

# Philosophical Inquiry and Psychological Development

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**ABSTRACT:** Reasoning can promote psychological development, so even if the role of philosophical counselor is defined strictly in terms of assisting the reasoning of the client, we can expect client-centered philosophical inquiry to yield psychological benefits. The practices of philosophical counseling and psychotherapy permeate one another to some degree while also diverging in characteristic focus. Philosophical counselors are particularly well suited to helping clients think through their situation in the world.

Can one person assist the psychological development of another by means of shared rational inquiry? Psychological development and rationality can be defined in terms of a common goal, for changes in the self are judged to be positive and cognitive procedures are judged to be rational to the degree that such changes or procedures put us more in touch with reality. Cognitive steps that lead us away from the truth are deemed on that basis alone to be both irrational and counterproductive to the development of the self. Given the role of reasoning in psychological development and given the old adage that two heads are better than one, we can expect that in many cases one person will be able to contribute to another person's psychological development by contributing to the other person's reasoning. Joe can bring to an inquiry intuitions and perceptions that have eluded Sam, thereby contributing to the receptive, expansive phase of rationality, and Sam might detect inconsistencies and draw inferences that Joe has overlooked, thereby contributing to the active, integrative phase of rationality. This does not mean that every individual is capable of contributing to the inquiry of every other individual. There are times when two heads are worse than one (at least for one of the persons involved), for example when one person lacks sufficient skill to assist another or when two persons differ to such a degree in their initial assumptions that reasoning together is unproductive. But we can expect that in many cases dialogue will

improve the breadth and rigor of a person's reasoning, and in such cases one person is in a position to contribute to another person's psychological development by engaging in inquiry with him.

Participants in an inquiry can benefit psychologically without having any psychological symptoms that need curing. Psychological development, construed as growth in the self's degree of engagement with reality, encompasses much more than the alleviation of symptoms. One might argue that every personality includes a degree of neurosis and that we therefore can be sure that symptoms (broadly construed) will be present whenever two persons reason together. But even granted this assumption the potential benefits of reasoning extend beyond the cure of neurosis<sup>1</sup> to include other psychological improvements such as the development of new skills, the acquisition of additional knowledge and the development of greater powers of empathy. One might use the term "neurosis" to refer to a lack of development in each of these respects, but this would stretch the term considerably, converting "neurosis" into a label covering every non-optimal psychological state.

In most cases both participants in a shared inquiry can expect to benefit from reasoning together. However, it is possible for the expected benefits to be distributed unequally. For example, one person can join the inquiry of another, provisionally accepting the other person's premises and exploring their implications. If the person who adopts the cognitive agenda of the other has experience in the relevant sort of inquiry and if, in addition, he has made a long-term, professional commitment to assisting the reasoning of others, then the person whose interests guide the inquiry can expect to receive some psychological benefit from the interaction. The person whose agenda determines the content of the inquiry could benefit from the interaction even if his partner does not have greater knowledge or cognitive skill than he has, for the benefit flows primarily from the opportunity to conduct his own inquiry in partnership with another person.

In light of these observations it seems plausible to imagine that a professional in the business of helping clients think through whatever issues are important to them could have a positive effect on the psychological development of his clients. And in fact the profession we have been discussing in such general and hypothetical terms already exists. Over the past twenty years approximately one hundred

philosophers in about a dozen countries have begun to engage in philosophical inquiry with private clients or with interested groups in bookstores, cafes, prisons and nursing homes.<sup>2</sup> By involving the general population in philosophical inquiry, such “philosophical practitioners” or “philosophical counselors” move outside the orbit of philosophy as an academic specialty, reviving an older, more inclusive tradition that treats philosophical inquiry as a dimension of every person’s life. The assumption here is not that large numbers of people are anxious to discuss philosophical issues of an academic nature, yearning (for example) to discuss Kantian epistemology or Rawls’ theory of justice, but rather that each person, merely by virtue of being human, confronts questions that are philosophical in a broader sense. Some of these broader philosophical questions lie at the core of particular areas of professional philosophical inquiry but nevertheless can be explored without referring to the historical or contemporary literature. One need not be a philosophy student or philosophy professor to ask how our knowledge is justified or whether a particular socioeconomic system is unjust or why there is something rather than nothing. Other philosophical questions are far less general and focus on the particular situation of the person who raises the question. For example, a person might ask “What occupation ought I to follow?” or “What kind of relationships are worth seeking?” or “What experiences have meaning for me?” The scope of such questions is narrow and the particular circumstances and identity of the questioner are relevant to their answers, but in their own highly contextual way such evaluative and existential questions raise philosophical issues. To some degree each person must think through such questions for himself, but a philosophical counselor can be of assistance in rendering such inquiry less arduous—or at any rate less lonely—than it would otherwise be.

