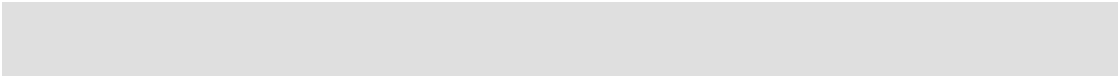


PHILOSOPHY AS THERAPY

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Abstract

This article reviews a number of recent books and practices that address a renewed interest in the role that philosophy might play in the living of a rich and fulfilling life. The review looks at books addressed to the general public as well as books which discuss such classical and Hellenistic philosophers as took their task to be helping people achieve happiness in life. It then turns to some newly emerging philosophical practices such as philosophical counselling in order to explore whether philosophy can still be a source of consolation or guidance in contemporary life.



Books discussed in this lecture:

Alain de Botton, *The Consolations of Philosophy*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 2000

Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life*, (Edited and with an introduction by Arnold I. Davidson), Oxford, Blackwell, 1995.

Lou Marinoff, *Plato not Prozac! Applying Eternal Wisdom to Everyday Problems*, New York, Harper Collins, 1999.

Shlomit C. Schuster, *Philosophy Practice: An Alternative to Counseling and Psychotherapy*, Westport CT, Praeger, 1999.

Peter B. Raabe: *Philosophical Counseling: Theory and Practice*, Westport CT, Praeger, 2001.

Introduction

There is a renewed interest these days in philosophy as a practice outside of the academy and as an interest for non-professional philosophers. The focus of this interest is the link between philosophy and the problems of daily life which, it is said, are not addressed by a great deal of academic philosophy. A possible exception to this claim is Michel Foucault's recent work on the 'care of the self' which he sees as the fundamental concern of classical ethics. But even this work is a part of his genealogical/historical project exploring the emergence of the modern subject, rather than an attempt to show how philosophy might help us live a richer and more fulfilling life. This lecture reviews a number of recent books and practices that address the latter interest and suggests that some themes of considerable philosophical

profundity lie at its base: themes about what constitutes a well-lived life, what is the nature of the self, whether the self can even be known, and whether the practice of philosophical inquiry and philosophical dialogue can, in themselves, help us to live better lives. If, in the classical period, philosophy played a role similar to modern psychotherapy, can it recover such a role today? Can it help us care for ourselves?

Popular Books

A great deal of public interest in philosophy has been stimulated by Alain de Botton's best selling book, *The Consolations of Philosophy* and the television series based on it, *Philosophy – a Guide to Happiness*. The book comprises six chapters in each of which a particular philosopher is invoked in order to provide insight and encouragement in relation to problems which threaten happiness in human life. So there is a chapter on how Socrates might help us with deal with unpopularity, how Epicurus might have dealt with not having enough money, how Seneca might help us face frustration, how Montaigne faced feelings of inadequacy, how a broken heart might be relieved by thinking about Schopenhauer's views on romantic love, and how Nietzsche's philosophy can help us cope with (but not overcome) difficulties.

The book is written for a popular lay audience and enhances its easy prose with illustrations and diagrams. It tells the stories of the six philosophers' lives as well as explicating relevant themes from their philosophies in a way that is both engaging and stimulating. Some professional philosophers who have reviewed the book have complained that the explications of the philosophers' thoughts are superficial, but such a charge needs to be evaluated in the light of the author's aims. Although there is no preface which explains those aims, the dust jacket promises us 'an indispensable compendium of advice on how to deal with some of our most familiar woes'. It also

promises 'a dazzling introduction to the history and uses of philosophy'. The latter the book clearly is not. If the book were a history of philosophy, or even of the six philosophers discussed, then we would expect a much more thorough treatment of the ideas of these philosophers. In the case of Socrates we would expect a discussion of such issues as the grounding of virtue in knowledge. We would expect to see the practical advice of Epicurus and of Seneca grounded in their metaphysics of a natural world ruled by chance and by reason respectively, and we would be told how Montaigne's views grow out of those of Epicurus and of Seneca. We would be shown how Schopenhauer draws on the tradition of Plato and of how radically Nietzsche rejected this tradition. But none of this is de Botton's purpose. For him, the issue is simply what we can learn from these thinkers in order to help us face the difficulties of our own lives.

Socrates helps us face our own unpopularity because he allowed himself to become unpopular in his community by asking troublesome questions. De Botton explains why he did this and sets out the logical structure of his questioning, thereby giving us some hints as to what it is to do philosophy. He also urges us to follow Socrates' example in following only the dictates of reason rather than popular opinions. But the main point which is meant to inspire us is that it was because of the courage of his convictions that Socrates was unpopular and put to death. We should take comfort from this and be inspired by it. Of course, it might be argued that unpopular people should take a good hard look at themselves and ask themselves why they are unpopular. The fault may lie with them. But this aside, there is no doubt that the story that de Botton tells is an edifying one.

The problem is that it is the story that is edifying rather than the philosophy. We are told what Socrates did in questioning his fellow Athenians. We are told about his trial and his acceptance of death. But we are not told about Socrates' philosophy apart from a few illustrations of his questioning taken from Plato's published dialogues. (Of course it is difficult, if not impossible, to extricate Socrates' thought from Plato's, but we are left to wonder whether there was any content of belief that Socrates was prepared to die for, or whether it was just his practice of rational questioning which was the object of his martyrdom.) The reader of the book is not given any reason to take courage in the face of being unpopular. He is given an exemplar. The reader does not have to do any philosophy in order to be comforted by Socrates. He or she needs only to be impressed by his story.

