assist the thesis student in learning, planning, and writing, to ultimately fulfil his or her potential as a student and researcher. In this context the target is getting something written which is good, and the problems which are causing the student difficulty are probably fairly well acknowledged by the student. In the therapeutic context, however, the aim, at least at the outset, is very broad: to help the clients discover, then to understand, and finally to deal with their issues. The relevant difference is that the professor working with a thesis student is 'assisting' in quite a different sense from the way in which he or she would be 'assisting' a client. A counsellor is targeting the client's functioning in life, that is, an extremely broad range of interest, whereas the professor as thesis advisor is merely focusing on one element in a person's life. And because the client in counselling may not know what is wrong and what is to be done, the therapist cannot know where all this will lead. By contrast the professor knows to narrowly target the learning/research process as it operates in a rather well-defined discipline and at a specified level of learning. Roughly put, the professor is in a targeted activity while therapy is more open-ended. Granted this is less true when the student is still deciding on a topic of study.

Another difficulty, given a philosopher's training and education, is that the philosopher may wrongly perceive all clients as rational calculators, that is, as individuals who can or should be reasoned with. Granted most clients may eventually be reasoned with effectively, yet clearly the approach in counselling needs to be very gradual and much gentler than an academic philosopher would like. Realistically, a philosopher cannot expect clients to hold their own in a rational discussion—and much is involved in the idea of 'holding their own'.

In sum, a philosopher needs to learn how to interact with clients in a way that is strikingly different from that generally used when working with students, even as a thesis advisor, or with colleagues for that matter—a tall order when one considers the difficulty we have in changing our way of interacting with others. A philosopher needs to develop an approach which is gentle, non-confrontational, and empathic—qualities which are not likely to be strongly represented in someone trained to be critical, to be challenging of others' thoughts, to seek truth before all else. Notably, clinical psychologists do go through a period of supervised training to ensure that they develop an approach appropriate to counselling.

The average client—that is, one not trained in reasoned argument—will likely react to reasoned argument (or a typically academic approach) in ways in which

an academic philosopher would not expect. For example, suppose that a client has a strong belief in fairies or nature spirits; she might tell her counsellor that she makes a point to stop and leave treats at the garden's edge for her fairies and that she offers prayers to the nature spirits. But if this eccentric belief in fairies and nature-spirits seems to have no negative effects on her life, a therapist would probably not challenge it, since it falls under the general rubric of religious beliefs and counsellors are not generally in the business of reforming a client's religious commitments. A philosopher, however, who may have dedicated all his or her life to getting to the truth, might feel an urge to challenge the client about her fairies. Indeed, the philosopher might want to offer arguments for abandoning the belief. Hopefully, a philosopher—particularly one who respects a generally coherentist view of truth—would search instead for inconsistencies in the client's views and hope to deal with the problem in that way.

Having said that, however, it might well be that the philosophical counsellor has already spotted a tendency in the client to be credulous, to defer too much to authority, to lack confidence in her ability to make independent judgements. If this is so then the belief in fairies might well offer an excellent opportunity for an approach to the issue of the client's epistemic habits. The very fact that the belief in fairies is not a central issue for the client will mean that it offers a relatively harmless but still useful foil to this end. Discussing this belief in fairies will offer a safe topic upon which to begin changing the client's habits toward a more critical attitude regarding her beliefs.

So, in this case, where the philosophical counsellor has a clear conception of the need for a sound epistemology, it is clear that he or she could offer valuable additional insights and strategies to begin the process of reforming a client's belief system, a reform which might well not bear fruit immediately but which could prove to have a profound beneficial effect in the long run: that is, as the lesson learned in the case of fairies is transferred, say, to issues in the work place or in family relations.

