

PROJECTING 'THE GOOD LIFE' IN PHILOSOPHICAL COUNSELING

Aleksandar Fatić
Research Professor
Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory
University of Belgrade

Abstract: The paper examines the conceptual matrix of philosophical counseling, and philosophical practice generally, which distinguishes philosophical practice from mainstream theoretical philosophy. I argue that the essence of philosophical practice is the realization and radicalization of Pierre Hadot's paradigm-shifting view of 'Philosophy as a Way of Life', through the projection of philosophical concepts and methods to the goal of attainment of the good life by moral education and character-building. The baseline concept of the good life that the paper works with is the relatively uncontroversial concept of a life based on sustained reflected pleasures that are both socially desirable and individually fulfilling. I argue that this type of concept of the good life as qualified pleasure is inherent in any doctrinal account of what it is to lead a good life, including the ones that emphasise asceticism, such as Christian philosophy of life and ethics. Finally the paper concludes that projections of the good life by philosophical counselors are reflective on philosophical counselor themselves: philosophical counseling is a way of 'the good life' that aims to use the resources of philosophy as a whole to help others build the moral qualities and character required to reach their own good lives. By projecting philosophical concepts and methods to the applied conceptual matrix of moral education and the good life, philosophical counseling emancipates philosophy as a whole from its current remoteness and isolation into an active, and reflective, role in the real lives of ordinary people. This heralds a paradigm shift in philosophy, from the pseudo-science that much of mainstream philosophy painstakingly pretends to be to an intellectual powerhouse for the enhancement of the quality, clarity and integrity of life, which was the reason philosophy initially emerged for, both in the Western and in the Eastern philosophical traditions.

Key words: character, virtues, paradigm-shift, practical philosophy, superstructure, industrial philosophy, pleasure, counseling, moral education, character-building, sensibilities, emancipation.

Philosophical counseling and contemporary mainstream philosophy

Projections of the good life are key to philosophical counseling, given its practical orientation and the fact that philosophical counselors work with troubled people. Thus, in a sense, by definition philosophical counseling works with those who lack the good life, in the effort to claim (or, in some cases, re-claim) it. In doing so, philosophical counselors differ from psychologists or psychiatrists merely in the methods used. The range of concepts and methodologies used in philosophical counseling is philosophy as a whole: any doctrine or method, if used skillfully and with proper judgement, may help clients understand and resolve their life issues. While the task of philosophical counseling so described does not appear controversial in any way, occasional friction with the therapeutic professions such as psychology and psychiatry can be understood primarily as economic, or professional 'turf' issues. However, much more puzzling at first sight is the unwillingness of mainstream contemporary philosophy to embrace philosophical counseling. Given that philosophical counseling is inclusive of all philosophical theories, concepts and methods, such reluctance by the philosophical industry of our day to work constructively with colleagues who pursue philosophical practice may seem unwarranted and unexpected.

Philosophical counseling builds on and radicalizes the paradigm-shifting view by Pierre Hadot that the fundamental role of philosophy is to be a way of life (Hadot, 1995). Hadot's argument mainly concerned ancient Greek philosophy, which he described as a quest for the good life, accompanied by 'superstructures' in the form of cosmology or metaphysics. These superstructures portrayed the universe, the earth or the gods in terms that would help people adopt values which were going to improve their quality of life. On this view, when Epicurus developed his 'atomistic' philosophy of nature, he did so with the intent to present fear of death as immaterial: if everything consists of atoms, which merely disperse at the time of death, then death itself is not a frightful experience. Fear of death, along with fear of gods, was among the main reasons for anxiety that members of the Epicurean 'Garden' worked to ameliorate. Similarly, when Plato developed his metaphysics of 'Ideas', on Hadot's reading, he did so in order to illustrate, on the level of ontological concepts, the fundamentality of values, which one tries to approximate in the course of cultivation of one's character, and virtues. Hadot generalized this interpretation of 'core philosophy' and 'superstructure' to all ancient philosophical schools.