And so it is with the other five philosophers in the book. While we are given brief and somewhat superficial descriptions of the content of their ideas, it is the story of their lives and deaths that do the rhetorical work of giving comfort. So we are given impressive glimpses of Epicurus' communal and frugal life. We are appalled at Seneca's courageous obedience to Nero's command that he kill himself. We are relieved at the ordinariness of Montaigne's life as a city official, petty nobleman, and traveller. Schopenhauer was so unlikeable that one could not expect any but the most pessimistic and deflationary conception of romantic love from him. And Nietzsche's views are grounded, not in the radically monistic metaphysics of the will-to-power, but in his habit of taking walks in the mountains despite extreme physical ailments.

De Botton's eloquent writing style makes these philosophers come alive for us on the page. But if we are moved to receive consolation from them, it stems from their lives rather than their ideas. The book should have been entitled *The Consolations of*

Philosophers rather than *The Consolations of Philosophy*. There is very little encouragement in the book for readers to begin to do philosophy for themselves. Very few arguments are offered or critiqued. If there is consolation to be had from *doing* philosophy or thinking philosophically, then this book does not teach us how to do that.

In the chapter on Epicurus, for example, we are warned against being seduced by consumerist advertising and to value friends and rational thought. These nostrums are easy to accept, but also easy to ignore. By what process can they be made influential in one's life? It is one thing to give them intellectual assent, it is another to be motivated by them to change one's life. How do we overcome the psychological need for false consolations? Is it just ignorance (as in de Botton's example of trepanning as a benighted medical procedure) that needs to be overcome or are there deeper and unconscious drives that move us? It would seem that de Botton's strategy is that of the classical homily or the modern motivational speaker: present an impressive life as an inspiration to others. But if it is *philosophy* which is to be a fount of consolation or a motivation for changing our lives for the better, then it should be the agent's own rational thought which effects the change. Does thinking philosophically, whether 'philosophically' is defined in relation to form or to content, have the power to change our lives?

The trouble seems to lie, as de Botton's chapter on Seneca begins to make clear, in an ancient philosophical anthropology. On this view, reason is a faculty or 'part of the soul' whose role it is to control the passions. The ancients were at one in teaching the art of rational control as the means for living one's life well. The emotions were seen as disruptive forces welling up from the lower parts of one's being: namely, the body,

while reason, through which we participated in the life of the gods, had the task of taking control. The Stoics famously urged us to achieve such control by extirpating the passions. Plato's theory was more complex but helped establish the bifurcation. Can we still accept this view of human beings in today's post-Freudian world? If reason is the slave of the passions as Hume argued, and if the passions are as complex and self-deceptive as Freud argued, why should we be confident that rational thought will have any eudaimonistic influence on our lives? Perhaps it is because de Botton has no answers to these questions that he appeals to the edifying biographies of his philosophers rather than to their arguments.

Nietzsche is presented as standing in the tradition of Socrates. Yet it was he who has done most to question the classical conception of reason and its predominance in philosophy. With his wholly new conception of 'psychology' as a basis for understanding ideas, de Botton could have opened up urgent questions about the role that philosophy can play in the pursuit of a well-lived life. Instead we get little more than homilies and nostrums about bearing up under stress. My complaint here is not that de Botton has missed much that is important and valuable in Nietzsche. It is that he has not shown us how philosophy has become, for this thinker, a wholly new and different source of consolation in life: not as the rule of reason over the passions, but as the acknowledgement of what we are deeply within ourselves and the determination to become who we are.

If de Botton's book and his television series awaken an interest in philosophy in the lay person, then he will have made a valuable contribution to contemporary life. There will be several forms that such an interest might take.

Studies of the Ancients

One approach for a person inspired by de Botton to see how philosophy might help them live life more satisfactorily will be a study of the very philosophers that de Botton himself discusses. While there are many studies available that readers might pursue, there are a few published in recent years which focus on the relevance of these and other philosophers to the questions that de Botton raises: namely, how might philosophy help us live our lives more fully so as to attain happiness? Let us explore one of these texts.

In his inaugural lecture at his accession to the Chair of the History of Hellenistic and Roman Thought at the Collège de France, Pierre Hadot argued that despite all the diversity in Hellenistic thought and all the various influences upon it from other Mediterranean cultures, some common themes stand out. Firstly, philosophy is seen as a spiritual path through which the philosopher holds himself aloof from ordinary life. Moreover, the ideals and doctrines of the school will be embodied in the person of the founder or sage who gives his name to that community. He will represent an almost unattainable rational ideal and style of life, captured in the term, 'wisdom'. This is why philosophy seems strange to ordinary people. Thirdly, philosophers aim at self-improvement and moral integrity through the control of distracting passions and the acquisition of a virtuous character. The means towards these aims are meditation on the doctrines of the school and on the physics of the universe, imaginative unmasking of the illusory priorities of ordinary life, contemplation of death, dialogue on these themes with others, and other structured exercises of reason. The goal of theory is to serve practice: namely, the pursuit of serenity in the soul. There was little

critique of the school's doctrines since they served as a means rather than as an objective search for truth.

