A Rhetorical Turn in Philosophical Counseling? An Invitation

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ABSTRACT: Far more than the dialectic philosophy of Socrates, the rhetorical humanist tradition avoids objectivist epistemology, charts a traversable path to practical wisdom, and aptly highlights the importance of aesthetic style. In those and other ways, we argue, it offers a preferable historical basis for today's philosophical counseling. Advocates of that contemporary practice tend to cite Socrates as its historical progenitor and favor the narrow propositional logic that is ascribed to him. Some practitioners, though, have also grown more attuned to metaphorical and narrative elements in a client's worldview. We aim to supplement their claims by drawing from principles of classical rhetorical theory, showing a way to rethink the practice of philosophical counseling today.

Ida Jongsma, a leading advocate of philosophical counseling, writes that "in order for philosophical counselors to attain a professional status and to be taken seriously by the philosophical world and the general public, it must clarify its basic assumptions and theoretical framework."[1] If she is correct, it might seem odd to suggest a rhetorical turn in philosophical counseling. The study of rhetoric has long had a reputation as rather facile, and it would rarely be associated with the haughty task of clarifying a "theoretical framework." The irony of our proposal runs still deeper in that philosophical counselors most often cite Socrates as their historical progenitor, and it was he who led the ancient

[1] Ida Jogsma, "History and Open Questions," Ran Lahav and Maria da Venza Tillmanns (eds.), *Essays on Philosophical Counseling* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, Inc., 1995), 31.

charge against rhetoric as a "false science" focused on "mere" opinion, social appearance, and stylish flattery.

But Socrates' pejorative characterization of rhetoric in the *Gorgias* misrepresents this ancient form of education and social praxis. Like ancient philosophy, classical rhetoric promotes lifestyles of critical reflection aimed at enriching everyday experience and improving human character. The main difference between the philosophical praxis of Socrates and his Athenian competitor, Isocrates, is that Socrates privileged the propositional logic of dialectic over all other forms of reasoning: Isocrates taught both conceptual disputation *and* the informal arts of ethical public argument and stylistic appeal.[2]

In this paper, we explore how principles of classical humanist rhetoric could help today's philosophical counselors understand their practice in fuller terms. We start by outlining the core ideas of classical rhetoric through a contrast with Socrates' dialectic philosophy. We then suggest that the literature of the contemporary philosophical counseling movement often reflects a Socratic bias in favor of propositional logic and conceptual clarity as the end of philosophical praxis, though a growing number of practitioners have also begun to invite a rhetorical turn in the field. Finally, we seek to supplement these practitioners' claims. We do so by examining how principles of classical rhetorical theory can help re-conceptualize key elements of the philosophical counselor's practice. More specifically, we consider how an understanding and analysis of clients' belief systems might include a narrative and metaphorical element.

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[2] It probably is inaccurate to ascribe a post-Cartesian dichotomy of logic versus rhetoric, proposition versus image, to ancient philosophy itself. We are addressing certain dominant readings of Plato's Socrates in contemporary times—how he has descended to us through history today. For a prime example of such a reading, see Martha C. Nussbaum's heavily influential *The fragility of goodness: Luck and ethics in Greek tragedy and philosophy* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 87-88, 122-35, 392-94. As we examine later in this paper, many advocates of philosophical counseling today seemingly subscribe to such interpretations. Accordingly, it makes the most sense and is most useful to present Socrates as we do here. We hope to publish another paper at

I. Socrates as Philosophical Counselor: The Rhetorical Alternative

There is little doubt that the philosophical counseling movement has most often named Socrates as the historical figure in Western philosophy who best represents the goals of contemporary practitioners. Great Britain's Society of Consultant Philosophers calls Socrates its "main inspirational source," referring to his dialogues as a "paradigm for philosophy 'practiced' as a way of life."[3] Louis Marinoff of the United States reports that he "see[s] the counselor's role as helping the client to lead precisely what Socrates called 'the examined life.'"[4] Israeli practitioner Shlomit Schuster recognizes: "Socrates as a philosophical midwife and as philosophical practitioner are themes which constantly recur in the literature of philosophical practice."[5]

There seem to be two primary features of Socrates' brand of philosophical praxis that most attract contemporary practitioners. First, like today's philosophical counselors, Socrates sought individual dialogic partners for an active and ongoing exploration of their beliefs and assumptions. The Athenian gadfly eschewed the boundaries of academic institutions to directly engage those in need of philosophical help on an individual basis. As Paul Sharkey writes in the *New York Times*, "[P]hilosophers have begun to scamper down from the ivory tower to conduct business the way Socrates did—by returning, literally, to the marketplace."[6] Elliot Cohen agrees: "It is no novel

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some point showing how Plato's Socrates can serve as an authentic historical progenitor for philosophical counseling.

[3] The Society of Consultant Philosophers, "What Is the Society of Consultant Philosophers?" 1999.

