

# On the Competence of Philosophical Counsellors

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## Abstract

*In this paper, I will discuss my research into the competence of philosophical counsellors, i.e. the ability to perform their work well. I studied the literature and conducted a series of open interviews with philosophical counsellors in the Netherlands and Flanders. I could distinguish three basic competences: questioning, interpreting and understanding. These competences are sets of mutually related skills used by a counsellor during a dialogue with a client, group or organization, grounded in philosophy. The philosophical questioning is grounded in the skeptic tradition, interpreting in the stoic tradition, and understanding in the source of philosophy itself with its search for wisdom and truth. These competences can be called arts as they result from mastering techniques already acquired during the study of philosophy. However, applying them to human beings instead of to texts requires additional training in psychology, discussion techniques or management of a practice. Different styles of philosophical practice emerge by more or less accentuating one of the three basic competences. I will argue that the basic competences will become a distinguishing feature of a philosophical practice when used in a reflective way, e.g. a conscious application of a sequence of questioning, interpreting, understanding, questioning the understanding, etc. The results of this research can be used for developing competence-based educational programs for philosophical counsellors.*

**Keywords:** Philosophical Practice, Philosophical Counselling, Competences, Educational Programs

*For the work reveals in actuality what is only in potentiality*  
Aristotle, Ethics

## Introduction

Philosophical practice is an emerging paradigm in counselling (McLeod, 2002). It originated in the late 1970s from critiques of academic philosophy or psychotherapy. With social utility in mind philosophers started counselling aimed at individuals, groups and organizations. After some time, the sociological characteristics of a paradigm emerged (Kuhn, 1970), such as a theory (Hadot, 2002a, 2002b), recognized examples like Achenbach (2001), Marinoff (1999) or Brenifier (2006), professional organizations, journals, meetings and training courses. As it was a *new* paradigm, an ongoing fundamental discussion was also encountered. There still is no consensus on nature, matter or method of philosophical practice. This hinders the development of an educational programme for philosophical counsellors. Many different courses are offered, but which one suits philosophical practice? There are no established criteria for that. Some say the study of philosophy is sufficient, others call for additional training. In fact, there is no officially approved educational programme for philosophical counsellors in the

Netherlands to date.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, I studied the literature and documents from the archive of the Dutch Association of Philosophical Practice, and conducted a series of open interviews with philosophical counsellors in order to answer the questions: (i) What is philosophical practice? (ii) What competences do counsellors need for philosophical practice? (iii) How to translate these competences into educational programs? In this paper, I present the results of my study. Different competences can be identified. They can be reduced to three basic competences (abilities) and integrated into a theory of philosophical counselling.<sup>2</sup> The results of this research can be used for developing educational programs or the training of philosophical counsellors based on competences.<sup>3</sup>

### What is philosophical practice?

In the Netherlands, there is an ongoing debate about the question what philosophical practice actually is. Some philosophers consider it a practice, just like medical doctors or psychologists speak of their practice when they refer to a room where people visit them for advice. From such a point of view, the philosopher becomes a counsellor and philosophy a form of consultation (Basili, 2008). Others speak of a philosophical practice in a broader sense. They tend to see it as a faculty of everyday life, a life style, an art of living, a 'praxis' in a political or ethical sense. From this point of view, philosophy actually is philosophical practice and counselling a vehicle to attain a philosophical way of life (Achenbach, 2001). These different points of view make it difficult to define the concept 'philosophical practice'. Gerd Achenbach, one of the founding fathers of philosophical practice, recently spoke of a philosophical practice as 'the work(s) of a philosopher'.<sup>4</sup> This definition has the force of simplicity. It seems to hold in general. It involves both ends of the spectrum—consultation or art of living—and it even includes a philosopher writing a paper or a book, or teaching a class of students. It has the weakness of being too broad. We might want to add something to this descriptive definition, so that it becomes something like: 'the work of a philosopher in a spoken dialogue with people who do not need to have (academic) training in philosophy'. In this way, counselling becomes a vehicle for philosophical practice in a broader sense of the word. It also follows that studying the activities of a philosopher at work gives a clue in defining the concept of philosophical practice. These activities have different forms nowadays. Some counsellors restrict their consultations to a radical, Socratic questioning, like Brenifier (Fastvold, 2006); others follow Achenbach and the tradition of understanding ('Verstehen'). However, most of them work in an interpretative,