These facts present methodological difficulties for scholars. The written texts are a secondary deposit left by an oral tradition of teaching, dialogue, and debate and this makes exegesis of the extant ancient writings difficult. Much of classical philosophy consisted of commentaries on the writings of the founders of various schools, including Plato. So philosophy became a search for the authentic meaning of texts, rather than for truth (although the latter was seen as the inner meaning of the texts). The object of philosophical discourse is earlier philosophical discourse. This is a theme to which Hadot returns when he suggests later that contemporary philosophy may be caught in the same predicament.

A central theme of his book is that Hellenistic philosophical practice was focused on what Hadot calls 'spiritual exercises' of which the goal is 'a transformation of our vision of the world, and a metamorphosis of our personality' (82). The ancients used these exercises to learn how to become free from the passions and the worries of daily life, in the case of the Epicureans in order to enjoy the moment as something given by chance, and in the case of the Stoics, as a duty laid upon one by one's place in the cosmos. The Stoics argued that the 'natural' view of things (as opposed to the 'human' view) takes the universal and objective view and thus disabuses things of their putative importance. Only the moral goods of life, of which we are the masters, are relevant to our flourishing. Even the dialogues of Socrates are said to lead in this direction. With all the variety in different schools, the method of these spiritual exercises is common: namely, 'the rhetorical and dialectical techniques of persuasion, the attempts at mastering one's inner dialogue, and mental concentration.' (102)

Hadot suggests that the tradition of religious and monastic spiritual exercises of Christianity stems from the ancient philosophers. But it was also Christianity which came to rob philosophy of its role as a structure for such spiritual exercises. In medieval times it became a mere provider of intellectual tools for doing theology. And modern philosophy is heir to this intellectualist and desiccated tradition.

Hadot returns to this theme in his final chapter in which he stresses that philosophy was and is a *way of life*. Real wisdom makes us *be* in a different way. Wisdom may be unattainable, but it must be pursued so as to constitute our philosophical way of life. Philosophy in this sense is therapeutic in that it brings peace of mind and inner freedom through ‘cosmic consciousness’ (which, as I will explain below, is different from an objective scientific worldview in that it involves seeing one’s own place in the totality of things). “In order better to understand in what way ancient philosophy could be a way of life, it is perhaps necessary to have recourse to the distinction proposed by the Stoics, between *discourse about* philosophy and *philosophy itself*.” (266) Living as a philosopher is not just applying a set of theorems to life, but a self-transformation through the Stoic disciplines of physics, ethics, and logic. But the modern tradition of philosophy has become a discourse about philosophy.

While the Stoics concentrated upon the purity of one’s intentions so as to bring one’s individual will into conformity with universal reason, the Epicureans focused upon the pleasure of existing. In either case the goal was to be attained by rigorous intellectual work and attention to the present moment. Hadot disagrees with the common image of the Hellenistic philosopher as one who withdraws from the world. He thinks “there is an equilibrium – almost impossible to achieve – between the inner peace brought about by wisdom, and the passions to which the sight of the injustices,

sufferings, and misery of mankind cannot help but give rise. Wisdom, however, consists in precisely such an equilibrium, and inner peace is indispensable for efficacious action.” (274) This is a theme to which we will see other of our authors returning.

Hadot’s chapter seven discusses the Foucault of *The Care of the Self* and explains how Hadot thinks Foucault interprets the ancients as focussing too much on the ‘self’ and not enough on the objective and universal aspects of nature and cosmic reason by which we must guide our lives. Unlike Foucault, Hadot attributes a greater concern for justice and service of the community to the Hellenistic philosophers.

Aesthetic considerations have a deep resonance in Hadot’s view. We should not understand the ‘cosmic consciousness’ sought by the Stoics and others as an objective or scientific form of understanding. Rather such ‘philosophical perception’ should be seen as a form of aesthetic perception. Contemplation is not just a seeing of the world objectively, but an objective seeing of our unity with the world. It is this which, according to Seneca, requires an interior transformation of attitudes. And it is this which shows that the Hellenistic philosophers should not be seen as being preoccupied merely with an individualistic transformation of the self. Their concerns were truly with the world and with reality as a whole.

Philosophical Counselling

For those who are inspired by de Botton to study philosophy in relation to the question, How might philosophy help us live our lives more fully so as to attain happiness? there are a few highly relevant contemporary studies which seek to

continue the discourses established by the ancients. These centre on the philosophical practice called 'philosophical counselling'.

Marinoff's book offers a popular description of this practice. Whereas people used to go to priests or therapists for problems of life, there is now philosophical counselling available as well as group facilitation and organisational consulting. Marinoff explains that such philosophical practices consist in finding relevant ideas from the great philosophers (East or West) and applying them to the problem at hand, much in the way that de Botton does. In this way, stress and confusion can be avoided and guidance found. Marinoff explains that most counselling relationships are very short term, with many comprising only one session. They help people to think more clearly about their problems through the exchange of philosophical ideas with the counsellor.