[4] "Interview with Louis Marinoff," *Philosophy Now*, 1988. <http://www.kcl.ac.uk?kis/schools/hums/philosophy/PhilNowHome.html>.

[5] Shlomit C. Schuster, *Philosophy Practice: An Alternative to Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Westport, London: Praeger Publishers, 1999), 37.

[6] Paul Sharkey, "I Bill, Therefore I Am—Philosophers Ponder a Therapy Goldmine," *New York Times* (March 8, 1998), 4-1.

suggestion that philosophers should take an interest in harnessing their logical tools to solve human problems; nor is the idea of philosophical counseling. Just look at Socrates!"[7]

The second and, we believe, more tenuous justification for a Socratic foundation for philosophical counseling lies in the nature of Socrates' dialogic practice. According to some, Socrates maintains an open and undogmatic relationship with his partners that is worthy of emulation. Dries Boele maintains that rather than instructing clients in the philosophical truths that they should adopt, "[P]hilosophical counseling is based on the ancient Socratic ideal of being a 'midwife' of wisdom, that is, of helping counselees give birth to *their own thinking.*"[8] Michael Schefczyk draws a similar conclusion: "Like modern philosophical counseling, [Socrates'] philosophizing consisted not in transmitting ready-made views, but rather in the process of examining the conceptions which underlie one's life."[9]

Despite these parallels between Socrates and contemporary philosophical counseling, there are significant problems in a hasty appropriation of his dialectic practice as a guide for the field. First, there is the issue of the relationship between Socrates and the philosophical uses to which Plato puts him in the Socratic dialogues. As Ekkehard Martens has pointed out, Plato's objectivist moral epistemology is inconsistent with open-minded, undogmatic dialogic practice that philosophical counselors wish to model.[10] One of the main reasons Plato's Socrates can lead his dialogic partners to see the philosophical truth in a particular situation is that there is an objective basis for the conclusions that, ultimately, they *must* come to. The individual soul possesses the innate ability to recognize the "true"

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[7] Elliot Cohen, "Some Roles of Critical Thinking," in Ran Lahav and Maria da Venza Tillmanns (eds.), 131.
[8] (emphasis added) Dries Boele, "Training of a Philosophical Counselor," in Ran Lahav and Maria da Venza Tillmanns (eds.), 37.
[9] Michael Schefczyk, "Life-Directing Concepts," in Ran Lahav and Maria da Venza Tillmanns (eds.), 83.
[10] In Schuster 37-38.

forms that undergird the social and natural worlds. As Alexander Dill has aptly noted, "Socratic dialogue is not an authentic dialogue because Socrates insisted on getting particular answers to particular questions."[11] In this respect, one does well to recognize that Plato's Socratic dialogues are almost always set pieces. The dialectic of question and answer follows an inexorable logic in which Socrates' own philosophical beliefs are almost always confirmed. To put it another way, to the extent that issues of human conduct are open to critical debate in Socrates' dialogues, there is the problem that *he always wins*.

With these concerns in mind, we are led to ask whether there might be another historical model that could inform contemporary philosophical counseling. As we have already suggested, classical rhetoricians are worthy of consideration. Like Socrates, Isocrates sought to directly engage his students in a critical examination of their "life-directing concepts." Moreover, he did so without objectivist epistemological baggage. Rather than explicating the Isocratean alternative to Socrates' philosophical practice, though, we wish to focus on a figure of the classical rhetorical tradition who is even more developed and influential: Marcus Tullus Cicero.[12] Cicero's unified philosophical and rhetorical practice challenges Socrates' moral certitude on the basis of a contingent social ethic that is open to the shifting demands of time and circumstance. Moreover, Cicero highlights the importance of aesthetic and stylistic capacities for the full development of human character. After explaining the contours of Cicero's humanist rhetorical philosophy, we will augment his argument in favor of the philosophical significance of aesthetic style. We will do so by calling attention to the work of two contemporary neoclassical rhetorical theorists: Kenneth Burke and Martha Nussbaum.

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[11] In Schuster 42.

Interestingly, like Plato's Socrates, Cicero presents his ideas about rhetoric and philosophy in a dialogic form. His magnum opus *De Oratore* uses the figure of Crassus—a great teacher of civic discourse—to represent his views about the contribution rhetorical education makes to development of human character. And the related philosophical treatise, *De Officiis*, comes in the form of a letter to his son Brutus.[13] But unlike Socrates, there is a closer correspondence between the dialogic form of Cicero's discourse and his commitment to a fully dialogic epistemology. For Cicero, the philosophical "truth" about a particular personal or political problem is not a matter that can be resolved *for certain*. Instead, Cicero's Crassus seeks to develop in his students the faculty of *decorum*.

