

***Philosophical Counselling as a Quest For Wisdom<sup>1</sup>******Ran Lahav***

The use of philosophy for counselling, directing, and enriching everyday life can already be found at the very beginning of western philosophy, in the 6th century BC in ancient Greece. The philosophies of the Pythagoreans, the Stoics, the Cynics, as well as other ancient schools, and in later periods - various religious philosophies, philosophies of the Renaissance, Romanticism, Communism and Socialism, Existentialism, Feminism, and many others, were used to help individuals to understand themselves, live their lives more fully, and deal with their personal problems.

However, philosophical counselling as a specific discipline is a relatively young field. It was born in 1981 in Germany, and from there spread to other countries, such as Holland, Israel, South Africa, USA, Canada, France and the UK. There are now several hundreds of people involved in the field. Several associations operate in a number of countries, and these organise workshops, colloquia and lectures, some also publish newsletters or journals. International conferences on philosophical counselling are taking place almost every year, and courses on the topic are offered in several universities. The field is obviously growing and expanding. But what is it all about - is it just another one of the many hundreds of approaches to therapy and counselling that appear every few months?

In this paper I will suggest that the answer is negative. Philosophical counselling is based on a unique subject matter and goal that are fundamentally different from those of psychologically-oriented therapies. It is aimed at what the original meaning of the word 'philosophy' means in Greek, 'philo-sophia': love of wisdom. This age-old goal of wisdom has been almost forgotten in our technological, comfort-seeking, self-centred age. It is the goal of philosophical counselling, as I see it, to remind us of this important aim. Philosophical counselling is a personal journey in the world of ideas, aimed at wisdom.

**A general characterisation of philosophical counselling**

Dozens of papers have already been published and presented on the topic of philosophical counselling. Anybody who reads this literature will find out that, like most other disciplines, philosophical counselling does not comprise one single unitary field, but rather a cluster of approaches (see some distinctions and typologies in Lahav, 1995; Lahav, 1996a; Blass, 1996b). This is natural, since disciplines do not normally develop in accordance with a fixed definition. Nevertheless, the different approaches do share some general characteristics. Perhaps the most salient characteristic that is common to all forms of philosophical counselling is that, unlike in most psychotherapies, the counselling session focuses on philosophising between the counsellor and counsellee. The point is not that the counsellor approaches the counsellee from the perspective of a certain philosophical view, as for example existential psychotherapists work from the perspective of existentialist philosophy. This would hardly be unique to philosophical counselling, since, clearly, many therapists come to the therapeutic session equipped with a theoretical framework that can be regarded as a 'philosophy' - of life, of mental health, etc. Indeed, in order to adhere to some specific philosophy, one need not be an experienced philosopher. The point is, rather, that in philosophical counselling an open

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philosophical dialogue takes place within the session. What the philosophical counsellor and counsellee do is philosophise.

I think that all philosophical practitioners would agree with this characterisation and say that indeed they philosophise with their counsellees. The crucial issue is how, and towards what goal, this philosophising is done in the counselling session. And here, in answering this question, differences start to appear. One answer that is sometimes heard is that the counsellor uses philosophising primarily for the sake of helping counsellees overcome their personal problems through an analysis of their beliefs about, or attitudes towards their situation (Cohen, 1995). For example, an individual may complain of difficulties at work, and the counsellor, through the use of philosophical tools of analysis, may help them to see more clearly the problems in their conception of themselves in the workplace and thus find ways to overcome them. The difficulty with this approach, aside from the fact that it is hardly different from various cognitive psychotherapies, is that if it aims primarily at problem-solving, then it demotes philosophy to the status of a means to something else, namely, promoting the counsellee's satisfaction. Philosophising is used here only in ways that help the counsellee to feel better, regardless of how true, intellectually rich, conceptually well-founded, or spiritually deep it is. Whether or not the counsellor's philosophising with the counsellee is deep or shallow, coherent or a heap of isolated clichés - this does not matter at all as long as the personal problem is solved and the counsellee becomes happier. 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.

It appears, then, that any form of philosophical counselling which regards philosophical investigations as meaningful in themselves, rather than as mere tools for something else, ought to aim at philosophy's traditional goal, namely, the search for wisdom, or some related variation of it: enrichment, edification, broader and deeper self-understanding. To be sure, when a person gains better self-understanding they are likely to be able to better deal with their situation and overcome specific problems, but this is at most only a secondary goal. And indeed, many philosophical counsellors see the development of philosophical self-understanding as a major aim in their counselling - often with the additional goal of helping the counsellee to overcome specific predicaments.