Marinoff calls the process 'therapy for the sane'. That is, it does not do the work of psychotherapy or treat mental illness. Marinoff rejects the medicalisation of many life problems at the hands of the psychotherapeutic community. Being based on science, the approach of most psychotherapies is objective and causal and it is not obvious that delving into the causes of one's behaviour or concerns is always helpful in improving the situation. Marinoff would reject the notion that self-knowledge gives us freedom. Marinoff also critiques the medical model that is inherent in most psychological therapies, with its proliferation of diagnostic categories, the reification of syndromes, its seeming endlessness, and its irrelevance to everyday problems. Helping people should not be based on science, says Marinoff. It is an art. It requires empathy rather than scientific expertise.

Marinoff presents an outline of his own five-step approach which he designates with the acronym: PEACE.

- P Identify the Problem
- E Take note of the Emotions involved
- A Analyse, enumerate and evaluate the options available for solving the problem
- C Contemplate your entire situation. Develop an integrated and objective view of the problem and possible solutions. Draw on philosophical insights and interpretations of such problems and adopt a philosophical attitude.
- E Having made a decision after the earlier stages, you reach Equilibrium and are at peace with yourself and the solution you have come to. You are now ready to act and to use the insights gained in this problem situation in other situations in your life.

Marinoff illustrates this structure, and also argues how philosophical counselling would differ from typical psychotherapy, by describing the case of Vincent who was forced to remove a painting from his office wall because it gave offence to others. Vincent was angry about this. Marinoff says that a psychotherapist would tackle this anger as the problem, whereas a philosopher might help Vincent see and accept the injustice of what happened to him. Moreover, Vincent is himself responsible for the offence that he has taken at the incident and so for the anger he feels. Seeing this allowed Vincent to stand back from the issue and get on with his life. Central to this argument, which it only took one session to effect, was a distinction between harm and offence that philosophers are trained to make. So it is clear thinking rather than lengthy therapy can lead to a new equilibrium.

This form of practice draws insights and arguments from the tradition of philosophy in order to apply them to present problems. Accordingly Marinoff presents an extremely brief survey of philosophies and philosophers from Socrates through to the existentialists and analytic philosophers in the Anglo-American tradition that

Marinoff suggests we will find useful in the ‘contemplation’ stage of his five-step process. The survey includes some Eastern philosophers but is surprisingly silent on the Hellenistic and Roman philosophers discussed by Hadot. Readers of de Botton will recognise Seneca’s thinking in the Vincent case.

There are also some brief remarks of a more theoretical nature. Marinoff is grateful for Descartes’ distinction between body and mind because it makes philosophical counselling possible. If you have an illness or a problem that originates in your brain, he suggests, you should see a doctor. But if it is a problem in your mind, then philosophical counselling is apposite. There is considerable naivety in this view, assuming, as it does, the completeness of the mind/body distinction, the transparency of the mind, and the reality of free will as a function of the mind. Marinoff also attributes to Hume a view that he finds very liberating: namely, the view that there is ‘no such thing as necessary cause; that we can’t establish a causal connection between any two events.’ (65) He thinks that this implies that there is no predestination and that anyone can change. Now while it is true that it will be liberating for anyone to suppose that they can change, I doubt that one would need to deny the reality of causality or adopt Hume’s essentially epistemological view on this matter in order to yield this outlook. Marinoff’s interpretation of Hume is too brief to be enlightening and seems, at best, inaccurate.

The greater worry for a book of this kind is the way in which, like de Botton, Marinoff surveys a large number of philosophical ideas and picks up a few thoughts that might be relevant to how we contemplate life without delving into the reasons behind those views, the context in which they were developed, or whether they are rationally justified. The reader is meant to just nod in agreement and apply the idea to

their own life. There is no invitation to consider whether the ideas are sound or not. They are treated as if mentioning them in one or two sentences would be enough for them to have an impact on our attitude to life. This chapter and the rest of the book are liberally sprinkled with quotations from philosophers and, once again, one is put in mind of desk calendar aphorisms which are meant to do their edifying work by virtue of their pithy cleverness, rather than by the thoroughness of the arguments of which they are the outcome.

The next chapters present a number of cases to illustrate how philosophical counselling works. So there is the case of Doug, the late night DJ, who does not have anyone to love. Marinoff presents him with some insights from Lao Tzu and from Buddha. But the upshot of these considerations is that there may be psychological forces at play in Doug's life of which he is not fully aware (perhaps he got the late night job in order to avoid close contact with others). But if this is Marinoff's approach here, how does this differ from the pursuit of causes of which he accuses psychotherapy? And what does it do to Descartes' transparent self-knowledge? In other cases, Marinoff adopts a strategy which he calls 'bibliotherapy', in which he and the client study a relevant text together in order to find a solution to a problem and a deeper attitude to it. (In the discussion of his cases, Marinoff only occasionally refers back to the PEACE structure which he has described but, as he says that it is the Contemplation and Equilibrium phases that are distinctive of philosophical counselling, I assume that the introduction of philosophical sayings and texts are intended to enrich these phases of the process.) But, once again, one does not see him engaging in a deep philosophical dialogue using the text as stimulus material. Rather, the text is mined for pithy aphorisms which may (or may not) inspire a change in attitude.

The case of Tonya, on the other hand, shows some real philosophy being done (but Marinoff is not the counsellor in this case). Tonya is uneasy about the degree of commitment required of her in her marriage. Discussion with her displays that she understands 'being committed to her relationship' to mean having taken on obligations and fulfilling the expectations of others. Here there is room for genuine philosophical work which would consist in a conceptual and existential exploration of what commitment is. And it was such work that led to a new and fruitful form of equilibrium for her.