In the concept of *decorum* we find a model of critical reflection that might well prove useful for today's philosophical counselors. The first philosophical counselor of our age, Gerd Achenbach, aptly proclaims that "*Philosophical counseling is the striving for practical wisdom*" and that "*Wisdom is to be introduced as the key notion of philosophical counseling*."[14] Contemporary philosophical counselors seem to appoint *phronesis* as the kind of practical wisdom most appropriate to seek within philosophical counseling. The notion of *phronesis* takes different forms in ancient Greek philosophical tradition, of course, but all those forms differ from *decorum* in two key ways. First, both *phronesis* and *decorum* ideally show what action is right relative to given circumstances. But typically, to enact *phronesis*, I must try to find what (particular) action is right by deducing or inducing from abstract, universal principles. As Nietzsche and others see especially in Platonism, a wide gulf separates *nous*

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[12] The classical rhetorical tradition, like philosophical tradition, is far from univocal. One might well also consider the views of the Sophists or Aristotle in considering the implications of rhetorical inquiry for philosophical counseling, no doubt resulting in different conclusions and insights, but such a project lies beyond the scope of this paper.

[13] Marcus Tullus Cicero, *De Oratore*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942/1982), and *De Officiis*, trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913/1990).

[14] (emphasis in original) Gerd Achenbach, "On Wisdom in Philosophical Practice," *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines* 17, 3 (Spring 1998), 8.

(theoretical knowledge) from concrete action. By contrast, I cultivate *decorum* first by relating particulars to other particulars through metaphor; what arises over time from this repeated exercise is less a faculty of calculation than of intuitive judgment. Second, *decorum* involves a dimension of aesthetic style—an ability to judge how to do *and say* the right thing, in the right way, at the right time. Thus, this Roman form of practical wisdom both subsumes and surpasses *phronesis*.

A full account of Cicero's rhetorical philosophy is beyond the scope of this paper, but we wish to underscore two fundamental aspects of his thought and practice. First, Cicero works from the assumption that human belief systems originate in social communities. It is the *sensus communis* that provides the philosophical palette we have to choose from in judging how to respond to particular problems and situations. This humanist ontology carries a moral obligation: since social tradition empowers us as moral agents we must act with an eye towards the good of the community and not only our own selfish interest. In this regard, moral virtue—in the Platonic sense of immutable norms discovered through philosophical reflection and logically valid moral reasoning—plays an important role in the ethical life of the community. As Cicero explains in *De Officiis*, humans are in fact drawn toward the "full and intelligent development of the true,"[15] in the Socratic sense, and we often seek "a duty for the performance of which an adequate reason may be rendered."[16] Cicero thus recognizes that training in "academic" philosophy and its argumentative style makes an important contribution to the development of critical thinking skills in students. Citizens are well-served, Cicero believes, by being able to explicate argumentative premises, identify hidden discursive assumptions, and achieve conceptual clarity.

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[15] *De Officiis* I.iv.15.
[16] *De Officiis* I.iii.8.

But Cicero also contends that when persons engage in the brand of philosophy that Plato's Socrates endorses—a kind that is abstract, dialectical, and speculative—they end up "devot[ing] too much industry and too much deep study to matters that are obscure and difficult and useless as well."[17] As a result, while "all these professions are occupied with the search after truth," Cicero says, "to be drawn by study away from active life [*vita activa*] is contrary to moral duty. For the whole glory of virtue is in activity."[18]

In other words, Cicero advocates a philosophy of active community involvement in which one struggles to discern the particular moral duty appropriate to a particular situation. There is no simple formula, procedural or substantive, to predetermine the outcome of decorous judgments. There is only the commitment to "make the interest of each individual and of the whole body politic identical. For if the individual appropriates to selfish ends what should be devoted to the common good, all human fellowship will be destroyed."[19]

How, then, would the philosophical counselor or teacher of ethics help citizens function within the *vita activa*? Again, rather than focusing on abstract propositional rules of moral reasoning, the philosophical counselor would draw attention to concrete historical exemplars of virtuous action. For instance, one might consider how Pericles embodied civic virtue in his famous funeral oration or how Cicero himself exhibited an appropriate degree of bravery in resisting Caesar's imperialist ambitions. In their nuances and particularities, such concrete exemplars let individuals generalize across situations and

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[17] *De Officiis* I.vi.19. Later figures in the humanist tradition voiced similar concerns. Desiderius Erasmus (c. 1466–1536), for example, charged that "[W]hile he disputed and reasoned of clouds and ideas, while he measured the feet of a flea, and marvelled at the voice of the gnat, he did not fathom the commonest concerns of life." *Praise of Folly*, trans. Hoyt Hopewell Hudson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941/1969), 81.
[18] *De Officiis* I.vi.19.
[19] *De Officiis* III.vi.26.

take guidance from them without reducing them to an abstract set of deductive ethical norms—norms that do violence to the unique situation in which one is called on to act.

