

## **Introduction:**

### **Symposium on the Life and Works of Shlomit Schuster**

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This collection of four papers is a tribute to the work of the late [Dr. Shlomit C. Schuster](#), who passed away in July at the age of 64. The distinctive feature of all of these papers is that they have been written by philosophical practitioners who personally knew her. What each brings to light is the salient connection between her personal attributes (the type of person she was) and the character of her work. Indeed, she cared deeply about her clients in a way that was only possible for a person whose true nature was to care.

Methodologically, what is most striking in the four papers is the critique of Shlomit's distinction between philosophical practice and psychotherapy. For her, philosophical practice was *sui generis*, not in any respect reducible to or fundamentally related to psychological practice. Her attraction to Gerd Achenbach's "beyond method" approach to philosophical practice sets her apart from the four authors in this symposium. Still, there is a deep affection and respect that each has for this mild mannered woman who dare to stand her ground against very insistent and sometimes dogmatic currents within the philosophical community. This comes out clearly in the case of Shlomit's resistance to those who have wanted to bring philosophical counseling under the umbrella of state licensing.

For Shlomit, the core of philosophical practice has been its respect for human autonomy, that of both the practitioner as well as the client. At least one author has found Shlomit's strong emphasis on clients' subjectivity to be out of step with the inter-subjective constraints placed on human existence by environment conditions (economic, legal, social, etc.), and by clients

themselves whose subjective states of mind may sometime portend danger to themselves or to others (e.g. suicidal or homicidal ideation). However, all authors agree that authenticity and freedom (within rational limits) should be a central value in philosophical practice.

In the last chapter of Shlomit's life, she became increasingly interested in spirituality as developed through Christian thinkers such as Climacus, who used the analogy of "Jacob's ladder" as a basis for aspiring to the "higher virtues"—for example, humility, faith, hope, and love. As some authors suggest, this amalgamation of philosophy with spirituality may have been a result of Shlomit's own illness and impending death.

However, I see this ascent toward spirituality in Shlomit's thinking as an inevitable realization that, in the process of becoming authentic and free, one moves beyond one's own subjectivity. From the theological perspective, this new level of self-realization would be communion with the Divine. But the latter has different meanings for different philosophers, and it need not be theological.

Along with the philosophical practice approaches held by the four authors in this symposium, my own philosophical practice approach, Logic-Based Therapy (LBT), seems, *prima facie*, miles apart from a non-methodological approach; for LBT is a definite method. There are, after all, [six steps](#) to this method. Paradoxically, however, there are incredibly striking similarities with Dr. Schuster's approach.

In the first step of LBT, one seeks to enter the phenomenological world of the client through empathetic understanding, active listening, and reflection. The therapist does not attempt to control how the client thinks or feels. This requires that therapists be authentic, caring, tolerant, and respectful. Otherwise the client would not dare disclose her deepest secrets to a perfect stranger. In so doing, the therapist is able to discover the manner in which the client

thinks and feels, and how this cognitive-emotive subjectivity directs how she lives. While, in subsequent steps, LBT moves into philosophical analysis of this thinking, it never imposes a philosophy on a client. The autobiography of the client, her own narrative, is what ultimately sets the basis for the philosophy the client chooses and applies to her life. In other words, the autonomy and freedom of the client are paramount. Thus, a theistic client may feel at home with the likes of St. Thomas in addressing her particular problem of living, while an atheistic client may find Nietzsche more comfortable. Further, these philosophies are paired with particular “guiding virtues” that correspond to the type of irrational thinking a client exemplifies. Thus, for example, a client who tends to jump on the bandwagon may work toward the guiding virtue of authenticity, and the philosophy she uses to write her new narrative of life will be one that is consistent with her own philosophical predilections.

It is quite ironic that Shlomit ended her career embracing a virtue-based philosophical practice approach. She discovered this element in the Christian monks; I, in the ancient Greeks; but we both found our respective philosophical homes in the edifice of an aspirational, virtue-based philosophical practice. This is not so surprising inasmuch as both are teleological, and it was Plato and Aristotle who helped set the metaphysical foundations for Christian thought—from Plotinus and St. Augustine to Aquinas.

So, philosophical practice is indissolubly bound up with the moral character of the practitioner. Philosophers who are arrogant, disrespectful, and intolerant need not apply. This is a central theme running through this collection of articles; and it is precisely what is so incredibly salient in the work and person of Dr. Shlomit C. Schuster.