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TOPIC: African philosophy and philosophical counselling: Insights from African hermeneutics and conversational philosophy

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Zoom registration link: [Click here](#)
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Speaker: Jaco Louw

Abstract

At the heart of philosophical counselling, an emerging field of practical philosophy, is a modest claim, that the lay public can benefit from *all* that philosophy has to offer. If accepted, this claim suggests that different philosophical traditions should be incorporated into the philosophical counselling discourse. Even though various philosophical traditions have slowly been incorporated, there are sparse mentions of African philosophy in the philosophical counselling literature. However, Ubuntu philosophy has recently garnered some attention. Nonetheless, in this talk I address this dearth of African philosophical input through the introduction of two alternative notions of African philosophy, namely, African hermeneutics and conversational philosophy. These two schools of thought provide valuable and enriching insights to the philosophical counselling discourse. Through this introduction, I aim to transform two key mechanisms as found in the philosophical counselling literature. These mechanisms, that of a *hermeneutical happening* and *collaborative philosophising*, invaluable as they are to our understanding of philosophical counselling, lack a certain contextual nuance and situated sensitivity. Consequently, a problematic value-neutrality is continually reproduced; the philosophical counsellor then emerges as an “unprejudiced and value neutral educator”. With the help of African hermeneutics and conversational philosophy, I aim to positively transform these mechanisms. This transformation involves taking seriously the situated and contextual response, emerging from and responding to, in this case, an African lifeworld. Resultant is an *interpretive actualisation* through a collaborative undertaking rooted in the very conditions of the philosophical conversation.

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African philosophy and philosophical counselling: Insights from African hermeneutics and conversational philosophy

Abstract

At the heart of philosophical counselling, an emerging field of practical philosophy, is a modest claim, that the lay public can benefit from *all* that philosophy has to offer. If accepted, this claim suggests that different philosophical traditions should be incorporated into the philosophical counselling discourse. Even though various philosophical traditions have slowly been incorporated, there are sparse mentions of African philosophy in the philosophical counselling literature. However, Ubuntu philosophy has recently garnered some attention. Nonetheless, in this talk I address this dearth of African philosophical input through the introduction of two alternative notions of African philosophy, namely, African hermeneutics and conversational philosophy. These two schools of thought provide valuable and enriching insights to the philosophical counselling discourse. Through this introduction, I aim to transform two key mechanisms as found in the philosophical counselling literature. These mechanisms, that of a *hermeneutical happening* and *collaborative philosophising*, invaluable as they are to our understanding of philosophical counselling, lack a certain contextual nuance and situated sensitivity. Consequently, a problematic value-neutrality is continually reproduced; the philosophical counsellor then emerges as an “unprejudiced and value neutral educator”. With the help of African hermeneutics and conversational philosophy, I aim to positively transform these mechanisms. This transformation involves taking seriously the situated and contextual response, emerging from and responding to, in this case, an African lifeworld. Resultant is an *interpretive actualisation* through a collaborative undertaking rooted in the very conditions of the philosophical conversation.

Keywords: philosophical counselling; African philosophy; conversationalism; hermeneutic; Tsenay Serequeberhan; Jonathan Chimakonam

Introduction

Philosophical counsellors often claim that their practices bring counselees, or the lay public, into contact with the full breadth of what philosophy has to offer. Philosophical counsellors Shlomit Schuster and Peter Raabe, in fact, assert explicitly that philosophical counsellors must be, what Lou Marinoff and others have coined,¹ fundamental generalists. Schuster (1995:101), for example, writes that ...

¹ See, for example, Fatić and Zagorac (2016:1421), Fatić (2013:1250-1251), and Marinoff (2002:50).

... [t]he history of philosophy can serve as a source of well-being when discussed appropriately. Thus, a Sartrean, Buberian, Plotinian, or any other exclusive philosophical practice, method, or tool, *would prevent both clients and practitioners from having an authentic encounter with all that philosophy can offer.* (Emphasis mine)

Raabe (2001:214), in his turn, accords that ...

... [i]t seems therefore that a fundamental element of philosophical counseling must be the philosophical counselor's *familiarity with, and willingness to draw on or discuss, in an open-minded way, a variety of philosophical perspectives and approaches,* and that [her] "agenda" contain nothing more restrictive than [her] desire to help [her] client. (Emphasis mine)

However, when turning to the philosophical counselling discourse a glaring omission is visible – there is a substantial lack of engagement with African philosophy and an absence of philosophical voices speaking from the African continent itself. Recently, some scholars have been turning to especially Ubuntu philosophy in their attempts to positively expand the philosophical counselling discourse.² Nonetheless, in this talk I want to address the dearth of African philosophy by introducing two alternative African schools of thought, namely, the radical African hermeneutics of Tsenay Serequeberhan, and the conversational philosophy of Jonathan Chimakonam.