In another case, the counsellor teaches the client to meditate in order that he might break his habit of criticising his partner. How does this differ from many forms of psychotherapy? More generally, the form that philosophical counselling takes is that of finding a suitable quote or schema from any philosopher and applying it by analogy to the case at hand. It is therapy by analogy. Just how apt the analogy is is never discussed. The client's problem is just made to fit the pattern of the philosopher's thinking: whether it be Hegel's transcendence, Heraclitus' view of the interaction of opposites, Hobbes' notion of the state of war, Buber's I-Thou, and so on. Moreover, the client is expected to see their own situation clearly through the prism of the philosophy in question. Self-knowledge and philosophical understanding are both assumed to be easy. One could ask why the philosophers are mentioned by name at all. Does the client who is too self-giving need to be told about Ayn Rand in order that she be convinced to give some thought to herself? What is added to that suggestion by explaining that philosophy? Why not just point out the harm that this client is doing to herself so that she will change her attitude and establish a new equilibrium. Is the counsellor committing the fallacy of argument from authority?

What is striking as one reads the many brief case descriptions is that we never learn what Marinoff's philosophical commitments are. He has a philosophical *bon mot* for every case, but we never know whether he believes them himself. Many of them are inconsistent with each other. In one case we see him espousing both Kant's and Ross' conception of duty without seeming to notice that Ross' notion of a *prima facie* duty is at odds with Kant's absolutism. Where is Marinoff coming from in his relationship with his clients? Is he a philosopher with philosophical commitments and a dedication to help others see the truth as he sees it? Or is he a collector of sayings with which he can encourage and edify his clients but without any intellectual commitment on his own part? Does he think there is a genuine good for each case derivable from some general theory of the human good, or is he a postmodernist seeking only a particular solution acceptable to a particular individual? Is he a consequentialist or a deontologist? (He seems to be both.) He will even countenance the doctrine of reincarnation if that helps a client to face life's challenges. Will anything do, provided it helps? To what extent is he giving his clients just and only what they want to hear? Marinoff never defines what the 'philosophical outlook' is that he thinks clients should attain. Is it a theory that is rationally worked through and justified, or is it just a comforting attitude? The advice given by the ancients was backed up by metaphysics. How valuable can advice be that does not have such a basis?

Marinoff also shows himself unaware of the social and economic contexts of his clients. Many of them seem to have opportunities and possibilities that are denied to those of more exigent means. That work should be creative in order to be satisfying is a platitude not only because it requires analysis of its key terms but also because creative work is not available to a vast number of people. It is striking that most of Marinoff's examples are of success stories. Given a little philosophical counselling,

Marinoff's clients all go off and have beautiful relationships, success at work, and meaningful lives. Nothing ever goes wrong once you have been touched by philosophy. What about 'permanent adversities' such as bad luck or the evil that is done to you by others? The most obvious manifestation of our powerlessness in relation to reality is our own death. And here Marinoff takes on a much less confident tone. How you face death is up to you.

The modern practice of philosophical counselling was developed in recent times by the German philosopher Gerd Achenbach and is continued today by members of the International Society for Philosophical Practice which he founded. Shlomit Schuster's book describes the concept and methods of philosophical counselling that have been developed within this recent tradition and raises a great many questions as to what, precisely, philosophical counselling is. Using a medical metaphor, how does such counselling differ from psychotherapy in all its many forms (including psychoanalysis understood as a form of 'talking cure')? What are the methods of such counselling that mark it off as distinctly *philosophical*?

After an historical survey of the practice, a wide ranging survey of writings about it, and an exposition of its theory, Schuster's answer to this last question is that philosophical counselling is dialogical. It is a conversation. Indeed, following Achenbach, Schuster insists that there is no method being followed in a counselling session. Just as one does not follow a plan or a strategy in a conversation, so philosophical counselling involves only a 'method beyond method'. The impetus behind this thought is the need to distinguish philosophical counselling from all forms of psychiatry, psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, or other 'treatments' conceived on a medical or therapeutic model. Inspired by elements of the anti-psychiatry movement

of the sixties, Schuster sees such therapeutic approaches as objectifying the client. (Schuster refers to her own customers as ‘visitors’ rather than as ‘clients’). A therapist produces a diagnosis. That is, he forms a theory about the client and about what the unconscious or otherwise hidden causes of their problem might be. A therapist interprets what a client says and the way she behaves in terms of categories of pathology, and claims to have a better knowledge of the client’s motivations and drives than does the client herself. In this way there is an inequality of power between therapist and client. The therapist is an expert and the client becomes an object of treatment. The ideal of philosophical counselling, in contrast, involves a mutuality between counsellor and visitor as they engage in a conversation with salutary intent.