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<sup>1</sup> The Dutch Association for Philosophical Practice (VFP) has 140 members to date. Sixty five members hold a philosophical practice, most of them part-time. They offer Socratic dialogue and/or individual consultations. They all hold a degree in philosophy, but they differ in their post-graduate education. The VFP offers an additional training in philosophical counselling. This course is not competence based, but shaped by the experience of counsellors.

<sup>2</sup> Eight interviews with founding fathers of the VFP. Questions were asked as stated. Answers were examined critically and further elaborated on. I selected themes from the interviews and the policy documents of the VFP, appearing almost every year since 1989. I bundled the themes in a theory, thus following the grounded theory approach of Glaser and Strauss (1967), founders of the qualitative research methodology.

<sup>3</sup> This suits developments in higher education where competence-based programs seem to be the norm nowadays.

<sup>4</sup> Reutlingen, Frühjahrstreffen IGPP, 16 April 2008.

therapeutic style, like Lou Marinoff.<sup>5</sup> Thus, there are different applications of the concept 'philosophical practice'. What is common in the practice it refers to?

### Discovering competences

Competences might be the common ground of the different forms of philosophical practice. By studying the work of a philosophical counsellor, we can distinguish different tasks he or she performs and discover competences for performing these tasks well. A common definition of competences in service or business industry reads: 'the ability of people to perform work to a set standard in employment' (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). The normative element of this definition is remarkable. A 'set standard in employment' is exactly what is lacking in philosophical practice to date. Therefore, I prefer a more neutral definition of competences by focusing on 'abilities of people'. This concept can be understood by Aristotle's distinction between potentiality and act (Aristotle, 1988: p69f). For example, a tree can be a seed or an oak with stem, branches and leaves, and there is a connection between the two different forms of the tree; the seed becomes a full-grown tree, because it has the potential to do so under the right circumstances (water, sunlight, etc.). The same holds for people. A runner can run a marathon in about 2 hours and 4 minutes, but he is actually not always running marathons. It is something he might be able to do under certain circumstances (a competition, a race to run, etc.). He might even fail to do so, but we still believe he can do it when there is evidence for holding that belief. A competence is related to beliefs, circumstances and relational (not inherent) properties of a person. It is something, which *could* reveal itself when the context is right. In order to discover a competence we have to look at what counsellors actually do and trace back the underlying competence, analyzing beliefs, context and relationships, following Aristotle: 'For the work reveals in actuality what *is* only in potentiality' (1988, p299). In this way, my empirical approach incorporates a philosophical idea. I gathered beliefs of philosophical counsellors in the context of the work of a philosopher and I tried to explain philosophical practice by a conceptual model.

### A philosophical counsellor at work

When we study the work of a philosophical counsellor, whether in individual counselling, moderating groups or advising organizations, actually we see the counsellor (i) communicating with guests or clients,<sup>6</sup> and (ii) applying knowledge and skills acquired in the academic study of philosophy.

(i) In philosophical practice, a philosopher enters into a spoken dialogue with a guest or client. A dialogue can be understood by looking at the (specific) rules people follow in a language community (Wittgenstein, 1950). Rules can be more or less explicit. For example, a basic rule can be that one person speaks (*active*, sender) while the other keeps silent and listens (*passive*, receiver). However, this

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<sup>5</sup> I consider them prototypes of philosophical practice. In the Netherlands, counsellors studied their work or followed training courses abroad and applied the knowledge gathered there in a construction of their own practice style. Eite Veening developed a method, called 'Aristonide', based on analysis and radical questioning for individual counselling. Will Heutz is well known for following Achenbach's approach in the hermeneutic tradition. Most counsellors in the Netherlands work in a therapeutic style, like Marinoff (see Delnoij & Van der Vlist, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Following Achenbach, I prefer the word 'guest' for the persons we counsel.