The term “philosophical counselor” suggests that the philosopher in private practice will provide some kind of advice to the client or will engage in some therapeutic activity designed to solve a problem that the client brings to the session. Naturally we might wonder what advice a philosopher is in a position to provide when the subject of philosophy has so much trouble answering the questions of which it is composed.<sup>3</sup> We might also wonder about the propriety of philosophers offering a kind of therapy when they have no training in the diagnosis or treatment of psychological disorders. Partly for these reasons the

term “philosophical practitioner” is often preferred by writers who define the role as excluding both the giving of advice and the treatment of psychological illness. I will use both terms here, referring to philosophers in private practice as counselors and as practitioners while trying not to prejudge the issue of what exactly a philosopher can do for his clients.

What services might a philosophical counselor provide? Somewhat paradoxically, the philosopher in private practice is not in a very good position to offer traditional academic instruction. If a client wishes to explore a specific theoretical issue, such as whether determinism is compatible with free will or how linguistic meaning is related to reference, or if the client wants help in comprehending the work of a particular philosopher, the breadth and complexity of historical and contemporary philosophical debates will render it highly unlikely that the philosophical practitioner will have much familiarity with the particular issue or figure of interest. A philosophical practitioner meets a roster of clients with diverse interests and has little time to prepare for each session, so he will typically find it difficult to assist a client who has well-defined academic interests. Admittedly, philosophical counseling sessions might not be entirely pointless in such cases. The philosopher could hear the client out, provide an internal critique of the client’s thinking, offer feedback on any writing the client generates, and attempt to think along with the client despite a lack of familiarity with the relevant primary and secondary literature. However, it seems that anyone with a specific philosophical interest would be better off taking a university course on the relevant topic. On the other hand, some clients might be looking for a general introduction to philosophy, and a philosophical counselor with broad interests could offer an introductory survey course in tutorial form. Philosophy can be a difficult field in which to find one’s feet, partly because terms are defined contextually in the course of debate, and one-on-one discussion with a philosopher can be a good way to get oriented in the field. Persons who feel intimidated by the prospect of enrolling in a philosophy course at a university might appreciate such an introductory tutorial.

However, these relatively academic offerings do not tap the real potential of a philosophical practice. Philosophical practitioners are in a good position to offer something that philosophy professors do not provide, namely a sustained, in-depth and shared exploration of whatever evaluative, conceptual or

existential<sup>4</sup> issues the client might wish to think through. In hiring a philosopher the client hires someone committed to the project of rational inquiry who is willing to devote himself to the cognitive agenda of the client. In addition, the philosophical practitioner brings to the discussion some degree of familiarity with the enterprise of philosophical inquiry. Dialogue with a philosopher could help the client to define his terms, question his assumptions, resolve inconsistencies among his beliefs, and deepen his understanding of his situation.<sup>5</sup> Each of us can consult a variety of experts and published sources when we wish to gather information about a particular subject, but the sources of objective information tend to fall silent when the issue at hand is integrally connected to the identity of the inquirer or when the issue slips the disciplinary traces and eludes every standard form of expertise. Many philosophical questions are best explored in a context that is intermediate between private introspection and public debate, and a philosophical counselor can provide an unusually intimate form of cognitive assistance by joining the problem-space of the client and sharing the struggle to move forward from the client's current position.<sup>6</sup>