There is a very deep philosophical-anthropological commitment in such a practice which Schuster fails to acknowledge fully. To express it in old fashioned terms, it accords a higher place to free will than is customary in contemporary ways of thinking. Under the influence of Freud, and such philosophical precursors of Freud as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, postmodern humanity is apt to think of itself as subject to unconscious and instinctual drives as well as the formative – and sometimes baneful – influences of society, upbringing, and circumstances. When we are unhappy we tend to look for causes by interrogating the parenting we have received, the partners we have chosen, or the job we have ended up in. And if things are not immediately clear to us we might seek the help of psychiatrists or other psychotherapists. The promise of such a practice is that by becoming clear on what is causing our unhappiness, the hold of those causes upon us will be loosened and we will be freed to pursue our authentic goals successfully. This is the promise of the modern form of self-knowledge.

Schuster adheres to an older faith. Just as Socrates had held that explicit knowledge of how to live one's life would lead one to live well, so today's philosophical counsellors hold that by becoming articulate about the goals, ideals, and concerns of one's life, one will be able to live more effectively. What is the basis for this view? It is that when we act – in a genuine sense of 'act' – we are motivated by reasons rather than moved by causes. And we can take more control and accept more responsibility for our lives when we are conscious of these reasons and when these reasons are, indeed, rational and intelligent. Rather than seeing ourselves as subject to motivational forces – a self-image that is antithetical to taking responsibility for one's own life – Schuster appeals to philosophers like Sartre to stress freedom and authenticity. An authentic life is a Socratic life: that is, a life in which there is honest self-appraisal and rational inquiry into goals. In short, an examined life. The role of philosophical counselling is to engage in the kind of conversation with visitors which will allow those visitors to attain to a greater degree of rational self-knowledge and responsible self-control.

This presents two problems. Firstly, the evaluation of the practice of philosophical counselling depends upon a resolution of that most perennial of problems in philosophical anthropology: namely, the nature of human freedom and responsibility. It is a problem which, as the debate between Socrates and Aristotle over 'weakness of will' shows, has been with us for a long time. And, as contemporary fascination with such theories as sociobiology shows, it is far from resolved. Self-knowledge is difficult to attain. Secondly, while there may be many people who have a requisite degree of self-possession for living life in the light of good reasons and explicit knowledge of what is good for living (whether that knowledge will have been attained by their own study and reflection or with the help of conversations with a philosophical counsellor), the unfortunate fact is that there are a great many people in

our society who find themselves unable to do what they want to do or know it is good to do. The claustrophobic person may want to get into a lift and have a perfectly well thought out reason for doing so. Yet he finds he cannot do it. Whom should he consult: a philosophical counsellor who can help him clarify his reasons (and thereby, perhaps, make them motivationally stronger), or a therapist who might successfully expunge the phobia and so free the client to act as he wants to (assuming that the therapy used is effective)? Is the difference here one of degree? Is there a range of approaches with Rational-Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) at one step removed from philosophical counselling at one end, and electro-convulsive aversion therapy along with milder forms of behaviour modification at the other? And where would psychoanalysis be on such a spectrum? Schuster asserts that the difference is one of type. For her, philosophical counselling is generically different in that it respects, and seeks to enhance, the autonomy of the visitor.

But her reports of cases belie this assertion. Many of the cases that she describes in the last third of her book are of problems that result from causes rather than bad reasons. So one person is unable to sleep. Another engages in compulsive behaviour. There is a case of eating disorder. Another has irrational feelings of guilt. There is a case of a person with suicidal tendencies and another has nightmares. Many have been in one form of therapy or another and found the experience unsatisfying. Schuster frequently forms theories about her visitors and about what is wrong with them (how is this not an objectifying diagnosis?). In the light of such theories, she often gives advice. And she also admits that, often, salutary effects flow just from the visitor having a chance to express their worries and feelings. Just how different is all this from the less manipulative forms of psychotherapy? There are only a few cases where the visitor is in need of a philosophical worldview in order to help make sense of life

and even then, rather than engage in dialogue, Schuster refers her to a philosopher from the Western canon. She often gives visitors (even the ones whose problems have unconscious causes) philosophical texts to read (sometimes quite difficult ones and she does not report helping the visitor to understand them), or instructs them on the ideas of relevant philosophers. In short, when a philosophical approach is taken it is recognisable as philosophical only because of its content and not because of its process. Whether she acknowledges it or not, Schuster is a therapist.

As with Marinoff, Schuster's 'method beyond method' of counselling smacks of the 'aphorisms for sale' approach. There is no commitment to any one philosophical position on her part and there is little attempt to teach visitors to do philosophy for themselves. If it is therapy it should be based on psychological theory – and it isn't. If it is philosophy it should respect the autonomy of the visitor and propound a coherent philosophy – which it doesn't.

Peter Raabe's book is at once more thorough and more effective in identifying a distinctive practice of philosophical counselling. Based on a PhD thesis, the text begins with an exhaustive survey of an extensive literature in which forms of counselling that either explicitly or implicitly claim to be philosophical in some sense are described and, in many cases critiqued. About the only field missing from Raabe's survey is that of pastoral care which would have provided an interesting comparison, especially since he does discuss cases of group sessions in prisons which have rehabilitative aims. Themes that emerge are that the aims of philosophical counselling are to help clients (Raabe does not use the term 'visitor') come to know themselves and to understand their lives better by philosophical means. It concerns questions about the meaning of life and other existential themes and seeks to fill the void left in

our spiritual lives by the cultural eclipse of religion. Insofar as our emotions and attitudes are as important to such aims as our reasoning, it does not just confine itself to logic and critical rationality. It is client centred and seeks to explore, critique, or ground the client's worldview through dialogue. It aims to assist clients achieve authenticity in self-knowledge and action. The counsellor is said to be using hermeneutic techniques of understanding and to encourage the client to apply phenomenological forms of thought to their self-understanding.