does not always hold. For example, in *opera* we encounter a highly appreciated 'way of speaking' quite unlike normal conversation. Interlocutors seem to speak on their own account, not listening to each other, sometimes even speaking at the same time. We call this a duet or ensemble. And when we hear people speaking in trains, on the metro (e.g. via cell phones) or at parties, this even seems to be a very common form of communication. It is an uncomplicated mode of speech almost without any rules. Not much attention is being paid to what is said or how it is formulated. Sharing an atmosphere seems to be the main purpose. It is a way people share 'togetherness'. An argumentation seems to be other end of the spectrum. When people enter into an argumentation they follow explicit rules for speaking, sometimes they even apply logical rules, they reason. There is a high level of attention. Participants have to be (very) conscious about what they say. They 'think'. Information is exchanged in a highly efficient way. It is the predominant form of communication at universities or (some) ministries. The objectivity pushes the speakers into 'otherness'. A dialogue is in between a duet and an argumentation. Sometimes explicitly-stated rules are used; sometimes the communication is aimed at fostering the atmosphere of being together. A dialogue can be defined as an exchange of arguments within a certain atmosphere. In philosophical practice, a dialogue looks like a wandering, a philosopher and a guest joining in a search for the truth, the right choice or inner peace.

(ii) In dialogue, a philosophical counsellor applies philosophical knowledge and skills acquired in the academic study of philosophy. For example, Ruschmann (1999) defines philosophical counselling as an epistemologically grounded interaction between a philosopher and a client, aimed at understanding ('Verstehen'), critical thinking or an attempt to manage values. This definition relates philosophical counselling to the academic study of philosophy. The academic study of philosophy can be focused on the (historical) development of thoughts or on the content of these thoughts. Methods are drawn from the subject matter itself. Phenomenology, dialectical method, analytical method and logic are part of most study programs. These methods result in ideas on metaphysics, knowledge or meaning, forming the content of theoretical philosophy. Practical philosophy usually comprises ethics, politics and social philosophy. These topics are considered applied philosophy, probably because of their claim on social utility. However, their theoretical character and enclosure in an academic context was a strong impetus for philosophical practice to emerge in the 1980s. Philosophical practice completes philosophy by "bringing its fruits to the market" (Hadot, 2002a).<sup>7</sup> Academic philosophy is marked by objectivity. It aims at stating thoughts in an impersonal way. Philosophical practice, however, aims at a personal philosophical experience. Its aim is not to interpret the thoughts of an individual guest or client in terms of impersonal philosophy, but to relate thoughts to actions in everyday life. This doesn't turn philosophical practice into an applied science, a technique (*techne*) like medicine or psychology. Philosophical practice does not have a fixed method (Achenbach, 2005). Philosophical practice

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<sup>7</sup> According to Hadot (2002a), philosophical practice had to be rediscovered. It raises questions by spiritual exercises in everyday life. Theoretical philosophy (metaphysics, physics, logic, and theory of knowledge/meaning) should produce the answers and practical philosophy (ethics, politics, social philosophy) applies these answers to practice. Thus a circle of questioning, interpreting and understanding reveals itself, reminding us of the wheel of wisdom as an original impetus of philosophy.

actually requires a sense of purpose and a quality of mind (*phronesis*), based on competences acquired by the study of philosophy.