A central example of the kind of problem that a client is likely to bring to a philosophical counselor is a moral dilemma or conflict between competing values. Value conflicts typically arise from highly specific circumstances in which a unique person confronts a unique situation. The person caught in a moral dilemma will not find an answer in an ethics textbook nor will the philosophical counselor provide an answer. Instead, the philosopher will join the inquiry, steering a middle course between adopting the stance of the client (which would leave the philosopher similarly baffled) and introducing considerations that are extraneous to the client's perspective (which the client would experience as irrelevant). Such a middle course can be fruitful because the client's descriptive and evaluative beliefs constitute a worldview that is inevitably one position in a dialectical sequence. In his own thinking the client is driven forward through a series of positions by the logical tensions and inconsistencies that afflict each position along the way, and the philosophical practitioner can work to move the client's thinking along, helping him to discover the next dialectical step. The philosopher can do this without knowing the ultimate answer to the client's question. In fact, the philosopher will enter more fully into the spirit of the inquiry if he does not believe that he knows the answer sought by the client.

The philosophical practitioner naturally has a worldview of his own. While serving as mediator of the client's intrapersonal value conflict the philosopher cannot put his own descriptive and evaluative beliefs entirely out of play. At the same time the philosopher should not attempt to convince the client of the truth of the philosopher's own beliefs, for the client has not elected to subject himself to any such regimen of persuasion. Rather, the role of the philosopher is to assist the dialectical development of his client's beliefs, drawing on his own beliefs as needed to suggest alternative interpretations, question the validity of inferences, resolve ambiguities, and search for the most plausible resolution of inconsistencies. The issue under discussion might be broadly theoretical in nature (it might even be an issue that is actively debated in the philosophical literature) or it might be quite personal and concrete, so that the solution will hinge on specific features of the client's identity and circumstances, but in either case the philosopher need not and typically will not know the answer to the client's question. A philosopher can neither answer the age-old questions of his field nor resolve the concrete dilemmas of his clients. All he can do is join the client in struggling with the issues that the client raises and strive to help the thinking of the client along. The chemical analogy here is a catalyst that enables a chemical reaction to proceed more rapidly, except that a catalyst is left unchanged by the reaction it catalyzes whereas a philosopher is not so immutable and might find that his own assumptions undergo revision in the course of the inquiry that he promotes.

How is the activity of philosophical counseling related to psychotherapy? Philosophy and therapy are both difficult to define, and the relationship between philosophical counseling and therapy is not easy to pin down. Therapists engage in a wide variety of activities not limited to the cure of psychological disorders, including such processes as the clarification of beliefs, the unpacking of intuitions and the exposure of non-optimal patterns of thinking, all of which play a role in the practice of philosophical counseling. Lahav attempts to distinguish between therapy and philosophical counseling by pointing out that therapists strive to interpret the behavior of their clients as the expression of underlying psychological factors, including unconscious processes, whereas philosophical counselors interpret their clients' behavior as responses to broadly philosophical features of the human condition, including evaluative,

conceptual and existential aspects of our situation.<sup>7</sup> For example, Lahav claims that a philosophical counselor would never theorize about the degree to which a particular belief of a client should be attributed to unconscious forces.<sup>8</sup> But this way of drawing the distinction—according to which, plausibly enough, therapists focus on the self and generate psychological explanations while philosophical counselors adopt a broader focus and generate philosophical explanations—is not very sharp, for all accounts of human behavior refer explicitly or implicitly to both psychological processes and non-psychological conditions. If an appeal to unconscious processes is occasionally useful for understanding one's own behavior, it seems arbitrary to forbid philosophical counselors to explore such hypotheses in their work. Conversely, a therapist should be aware of the evaluative, conceptual and existential context within which unconscious psychodynamic processes might play a role in determining a client's behavior.

Another way we might try to differentiate between therapy and philosophical counseling is in terms of the degree of psychological health of the client and the degree to which a medical model is applicable to the interaction between client and professional. Most therapeutic activity is designed to cure some symptom whereas philosophical counseling, which is nothing more than assisted philosophical inquiry, typically does not set out to cure a symptom but rather aims to promote further psychological development within the range of the healthy. Psychologists have been legitimately concerned at the prospect of clients with psychological disorders of varying degrees of severity being treated by philosophers who have no training in the treatment of mental illness. These fears would be greatly alleviated if philosophical counseling were considered appropriate primarily for persons who meet some threshold of psychological health and who wish to pursue a program of psychological change that begins rather than ends in the absence of psychological symptoms. However, this line of demarcation also is not as sharp as we might like. Many clients of therapists are unusually healthy and use therapy to supplement their already considerable degree of insight into their own motivations and actions. In addition, as Marinoff<sup>9</sup> points out, a person could be clinically depressed as a result of struggling with an unresolved moral conflict, in which case treating the depression without addressing the moral issue at stake would fail to address the root of the problem. The existence of symptoms does not automatically entail that a

client should see a therapist rather than a philosophical counselor, nor does the absence of symptoms entail that a client should see a philosophical counselor rather than a therapist.