Raabe discovers a great many methods used by various counsellors which draw on a bewildering variety of philosophers and psychologists. He also distinguishes specific techniques and strategies, some, like Marinoff's, involving stages or steps in definite procedures. He agrees with those who reject the 'beyond method' approach arguing that for an incipient profession to adopt an 'anything goes' approach would be for it to jeopardise its credibility. Raabe devotes an entire chapter to the dialectic between philosophical counselling and psychotherapy in its many forms. He agrees that it differs from psychoanalysis which seeks causes of which the client is unconscious, but points to other forms of psychotherapy, such as REBT, existential therapy, and logotherapy, to which it bears similarities. Indeed, he questions whether the distinction is sustainable, especially since many forms of psychotherapy involve the 'intentional stance' towards clients (seeing them as autonomous and acting on reasons) that is central to philosophical counselling. So once again, what is distinctively philosophical about this practice? Perhaps, given the expectations with which clients come to philosophical counselling, this practice ought to be acknowledged as being therapeutic in the modern sense.

In the central section of the book, Raabe offers a four-stage method or process which should mark philosophical counselling at its best. While not every period of counselling with a client may involve all four stages and may not need to, an ideal and complete program would. Raabe suggests that the various aspects of these four stages exemplify what other writers on philosophical counselling have seen as its central feature. In this way his model combines what is best in many other accounts. The first stage is called 'Free-Floating' and consists in the client expressing their problems and feelings while the counsellor listens carefully and sensitively but with a minimum of interruption or direction. As Schuster had noted in some of her cases, giving clients the opportunity to unburden themselves of their concerns or questions can have a salutary effect in itself. This stage is exploratory for both client and counsellor in that the former can explore what the process involves while the latter can judge (but without forming a diagnosis) whether the case is amenable to the philosophical counselling approach. This stage may last for several sessions of one hour as both parties move towards a deeper understanding of the situation or concern of the client. Insofar as the counsellor contributes, it is to offer reassurance. Raabe suggests that this stage echoes Achenbach's and Schuster's 'method beyond method'.

The second stage is that of 'Immediate Problem Resolution'. It is at this stage that philosophical counselling is most like psychotherapy. The client might have problems making a difficult decision, or be inhibited in life by barely understood personality factors. There may be a moral dilemma, or a lack of understanding of what is important in a situation. At this stage, the counsellor does indeed act as an expert and seeks to guide the client (by Socratic rational argument used to uncover misconceptions, in the example that Raabe offers) to a solution to the problem. That said, it remains true that the solution must be genuinely discovered by the client and

not just offered by the counsellor. At this stage, the counsellor works within the worldview of the client (in his example, Raabe does not challenge his client's religious beliefs) so as to uncover a solution that the client can immediately accept. The progress towards the solution should be rationally grounded by logical steps in premises and assumptions that are already in place. The counsellor should use no rhetorical means of persuasion such as would allow the client later to suppose that he had been conned. Many clients leave counselling after the successful completion of this stage.

But the third stage begins to highlight the distinctly philosophical nature of philosophical counselling. It is the stage of Teaching as an Intentional Act. Having left the immediate problem behind the counsellor now seeks to impart the skills of logical and critical thinking that had allowed that solution to emerge so that the client can, in future, deal with such puzzles on their own. Raabe notes that many writers on philosophical counselling espouse this goal but do not display it in their practice. They seem to assume that having gone through a rational process the client will just pick up those skills implicitly. Raabe sees philosophical counselling as teaching. One directly relevant way of approaching this will be to review stage two after the event and uncover the intellectual moves that had been made in it. But it is not only logic that is involved here. There should also be theoretical discussion of emotions and other personality factors that enter into the living of life. This stage should be productive of insight. Perhaps the practice of Socrates exemplifies this stage insofar as, when it succeeds, it empowers the client to live life with self-sufficiency.

Long term clients may want to proceed to the fourth stage of the philosophical counselling process: namely, 'Transcendence'. It is here that the client is led to see

themselves and their lives in the context of a larger whole, whether it be society, the world at large, or a religious conception. This stage seems to echo Marinoff's 'Contemplation' and 'Equilibrium' stages. At this stage there is discussion of the adequacy of world-views and there may be challenges to the conceptions that do not hold up to rational scrutiny. The counsellor is not seeking to impose his own views, but he is teaching the client to think critically about their own and to discover the standards and criteria of acceptability for such views. Here the goal is to be as objective as possible and to do philosophy. Here the client is developing their own theory about life and the world. Raabe does not say so at this point, but I would imagine that at this stage it might be appropriate to give the client short texts to read between sessions and then to discuss them. This would be more than just providing a few thought provoking epigrams or aphorisms because attention would be drawn to the arguments in the text. I also imagine that it may also be appropriate to pursue the aims of this stage of philosophical counselling in the form of well structured Socratic Dialogue group sessions. Raabe makes the important point that this and the previous stage of philosophical counselling are proactive and preventive in the life of the client in that they ground her rational autonomy. I imagine that the nature of the counsellor-client relationship becomes quite difficult at this point. The counsellor has taken on the role of a teacher but, like all good teachers, will need to take care to both introduce new and challenging ideas while still respecting the ideas and worldviews that the client already evinces. The counsellor must not impose his views or disparage those of the client while still bringing the client to new understandings and, perhaps, to a revision of previously held views.