Studying philosophy comes down to reading and interpreting texts. In different times different texts were studied. At Dutch universities, the reading and interpreting of the works of Marx were indispensable elements of the study of philosophy until the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. The study of Marx disappeared from most curriculums. However, the study of philosophy remained stable over time. So it cannot be the knowledge we extract from texts that defines philosophy. By reading and writing a philosopher develops a competence best described as reflectivity: 'thinking about thinking'. Reflectivity is trained and a critical attitude is being developed. The student of philosophy has to possess a sense of wonder, an open mind, and the ability to suspend his own opinions and to focus on the text. This critical attitude can be acquired by interpreting certain kind of texts. In philosophical counselling a philosopher applies reflective skills acquired during the study of philosophy in a dialogue with guests or clients. He reads guests or clients as he reads a philosophical text. The main difference lies in the context. Reflective skills are applied to real life persons now, the dialogue consists of spoken words, and the time frame is the now, the actual moment the dialogue takes place. In a sense it is like playing a piece of music. The performance is important for its quality. What competences do philosophical counsellors need for this?

### Three basic competences

In eight interviews with pioneers of philosophical practice in the Netherlands, I explored competences in relation to the tasks performed (their work). The interviews were completed with statements from policy documents until no more different opinions seem to emerge (*table 1*). There are different answers to the question what counsellors actually do during counselling (*left column, table 1*). Requirements for performing these tasks well were also mentioned, such as: attention, listening, questioning, interpreting, understanding and reflection (*middle column, table 1*). These aspects of counselling seem to be general tools for persons to be in dialogue. They can be recognized as elements of discussion techniques too. However, in philosophical practice each element has a typical philosophical colour. Listening, questioning and interpreting are not just tools to keep a conversation going, but they are grounded in a philosophical tradition and applied in a reflective way. It is most important that a philosophical counsellor gives attention to a guest or client expressing himself as a human being. Uniqueness and authenticity are important concepts here. The guest is not looked upon as an example of a species, which is often the case in therapy or psychology when a (general) therapeutic model is applied to the individual, but in philosophical counselling the guest is looked upon as a person constructing a way of life. A person needs room and understanding for realizing this. In this way, the conceptual connections between tasks and requirements are explored. It leads to a formulation of basic competences in terms of abilities (*right column, table 1*), so that the empirical material fits our definition of competences. Both requirements and abilities are covered by it.

Table 1. Competences of philosophical counsellors

<b>Tasks (literature, interviews)</b>	<b>Requirements (literature, interviews)</b>	<b>Abilities</b>
Facilitating personal change	Reflective dialogue	AoU
Contemplating well being, facilitating choice	Creating examples, use of examples	AoU
Creating free space/room to think	To be open, without prejudice, not to know (Socratic attitude), transparency, creativity	AoU
Change thinking	Questioning	AoQ
Make people think	Questioning	AoQ
To think along (sing along)	Empathy, philosophical understanding	AoI
Examine ways of thinking	Logical skills	AoI, AoQ
Facilitate self reflection	Questioning the how, where and wherefore	AoQ
Intensifying everyday speech	Alertness, amazement	AoU
Intensify experience	Questioning, mirroring, opposing	AoU
Creating meaning and sense, construction of lifestyle	Telling a story, giving (suitable) examples	AoI, AoU
Reading philosophy/philosophers	Understanding and explaining texts	AoI
Philosophical diagnosis, localisation of a problem	Listening, interpreting problem in philosophical terms	AoI
Translating questions or problems in philosophy	Mediating philosophy	AoI
Clear formulation of a problem or thoughts, reflection	To be present, attention, concentration, Knowledge of philosophy/philosophers	AoU, AoI
Analyse thinking/thoughts	Listening, questioning, interpreting, applying logic	AoI
Exercise in thinking	Confronting client with logic or examples	AoQ
Facilitating consistency of thinking	Logic	AoQ, AoI
Making presuppositions explicit	Recognizing philosophical elements in speech, bringing in philosophical concepts	AoI
Applying philosophy	Knowledge and skills from studying philosophy	AoU
Teaching to philosophise/think	Listening, explaining, interpreting	AoI
Facilitating dialogue, moderating groups	Alertness, listening, questioning, interpreting, being present	AoU
To deepen dialogue	Questioning, interpreting	AoQ, AoI
To explain philosophy	Knowledge of philosophy	AoI
To clear up dialogue	Logic	AoI
To make speech more interesting	Using examples	AoI
Find a metaphor to express meaning	Interpreting, understanding	AoU
Creating atmosphere	Listening, understanding, empathy	AoU
Facilitating a philosophical way of life, integrating work, life and philosophy	Giving examples of a philosophical life, reading philosophy	AoI, AoU
Stimulating the art of living	Critical reflection, creativity, knowledge of examples	AoU