But how can philosophy - which traditionally has often been focused on abstract and highly theoretical discussions - possibly be relevant to the life of a particular individual? How can a discipline that has been so preoccupied with the construction of general theories, at least during the past several centuries, contribute to the self-understanding of a concrete life?

In a paper that was published several years ago, I tried to give a general answer to this question, one that would apply to most forms of philosophical counselling with which I was familiar (Lahav, 1995). In this way I hoped to give philosophical counselling a general theoretical framework. The basic idea was that the reason philosophising can be used for gaining self-understanding is that every individual lives a personal philosophy. A person's emotions, feelings, beliefs, hopes, fantasies, and entire way of life express, usually implicitly, certain philosophical assumptions or views about the nature of the world and of life (for variations and discussions on this theme, see Mijuskovic, 1995; Schefczyk, 1995; Jopling, 1996). To put it differently, a person's way of dealing with his or her life can be seen as comprised of personal responses to basic philosophical life-questions, such as the nature of love, the value of work, or the meaning of life (Prins-Bakker, 1995). However, although individuals *embody* personal philosophies through their everyday attitudes, they are usually not *aware* of their nature, their basic

assumptions, structure, logic and implications. The goal of philosophical counselling is, therefore, to help counselees to expose and clarify the network of concepts and ideas that underlies the relevant aspects of their lives: analyse basic concepts that characterise their various attitudes, uncover and examine hidden presuppositions in their way of life, explore conceptual interconnections, or in short, investigate the philosophy of life which the person is living. This clarification is intended to develop in the person a richer philosophical understanding of their self and the world, with the possible secondary gains of enhancing their capacity to better cope with specific personal problems.

I believe that this proposed characterisation does indeed capture the essence of most of the approaches to philosophical counselling that are practiced nowadays. However, it now seems to me, on the basis of both theoretical and practical work in the field, that this conception of philosophical counselling falls short of the much greater potential that philosophising can have in our lives. By restricting itself to the examination of the philosophy that is already embodied in the person, by focusing only on what is already contained in the individual's specific attitudes, this approach fails to explore those domains of wisdom which extend far beyond the person's actual life. It thus fails to unfold new horizons of ideas, concepts and meanings, and to transcend the counselees' current way of being. After all, the material that is already contained in the counselee's specific circumstances may be rather uninspiring, and it may be much more significant to them to look beyond it to other realms of life, rather than to delving into their actual condition.

This is indeed the basic idea that I have been developing in the past several years (Blass, 1996b; Lahav, 1996b). In this paper I would like to focus on this approach and explore its fundamental characteristics. In order to do so, let me start with a brief glance at some central intellectual and spiritual challenges that this approach addresses.

### **The need for wisdom**

The life of the individual in contemporary western culture is, to a very large extent, devoid of what can be called wisdom. By these notions, as well as related ones such as those of spirituality, depth, meaningfulness, or edification, I mean various ways in which the person opens him/herself up towards a personal encounter with the endless horizons of meanings that are interwoven in human reality. Viewed this way, wisdom - to be distinguished from knowledge or smartness - requires that I go beyond my narrow self and the limitations of my preconceptions and attitudes; beyond my particular opinions and desires to which I am tempted to cling; and beyond everything which I tend to take as incontestable, already settled, a finished matter of fact. The inability to go beyond all this, or in other words - the sinking into one's fixed and already-settled attitudes, opinions, ideals and desires - imprisons the individual in a petrified and narrow world, and manifests itself as emptiness and meaninglessness. These are so pervasive nowadays that many take them for granted as natural parts of life, hardly ever striving for anything more than sustaining their current way of being through personal gratification, security, comfort, or material gain. In this sense we live in a time of crisis, a period in which human existence is losing its dimension of depth, wisdom, and spirituality and is becoming more and more shallow, self-absorbed and one-dimensional.