Philosophical counseling as a contribution to contemporary philosophy is more radical than Hadot; it takes Hadot's principle and takes it one step further. Philosophical practice, including counseling, aims to take any philosophical school of method of thinking and turn it into a tool to alleviate human suffering. It does so on certain conditions: that the client's problems are philosophical rather than medical, that they seek philosophical insight rather than a diagnostic label, and that their goal is the good

life rather than to make the bad life bearable enough to live another day, which is typically achieved by mind-altering drugs.

The problem with this approach, from the point of view of mainstream philosophical industry, could be the perception by mainstream philosophers that, if philosophical practice were embraced by mainstream contemporary philosophy, much of the current specialized philosophy, detached from real life, might appear as 'mere superstructure'. Even a cursory glance through some of the dominant journals issued by mainstream philosophical clans shows that the range of topics and approaches, by and large, remain irrelevant to the ordinary person. In fact, some of the debates led within these clans concern only a few members of the clan who have previously already said something on the same topic, meaning that the readership of some of these arguments is no more than a few dozen people worldwide. With some of the topics, even the dozen readers would find it very difficult to find any practical use for the texts. In other words, most of the modern philosophical production neither seeks to assist the achievement of the good life, nor is useful for this purpose. In fact, much of that production is not useful for any practical purpose at all.

On a methodological level, the treatment of many of the philosophical problems by the mainstream philosophical industry today is what Russian theatre director Nikita Michalkov recently called 'McDonalds Science': a nicely and neatly processed, well packaged, nicely presented and hygienic stuff with dubious 'nutritional value'. The standardization is applied rigorously: the packaging of style must be perfect, the methodology must be clear and make the product easily digestible, and the combination of ingredients must be well documented on the product label. For most ordinary readers, even educated ones, once the dense packaging of references and bibliographies is unwrapped, and as with many modern products to do away with the packaging can be a time consuming task, the product is often bland and unconvincing. The production standard of mainstream modern philosophy is industrial, and this is why the entire mainstream philosophy, divided in its clans, families and ideologies, could be called 'industrial philosophy'. The industrial standard of philosophy, as any other industrial standard, allows no major deviation from the sample. Any product likely to cause indigestion or containing ingredients known to cause upset is routinely eliminated. The industrial philosophy of today would never allow the publication of Nietzsche's or Schopenhauer's ideas if they were to emerge now. It would probably consider Hegel nothing short of seriously psychotic. And most likely the noble patriarchs of the contemporary philosophical ideological tribes would call for the arrest of Epicurus as a 'rogue'.

Simply put, philosophy is incompatible with industrial standards. Philosophical progress is predicated upon a freedom of intellectual creativity and right of expression, and any 'quantification', 'indexing', 'counting of citations' or anal-retentive 'editorship' militates

against such progress. The existence of all these things borrowed from the natural and mathematical sciences is the reason why contemporary philosophy is stagnating. At the same time, mind-altering drugs in most nations are used on a par with food. As philosophy, the primary intellectual way to make sense of life, has rendered itself impotent, caged in the self-imposed Procrustean frame of quantitative sciences, the new professions, defected from philosophy, led by psychology, have proceeded to medicalise the increasingly unhappy and 'unreflected' daily lives of millions worldwide.

One wonders what would happen if philosophical practice more generally assumed its natural place in mainstream philosophy journals, at philosophy departments and in undergraduate philosophy curricula? How many readers or students, once they encounter the vista of practical 'general' philosophy, would opt for career devoted to understanding what it means to follow a rule or to utter a malapropism, if the alternative is to study what it means to lead a good life or join a community of intellectual friends? How many PhDs would be written about what it may mean to make a decision, when the alternative is to write about what it means to make oneself and others happy with their lives?

The above is not to suggest that specialized work on various miniscule topics is not philosophically valuable, but it is to suggest that such work is less directly relevant to improving the quality of life and is much less attractive for most people than a more generalist use of philosophical concepts and methods to address real-life dilemmas and conflicts. This is where the modern 'McDonalds' philosophical industry may feel that a threat from philosophical practice might lie. It could be that the dominant philosophical clans who disown philosophical practice, or pretend that 'they do not know what it means', as they sometimes phrase it, in fact fear that their painstakingly achieved status of specialized manufacturers of industrially standardized philosophical burgers might quickly be relegated to 'mere superstructure'. This is a scary prospect. Fortunately, the fear is unfounded.