\* AoQ: art of questioning; AoI: Art of interpreting; AoU: art of Understanding

In terms of abilities, there are three (basic) competences for philosophical practice: (i) the art of questioning, (ii) the art of interpreting and (iii) the art of understanding. Questioning, interpreting or discussing philosophical examples in order to understand life is something counsellors actually *do* when meeting guests or clients. A potentiality is realized in practice. The three basic competences are sets of mutually related skills used by a counsellor during a dialogue with his client, group or organization. They can be called *arts* as they result from mastering techniques already acquired during the study of philosophy. Different styles of philosophical practice emerge by more or less accentuating one of the three basic competences, such as the (radical) Socratic questioning (Brenifier), the interpretative style (Marinoff) and the understanding ('Verstehen') of life (Achenbach). Application of the basic competences in a reflective way relates philosophical practice to the study of philosophy.

### The art of questioning

By posing questions, a philosophical counsellor deepens the dialogue with his guest. The questioning is usually inspired by the Socrates of the early Platonic dialogues, such as 'Laches' and 'Euthyphro'. A radical questioning defies every attempt to define a concept (*courage* or *virtue*), ending up with an 'aporia', in which we know that we do not know (a state of mind that can be called 'philosophical'). The starting point is the 'what-is' question: repeated again and again until the aporia is reached. The philosophical—'what is x'—questions about *being, doing* or *having* actually incorporate the 'not-knowing'. This 'not-knowing' does not refer to the knowledge of facts, but to an attitude which is a source of questioning the obvious, a detachment from dogmatic knowledge, an impetus for critical thinking, so that there is room for an authentic (re)construction of the guest's life style. The 'not-knowing' opens up possibilities for a guest to look at his questions in a new way. Some people may suffer from posing or sticking to (wrong) questions about unsolvable problems, a fixed past or an unattainable future. The Socratic approach offers a way out. It takes the guest from one question to another, aiming to end up with a *philosophical* question. A philosophical question is like a Zen riddle (Koan). A Zen riddle is not to be solved. It (just) serves the training of a contemplative attitude in life (Cleary & Cleary, 1992). In the same way we can understand the philosophical question. It is a question, not there to be answered. It nurtures a critical attitude in life.

### The art of interpreting

In interpreting, a philosophical counsellor connects philosophical examples with the text of his guests. The work of Lou Marinoff (1999) illustrates this. Once he counselled a lady, 20 years old. Her mother had sent her from psychologist to psychologist. Her mother was rather conservative and church-going. She thought her rather free and creative daughter abnormal and wanted her individual lifestyle to be treated. Marinoff understood this issue about lifestyle not as a pathological, but as a *philosophical*, matter. He analyzed the conflict between mother and daughter in terms of a relativist (daughter) and absolutist (mother) point of view. According to the daughter, values or norms were a matter of taste. According to the mother there were objective and universal values or norms, existing independently of us, to be known through, and transferred by, education.

By interpreting the conflict in terms of relativists and absolutists, Marinoff makes a diagnosis, like in medical therapy.<sup>8</sup> Next, Marinoff tells his client a story of a teacher. Imagine a teacher, teaching philosophy to a class of students, all relativists. They protested when the teacher judged all of them a C (not qualified), based on his personal opinion. Suddenly they wanted to prove their work was worth a B or more. They pointed out objective criteria for that. They discussed the values for the criteria to be based upon. The story shows the classical objection against relativism. If 'every norm or value is relative' then this statement should be relative too. However, it pretends to be an absolute truth. The client understood the story. In this way, Marinoff persuaded the daughter to recognize the problem of the objectivity of values. She could discuss this with her mother. The conflict turned into a dialogue about the objectivity of values.