Ironically, this is happening precisely in an era in which science and technology have been making amazing progress. In fact, we live in the midst of a scientific-technological explosion that supplies us with unprecedented means of communication, transportation, medicine, education and entertainment. One could have expected that these developments would open new horizons for the human spirit; that modern technology would allow the person more time for spiritual development; that accessibility of the internet, books, and personal computers would enable people to broaden and

deepen their intellectual horizons; that television, telephone, the e-mail and other means of communication between cultures would contribute to our cultural richness. But the result of this scientific-technological explosion is precisely the opposite. Instead of opening in the person new spaces for going beyond trivialities into inner fullness, deepened reflection, cultural richness - life has become erratic, quick, superficial, dependent on external stimuli, focused on immediate self-gratification, alien to itself and at the same time absorbed in itself. Today's world appears to offer us much freedom, but the choices which occupy most people's minds are typically no greater than whether to go to this or that restaurant, to consume this or that type of vitamin, or buy this or that new pair of shoes. The average individual's greatest dream is hardly loftier than buying a new shiny car or advancing to the next rank in the workplace. Life is imprisoned in the trivialities of commercials and television movies which impose their inane standards of how one should dress, what ought to be said, what one should aspire to, which jobs are respectable, and which opinions are 'in'.

To some extent, this is not a novel condition. In all historical periods the majority of human beings were occupied with their small concerns. Deeper spirituality or wisdom has always been the lot of only few. Hence, the need for wisdom has always existed in western civilisation, and philosophy has never been redundant. Nevertheless, there is an important difference between our present age and previous periods. In previous historical periods there always existed a dimension of spirituality and wisdom at least as a possibility, even if most people had scarcely utilised it. Even in periods in which much of humanity was sunk in great decadence, there still was a space, on the conceptual maps of the time, for edification and spiritual richness. It was still existing as an option even if rarely realised, it was part of the landscape of the world. Today, in contrast, the dimensions of wisdom, depth, spirituality have been largely forgotten by most parts of western civilisation, even by the intellectual sections of society, and in this sense they are evaporating out of existence, even as a mere possibility.

This world that I am describing and in which we live is commonly called 'post-modernity'. Much has been written about the post-modern world and worldview, and I will not be able to explore here how its basic characteristics are related to the disappearance of wisdom. Suffice it to say that it has aggravated our spiritual and intellectual needs to the level of a spiritual crisis, a crisis that poses a fundamental challenge to contemporary humanity.

I suggest that the role of philosophical counselling is to take part in the effort to address this human situation. Philosophy as a search for wisdom is a search for broadening and deepening life. Its role is not to help counselees be more satisfied, but wiser; not to overcome problems in their workplace or in their marriage, but to explore the domains of ideas and grow towards wisdom. And again, although the search for wisdom is likely to empower a person to overcome personal problems, this is not its primary goal.

### **Philosophical counselling and psychotherapy**

How, then, is philosophical counselling to serve as a search for wisdom? It would be helpful to explain this point by comparing philosophical counselling to psychotherapies. It is impossible to give a general definition that would precisely capture the many hundreds of different psychotherapies existing today. Indeed, a number of philosophical counsellors who tried to put them all under one definition unfortunately ended up with simplistic generalisations or even distorted caricatures (see a critical summary in Blass, 1996a). Nevertheless, I believe that most of them would roughly fit into the following characterisation: psychotherapies focus on that which occurs to, or in, the person or persons in question. Their primary concern is to understand and/or modify

(usually both) those conditions which the persons in question undergo - whether experiential, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, etc.

In contrast to psychotherapies thus characterised, philosophical counselling, as I see it, does not focus on what happens in, or to the person. Philosophy as a search for wisdom is a journey beyond the person. To see what I have in mind here, the following analogy may be helpful. Consider, for example, the familiar case of a person who for many years feels emptiness and boredom, until at last a deep change occurs when she encounters something that touches her deeply; perhaps she joins some social cause, converts to a certain religion, starts painting, etc. She now finds a new source of vitality and meaningfulness. Let us assume that the person is not simply deceiving herself by her new occupation but is truly moved and grasped by it. What is interesting in such cases is that the previously dissatisfied person now expands herself not by digging in the ground on which she is standing but by journeying to other domains of life in which she has never been; not by analysing her actual emptiness and modifying the psychic forces sustaining it, but by going beyond it, in fact by going beyond herself, overcoming herself. The material that had been inside her had not been sufficient for a meaningful life. Meaningfulness required in this case - and I believe that this is so in the vast majority of human lives - encounters with realities outside the person.