Philosophical counseling can provide a context for almost any type of philosophy to become practical and relevant to real life. While for the strict disciplinary philosophy of language the preoccupation with malapropisms or with reference may take place within an isolated ivory tower, guarded by clan worriers armed with mathematical formulae and hermetic symbolic language, the use of philosophy of language in counseling is one of the most potent tools to help people understand their issues. John Searle's famous idea that philosophy of language is essentially the philosophy of mind comes to life most directly in counseling sessions, where people are faced with the intricacies of their linguistic intentions and the features of language as Wittgenstein's 'picture of the world' of themselves and their important others. Analytic ethics dealing with what it is to lie is confined to a narrow academic readership per se. However, when it is brought to life in philosophical counseling, it can help people to give meaning to and resolve dramatic

and debilitating relationships and frustrations. The same applies to almost any type of philosophy when it is placed in the counseling context. Philosophical counseling is potentially emancipating for almost any type of academic philosophy; it offers specialized contemporary philosophy a chance to become relevant to ordinary people again.

'The Good Life' Ground Zero: Pleasure

There are various conceptions of the good life for various philosophical schools, systems of religious belief, and even various therapeutic schools. Many of these concepts are mutually contradictory and arise from opposed starting premises and mutually incoherent value systems. In what remains of this paper I will focus on what I believe to be 'ground zero' of the good life from a practical point of view: the life of sustained pleasure. While the idea is historically Epicurean, and is commonly associated with the philosophy of 'hedonism', I will argue that it is in fact a much more serious component of any feasible conceptualization of the good life in any type of counseling, including philosophical, but also pastoral counseling. I will explore the initial Epicurean concept of pleasure and show that the pleasure Epicureans sought was in fact one found in ascetic life. I will then proceed to argue that even those forms of counseling that explicitly oppose pleasure as the founding value of the good life implicitly rely on pleasure. To illustrate this, I will examine the Orthodox Christian view of the good life as a life of asceticism, and show how the Christian doctrine of redemption, which putatively denounces pleasure, in fact logically presupposes the cultivation of particular types of pleasure in order for the faithful to achieve the good life and earn redemption through such life. If this argument is sufficiently compelling, it should establish the quest of pleasure as the primary goal of practical philosophy, with special focus on philosophical counseling. This should go some way towards proving that it is both practically and logically difficult to viably conceive of the good life without founding it on pleasure.

Epicurean *Principal Doctrines* no. 1, 2 and 34 read:

1. A blessed and indestructible being has no trouble himself and brings no trouble upon any other being; so he is free from anger and partiality, for all such things imply weakness.
2. Death is nothing to us; for that which has been dissolved into its elements experiences no sensations, and that which has no sensation is nothing to us.

34. Injustice is not an evil in itself, but only in consequence of the fear which is associated with the apprehension of being discovered by those appointed to punish such actions.¹

These lines suggest a 'brutal hedonism' devoid of any reference to virtue and morality. They are partly the reason Epicureanism has been perceived as simple hedonism and rejected by much of subsequent moral philosophy. There are, however, different lines in Epicurean teachings that reflect an entirely different practical relationship with moral philosophy:

5. It is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely and honorably and justly, and it is impossible to live wisely and honorably and justly without living pleasantly. Whenever any one of these is lacking, when, for instance, the man is not able to live wisely, though he lives honorably and justly, it is impossible for him to live a pleasant life.

3. The magnitude of pleasure reaches its limit in the removal of all pain. When such pleasure is present, so long as it is uninterrupted, there is no pain either of body or of mind or of both together.

15. The wealth required by nature is limited and is easy to procure; but the wealth required by vain ideals extends to infinity.

19. Unlimited time and limited time afford an equal amount of pleasure, if we measure the limits of that pleasure by reason.