It is through concrete analysis of particular ethical situations that one most readily develops the flexible capacity of *decorum*—a capacity for making philosophical judgments among the competing moral claims within human communities. But Cicero makes a second claim that is helpful for the philosophical counselor. It is not enough to explore concrete ethical situations in order to develop the ability to make intellectual judgments about the "good" in a particular case. Cicero's virtuous citizen is also called on to be able to express rhetorically her viewpoints as an active member of the community. In this context, *decorum* involves articulating a philosophical position on a particular topic that is truthful in regards to the subject matter, aesthetically coherent within itself, and suited to the needs and interests of its audience.[20]

In *De Oratore*, Cicero responds to speculative philosophers such as Plato who would "separate words from thoughts as one might sever body from mind" in the development of ethical character.[21] Cicero warns: "[N]either process can take place without disaster."[22] He grants that "it is impossible to achieve an ornate style without first procuring ideas and putting them into shape," but he insists that "at the same time, no idea can possess distinction without lucidity of style."[23] Why is stylistic mastery important to the development of ethical character? It calls on the individual to transcend the narrow horizon of experience afforded by the private contemplation of normative rules. It requires that individuals extend their ethical consciousness so as to tailor their discourse to some other person or

[20] See Michael Leff, "Things Made by Words: Reflections on Textual Criticism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 79 (1991): 223-231.
[21] *De Oratore* III.vi.24.
[22] *De Oratore* III.vi.24.
[23] *De Oratore* III.vi.24.

persons. In other words, Cicero calls for citizens to engage themselves in truthful, beautiful, and effective public dialogue in order to fully develop their own character and serve the good of the community from which they originated as ethical beings.

In sum, Cicero urges a unified social praxis, one in which persons reflect on the concrete dimensions of ethical and rhetorical decision-making in human communities. The ability to use abstract concepts, ideas, and norms to clarify and develop one's thought, action, and speech still is part of the equation. But Cicero's dialogism far surpasses Socrates' in that speculative philosophy must ultimately give way to concrete, stylistically constituted judgments about particular circumstances. Since our beliefs originate not from metaphysical truths or epistemological certainties but from human communities, Cicero calls the philosophical counselor to the *vita activa* in a radical way. Philosophical counseling modeled on classical humanist rhetoric would cast suspicion on critical reflection that stays locked within abstract propositional logic. And rhetorical philosophical counseling would seek to supplement the development of critical thought within the individual by helping her more eloquently express her relation to the wider social community.

Thus far, we have suggested that a counselee's ability to craft eloquent cultural expressions will help her develop a robust philosophical praxis. Contemporary rhetorical theory can clarify why this is so. Kenneth Burke, the most influential figure in neoclassical rhetorical theory, suggests that Socrates' propositional philosophy is based on the "semantic ideal" of meaning—that is, "the ideal of a purely 'neutral' vocabulary, free of emotional weightings. . . ."[24] As Burke explains, "[T]he ideal semantic definition of a chair would be such that, on the basis of the definition, people knew what you wanted

[24] Kenneth Burke, "Types of Meaning: Semantic and Poetic Meaning," in Joseph R. Gusfield (ed.), *On Symbols and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 86.

when you asked for one, a carpenter knew how to make it, a furniture dealer knew how it to get it, etc."[25] In other words, a semantic style seeks conceptual clarity and ideational precision as its chief end.

By contrast, "poetic meanings" require that speakers and listeners be able to reflect upon an issue or idea from multiple, irreducible perspectives. Burke explains that "Poetic meanings, then, cannot be disposed of on the true-or-false basis. Rather, they are related to one another like a set of concentric circles, of wider and wider scope. Those of wider diameter do not categorically eliminate those of narrower diameter. There is, rather, a progressive encompassment."[26] He continues:

> The semantic ideal would attempt to get a description by the elimination of attitude. The poetic ideal would attempt a full moral act by attaining a perspective atop all the conflicts of attitude. The first would try to cut away, to abstract, all emotional factors that complicate the objective clarity of meaning. The second would try to derive its vision from the maximum heaping up of all these emotional factors, playing them off against one another, inviting them to reinforce and contradict one another, and seeking to make this active participation itself a major ingredient of the vision.[27]

As with Cicero, the aesthetics of rhetorical style have deep philosophical significance. The impoverished style of traditional academic philosophy—abstract, didactic, and barren—shapes the character of those who employ it. "Poetic" strategies of understanding and analysis are necessary if philosophical counselors are to nurture in their clients the ability to lead "examined lives" that are flexibly perspectival and open to multiplicity and change within concrete cultural settings that shape beliefs and values. As Burke concludes, "A fully moral act is a total assertion at the time of the assertion. Among other things, it has a style—and this style is an integral aspect of its meaning. If it points to the chair and

[25] Burke 89.
[26] Burke 90.
[27] Burke 92-3.

by saying 'faugh,' it pledges itself to one program—to another if it adopts the style of 'ho, ho,' or 'might I?' The style selected will mold the character of the selector."[28]