In a similar manner, philosophical counselling has the potential of helping the counsellee not just to understand her actual particular condition, but also to go beyond her present horizons. As we have just seen, this can be done in many ways and fields such as social activism and painting, not only through philosophy. But what is special about philosophy is that it leads the person to an encounter not just with this or that aspect of our world, but with the very ground of being, the foundation of our lives. The role of philosophy in philosophical counselling is to open up the counsellee to the all-encompassing horizons of meanings that constitute our reality, which is to say, to wisdom. To put it dramatically, in terms of Plato's famous cave metaphor about us people who live in a dark cave and can see only shadows, the point of philosophy in counselling should not be to help those cave-dwellers explore the shadows among which they live, but rather to help them leave the cave and climb up to the greater light of the world outside.

Seen in this way, undergoing philosophical counselling is more akin to undergoing art education than psychotherapy. Like the study of art, philosophical counselling involves encountering novel contents outside one's present self. While studying art one learns the rules of perspective or how to lay paint on the canvas, delves into the works of the great masters, tries newly learned techniques, etc. Similarly, in philosophical counselling, one encounters new ideas that disclose new aspects of human existence and that are not already in the individual's psyche in any reasonable sense. It is a journey to a realm that extends far beyond what is already manifested in the person's life.

The vision that I am ascribing here to philosophical counselling can be found, in various forms, in most human cultures and in most historical periods. It is the vision that the good life does not mean merely functioning properly (emotionally, cognitively, behaviourally, etc.), nor merely enjoying oneself. A fuller life involves the edification of the spirit and the understanding.

I should emphasise that the edification envisioned in philosophical counselling cannot possibly follow some particular theory about life. Talking about philosophical counselling in accordance with, say, Plato or Sartre would be a contradiction in terms. The search for wisdom, by its very essence, is not confined to one single picture of reality but is rather a dialogue with the infinite network of ideas and perspectives that are woven into the realm of potential ways of being. Furthermore, it is a personal journey that draws its life not from a given doctrine but from the individual's unique experiences and

dialogue with human reality. At the same time, it is important to realise that such a journey may utilise materials, such as concepts and ideas, borrowed from traditional philosophies. Indeed, it would be superficial and pretentious for a person not to take into consideration already existing insights and discussions about life, as though he is the first in history to search for wisdom, and as though the landscape of ideas has never been explored before.

### **The problem of psychologisation**

My remarks so far should in no way be seen as a criticism of psychology. Psychotherapeutic approaches may be useful when taken as one among other perspectives on life, and when they do so, they play an important role in helping individuals to cope with their lives and personal problems. Furthermore, psychotherapy is likely to be helpful even to philosophical counselling. It is my impression that many counselees would greatly benefit from a psychotherapy that would release them from psychological bonds that hinder them from appreciating and developing new philosophical insights and incorporating them in their lives.

What I am criticising is, rather, our culture's tendency to over-emphasise the psychological perspective to the neglect of other perspectives, and thus to forget the age-old goals of wisdom and spiritual edification. This trend of 'psychologisation' or 'psychological imperialism' is the tendency to regard all aspects of living as capable of being understood psychologically. This includes, in particular, existential issues, that is, questions about how one should make one's life worthwhile, full, meaningful, growing with wisdom. As much of contemporary society sees it, if one wishes to be helped in these matters, then the psychotherapist is the proper address.

This is a terrible distortion of the meaning of basic life-issues. It is as though the therapist already has a ready-made answer to the profound philosophical issue of what counts as a meaningful and worthwhile life, so that all that is needed is to direct the patient in the right way. And indeed, quite a few therapists aim in their work, often implicitly, towards certain specific values, such as independence and self-reliance, self-confidence, productivity, assertiveness, etc. The assumption is that this is what life should be like. To realise that these values are highly questionable and at the very least require critical philosophical inquiry, it is enough to see that each and every one of them is seen as unacceptable and even abhorrent in some societies that are not ruled by the individualistic, self-centred, achievement-oriented ideology of the contemporary West.

There are, however, many other therapists who realise that they do not have ready-made answers to basic life-questions, and resist sneaking them implicitly into their work. Among those, many try to leave the answers in the hands of the clients themselves. But here lies a no lesser danger of distorting the nature of life-issues. For it seems that this approach assumes that replies to life's deepest questions are a matter of personal taste. It confuses the realisation that there are no universal answers that are true for everybody, with the misguided idea that anything goes and that these questions are to be settled by the sheer power of arbitrary personal decision or blind feelings and nothing more. It fails to realise that it is precisely because those questions do not have a final and universal answer that they require a profound investigation, probably a never-ending one. By comparison, the fact that there is no universal criterion for how paintings should be painted does not mean that anything goes and that artists should not bother to study art. It is precisely because there is no one universal and final answer as to how to paint that a serious artist must go on a never-ending but ever-deepening personal journey and delve-not into the world of psychology, but into the world of art and artistic meanings. In a similar way, philosophical counselling helps the counsellee to delve into the fundamental reality disclosed through ideas in a journey which, though it would not

yield a final universal solution, nevertheless - and in fact precisely for that reason - is the way of wisdom and edification.