It seems best to think of therapy and philosophical counseling as shading into one another along a spectrum or continuum of situations and interventions.<sup>10</sup> There is likely to be some philosophical dimension to the situation of any client afflicted with serious psychological illness, and a good therapist will include philosophical inquiry among his arsenal of techniques for treating his clients' suffering.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, there is likely to be a psychological dimension to even the healthiest cases of philosophical inquiry, for our struggles to think through the most vexed and fundamental issues are often shaped by the vagaries of personality, so that a philosophical counselor will need to remain alert to the psychological context of his client's inquiries. The two practices permeate one another to some degree, with therapists and philosophical counselors each engaging on occasion in activities that are more characteristic of the other. At the same time a polarity between the two practices remains apparent. Therapists strive to move their clients toward some ideal of psychological health, whereas philosophical counselors stand ready to throw into question their own and their clients' assumptions about what constitutes psychological health. Depending on the circumstances therapists are not averse to intervening in a relatively external fashion, applying such remedies as behaviorist schedules of reinforcement or psychoactive drugs in order to alleviate their clients' symptoms. By contrast, philosophical counselors operate almost entirely in an immanent fashion, provisionally accepting the worldview of their clients and working to help the client take whatever cognitive steps follow from his current beliefs.

Therapists are expected to notice when a client raises a philosophical problem in order to avoid confronting an underlying psychological problem. For example, a client might introduce philosophical content into a therapy session in order to insulate himself from the therapist, using intellectualization as a defense. A good therapist will notice when this is happening and will search for a route back to the psychological issues lurking behind the philosophical concern. Clearly there are cases where such a professional mindset is useful for working through a client's resistance. This does not mean that whenever a therapist's client expresses a psychological problem in highly intellectualized terms or even

spins out philosophical theories for the sole purpose of avoiding a psychological issue it is always useless or counterproductive to engage the client in philosophical discussion. A certain degree of engagement at the philosophical level might reassure the client that his concerns will not be approached in a reductive spirit. But regardless of what course of action the therapist pursues as a remedy, the therapist will tend to interpret philosophical inquiry as a sign of underlying psychological dynamics and he will attempt to bring these underlying dynamics to the surface.

Clearly, it can be difficult to identify when philosophical inquiry is functioning as defensive intellectualization and when such inquiry is functioning as a legitimate means of engagement with the human condition. The training and client-base of therapists will tend to make them particularly alert to intellectualization and somewhat less sensitive to the possibility of healthy philosophical inquiry. Conversely, we can expect that philosophers, as a result of their training, will tend to give philosophizing the benefit of the doubt and be less likely to notice when philosophical inquiry is being used as a dodge or defense. These professional orientations are probably beneficial in the majority of cases handled respectively by the therapist and philosopher, but they carry obvious risks. Freud himself, in what seems to have been a defensive reaction against his own early interest in philosophy, gruffly dismissed an entire domain of inquiry when he claimed that “The moment a man questions the meaning and value of life he is sick, since objectively neither has any existence.”<sup>12</sup> A therapist who has no philosophical training and who is unaware that philosophical mysteries pervade the worldviews of the sanest of persons is unlikely to handle the philosophical questions of his clients in the most sympathetic or productive way.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, there is nothing very appealing about the idea of philosophers in private practice unknowingly helping their clients to consolidate an overly intellectual response to psychological distress. The therapist and the philosophical counselor will each do a better job to the extent that they remain aware of the limitations of their respective professional orientations and refer clients to one another whenever this would benefit the client.