The example shows: (i) an ordinary conflict can be translated into philosophical terms, (ii) the conflict is illustrated by an example, (iii) the example does not solve the problem, but *changes* it and improves the dialogue. I want to call this the *interpretative tradition of philosophical practice*. Translating the words of guests into philosophical terms seems to be its working model. Examples have to fit the problems or questions of clients. During the consultation, the example becomes a metaphor with meaning to the client.

### The art of understanding

In understanding, a counsellor connects philosophy to the life of a guest, so that it explains a development, a choice or a lifestyle. In fact, a counsellor relates the thoughts or actions of a person to a philosophical biography. The study of philosophy offers many examples of a philosophical way of life. Using them in philosophical practice requires a different way of reading philosophy. The works of Hadot are important for this. Hadot transcends the philological reading of philosophical texts and returns to their meaning for everyday life (Hadot, 2002a). He works on the character of Socrates, not in an attempt to treat Socrates as a historical figure or to interpret Plato as his intellectual biographer, but in an attempt to understand the meaning of the text for (everyday) life (Hadot, 2002b). The character of a philosopher is found in the way his work relates to life. Not only ancient philosophy is important for this. Philosophy is full of examples to be used in philosophical practice in order to bring about understanding. The (auto)biographical works of for example Augustine, Descartes (writing in the first person singular) or Nietzsche seem to be more suited for this than the pure theoretical works of, for example, Kant.<sup>9</sup> We may think of the confessions of Augustine. His work actually is a metaphor for understanding life (Hadot, 2002b). The metaphor captures a development: being a skeptic as a young man, stoic as an adult and longing for wisdom as an old man. It explains choices and a way to be. We could consider Descartes, being a scientist involved in geometry and optics,

<sup>8</sup> Lou Marinoff claims philosophical practice is a therapy (Marinoff, 1999, p.29f). Just like a medical doctor he translates signs and symptoms into a diagnosis, which points the way to a therapy. If the therapy (the story in our example) satisfies, the intervention ends; if not, the cycle is repeated by gathering signs and symptoms again, interpreting them, adjusting the diagnosis, giving a new therapy, etc. (Wulff, 1976). The interpretative approach follows the same circular scheme, but the content differs. Therefore, I think we can also call the interpretative style in philosophical practice a *therapeutic* style.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore, studying the confessions of Augustine, Montaigne, Rousseau should be part of the training of philosophical counsellors (Achenbach, 2005).

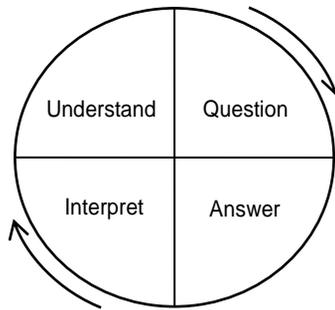
becoming a philosopher by reflecting on his method (an excellent example of how to understand modern life with its metaphorical doubt and its self-centred rational, planned actions, by critical reflection). We may think of Nietzsche, being a philologist and becoming a philosopher by criticizing philosophy as a philology. Nietzsche's work is an excellent example of how to understand postmodern life with its chaos, continuous crisis, hunger for experience and longing for intense experience in living the now ('everyone will be famous for 15 minutes') by constructing and living through a story. There are many aspects of a philosophical life—contemplation, inner peace, authenticity, radical thinking, making choices, being different—and they can be found in the works of many philosophers. In this sense, philosophical practice is a way to deal with life, referring to a lifestyle, an art of living. It offers a new way of looking at philosophy by relating thinking to action, a way of looking at philosophy that might be as old as philosophy itself (Hadot 2002a).