All this is to say that basic life-issues cannot be addressed by psychological means, as is so commonly thought in our society, but by philosophical ones (and probably others as well, e.g., religious), that is, through a search in the landscape disclosed by ideas. The proper attitude of the psychotherapist is neither to answer them by herself for the patient, nor to encourage the patient to answer them in accordance with her personal taste or inner feelings, but to encourage her to embark on a philosophical self-investigation towards wisdom, something that lies outside the boundaries of psychotherapy.

For this reason, psychotherapy and philosophical counselling should be seen as non-overlapping and complementary fields, each dealing primarily with a different dimension of life. Indeed, a significant portion of my counselees had previously seen a psychotherapist, and most of them described their experience as positive. The reason they came to see me was that they felt that some important aspects of their lives, which they identified as philosophical or relating to ideas, were not addressed satisfactorily in their therapy.

### **The search for wisdom**

The above comparison of philosophical counselling to psychotherapy sheds the following light upon the nature of the former. Philosophical self-investigation is a process in which the person rises beyond her self-centred concerns and specific interests and opens herself to the endless horizons of potential understandings of the ground of our being. It is a dialogue with the infinite network of ideas that are interwoven into life and intimate to us the fabric of its basic reality.

It is here that we can see the role of philosophical counselling in the search for wisdom. The subject matter of philosophy is to unfold the ideational foundation of our world: the various meanings, implications, and interconnections concerning the concepts of freedom or the self, the moral implications of guilt, the worthwhileness or worthlessness of success, and indeed the meaning of truth and wisdom. Notice, it deals not with psychological events and processes such as *feelings of guilt* and *desires for freedom*, but rather with the *concept of guilt* and the *idea of freedom*. Feelings and desires are indeed the subject matter of psychology which may study their aetiology, behavioural manifestation, etc.; but the world of ideas is the domain of philosophical investigation. Admittedly, to some extent all disciplines can be seen as exploring concepts or ideas, but it is the task of philosophy to explore the most basic ideas that underlie our lives, the very foundation of our reality.

### **A case study**

How is this lofty vision to be applied to concrete life, particularly to one-hour sessions with counselees? Naturally, the road from this general and abstract vision to concrete practice is long, and involves many theoretical, methodological and philosophical steps. Let me make here a dramatic leap to the end of this road, and present a case study. In this case study I will focus primarily on the first few steps in the philosophical counselling, ones which I find extremely crucial in leading the conversation in a direction that is fruitful both philosophically and personally.

The counsellee, let us call her E, was a student in her twenties. As I later found out, she came to see me in order to try dealing with her predicaments from a perspective different from her psychotherapy sessions, which she felt had their limitations. In our first meeting, E told me of an insight to which she had come in recent years, namely, that people's actions are always motivated by egocentric self-interest. This presumably

includes actions which on the surface appear altruistic but in fact are performed with the aim of receiving something in return, usually the fulfilment of emotional needs for empathy or acceptance. She added that it is too bad that people are like that.

Philosophical counselling may seem to be the setting for discussing precisely theories such as E's, and one could have expected me to launch a philosophical inquiry of it. However, the danger in prematurely delving into such a discussion is that it could divert the conversation to a theoretical level that is remote from, or only superficially related to the counsellee's life. Philosophical counselling is not a philosophy class about abstract issues, but focuses on philosophy as it is embodied in concrete life. It is, therefore, important to allow the counsellee's way of being (including her predicaments, attitudes, hopes, etc.) to speak no less than her avowed theories. It is the philosophy *within* counsellees' life, not their theories *about* life, that is the primary concern. In fact, this is a common mistake which, in my experience in supervising, beginning counsellors tend to commit. They are only too happy to find in their counsellees' views a philosophical issue to discuss, and often neglect their actual lives.