In another case one might worry that the philosopher may not even be made aware that his or her efforts have become futile in an even larger sense. This often happens in the case of a client that presents as being intelligent and confident about the issues that need dealing with. And so client and counsellor blithely proceed with the joint agreement of what the major issue might be, but the real issue—that is, the core issue—may not ever get addressed and so, in the end, the client may not be any better off than when she first came in. An example to illustrate how this might happen would be the case of a client who in fact is in an abusive relationship, but does not consider it abusive because she may not be prepared to deal with the understanding that she is choosing to remain in such a relationship. She may have rationalized to herself that she either deserves the treatment she receives from her husband because she is at fault, or she is afraid to leave the relationship because she is afraid not to be in a relationship. In other words she is engaging in what a psychological therapist would refer to as *denial*, or what the philosophical counsellor would refer to as *self-deception*. She may, therefore, enter into counselling stating in a confident manner that there are many stresses in her life, and she would prefer not to be so stressed, but doesn't know how to alleviate the stresses. She may even give examples of numerous factors she believes are causing stress in her life; but because of her self-deception she may neglect to mention the crucial factor which is contributing to her ongoing stress—

namely the nature of her relationship to her husband. The counsellor may even question her directly about her relationship and she may convincingly state that it is fine. And so the philosophical counsellor—inexperienced in what brings clients to counselling—may presume her reasons for wanting counselling are as provided by the client and may proceed with counselling entirely missing the core issue or root of her distress. Of course, this can happen to anyone in a counselling profession. Psychologists and other clinicians are alert to denial—which is very common amongst clients, especially amongst those new to counselling.

On the other hand, again, a philosopher because of her or his training may well have come across the problems associated with self-deception through the course of her or his training and might well have some sound ideas in this area. That is, he or she may well appreciate the aetiology of these kinds of deceptions, she or he will probably have studied the phenomenon in himself or herself and those near and marvelled at the intricacy and resourcefulness which ordinary people exhibit as they weave the interconnected webs of self-deceptions which, once strung, quickly become part of the fabric of character.

Such a philosopher has learned to take a keen interest in self-deception not just because academics, like others, are prone to such deceptions, but also because on a personal level, self-deceptions present among the most interesting and revealing facts about our public and private selves. So it's not at all clear that a philosophical counsellor will miss the signs—the hints, the delicate psychological flutterings—which mark a human's attempt to shade or hide their cherished beliefs from an examining light.

Another problem which may worry us is that a client may stop paying attention altogether: that is, no longer hearing or absorbing what the philosopher may be communicating—even that if it may be beneficial. And such clients may give no indication whatsoever that their minds have already shut off. A student, on the other hand, would tend to be upfront if she does not understand her professor's explanation. Granted, not all students have the confidence to be completely honest about their lack of understanding; still, a student is trying to learn from her professor, and has asked for the appointment, so it is important to the student to understand what is being said. But the reality is that a client does not generally enter counselling because he or she wishes to learn anything—or even to have anything done to her in terms of changing her attitudes, perspective, etc. This type of problem—that is, when a client does not listen to what is being said—usually happens because a client does not wish to face a truth. For example, the client may not want to accept that he himself must change rather than holding onto a false hope that somehow some external factor can or will change. If a client's partner is an alcoholic, for example, he may be engaging in behaviours that are co-dependent: that is, the partner may be indulging in rescuing behaviour and may, in this way, be contributing to his partner's addiction. The counsellor may point this out to him, but the client may not want to accept that his efforts to 'help' his partner are in fact contributing to the problem rather than alleviating it.

Cognitive therapist Aaron Beck (1981) would suggest that all the preceding examples of deeply entrenched belief systems appear to be relatively impervious to information that doesn't fit within them. Cognitive therapists would say that because clients come in with a more or less firmly held particular worldviews, and for this reason, insight—philosophical or otherwise—does not result in any quick behavioural change (Bohart & Todd, 1994). But it would be incorrect to assume

that therefore by clarifying the thoughts and concepts a client holds that the veracity of a belief system cannot be reached through philosophical intervention.

By recalling Glass's findings that 'talk' therapies do in fact lead to an increase in therapeutic effect then we can presume that it is through the intervention of a philosophical counsellor, whose overall goal is the well-being of the client, very broadly defined, which is probably promoted by, at least, reasoned argument and the client being honest and open (Glass, 2001). It is in this sense that the 'truth' of the matter should be gradually assimilated by the client.

Some Challenges along the Way

Let us grant that, in time and with long experience, a philosopher will probably come to adjust to the unique demands and challenges that clients offer, and that until that happens, the philosopher attempting to practice counselling will likely make mistakes—more or less serious ones. Let us grant further that some clients will be left worse off than before they entered counselling. At the very worst, the well-intentioned philosopher may challenge beliefs and attitudes in such a way that the client is undermined and left with even less confidence, worse guilt, deeper depression, less of a sense of self-worth, and so on.