In her analysis of the philosophical contribution of literary style, the Neo-Aristotelian philosopher Martha Nussbaum adds further support for the notion that philosophical counselors should concern themselves with the aesthetic, cultural, and stylistic dimensions of critical reflection. Commenting upon the fact that traditional academic philosophers, like Socrates, seem to have banished poetry from the republic of letters, she notes that "an abstract theoretical style makes, like any other style, a statement about what is important and what is not, about what faculties of the reader [or listener] are important for knowing and what are not."[29] For example, "[A]n article . . . argues that the emotions are essential and central in our efforts to gain understanding of any important ethical matter; and yet it is written in a style that expresses only intellectual activity and strongly suggests that only this activity matters for the reader in his or her attempts to understand."[30] According to Nussbaum, in order for individuals to develop the ability to appreciate the emotional and figurative nuances of particular situations, their reflective faculties must be nurtured through interaction with literary works and other cultural products. The ability to understand and produce rhetorical style that captures the complex texture of the human condition is essential to the full development of human character. Nussbaum is worth quoting at length here:

> There may be some views of the world and how one should live in it—views, especially, that emphasize the world's surprising variety, its complexity and mysteriousness, its flawed and imperfect beauty—that cannot be fully or adequately stated in the language of conventional philosophical prose, a style remarkably flat and lacking in wonder—but only in a language and in forms themselves more complex, more allusive, more attentive to particulars. Not perhaps, either, in the expositional structure conventional to philosophy, which sets out to establish something and then does so, without surprise, without incident—but only in a form

[28] Burke 93.
[29] Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) v.
[30] Nussbaum 21.

> that itself implies that life contains significant surprises, that our task, as agent, is to live as good characters in a good story do, caring about what happens, resourcefully confronting each new thing.[31]

With these words Nussbaum beautifully captures the worldview of the classical humanist tradition. Part philosophy, part rhetoric, it calls for persons to be able to lead an "examined life" that is not limited to the logical strictures of propositional logic and dialectic method. It urges them to reflect upon the cultural products and social communities in which they live. It asks them to judge and act, to listen and express themselves. Might contemporary philosophical counseling model itself on such a vision?[32]

II. Psychotherapy and Philosophical Counseling: The Propositional Bind

We have suggested that it would be preferable to model contemporary philosophical counseling on the humanist rhetorical tradition. It retains Socrates' commitment to critical reflection on one's life. But it also moves beyond the limitations of abstract propositional logic, allowing the cultivation of judgment and aesthetic style.

Our discussion thus far can shed light on how today's philosophical counselors understand their practice. We contend that in trying to distinguish their practice from psychotherapy, some of them have portrayed philosophical counseling as mainly an exercise in propositional logic. Others in the field have steered away from that trap, though, and we mean to help contextualize and advance their rhetorical turn.

American philosophical counselor Louis Marinoff writes that "the greatest theoretical challenge to us who call ourselves counselors is to articulate what distinguishes us from psychological counselors,

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[31] Nussbaum 4.

not only in terms of method but also with respect to the nature of the counselor-client relationship."[33] Gerd Achenbach has focused rather closely on that task, as has the most prominent advocate of his philosophy, Shlomit Schuster.[34] Achenbach and Schuster have distinguished philosophical counseling along at least three conceptual axes. The institution of psychotherapy, they argue, constructs its counselee as a dependent and inferior object of diagnosis. (Consider the very label *patient* used in psychiatry.) By contrast, in philosophical counseling, counselee and counselor have equal power and status. The psychotherapist tends to view the client or "patient" as "ill"; some psychotherapists even posit that the malady lies in her unconscious. But philosophical counselors trust that their "visitors" are self-conscious, rational agents who know the concerns they wish to address. Psychotherapy is supposed to bring resolution. Philosophical counselors encourage sustained reflection on issues that may stay unresolved; the counselor may even *create new problems* for clients, incorporating "a philosophical awareness which *blocks* orienting certainties and guiding convictions and prevents their utilization as tools for particular purposes."[35]

Achenbach's and Schuster's radical dialogism is consistent with Cicero's desire to nurture a flexible capacity for judgment amid shifting historical circumstances. "The goal then," Achenbach writes, "is to maintain philosophical skepticism concerning everything which considers itself right, settled, conclusive, indubitable, or, in short, everything which considers itself 'true' and therefore wants to

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[32] Gerd Achenbach comes close to offering such a vision. See Schuster 40. Still, there are differences between Achenbach's vision and the one we advocate. In the following section, we examine these differences.