For these reasons I decided to resist, at this stage, the urge to philosophise about the ulterior motives of mankind, and instead to examine with E how her theory related to her everyday life. When I asked her about it, she explained that she found people around her behaving in self-serving ways, and that this made it difficult for her to emotionally open up to them. As a result of her insight, she said, she commonly displayed coldness towards those who sought her company and affection, accompanying it with intonations and gestures that made it clear to them that she knew their hidden intentions. I asked her whether she found such self-centred behaviour in her family too. She replied that indeed her theory applied especially well to her mother, who often behaved towards others in a seemingly warm way but later, behind their backs, commented about them with cynicism. The mother also often acted as though wanting to help family members while in fact manipulating them to satisfy her own emotional needs. At the same time, she would also warn E from people who desire her emotional intimacy, and would dissuade her from responding to them positively.

We continued to discuss her difficulties in her relations to other people, and she elaborated on various related experiences and incidents. Later in the session, she expressed her desire to focus, in our counselling conversations, on her difficulty in developing emotional relationships with others.

Up until now, E had been telling me of her predicament, and no philosophical point had yet been made. The first stage in philosophical counselling conversations is almost invariably one in which the counsellee describes him/herself and relates relevant incidents and experiences, often with the help of the counsellor's questions. This stage is intended to supply the personal experiences or contents from which philosophising can emerge. A personal predicament is often a good starting point, since this is where the fabric of life casts off its everydayness, becomes visible, and is opened for re-examination.

Note that this personal material, disclosed by the counsellee, can usually serve as a starting point either for psychotherapy or philosophical counselling, depending on whether it is examined in terms of psychological processes or in terms of philosophical issues and ideas. Clearly, E's predicament could also have been treated psychologically. For example, from the perspective of a psychoanalytic object-relation theory, it might seem promising to investigate the processes underlying E's identification with her mother and her suspicion towards others' motivations. Philosophical counselling does not deny the validity of psychological understanding and treatment, but rather sees itself as a very different endeavour, not one of treating inner forces in the person, but rather journeying in the domain of ideas.

So far, then, there was nothing specifically philosophical in my conversation with E. It was towards the end of our first session that the conversation took a philosophical turn, when I raised a philosophical issue concerning a presupposition which she had been taking for granted. In philosophical terms, the issue can be formulated as: What does it mean to relate to an other as a true person (rather than, say, as a thing)? What are the criteria, or essential characteristics, which define a genuine relation to another person? Or, in short: What counts as an authentic relation to a person?<sup>2</sup> It is important, however, to remember that the counsellee is usually not a philosopher and is not acquainted with technical jargon and with methods of high-power analysis. It is therefore important not to rush in posing the issue and in answering it, but rather to devote some time to its gradual formulation and clarification, and to the examination of its relevance to her life.

'It seems,' I said to E, 'that in your encounters with other people which you described, you felt that people were concerned only with their own affairs and are completely indifferent to the concerns of others. Each person dwells in his or her own world of self-centred concerns.'

She agreed that this had been her common experience. I now generalised the point. 'It seems,' I said, 'that for you, the Other<sup>3</sup> is, by his or her very nature, somebody who is always separated from you by an impassable gap.'

She asked me to explain what I meant, saying: 'Isn't it obvious that I and another person are two different entities, and that the Other is never myself?'

'Would you say,' I asked in return, 'that when you are in the company of a friend, you two are separate from each other in the same way that, say, this chair and this table are external to one another?'

She thought about this for a while, apparently somewhat perplexed. 'The reason I am asking,' I continued, 'is that it appears that I and a friend can meet in a way that chairs and tables cannot. We can be in a sort of togetherness. We may be able to cross the boundary between us in some sense.'

'But it does happen very often that people relate to each other as to a chair or a table,' she said, 'although it is also true that this may not be their only way. People treat others in many ways, some better some worse, some more sensitive some less.' I asked her to give examples from her own experience, and she described several.

'Imagine,' I then said to her, 'that we have in front of us this variety of relationships that you described, as well as many others. In fact, imagine that we set before us all the

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<sup>2</sup> Notice that the issue is not psychological, regarding how people tend to relate to others, for it cannot be answered on the basis knowledge of psychology data. There is nothing in people's heads or behaviours that can tell us which relationships are authentic and which relationships are not. Psychological processes do not come with a ready-made tag 'authentic' or 'inauthentic' on them. Determining the criteria under which a relationship to an other can count as authentic is a matter of analysis of the meaning of 'authentic relationship', not of psychological processes. At the same time, however, it may very well be that various psychological theories contain philosophical ideas that are relevant to the issue, and in this case they can be extracted and used in philosophical counselling.