Still, this does not mean that philosophers should not be doing philosophical counselling, nor does it mean that they should not be using reasoned argument. Quite the contrary, as indicated above, philosophers can offer clients unique opportunities for dealing with their issues that other professionals could not, because of the very skills and training a philosopher acquires. What philosophers entering into philosophical counselling need to do is to educate themselves about the particular population they will be working with, that is, they need to gain knowledge and understanding of the client mentality. They need to become aware of the complexity of the individuals who will be entering into a counselling relationship with them, they also need to learn how to be empathetic even when doing reasoned argument so that they do not inadvertently sabotage their own best efforts.

A final point is that philosophers will also have to adjust their technical language to that of their clients, so that they will be clearly understood. As Raabe says,

On a practical level, if philosophical counselling is to offer any benefit to the client, the philosophical counsellor must be able to articulate complex philosophical constructs to the client by using a vocabulary that is comprehensible to the client and compatible with the client's cognitive ability.

(Raabe, 2001, p. 211)

Clearly, only some philosophers will find that they have a talent in this area and so only some will find counselling congenial.

Conclusion

Despite the challenges, philosophers in academia can make the successful transition into private practice. It is their unique training and experience that gives

philosophers an edge over psychosocial professionals. Philosophers can use reasoned and rational argument, to help clarify the underlying cognitive structures (i.e., assumptions, beliefs and concepts) that form personal worldviews, in ways which will assist their clients towards achieving a better way of life.

Reasoning, problem solving, language, memory, attention and the organization of knowledge are deeply influenced by the kind of interaction that ‘talking’ therapies like philosophical counselling generate. Philosophical counselling—with its use of reasoned and rational argument and as Lahav (2001) reminds us, its traditional philosophical goal of wisdom and self-understanding—has a distinct advantage over other forms of non-behavioural therapies.

The behaviour and approach of the counsellor is crucial to getting through a client’s resistance in counselling. Ordinary persons are unaccustomed to reasoned and rational arguments in clinical settings. In order to effectively impart information to the client the philosophical counsellor needs:

to learn listening skills appropriate to the counselling setting;

- to acquire an understanding of what clients expect of ‘non-confrontational’ techniques of discussion;
- to develop a tolerance for the oddities of ordinary thinking;
- to learn to be interested in the trials and tribulations of lives lived outside the academy;
- to build on skills leading to empathy; to encourage the client to be honest and open in talking about himself or herself;

to expand their knowledge of the various philosophies of ordinary people.

To this end philosophers—hoping to make a successful transition into philosophical counselling—need training in the time-worn, proven standard counselling techniques in use by conventional therapeutic professionals. However, philosophical counsellors need to avoid such practices that produce ‘feel-good’ sessions, which pay no heed to clarifying and challenging the client’s belief system.

The normal goals of counselling will be significantly enriched by the addition of a requirement for honesty both on the part of the counsellor and the client. One has to assume that, providing the concern for honesty and openness is implemented in such a way as not to harm the client then it must be thought to strengthen the effect of the counselling since reality will not be acting to extinguish the conclusions reached in the discussions.

There is an opportunity for philosophical counselling to offer a significant advantage over other forms of conventional counselling. That is, the requirement for the client to be honest and open when talking about him or herself means that significant changes are going to be made in the practice of counselling. A whole range of fallacious reasonings are going to be barred, there will be an increased pressure for long-term results and for probing much more deeply and incisively into the cognitive and affective structures in the mind of the client.

No doubt, whether or not these surmises of an improved form of counselling are accurate, it remains true that such counselling will provide vocational opportunities for trained philosophers. It will then allow more students of the subject to devote their professional life to the subject. And, quite naturally, it will provide time and stimulus for them to write, to reflect upon new and interesting

philosophical experiences, which in turn are likely to stimulate new philosophical insights all of their own.

Finally, the possibility exists here that this new evolving profession will allow philosophy to find a way back into the culture and to provide a kind of service to the great numbers of ordinary people which it has never before provided.

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