[33] Louis Marinoff, "Philosophy Meets Pirandello: Six Professions in Search of a Schema," in Wim van der Vlist (ed.) *Perspectives in Philosophical Practice: The Proceedings of the Second International Congress on Philosophical Practice* (Doorwerth, The Netherlands: The Dutch Society for Philosophical Practice, 1997), 111

[34] See Gerd B. Achenbach, *Philosophische Praxis* (Cologne: Jürgen Dinter, 1987), and in his and Thomas Macho's *Das Prinzip Heilung* (Cologne: Jürgen Dinter, 1985). In English, see Achenbach's "Philosophy, Philosophical Practice, and Psychotherapy," in Ran Lahav and Maria da Venza Tillmanns (eds.), 61-74, and his "About the Center of Philosophical Practice," 7-15, and "What Does It Mean to Say: Philosophical Practice Is No Psychotherapy," 16-19, both in Wim van der Vlist (ed.). See Schuster.

abolish all further questioning."[36] Of course, Cicero's civic orientation tempers this incessant questioning with the need to act on the basis of a contingent understanding of the good, right, and true in a particular situation. But from a classical rhetorical perspective, the greater problem is that the effort to distinguish philosophical counseling from psychotherapy on the basis of a rational, self-empowered, dialogic partner has led other practitioners to think of philosophical counseling as a narrowly propositional form of critical reflection. In other words, Achenbach's and Schuster's radical hermeneutical openness has given way to neo-dialectics.

This propositional bind contradicts Achenbach's goal for philosophical counseling. He explains that "The content of communication in philosophical practice is not *propositional* knowledge that could objectively be addressed as '*knowing-that*,' but it is a *non-propositional knowledge*, that in a certain sense could be called '*knowing-how*' and that I want to describe as '*knowing-about*.'"[37] He adds:

> The knowledge of the wise is *incarnated* knowledge, which is witnessed by a certain way of life. Thus, it doesn't express itself in statements, but statements are at best used to speak *of* it and *about* it. Whereas propositional knowledge is *claimed* and *justified*, nobody gives an *account* of his non-propositional knowledge: It is the knowledge of the one who knows.[38]

Still, we submit that the ideal Achenbach puts forth is only a modest departure from propositional thinking and that it falls short of a rhetorical turn. In trying to offer an alternative to propositional knowledge, he concerns himself mainly with the structure of class logic and the rigidity of its categories. He neither questions the appropriateness of speaking in terms of class logic at all nor

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[35] Achenbach, "Philosophy and Psychotherapy," 72
[36] Achenbach, "Philosophy and Psychotherapy," 73
[37] Achenbach, "On Wisdom in Philosophical Practice," 10.
[38] Achenbach, "On Wisdom in Philosophical Practice," 10.

presses the most central question: How does reflection upon language contribute to the quality of ethical character?[39]

Though often rooted in the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein—and thus, written from within a philosophical tradition rather different from Achenbach's—the work of a Canadian philosophical counselor, Petra von Morstein, faintly echoes his cautions against propositional thinking. In an early piece, von Morstein distinguishes between images—in which reality is "immediately *given* or present in experience [and] is private, i.e., undetermined"—and pictures, which all words and sentences contain and express.[40] Pictures can, but do not necessarily, correspond to images. Problems arise from the assumption that pictures must. In writing that "Reality . . . is determinable, but any determination is necessarily incomplete,"[41] von Morstein strikes a chord quite similar to Achenbach's when he claims that "[N]obody gives an *account* of his non-propositional knowledge." But more generally, it is in urging connection with images—which she holds are "impossible to generalize from, or conceptualize"—and warning against absorption in the hyper-conceptualizations of pictures that she most reflects the Achenbachian call against propositional thinking.[42]

However, von Morstein escapes propositions as little as Achenbach does. Representative of her ideal for praxis, she maintains that "The good of philosophical counseling must be to lift the curse of

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[39] Achenbach does endorse Montaigne's claim that "I have made it my rule to dare to speak out what I dare to do […]. He who makes it his duty to say everything would also make it his duty to do nothing about what should be kept silent" (p. 15). But as Achenbach himself explains, the question Montaigne addresses with these words is "whether I can *think* what I do" (emphasis added) (p. 14). Montaigne's focus is on internalized, private reflection on ethical questions. Whatever he "says" is to an *imagined* other within the normative rules of a hypothetical discourse. Montaigne is far less concerned with how to tailor his speech for an actual, immediately present audience in such a way as to shape ethical character. Thus, he stays far closer to *phronesis* than *decorum*.

[40] Petra von Morstein, "Wittgenstein on Philosophical Methods as Therapies," *Zeitschrift für Philosophische Praxis*, 2 (1994), 13.

[41] von Morstein 13.

[42] von Morstein 13.

Apollo on Cassandra."[43] As Ernesto Grassi has pointed out, Cassandra breaks out of this curse only by moving from rhetoric to rationality.[44] Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* gives the most definitive account of Cassandra.[45] In that text, the Chorus speaks in the "explanatory" language of rationality and tries in vain to understand Cassandra's prophecies. "In accordance with her 'seer's' gifts Cassandra speaks a pictorial language which is distinguished from that of the Chorus by frequently falling back on participial phrases. The contrast between the world of Cassandra and that of the Chorus definitely illustrates the fact that the semantic approach cannot be attained or derived through a logical process."[46] In this context, Grassi reflects on rhetoric:

> This original speech, because of its 'archaic' character, sketches the framework for every rational consideration, and for this reason we are obliged to say that rhetorical speech 'comes before' every rational speech, i.e., it has a 'prophetic' [*prophainesthai*] character and never again can be comprehended from a rational, deductive point of view. This is the tragedy of the rationalistic process.[47]