Many lines in Epicurean writings show that they were far from advocating profligate life styles. The 'calculus of pleasure' inherent in Epicurean ethics reaches the inevitable outcome that a quiet, 'withdrawn' life amongst a small group of friends, focused on the minimum of 'necessary needs' which rule out even some of the 'natural needs' is sure to result in lasting pleasure, defined predominantly as the absence of pain:

21. He who understands the limits of life knows that it is easy to obtain that which removes the pain of want and makes the whole of life complete and perfect. Thus he has no longer any need of things which involve struggle.

27. Of all the means which wisdom acquires to ensure happiness throughout the whole of life, by far the most important is friendship.

Philosophical counseling provides a framework in which it is particularly easy to depict the practical value of the Epicurean views of pleasure and the good life, because it

¹ Principal Doctrines are preserved in entirety in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and opinions of eminent philosophers*, vol. 2, books 6–10.

allows moral standards to be examined in the context of real everyday motivations for action. When moral concerns are integrated with the dynamic role that pleasure plays in our lives, two things become clear. First, practically, the ideal situation for the good life is that a person enjoys doing what is morally desirable for them to do. This is the practical meaning of 'virtue', which ensures both individual fulfillment and social acceptance. Second, the reason pleasure has been treated as a suspect concept in much of the moral philosophy of virtue has been the lingering sentiment of Kantian aprioristic ethics, which insisted that acting rightly, if it is motivated by personal preference rather than abstract understanding of duty alone, deducts from the moral nobility of such action. This view entails that it is more 'noble' to act morally correctly when such action causes deprivation and suffering to the actor, then to do so when acting rightly brings satisfaction and joy. The logic has been mocked by philosophers who 'apologized for finding pleasure in doing good', but it has marked an entire era of moral philosophy which has caused apprehension of pleasure and a downgrading of the good life as the goal of ethics in favour of absolutist rationalist constructs of duty.

The reason why the ethics of duty is not easily reconcilable with ethics of the good life and with the goals of philosophical counseling (or philosophical practice more generally) is in the fact that it is a theoretical reconstruction of what a human being ought to be morally, rather than a statement of what the human being naturally strives for. Ethics of the good life works to integrate moral standards into the interpretation of what actors are naturally motivated to do. It tries to merge natural motivation with moral ideals, and perceives character-development, or 'moral training' as an empirical life project where one learns how to become a better human being by using one's natural motivations in more sophisticated, socially constructive and, ultimately, personally fulfilling ways.

David Hume was perhaps the clearest exponent of the ideal of moral learning without aprioristic prejudice as to the nature of the motivation for such learning or for moral action itself. (Hume, 1963). He argued that the development of virtues is possible through practice and repetition, as long as the person is 'tolerably virtuous' to begin with. 'Where one is born of so perverse a frame of mind, and of so callous and insensible a disposition, as to have no relish for virtue (...) such a one must be allowed entirely incurable, nor is there any remedy in philosophy' (Hume, 1963: 172). However, with sufficient discipline and a reasonably sound character one could develop the virtues that one chooses in order to improve one's character. Moral practice will lead to moral improvement, and one will gradually learn not only to act rightly, but also to find satisfaction, or pleasure, in so acting. This type of moral improvement is more sustainable than discrete aprioristic choice to act out of duty because it depends not only on the substantive description of the action one chooses and the moral value of that action; the empiricist's moral improvement works on the sensibilities of pleasure as well. Such moral training aims not just to cause the person to choose the morally right action,

but to develop one's character so that on any occasion one finds pleasure in choosing the right action. This idea is essential for the practical application of philosophy in counseling, whose goal is to instill lasting capacities in the person to act in most optimal ways while at the same time finding personal value in such action that will improve her quality of life. This is a dramatically different perspective from that of purely academic considerations of what it means to choose the right as opposed to the wrong course of action.