<sup>3</sup> In Hebrew, in which the conversation was carried out, there is a special term for a person other than myself, ('zulat') so that in our conversation we could speak, without using technical terminology, about what in the English philosophical jargon is termed 'the Other'.

different relationships that people can possibly have to one another. You have just told me that some relationships are more sensitive. Now, which of them, would you say, are relationships that are more sensitive, or that acknowledge the other for what he or she is, and which of them distort the Other? Which relationships are more true or proper in your eyes?’

This was the heart of the philosophical issue, the first which we came upon in our conversations. At this point, after the issue had received an initial formulation, an additional step was necessary, one that is crucial in philosophical counselling. The counsellee, as a person untrained in philosophical thought, usually has very little to say by way of answering a philosophical question. I, as a philosophical counsellor, cannot answer the question for her, but I must supply ‘raw materials’ - possible distinctions, concepts, assumptions, lines of thought, etc. - which she can use (develop, modify, reject, etc.) in her own way. Only so can the counsellee go beyond hackneyed slogans towards new perspectives and realms of existence. This must be done, however, with great sensitivity so as not to lecture or impose theories.

And so, after we discussed the issue for a while and she asked me to elaborate on it, I decided to illustrate it through the views of several philosophers. Since it was already the very end of our session, I proposed that we continue to talk about the issue next time. In the meantime, I suggested that she read one or two relevant philosophical passages, a few pages long each, which I offered to give her. She asked that I give her both, and so I did. One was an essay on love by the Spanish philosopher Ortega (1959), and the other a chapter on relationships by the Indian-born thinker Krishnamurti (1964).

I should say that I ordinarily keep a pile of excerpts from philosophical articles and books, easy to read, on a variety of philosophical topics. I often give them to those counsellees who are interested and capable of reading them. Such readings, if taken seriously, can be extremely enriching to the philosophical exploration.

We were now ready to start a stage which is usually the third in philosophical conversations, following the first stage of personal self-description and the second stage of the raising of a philosophical issue. Here the point is to postpone answering the philosophical issue at hand and to explore its complexity and range of possible approaches to it, in order to develop an understanding of its meaning and implications. This stage is soon followed by what I consider the fourth stage, which consists of relating the new theoretical understanding to the counsellee's life.

When these two stages are joined together, as they often do, the result is an examination takes place on two levels of discussion in parallel: on the philosophical level, it attempts to explore the networks of concepts underlying the issue, which, in E's case, were those related to interpersonal relationships, their inner structure, implications, basic assumptions, and of course their authenticity. On the personal level, the examination is intended to examine the implications of the philosophical ideas under discussion for the counsellee's concrete experiences and predicament, and also, in the opposite direction, from the concrete to the abstract - to give birth to new philosophical insights. The process of moving back and forth between the philosophical and the personal level and weaving the two into one another unfolds the horizon of ideas or meanings related to the issue, not only those that are already embedded in the counsellee's life, but more importantly those that extend beyond her actual way of being. The latter are intended to broaden her personal attitudes to herself and others, and help her transcend her present being towards broader and deeper understandings and attitudes.

We started the second session by talking about the reading material. She found the readings refreshing and enlightening, but also perplexing - she did not know exactly why. ‘I am not used to thinking about relations in this way,’ she said. It was only after a few minutes of inquiry that she understood: ‘I think I see now why the articles sounded

strange to me. It was because they analyse relationships and love without any reference to the issue of self-interest or altruism. I always thought that in order to talk about the essence of love or friendship, you must relate to selfish or unselfish motivations.' A little later she added: 'It is not that these philosophers deny what I feel about love and selfishness. They simply hardly talk about it, as though the presence or absence of self-interest is not the main issue at all in relationships.'

I believe that this was a very significant moment for E. A radical change in perspective was starting to take place when she started to understand the meanings of other ways of relating to people. Now she could see more clearly the implications of the philosophical views whose meaning she had previously felt only vaguely. And indeed, we found that for Krishnamurti, the major axis in his discussion of authentic relations has little to do with her concerns about selfishness, but rather focuses on the past versus the present. Specifically, within his network of ideas, the issue is whether one relates to others through ready-made ideas acquired in previous experiences, thus colouring them with preconceptions, or alternatively allowing the other person to be met in a novel space of the present. From this perspective, E's theory of selfishness, through which she had always dealt with others, made her attitude to others inauthentic. We continued to examine some of her experiences, and she could now see her preconceptions as amounting to a barrier, distance, and hence isolation -which is precisely what Krishnamurti holds.