For some persons interaction with a philosopher—or interaction with a particular philosopher—will turn out to be useless or even harmful. Whether the negative outcome is due to limitations of the client,

limitations of the philosopher, the particular needs of the client or the relationship between the two personalities involved, it will be necessary for one or both parties to end an unfruitful interaction. The client can end the relationship quite easily—he need merely stop purchasing the services of the philosopher—but the philosopher should tread carefully when bringing a series of sessions to a close because the client may have grown psychologically reliant on the meetings. In such cases the philosopher can truthfully state that he feels he cannot be of much assistance to the client, and he can suggest that the client enlist the services of another professional, referring the client to a therapist, pastoral counselor, philosophy professor, career counselor or other philosophical counselor, depending on his conception of the client's needs.

Given this general sketch of the role of philosophical counselor—which leaves room for the role to assume a somewhat different shape in the interaction with each particular client—it might still seem peculiar for a philosopher to collect fees while freely admitting that he does not know the answers to any of the philosophical questions his clients might raise. As we have noted, the philosopher in private practice devotes his energy and attention to the cognitive agenda of the client and brings to the exchange some degree of familiarity with the enterprise of philosophical inquiry. These factors alone might justify his fee. But there remains a sense in which this profession seems impossible to practice. To do his job well the philosophical counselor must listen intently and empathically, bracketing his own positions in order to enter into the worldview of the client yet also contributing his own insights as the inquiry unfolds. He must set a tone that allows the client to think through the most difficult and personal of issues. These are more or less traditional therapeutic skills, but in addition the philosophical counselor should serve as a mediator between the concrete, situation-specific inquiry of his client and the vast tradition of inquiry that constitutes the field of philosophy. This is a very tall order, calling on the philosophical counselor to possess and artfully deploy a thorough understanding of the history of philosophy and contemporary philosophical debates. If the role of philosophical counselor calls for this degree of knowledge and skill then it seems that virtually no one will be up to the task.

The figure of Socrates is reassuring in this regard not as a precedent demonstrating that philosophical counseling is possible, for it is not very reassuring to learn that a genius can provide this kind of service, but because Socrates made his own ignorance central to his practice. The philosopher's client is not looking for someone who has the answers he seeks, for no one else could be in possession of answers that are so integrally related to his own situation and identity. Rather, the philosopher's client is looking for someone who is willing to inquire with him on the matters that concern him. Here the philosopher's awareness of his own ignorance can work to the client's advantage. Philosophers, more than any other modern professional, are familiar with the topography of our ignorance, for they specialize in the exploration of places where the continents of our worldview fail to mesh, leaving gaps of understanding that no one has yet imagined how to close. Such gaps of understanding correspond to traditional philosophical issues—how the mind is related to the body, how free will can exist along with determinism, how moral truths fit into the world—that are simultaneously very close to home and very general in scope. Philosophical questions are intimate, raising the question of what sort of beings we are and what sort of beings we ought to become, and yet also intractable, forcing us to inhabit a situation structured by the absence of their answers. As a result our experience ends up laced with philosophical mystery and full of points where inquiry can begin. Under these circumstances the ability to assist the philosophical inquiry of another person depends on not knowing and on knowing that one does not know rather than on the possession of some knowledge ready for delivery to the client.

A therapist's actions are guided by a conception of psychological health that functions as the unquestioned goal of therapy, so that in a sense the truth about how a client ought to change pre-exists within the therapist before his interaction with the client begins. By contrast, Socrates described himself as a midwife (*Theaetetus* 150) who assists the birth of new beliefs in his conversational partners without contributing any substantive content to that which is born. It seems likely that the metaphor of midwife was chosen by Socrates to counter the misconception held by his contemporaries that he knew the answers to the questions he raised. The metaphor of midwife goes to the opposite extreme, suggesting that the truth pre-exists within the interlocutor rather than within the philosopher. In fact, the outcome of

philosophical inquiry pre-exists within neither the philosopher nor the client but rather emerges from the dialectic between them. The philosopher is likely to have some conception of what constitutes positive psychological development (for example, one might use the criterion of greater engagement with reality) but any such conception can itself become the subject of philosophical debate. Like a therapist the philosopher is involved in the transformation of the identity of his client, but unlike a therapist the philosopher stands ready to put his own basic assumptions at risk, for he joins his client's inquiry as one more person who does not know the answers to philosophical questions.