On a practical level, the value of the language of pleasure in philosophical counseling arises from the intuitive nature of the Epicurean idea that 'all men seek pleasure and avoid pain'. Starting from such an intuitive premise allows the counselor to work with the common prejudices and problems that the counselee brings to the session with greater ease and with less resistance by the client than if the counselor starts from a 'moral distance'. More fundamentally, however, the introduction of pleasure early on in the counseling is useful for the process of influencing value-judgments in the counselee. One good example of how the transformation of pleasures works relates to an exceedingly common problem in philosophical counseling, namely that of a deficit of self-esteem. Self-esteem is a significant source of satisfaction in modern society, where it arises from the fulfillment of externally imposed, and subsequently internalised expectations of oneself. A deficit of self-esteem will be triggered only by failure to achieve goals that the person has internalized, not just from any failure to measure up to someone else. As Alain de Botton (2004) pointed out one will not experience a crisis of self-esteem because one cannot dance as well as somebody else or because one cannot fly a plane, unless someone has already set these things as one's goals and has worked to achieve them. On the other hand, even in things seemingly unnoticeable to others, such as specific social skills or conversational habits, one might experience a lack of self-esteem if one has tried to improve without success, while somebody else, especially if this is a significant other (family member, colleague at work, close friend) has achieved the goal. Botton points to William James' formula of self-esteem:

Self-esteem = Success/Pretensions (James, 1890: 311)

The problem arises when the specific elements of this equation are considered separately. Success in various endeavors obviously depends in part on the resources available. However much resolve one might have to achieve a goal, if resources are inadequate the result will inevitably be difficult to achieve. Modern societies have provided far greater opulence of resources than had been the case throughout earlier history, and this would suggest that people's self-esteem should have increased, because their success has multiplied in most areas of life. However, the current epidemic crisis of self-esteem is caused by the much greater increase in the expectations, or size of goals, imposed by the society. The increase in the resources to achieve certain things has been dwarfed by the increase in expectations of

achievement. The ‘mathematical’ result of such quantitative changes in the elements of the equation has led to a true crisis of self-esteem and the resulting mass problems with anxiety and depression. The pharmaceutical industry has eagerly tapped into this structural problem to temporarily ‘fix’ the subjective side of self-esteem, while leaving the entire causal structure untouched. It has capitalised on a steady and increasing demand for temporary and sometimes damaging ‘quick fixes’, while maintaining a deliberate oblivion for the structural causes of the problems.²

One obvious way of resolving this issue is contrary to the dominant modern civilizational trends: rather than trying to catch up with the ever increasing expectations and muster maximum resources to do so, one might consider reducing self-expectations and learning to find pleasure in the existing successes. According to James, this will automatically lead to increased self-esteem. However, the strategy presupposes at least two conditions. The first is a reduction of perceived personal needs (similar to the Epicurean reduction from ‘all natural needs’ to just ‘necessary needs’). This is a step that introduces a turn from the habits of the mainstream community. The second condition is the existence of an ‘organic community’ that will support such lowered standards of expectations and a different and provide motivational support and an alternative external value-verification to the person. Such a community will largely differ in its values from the mainstream, as the Epicurean Society of the Garden did, and as the contemporary well-integrated parish communities often do. A potent example, of course, is the monastic life within many religions, including the Christian one. According to St. Gregory the Theologian, ‘absence of all worries in a quiet life is more precious than the shining of a public office’. St. Isidore of Pellusium writes that ‘(...) the person who moves in a crowd, while seeking to know what is of the Heaven, must have forgot that whatever is sown among the thorns will be chocked by the thorns, and that a person who has not found pleasure in a rest from the everything of this world cannot know God’ (Turner, 1905). St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite makes it explicit that monastic life makes finding *pleasure in asceticism* easier than secular life. (St. Nicodemos, 1989).³ The reason is that monastic life is lived with the strong support by an organic community which shares the same ascetic values, and it takes place far away from the mainstream secular community that is motivationally caught up in the vicious circle of

² I am not suggesting here that there are no mental states or mental health issues where psychotropic medication is indeed required. Neither am I saying that all issues of anxiety and depression are caused by the lack of self-esteem. What I do suggest, however, is that a large proportion of such cases is caused by the described structural factors, and that the use of medication in such cases is not only unsuccessful in the long term, but that it is both cynically opportunistic on the part of the ‘Big Pharma’, and that is actually makes the structural situation considerably worse.

³ St. Nikodemos is the author of the Orthodox version of the seminar work on asceticism, *Unseen Warfare*, from the Venetian original written by the Catholic author Lorenzo Scupoli. He was canonized in 1955.

chasing the ever increasing social expectations of success with modestly increasing means to do so.