I regarded with caution E's attraction to Krishnamurti's views. It is always dangerous, in counselling situations, to mention a philosopher's theory for fear that it would be accepted uncritically. Although good philosophers present us with a rich network of ideas thus illustrating how philosophical ideas can be developed, the danger is that the counsellee might take the philosophical theory as an authority and adopt it indiscriminately. One way to avoid this danger is to introduce alternative views.

I suggested to E that we look at other perspectives, and we now switched to Ortega. Here we found a different set of concepts that was used to characterise authentic love. We focused on his surprising claim that a person is, in some specifiable sense, not always inside herself (phenomenologically speaking, of course, not physically). True love (romantic as well as other), as opposed to desire, means going outside yourself towards the beloved. Love is a constant migration. In contrast, in the case of desire, which is often confused with love, the person brings the desired object towards and into himself. Thus, Ortega can be understood as proposing a criterion for authenticity, and as saying that within the spectrum of possible relationships that people tend to have, those that deserve to be regarded as authentic love contain such a migration, or going beyond oneself.

I asked E if she had ever experienced migration in Ortega's sense. She replied that the closest to it occurred with R, her ex-boyfriend. However, as we talked about this relationship, E realised that her extreme jealousy and her attempts to possess him were in fact contrary to Ortega's notion of migration.

After a while she told me: 'You know, I now see that for me, being intimate with somebody has always meant having him, encapsulating and keeping him in a glass cage. I now see that while I did in fact go outside myself towards R, it was always with the final aim of returning with him into myself and bringing him into my enclosure.' And now she also remembered that another man, with whom she had been briefly involved, complained to her once that (and here the translation from the Hebrew sounds somewhat awkward) while he was coming out of himself towards her, she was not going out towards him.

'It never occurred to me,' she said, 'that love and desire, the desire to have, are so different from each other. Being intimate means going out of where I am standing now,

agreeing to change myself towards the other, not trying to accommodate him inside my world.'

In our third session we went one step further towards the beginning of what I regard as the fifth stage, in which the counsellee starts developing her own personal response to the issue at hand. It is the last stage of the counselling, although 'last' here does not mean the end of the counselling, since new cycles of stages keep occurring as new personal material and new philosophical issues appear in the conversation.

Specifically, now that E was developing a better understanding of the issue and of some alternative philosophical responses to it, she was starting to be capable of doing her own individual thinking. She was getting ready to develop insights of her own, supplement them to the views discussed, and do her own modifications, omissions and combinations. We also expanded our horizon to include some ideas by Buber (1958) and Sartre (1977). Little by little we continued to weave the various ideas we found or formed-assumptions, concepts, etc. - into a richer, multi-faceted landscape, tied them more intimately to her experiences and life, and related them to other relevant philosophical issues.

As my earlier comments should suggest, we did not end our counselling sessions with a finished conclusion, a unified theory, a statement, but rather with a rich network of perspectives and ideas that marked a territory extending mainly beyond her initial stance. The point of the counselling was not to summarise her life through an inevitably one-sided picture. Nor was it to 'solve' her problem, but rather to go beyond it, towards broader perspectives on her actual and possible ways of being, thus enriching her philosophical self-understanding and her capacity to deal with her life.

E happened to be part of an outcome-study which I was conducting at the time. Let me finish by quoting from her questionnaire, which she filled out after 4 sessions, her description of her experience (translated from the Hebrew):

The conversations were meaningful to me, since they forced me to get out of my narrow frame of mind with which I usually relate to everyday problems. Part of the 'mist' evaporated, the picture was sometimes clarified, not because I broke down the problem to its parts but because I examined it from the broader perspective.  
(...)

There was a particularly meaningful moment when I understood how I see what loving is. Through this specific insight I understood how much my basic presupposition, concerning the self-centredness of man, colours my world in a very specific colour. It is commonly said that every person has her own subjective truth - this has become a cliché. But at that moment I understood *how much* my truth is subjective and how easy it is to fall into the prison of absolute conviction.  
(...)

The fact that the counsellor sometimes shared with me his thoughts and feelings about the issue we were discussing did not upset the balance needed for counselling, but rather helped my personal confidence (something I did not find possible at all in psychotherapy). My feeling is that I have passed a journey, a trip with another person who knows many paths that I don't know, and turns my attention to them. But I also saw that I have my own paths, and I too can sometimes lead to other regions, less known to him.

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