### **A model of philosophical practice**

The three basic competences are grounded in philosophy (Hadot, 2002a). The philosophical questioning is based on the skeptic attitude of Socrates in the early Platonic dialogues. The skepticism is the impetus for questions, making the consultee think. It opens up possibilities for new ways of interpreting facts, choices or lifestyle. The interpreting is closely connected with Stoic philosophy as it tries to interpret texts and facts of life by Plato or Aristotle in order to reach peace of mind or inner independence. The art of understanding ('Verstehen') originates in the ancient sources of philosophy itself, e.g. in a search for truth and wisdom (Dipalo, 2008). It requires a broad knowledge of philosophical biographies, not referring to the (plain) facts of a philosopher's life, but to an understanding of the connection between thoughts and life in order to explain the themes of our guests.

The three basic competences are all part of the reflective character of the study of philosophy. This can be pictured by a circle, a sequence of questioning leading to answers (even yes or no), interpreting the answers, understanding the interpretations, questioning the understanding again, etc. (*figure 1*). By going through the circle again and again we reach a level of consciousness called *philosophical*, an intimate connection between thoughts. It is not just an associative or a logical way of connecting thoughts. Thoughts are part of different phases now, conceptually connected by a process in time. This process can be called *critical thinking*. The conscious application of this circle is an act, a practice. Philosophical counselling facilitates this.

Figure 1. A model of philosophical practice: Philosophy as Critical Thinking



Competences grounded in philosophy and the application of them in the reflective circle are the distinguishing features of philosophical practice. Applying reflectivity to human beings instead of to texts requires a feeling for the right time and place, a sense of purpose and a quality of mind (*phronesis*). Therefore, additional training is needed. We have to translate the basic competences into educational programs for philosophical counsellors.

### Translating competences into educational programs

The results of this research can be used for developing educational programs for philosophical counsellors. The academic study of philosophy should be the starting point. As we have seen, by reading a certain kind of texts, the corpus of philosophy, the student develops a critical attitude and reflective skills (questioning, interpreting, understanding). This attitude and these skills are suitable for reading or writing texts or teaching at schools, but also for counselling people on problems about work, relationships or lifestyle. This shift in context requires additional training. The additional training course I have developed consists of five modules: (i) an introduction, in which we study the works of Pierre Hadot and some outstanding examples of philosophical practice (Achenbach, Marinoff, Brenifier, Lahav, etc.); (ii) we reconstruct the Socratic attitude from fragments of the works of Plato by questioning them; (iii) we interpret text fragments and spoken words of guests during consultation (videos); (iv) we study (auto)biographies of philosophers in relation to their thoughts, and finally (v) the student is asked to come up with an example of a philosophical life as a master proof in philosophical practice. The modules are shaped along the three basic competences, and in connecting them the student goes through a full reflective circle. Apart from these kinds of integral courses, an educational programme can also be built on a set of certified modules. A student can follow courses offered by different counsellors and acquire different skills in each course. A set of courses would lead to recognition as a philosophical counsellor. The structure of these courses can be built upon the competences mentioned in this paper. In this way (integral or modular), a competence-based educational programme for philosophical practice is accomplished. It suits developments in (university) education where competence-based programs seem to be the norm nowadays.

## Conclusions

By studying the works of a philosopher in practice we can discover competences which can be translated into educational programs for counsellors. Three basic philosophical competences can be distinguished: the art of questioning, the art of interpreting and the art of understanding. Different styles of philosophical practice emerge by more or less accentuating one of the three basic competences. These competences are grounded in the traditions of philosophy: the questioning in the Skeptic attitude, the interpretation in the Stoic tradition, the understanding in the ancient origins of philosophy itself. Integration of these competences in a reflective circle is a distinguishing feature of philosophical practice. A competence-based course programme for philosophical counsellors should be developed along these lines. Training in discussion techniques, psychology or practice management could complement such a course programme.

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## Acknowledgements

A first draft of this paper was presented at the *IXth International Conference on Philosophical Practice (ICPP)*, Carloforte, Italy 2008. I would like to thank the participants of this conference for their comments and reflections. I also would like to thank the counsellors participating in the interviews.

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