A shift in the concepts of pleasure as a prerequisite for the achievement of a 'good life' was a common precept in Ancient Greek philosophy. Aristotle argued that the intellectual pleasures are nobler than the pleasures arising from victory at war or from success in sports. The Epicureans were probably the first to recommend such 'ascetic' pleasures to everyone as a way to avoid anguish, guilt and fear, and live a happier, more peaceful life. This is why Epicurean ethics is potentially so useful for pastoral counseling. Its fundamental precept is that reducing the expectations of pleasure will ultimately lead to increased pleasure perceived as absence of pain and peace of mind, because in the long term the adverse events typically arising from the pursuit of more 'full blooded' or extreme pleasures will be avoided. Not just moderation, but asceticism in the proper sense is the Epicurean way to minimalist yet sustained pleasures throughout one's lifetime. Lowering what could be considered inauthentic aspirations and personal goals in a perspective of ascetic character-building can considerably benefit from an initial adoption of Epicurean views on pleasure.

Moral pleasure and character-building

The view of pleasure as integral to virtue and of character-building as instrumental to the ability to achieving a sustained good life highlights a strange fact about morally right action that is at sharp odds with the idea of a good life. This fact is that it is possible to act morally rightly while retaining the affinity to act morally wrongly. This is possible either through conformance to moral pressure exerted by the community or family, or through active self-interruption and independent self-discipline. Hence, it is possible to act morally correctly, while remaining 'a bad person' as far as one's affinities and true wishes are concerned. Clearly such morally right action will not contribute to the achievement of the good life, because it does not accord with one's true wishes and sensibility. From the point of view of duty-ethics a morally desirable state of affairs could therefore exist where moral communities are inhabited by morally upright, yet utterly unhappy people.

The point has struck a nerve with Christian authors as well. Emanuel Swedenborg espouses a view that 'God casts no-one to hell', because the 'testing of the soul' that the Christian dogma stipulates as occurring after death ensures that everyone ends up where one's affinities lie: those who have a strong affinity to sex and extreme pleasures would simply not be happy in Heaven. Those who find the meaning of life in the adrenaline-charged business transactions or sports may likewise belong elsewhere. However controversial his views might be for the mainstream Christian scholarship,

Swedenborg illustrates a point that ought not to be so controversial: depending on the affinities developed through the character-formation that this life ultimately represents, the future destiny of the soul will be guided precisely by the affinities it has developed during life. The idea is common to the Patristic theme that in order to qualify for salvation one should learn to 'lead an angelic life' here on Earth. What needs to be made explicit is that such 'angelic life' inevitably involves pleasure being found in the Christian virtues of moderation and self-denial. It is very clear that a sensibility for pleasures needs to be developed through character-building, and that the tests attributed to the initial after-life experiences in fact 'verify' the results of change of character. It is character that opens up the soteriological perspective in the Christian ethics, as far as a person's own efforts are concerned. As became clear earlier on, it is possible for a person to act rightly, while retaining the desire to act wrongly, and thus to fulfill the demands of duty ethics, while remaining a 'bad person' psychologically. Clearly the Christian dogma does not allow the ascent of 'bad people' into Heaven, nor would they be happy there, according to Swedenborg. In other words, the ideal of an 'angelic life' here must be conceptualized as a 'good life' with pleasures being found in the exercise of virtue. The threshold of salvation is higher than moral duty, aprioristic self-restriction and discipline in the repetition of rationally chosen 'virtuous' actions. What is required in a Christian ethics of the good life is much the same as what Epicurean ethics suggests: recognition of pleasure as the main drive of human action, and the successful transformation of this drive from a quest of 'base' pleasures to a yearning for quiet and ascetic life of peace, contemplation and absence of disturbances by worldly concerns.

One of the key Epicurean principles of the good life was to lower the level of expectations and find pleasure in the small things that are easy to obtain. The safest way to lead a 'pleasurable' life is to remain within a circle of friends, learn to enjoy peace and absence of pain, avoid public life, and cultivate trust and mutual support between members of the community who share the same values. One wonders just how radically this ideal differs from that of a monastic community or that of a harmonious Christian parish.