In some respects the role of philosophical counselor is strangely reminiscent of the role of interior decorator. At the beginning of a design consultation neither the decorator nor the client knows what decor will best suit the client. Only a dogmatic interior decorator would presume to know at the outset what decor is best and attempt to foist this decor on the client. The decorator has experience with many styles of decor and also has experience helping people to discover what style best expresses their nature. The decorator has general notions about beauty and also personal aesthetic preferences, but his general notions will tell him little about what a particular client will find attractive, and he must partially bracket his own aesthetic preferences in order to allow the aesthetic preferences of his client to emerge. The decorator's goal is to mediate between the unique situation of his client and the general category of the beautiful, and he can effect this mediation only through an intimate collaboration in which he offers the client a chance to define himself in aesthetic terms. All of this nicely parallels the work of a philosophical counselor. To close the gap even further we can point out that the identities of both decorator and client could change in the course of a series of aesthetic consultations. The client is likely to become more aware of who he is and who he would like to be with regard to aesthetic matters, while the aesthetic beliefs of the decorator might evolve in the process of helping the client. If we add Nehamas's emphasis<sup>14</sup> on the aesthetic dimension of existential questions—the idea that each of us strives to construct a life according to aesthetic as well as ethical criteria—then even the respective subject matters of decorator and philosopher are not entirely foreign to one another. There remains a difference of

emphasis: the designer assists his client in making aesthetic choices while the philosopher helps his client to resolve evaluative, conceptual or existential issues.

I asked one reader for his response to an earlier draft of this article, and he replied that I had succeeded in making the idea of philosophical counseling seem sane. I was happy to hear this until I realized that my achievement in making the idea seem sane was impressive only to the degree that the idea itself is actually crazy. But if someone were to set up a philosophical practice without any sense of the impossibility and even the absurdity of such an enterprise—for example, if someone were convinced that he had access to some philosophical truth and opened a practice in order to transmit this truth to his clients—then we would have to say that such a person lacked perspective on his chosen profession. Some of the humor in the idea of a philosophical practice comes from the tension between the mundane accoutrements of any profession and the elusive nature of what this particular profession hopes to accomplish. Achenbach describes philosophical experience as “that experience which we manage to save from being submerged in routine,”<sup>15</sup> and there is precious little routine in the content of philosophical inquiry. Yet, the philosophical counselor rents an office, chooses desk accessories, markets his services and bills his clients, all in the service of a practice whose goals transcend his understanding. Laughter could be directed at the idea of philosophical counseling in reaction to the perceived arrogance of someone who presumes to sell access to philosophical truth, but the humor in the idea persists even when we imagine the philosophical practitioner as anxious rather than arrogant, for the philosophical practitioner sets out to earn a living from the disorienting experience of philosophical inquiry. Laughter at the enterprise of philosophical counseling is related to laughter at the absurdity of our situation in general, for the idea of a philosophical practice has the power to intensify our sense of the contingency of our condition. We live surrounded by philosophical mysteries—admittedly mysteries invisible to those who lack a philosophical cast of mind—and yet we continue to live, that is to say, we go out to buy milk or to get a haircut, we pursue one occupation rather than another, we wonder how to remove a mustard stain from a shirt, and eventually we draw up a last will and testament, while

all the time remaining covertly unmoored, building our lives on assumptions that we can throw into question at any time. Philosophical counseling, uniquely among professions, squarely addresses this aspect of our situation.