Without enough attention to the stylistic and ethical dimensions of speech, philosophical counseling stays locked in a rhetoric of propositions. For instance, take the assumption that philosophical counselors "must understand [their] clients to be rational creatures."[48] This assumption leads Roger Paden to conclude that "[P]hilosophical counseling must focus on the cognitive or intentional aspects of consciousness, *primarily on ideas*, understood not simply as another kind of conscious phenomena, but as making truth claims, expressing theories, and reflecting world-views."[49] With echoes of Socrates' objectivist epistemology, we are told that philosophical counselors "must

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[43] von Morstein 16.
[44] Ernesto Grassi, *Rhetoric as Philosophy: The Humanist Tradition* (University Park, London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), 21-24.
[45] Grassi 22. Grassi explains that "Homer mentions her in the *Iliad* as the daughter of the king of Troy, but he does not elaborate on her fatal gift of prophecy (*Iliad* 13.366, 24.699). Pindar describes her as a prophet (*Pyth*. 11.20)."
[46] Grassi 22-23.
[47] Grassi 20
[48] Roger Paden, "Defining Philosophical Counseling," *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* 12, 1 (1998), 11.
[49] Paden 11.

value clear thinking, accurate description, and good reasoning."[50] Elliot Cohen is more methodologically specific about his proposed use of abstract propositional logic in the counseling setting. He suggests, for example, that "[C]ounselors can explore the inferential 'leaps' counselees make in their process of arriving at irrational evaluations"[51] and that "syllogistic logic can be employed by providing the framework for belief system analysis in terms of the standards of logic."[52] Catherine McCall seems to agree: "Being able to uncover these philosophical *concepts* in the real situation, and then being able to place these concepts upon a kind of conceptual map and to reason about them enables people to have a much fuller and better understanding of the nature of the problem—and the nature of this real problem is philosophical."[53]

The model of humanist praxis we have seen through Cicero, Burke, and Nussbaum helps to show the limits of centering philosophical counseling on abstract propositional logic. But that model also provides a useful framework within which to appreciate another stream of thought in the philosophical counseling movement. In the work of Ran Lahav, K. A. Zoë, and James A. Tuedio, we discern the beginnings of a rhetorical turn in the field.[54] Their work suggests that a rhetorical perspective might serve philosophical counseling in at least two ways: (1) as a tool to identify and unpack the "worldview" a client brings to counseling, and (2) as a strategy for how the client might critically reflect on her beliefs, values, and attitudes.

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[50] Paden 11.
[51] Cohen 125.
[52] Cohen 128.
[53] Catherine McCall, "Jobs for Philosophers: Philosophical Inquiry—Origin and Development," in Wim van der Vlist (ed.), 83
[54] The work of Martina Winkler-Calaminus also savors of a rhetorical turn. See her "Kunst Zu Erzählen," *Zeitschrift für Philosophische Praxis* (1995): 8-12. Especially in encouraging "an art of narration" in philosophical counseling—in which the counselor would help the client craft her autobiography in connection with traditions that underlie her culture—Winkler-Calaminus hits some themes common to rhetorical humanism.

Ran Lahav makes the bold claim that "[worldview interpretation] underlies virtually all current approaches" to philosophical counseling.[55] He suggests that a worldview can be defined as the "totality" of beliefs, actions, and emotions that constitute an individual's "personal philosophy." Worldviews rarely serve a coherent system that individuals actually use to make their way in the world. Instead, they are "second order" constructs that practitioners and clients can use to make sense of the complex set of motives that direct our behavior. Lahav's thesis is that "philosophical counseling can be characterized as an approach aimed at helping counselees interpret the worldview expressed by their way of life."[56]

We believe Lahav's concept of worldview interpretation only partially represents a rhetorical turn in philosophical counseling. The idea of a "worldview"—borrowed from the German hermeneutic tradition—suggests that an individual's personal philosophy cannot be reduced to simple propositional form. Alongside beliefs, ideas, and principles stand emotions, cravings, and expectations. In that sense, a worldview is much like Cicero's *sensus communis*—a complex, irreducible totality of motivations situated within a cultural context.

But in describing how the philosophical counselor is to relate to a counselee's worldview, Lahav retreats to the traditional propositional vocabulary of academic philosophy. He explains: "A person trained in philosophy is skilled in uncovering implicit presuppositions and offering alternative ones, in detecting inconsistencies, in drawing implications, in analyzing concepts, and in examining hidden patterns and structures."[57] He adds that

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[55] Ran Lahav, "A Conceptual Framework for Philosophical Counseling: Worldview Interpretation," Ran Lahav and Maria da Venza Tillmanns (eds.), 3.
[56] Lahav 7.
[57] Lahav 10.