Moral pleasure as the dynamic side of character-building is not limited to Christian or any other religious morality. It is a logical presupposition of any type of sustained virtue that is relevant to the achievement of a good life. However one perceives the good life, assuming that it is founded on basically morally upright principles and that it is socially desirable (not the 'good life' of drug traffickers or professional assassins), there are two key elements to it: the values and virtues defined by those values, and the character required to attain the virtues and approximate the values in life.

The goal of attaining a good life through the cultivation of adequate character, based on upright and instrumentally productive values and virtues that embody these values

defines philosophical counseling. The functional base-line for the success of philosophical counseling is working with the client to develop sensibilities for finding pleasure in virtues and the corresponding character that are productive for the attainment of the good life. In this process, the client's initial values and strategic choices in life are taken seriously, but they are not treated as unchangeable. The dynamics of the counseling is a philosophical interaction between the client as she enters the counseling and the counselor as he enters the counseling. At the end of the counseling, neither the client, nor the counselor need be the same, however the success of the counseling is measured by the progress one (the client) or both (the client and the counselor) have made towards the good life. For the client, this progress might consist in the development of specific new sensibilities for moral pleasures and the corresponding habits, resulting in character-modification, which will make their life more satisfying, freer and more autonomous than before. For the counselor, the progress might consist in a better appreciation of another philosophical theory of method, or a new understanding of the practical application of particular philosophical concepts. For both, progress and success in the counseling will manifest in particular pleasures, which for the client might be vastly different, while for the counselor are likely to be of the intellectual type of pleasures. These pleasures have an irreducible moral character, because they arise from a specifically moral goal: to do right for oneself by doing right for others. Philosophical counseling uses philosophical theory to produce moral pleasures on several levels in the counseling process, and in the lives of the client and the counselor.

Conclusion: Running with the Wolves

In their highly illuminating book on the neural foundations of emotions, including an account of the effectiveness of counseling from the point of view of neuroscience, Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini and Richard Lannon argue that counseling success has no significant connection with the discipline, method or school of counseling: counseling of whatever type is only effective if the counselor is willing and able to abandon the 'therapeutic distance' which some still consider as the professional credo number one, and become deeply immersed in the counselee's world, to the extent of almost losing touch with one's own world (Lewis, Amini and Lannon, 2000). The counselor must go with the flow of the client's emotional and neural processes, empathise and even identify with the client's perceptions, emotions and reactions, and only then refer to his own world, outside the client's, for tools, judgements and values in order to address and alleviate the problems caused by the clients thoughts, perceptions and feelings. The effectiveness of the counseling depends more on the personality and capacity of the counselor and on the receptiveness of the client to the counselor's persona than on professional skills.

At first sight, this might seem as a mechanistic view, and certainly one that might alarm the dogmatic adherents to various 'therapeutic approaches' in the healing professions. On another level, however, it is a sobering truth: counseling is a bi-directional process, where one personality uses her personal (including the professional) resources to empower another, compromised or threatened personality to find the lost way. All else concerning counseling is a myth. No amount of theory, expertise or empirical knowledge will assist the counselor if her personality does not have the resources to address the client's problems. At the same time, this sobering truth lays bare the practical value of philosophy for counseling: it assists the counselee by resourcing the counselor on a personal, as well as professional level. The philosophical way is one of self-improvement, not of the accumulation of methodological or technical expertise or information. A person who leads a 'reflected life', to use Socrates's famous concept, is a philosopher. By definition, a good philosopher should be well equipped to help others reflect on their problems and develop strategies, both rational on the one hand, and emotional and volitional, on the other, to resolve or heal them. To do so, the philosopher must be one who perceives philosophy as a way of life, and not as a discipline that in its use of scientific methodology falls just a little behind physics and is so much the worse, as many modern industrial philosophers perceive it. Further, to be an effective counselor the philosopher must embody the character traits and values inherent to philosophy as a way of life: he or she must be open-minded, tolerant of differences, refined in his emotions and genuinely interested in the puzzle that the other human being is and the drama that makes them who they are. Most importantly, however, to be effective as a counselor, the philosopher must be at ease with the task of a life-long search for 'the good life', and must be experienced, if not with clients, then with oneself, in putting all the conceptual resources of philosophical thought and tradition to the task of making a good life for oneself and for others. This is another way of saying that the effective philosophical counselor must be a decent philosophical 'generalist', as Lou Marinoff puts it, with skills and depth of insight that result from living one's philosophical dilemmas and meanderings, and with keen interest in and empathy for other human beings. This is a lot to ask.