## Endnotes

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1. It might be objected that reasoning cannot cure a neurosis. For example, one cannot cure a phobia by presenting evidence that the object of the phobia is not dangerous. But even granted that reasoning does not automatically generate emotions or behavior consistent with its conclusions there remains a sense in which reasoning, more broadly construed, paves the way to a cure. The techniques of psychoanalysis (e.g., interpretation of free associations, analysis of the transference, etc.) are methods of rational inquiry designed to uncover and alter the unconscious rationale of a symptom. In this broader sense the analyst seeks to cure a phobia by reasoning with the patient.
  2. Thus far, six international conferences and two collections of essays have been devoted to the subject of philosophical counseling. The collections are (1) Kenneth Cust (ed.), *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines*. Vol. 17, No. 3, (1998) and (2) Ran Lahav and Maria da Venza Tillmanns (eds.), *Essays on Philosophical Counseling* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995).
  3. The slow rate of progress in philosophy can be attributed partly to the fact that when progress in a field begins to accelerate the issue is subsequently recategorized as lying outside the domain of philosophy. For example, “natural philosophy” became “natural science” when cumulative progress in the study of nature got seriously underway. But this historical dynamic, in which philosophy functions as an “abnormal” discipline giving birth to various “normal” disciplines, supports rather than undermines the suspicion that philosophers qua philosophers will have little advice for a client.
  4. By “existential” I mean issues that put the questioner’s identity into question. In order to resolve an existential issue one must decide what sort of being one is or what sort of being one ought to be.
  5. These are among the benefits listed by Elliot Cohen in “Philosophical Counseling: Some Roles of Critical Thinking” [Ran Lahav and Maria da Venza Tillmanns (eds.), *Essays on Philosophical Counseling* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995), pp. 121-131], Louis Marinoff in “On the Emergence of Ethical Counseling: Considerations and Two Case Studies” [Ran Lahav and Maria da Venza Tillmanns (eds.), *Essays on Philosophical Counseling*

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(Lanham: University Press of America, 1995), pp. 171-191], and Jon Borowicz in “Philosophy as Conversion” [Kenneth Cust (ed.), *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines*. Vol. 17, No. 3, (1998), pp. 71-84].

6. Achenbach puts this point in Hegelian terms: “Subjective reason does not have in itself enough of what is essential for it....It needs an Other in order to test itself in a conversation with him and thus become a ‘concrete generality.’ This is the point at which philosophical practice becomes a real need....[J]ust like the subjective spirit, the objective spirit too is not true. It is, rather, a mere fact, something meaningless for the individual in his predicament: ...a ready-made thought from which thinking has long been evaporated.” Achenbach believes that the inadequacy of subjective spirit and objective spirit creates the need for mediation between them, which the philosophical practitioner strives to provide. Gert Achenbach, “Philosophy, Philosophical Practice, and Psychotherapy” in Ran Lahav and Maria da Venza Tillmanns (eds.), *Essays on Philosophical Counseling* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995), p. 71.

7. Ran Lahav, “A Conceptual Framework for Philosophical Counseling: Worldview Interpretation” in Ran Lahav and Maria da Venza Tillmanns (eds.), *Essays on Philosophical Counseling* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995), pp. 3-24.

8. *ibid.*, p. 7.

9. Louis Marinoff, “On the Emergence of Ethical Counseling: Considerations and Two Case Studies” in Ran Lahav and Maria da Venza Tillmanns (eds.), *Essays on Philosophical Counseling* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995), p. 174.

10. Despite his own attempt to draw a sharp distinction between psychological interventions and philosophical interventions Lahav agrees that any actual episode of counseling will inevitably include both psychological and philosophical elements: “It is clear that the degree to which a given therapy or counseling is philosophical or psychological should be seen as a dimension rather than a dichotomy.” Ran Lahav, “A Conceptual Framework for Philosophical Counseling: Worldview Interpretation” in Ran Lahav and Maria da Venza Tillmanns (eds.), *Essays on Philosophical Counseling* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995), p. 13.

11. Achenbach refers to “the pervasiveness of philosophical moments in therapeutic discourse” and concludes that “psychotherapy is a form of practicing philosophy,” albeit one in which the goals of the practice are not themselves put into question. Gert Achenbach, “Philosophy, Philosophical Practice, and Psychotherapy” in Ran Lahav and Maria da Venza Tillmanns (eds.), *Essays on Philosophical Counseling* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995), p. 73.

12. Quoted in Philip Rieff. *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 34.

13. Ran Lahav, “A Conceptual Framework for Philosophical Counseling: Worldview Interpretation” in Ran Lahav and Maria da Venza Tillmanns (eds.), *Essays on Philosophical Counseling* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995), p. 14.

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14. Alexander Nehamas. *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1985), pp. 226-234.

15. Gert Achenbach, "Philosophy, Philosophical Practice, and Psychotherapy" in Ran Lahav and Maria da Venza Tillmanns (eds.), *Essays on Philosophical Counseling* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995), p. 73.