> [O]ne's ability to organize relevant aspects of one's life into a meaningful overall picture that delineates structures, patterns, and interconnections gives one a handle for dealing with problems and working towards self-change. A worldview interpretation . . . offers counselees a system of coordinates, so to speak, with which they can make sense of their problems and attempt to manage them.[58]

At this point in his argument, we would do well to recall Nussbaum's admonition: an abstract propositional vocabulary stressing such notions as "systems," "structures," and "patterns" sends an implicit message about the type of human character that is valued. Lahav recognizes that worldviews are constituted by much more than clearly defined philosophical propositions, but he then privileges a relatively propositional mode of philosophy as the solution to a client's problems. For Lahav, if only clients can "delineate their [worldviews'] structure and logic," they stand in good stead.[59]

K. A. Zoë and James Tuedio more fully embrace a rhetorical perspective towards philosophical counseling. At the diagnostic level, Zoë recognizes that clients' worldviews are constituted as much by "narrative structures" and "societal myths" as they are by philosophical propositions.[60] But it is at the level of therapeutic praxis that Zoë really pushes beyond Lahav's plan for mapping propositions. Zoë focuses on the case of trauma survivors. She notes that society provides narrative structures as one resource for making sense of reality. These narrative structures often break down when traumatic events have no place in society's accepted vocabulary of meaning. Clients thus may find themselves in "narrative rifts," unable to make sense of their predicaments. Zoë suggests that under these circumstances, the counselor might function as a "professional storyteller."[61] In other words, rather than turning to propositional abstraction for escape, the philosophical counselor can choose from among "a large repertoire of interpretive paradigms" to encourage inventive forms of self-exploration on the part

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[58] Lahav 15.
[59] Lahav 15.
[60] K. A. Zoë, "Philosophical Counseling: Bridging the Narrative Rift," *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 2, 2 (1995), 24.
[61] Zoë 26.

of the client.[62] As Zoë explains, "[W]e may begin to posit the proper role of the storyteller not as that of imposing theoretical constructs on a hapless narrator, but rather as presenting hermeneutic possibilities."[63] Clearly, to pursue such a goal, both counselor and counselee function in the medium of rhetoric and style. It implies the ability to draw from aesthetic experience to express a horizon of meaning that is decorously suited to the immediate demands of a particular situation. It is as much art as logic, poetry as semantics.

James Tuedio's "postmodern" perspective on many of these same issues widens the rhetorical scope of philosophical counseling. Even clients other than trauma survivors may have to deal with "misleading pictures reinforced by the popular media that produce considerable pressure . . . to conform to patterns of life that are unhealthy. . . ."[64] The philosophical counselor can help these clients recognize "the constant play of interpretations that wrestle for supremacy within our lives, each perspective trying to establish the self-privileging domain of its own relativistic truth game."[65] Kenneth Burke would surely agree. Rather than *reducing* the complexity and uncertainty of competing claims on the counselee's worldview, the philosophical practitioner can encourage a *multiplied* perspectival play. As Tuedio writes, "[P]hilosophical counseling is an ill-structured process of dialogic facilitation that should exhibit considerable tolerance for the incommensurable features of a client's life narrative."[66]

The idea of metaphoric analysis might be a profitable area for future theoretical exploration and practical application. Zoë's and Tuedio's notion of narrative retains a relatively strong structuralist element. The plot of a story functions much like an argumentative premise, creating an experience of

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[62] Zoë 26
[63] Zoë 27.
[64] James Tuedio, "Postmodern Perspectives in Philosophical Practice: Reconstructing Life-narratives on the Frontiers of Human Development," in Wim van der Vlist (ed.), 183.
[65] Tuedio 185.

coherence and stability that has obvious therapeutic benefits. But in many instances, clients' worldviews may be even more rhetorically fractured and allusive. As one of the authors of this paper has suggested elsewhere, clients' belief systems often exist as a more dispersed set of "images" or metaphors that require even greater effort to reconstruct.[67] In this regard, the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson offers a useful analytical system to account for the "metaphors we live by."[68] Just as the philosophical counselor might experiment with alternative narrative constructions to promote self-reflection in a client, so too might novel metaphors produce new insights and possibilities for being.

Conclusion

A rhetorical turn in philosophical counseling invites practitioners to consider the limitations of traditional academic modes of reasoning and stylistic expression. To do so would be to associate philosophical counseling less with Socratic dialectic and more with humanist persuasion. In no way do we suggest that logic, argument, and conceptual analysis are useless elements of philosophical praxis. We mean just to accentuate more strongly and clearly the humanistic origins and strategies the philosophical counselor has at her disposal.[69]

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[66] Tuedio 185.
[67] Mason Marshall, "Philosophical Counseling and Autism: Tracing Possible Connections" (forthcoming in the Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Philosophy in Practice, 2001).
[68] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).
[69] We are deeply grateful to Dr. Thomas O. Buford, Dr. Shlomit C. Schuster, and Dr. Henry Teloh for their criticisms of earlier drafts of this paper.