The combination of professional and human qualities required for effective counseling will obviously make the proponents of some philosophical disciplines and approaches more likely candidates for philosophical counselors than others. An existentialist or an ethicist are more likely candidates for counselors than formal logicians or philosophers of mathematics or physics, simply because the latter are likely to have chosen their fields partly based on certain character-traits and sensibilities that are less concerned with other human beings, and more with abstract truths pursued in privacy. This is not necessarily, always so, but it is the case more often than not. A keen philosophical mind is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for success as a philosophical counselor; a keen interest in other people and a propensity to identify and empathise with them are

also required. Finally, the acceptance of professional risk to ‘run with the volves’ in their territory, along the private midscape of another person while retaining clear view of the main postulates of philosophical counsel — quest of the good life by virtuous character-building, clear reasoning and healthy discriminating judgement — must be part of the counselor’s own projection of the good life. These pre-conditions for becoming a philosophical counselor, while required, must also be desired. They are the virtues that make up the type of character and the range of moral pleasures which define a person well suited to run with the volves and take professional risks in order to help others articulate and attain their own value and character goals. Ultimately, these are the character requirements for a philosophical good life that is suited to helping others create their own good lives.

In short, philosophical practice is fundamentally about reflected pleasure as the base-line of the good life, and about the moral education required to reach such pleasure. It is inclusive of all the conceptual and methodological wealth of philosophy of almost any tradition or school, and is able to make any such theoretical philosophy a vibrating and living helping tool, however far removed it might seem from real life. By placing philosophical theory in the context of the simple conceptual matrix of reflected pleasure and moral education, philosophical practice, and philosophical counseling as one of its main applications, is emancipatory for theoretical philosophy as a whole. By virtue of being put to use in helping identify and attain the good life of philosophy’s clients, philosophy becomes the way of life of its practitioners and, whatever its substance and concepts, becomes ‘core philosophy’, and not ‘mere superstructure’. Philosophical practice is likely the ultimate realization of Hadot’s paradigm shift for the entire philosophy.

References:

Botton, Alain (2004). *Status Anxiety*. London, Hamish Hamilton.

Hadot, Pierre (1995). *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Oxford, Blackwell.

Hume, David (1963), “The Sceptic”, Essay 18 in Hume, *Essays: Moral, political and literary*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

James, William (1890). *The Principles of Psychology*. Classics in the History of Psychology, ed. by Christopher D Green. Toronto, York University. Internet edition: <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/James/Principles/>. Accessed 26 June 2013.

Kant, Immanuel. *Metaphysics of Morals* 6:331 (reference as per the Prussian Academy Edition).

Lewis, Thomas, Amini, Fari and Lannon, Richard (2000). *A General Theory of Love*. New York. Random House.

Kant, Immanuel. *Metaphysics of Morals Vigilantius*, 27:552-553 (reference as per the Prussian Academy Edition).

Laertius, Diogenes (1925). *Lives and opinions of eminent philosophers*, vol. 2, books 6–10. Transl. by R.D. Hicks. Harvard. Harvard University Press.

Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain (1989). *Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*. Transl. by Peter A. Chambers. New York. Paulist Press.

Philodemus (1988). *On Frank Criticism*, transl. by David Konstan et al, Atlanta, Georgia. Scholars Press.

Swedenborg, Emanuel (2004). *Heaven and Its Wonders with an Account of Hell*. Whitefish, Montana. Kessinger Publishing.

Turner, C.H. (1905). 'The letters of *Isidore of Pelusium*', *Journal of Theological Studies* 6: 70–86.