It is these last two stages of philosophical counselling that makes it distinctly philosophical. They also account for the insistence of many in the philosophical

counselling movement that only trained philosophers should be engaged in philosophical counselling. This point is also relevant to the question of what sort of training is appropriate for a philosophical counsellor. This is an issue that is being hotly debated within the profession, with Schuster leading the faction that would eschew formal training and Marinoff heading the faction that would insist on training and accreditation. If Raabe is right to suggest that there is no deep difference between philosophical counselling and certain forms of psychotherapy, and if Schuster's cases, many of whom require therapy, are typical, then it would seem to me that a philosophical counsellor should first be a trained therapist. It will be necessary for the sake of the first and second stages of the process that they be trained or experienced as therapists and it will be necessary for the sake of the third and fourth stages of the process that they be highly competent as philosophers and as teachers of philosophy.

There is much to be learnt for counselling from the Western tradition of philosophy. Philosophy is more than just intellectual skill. It also contains content that will help us live our lives well. And this is not just content in the form of inspirational aphorisms and edifying sayings. Such content could be conveyed by anyone with a good dictionary of quotations. Philosophy also gives us a form of thinking which enhances our lives through protecting us from prejudice and error, deepening our understanding, and enlarging our vision through our own thinking. Accordingly, to help someone live their lives well requires that one teaches them to *do* philosophy rather than just conveying insights from philosophers. And this in turn requires that the counsellor *be* a philosopher in the fullest sense of that term.

The final section of the book contains a number of case studies which amply illustrate what has gone before. We learn from these that Raabe does give his clients apposite

essays to read between sessions (and thereby indicates that counsellors should be sure to equip themselves with a wide range of reading both within and outside of philosophy). He also asks clients to write between sessions on occasion. I would imagine that their keeping a more formal journal would also be of use. Raabe also describes group sessions using both Leonard Nelson's 'Socratic Dialogue' method and Matthew Lipman's 'Community of Inquiry'.

The fourth of Raabe's stages is of special interest to me because of my own view of what makes a practice distinctively philosophical. Taking my inspiration from Aristotle's four-part analysis of human functioning (designated by him as 'parts of the soul'), I place great importance on the contemplative function which he distinguished from the calculative function. We use the latter when we plan, think logically, and intelligently order our lives, and when we act with forethought, insight, and prudence. But our lives are not complete when we live well at this level of our being. We also have a deep need for seeing ourselves within a larger world-view. Religion meets this need by placing our lives within the context of a theological story. Some political ideologies do it by placing our lives into a context of an historical trajectory. And I am impressed by the view that the quest for justice provides such a framework. Whatever form it takes, some larger view of this kind is a spiritual need that we all have and which both Plato and Aristotle thought grounded a fully happy life. Philosophy (along with theology, theoretical physics, art, politics, and possibly other human cultural forms) answers to this need. Accordingly, any counselling process that calls itself philosophical must go beyond offering pragmatic or therapeutic help to people. It must take them to what Raabe has called a level of transcendence. And this does not mean that it must teach metaphysical doctrines. Rather it means that it must inaugurate a form of thinking which enters the domain which classical philosophy has

opened up to us. We must develop what Hadot calls an aesthetic perception of our place in the totality of things.

Conclusion

The ancient inscription in Delphi, 'Know Thyself', and Socrates' claim that 'The unexamined life is not worth living', have given rise to important traditions within western philosophy. Under the influence of the enlightenment and the individualism of modern life, this has become a quest for fulfilment in life through thinking philosophically. What this has meant includes knowing oneself truly and living in accordance with that knowledge so as to achieve integrity and authenticity. It has also meant seeing oneself in the context of a larger whole, whether that be the cosmos, nature, history, or society, and living in accordance with that conception so as to achieve an ethical life. Contemporary philosophers are also beginning to see that it involves living in dialogue with others so as to create community and a less individualistic form of ethical self-knowledge. But in all cases it means using the methods of reason and argument in order to clarify thinking, avoid self-deception and superstition, and develop a warrantable world-view.

In what way are these practices distinctively philosophical? Is rational process enough? Or is there a content which may be called wisdom? The quest to know oneself and to achieve authenticity urges us to transcend the distortive layers of culture and causality upon our being and to become true to our true self. The quest to understand the cosmos and reality as it is in itself is similarly an attempt to transcend the distortive layers of culture and tradition upon our knowledge of reality. Perhaps these two quests are one and the same. It may be that the spiritual exercises or the 'care of the self' that Socrates inaugurated with his dialogical style of life lead

inevitably to the seeking of a 'cosmic consciousness', or an 'aesthetic perception', in which one achieves, through contemplation, a world-view and a self-conception marked by equilibrium and transcendence. It is only in modern times that the self that enters the dialogue, asks the philosophical questions, and is itself in question has been interpreted so individualistically. Perhaps in these postmodern times we will find ourselves when we stop looking for ourselves or seeking self-control and acknowledge the greater realities of which we are a part.