Before turning to these scholars and their respective philosophical thoughts, I want to first explain my understanding of philosophical counselling through two core concepts, namely, a *hermeneutical happening* and *collaborative philosophizing*.³ After unpacking these central mechanisms, I will critique their purported value-neutral application within philosophical counselling practice. As concrete example of such a philosophical practice, I will briefly look at some statements made by Schuster. Employing these mechanisms in such a value-neutral approach necessarily disregards the situated contexts and circumstances that inevitably shape both the counselee's and philosophical counsellor's perspectives.

Through the explication of key aspects of Serequeberhan and Chimakonam's philosophical approaches, I will then aim to positively transform a hermeneutical happening and

² See, for example, Richard Sivil (2024).

³ Both these mechanisms are prevalent in the work of various philosophical counsellors, especially that of the work of Raabe and Schuster in their readings of Gerd Achenbach, the so-called founder of the modern philosophical counselling movement.

collaborative philosophising. Through this expansion, a hermeneutical happening becomes reoriented as an *interpretive actualisation* grounded in the embeddedness of a dynamic conversation within concrete contexts and lived experiences. *Collaborative philosophising* reinterpreted necessarily emphasises and takes seriously the rootedness and contextual situatedness inherent to any philosophical exchange between philosophical counsellor and counselee.

1. Understanding philosophical counselling as a hermeneutical happening and collaborative philosophising

Understanding philosophical counselling is not always an easy task, as it has become a field of practice with seemingly no clear direction or unification. There seems to be as many conceptions of philosophical counselling as there are philosophical counsellors.⁴ Various philosophical counsellors regard this as a positive attribute,⁵ stemming somewhat from the fact that the seminal text by Achenbach, *Philosophical Praxis*,⁶ was only recently translated into English. While the practice of philosophical counselling tends toward decentralisation, as demonstrated by its multifaceted orientation,⁷ I have identified two crucial elements that underlie my own understanding of PC – namely, *collaborative philosophising* and a *hermeneutical happening*.⁸ I briefly elaborate.

Through the process of a *hermeneutical happening*, the philosophical counsellor becomes intimately involved⁹ and entangled¹⁰ with the counselee’s problems, questions, or the very reason they sought philosophical counselling. This is a dynamic and active practice through which the philosophical counsellor provides the counselee with “fresh impulses” or insights into their situation and aims to catalyse in them the desire to also philosophise. Unrestrained by predetermined theories or rigid methodological frameworks, the philosophical counsellor

⁴ See, for example, Marinoff (1999:37), Raabe (2001:xix), and Tillmanns (2005:2). However, compare this with Schuster (2004:15).

⁵ See, for example, Lahav (2008:6) and Robertson (1998:6).

⁶ See Michael Picard’s (Achenbach, 2024) translation.

⁷ Various images can be used to illustrate this disparate field of philosophical counselling. For example, Raabe (2001:xviii-xix) views the practice of philosophical counselling as a ball of yarn with no essential core, only various diverging, intertwined, and overlapping strands. I would much rather liken this aspect of philosophical counselling to either the image of a rhizome or that of a mosaic or tapestry.

⁸ These core concepts draw somewhat from the works of Raabe (2000:16; 2001:133) and Schuster (1992:587; 1997; 1999:12, 14, 34, 38, 97), who interpret and build upon, among others, Achenbach’s practice.

⁹ Achenbach (1997:2) states in Gadamerian fashion that the philosophical counsellor *opens herself to be interested* in the counselee’s problem(s) and question(s) when they authentically listen.

¹⁰ Aleksandar Fatić (2013:1250) relies on empirical evidence that illustrates the effectiveness of this rather intimate entanglement with the counselee’s problem(s)/question(s). This is opposed to maintaining a “therapeutic distance” in which the philosophical counsellor somehow finds the right balance between “closeness” and “distance” in a session.

facilitates an open philosophical space¹¹ for unrestricted inquiries and open-ended conversations to organically unfold. Crucially, this encounter is a hermeneutical *event*, one through which new knowledge, perspectives, or deeper self-understandings of epistemic importance emerge for the counselee.¹²

This hermeneutical moment forms the fertile ground from which collaborative philosophising¹³ can emerge. The very encounter between the philosophical counsellor and counselee becomes a lived moment, an event, a *happening* in and of itself. Through this potentially transformative process, a more examined and enriched way of becoming is co-cultivated and co-constituted by both parties. In this shared practice, the philosophical counsellor and counselee can draw profound insights not only from the wisdom spanning across various philosophical traditions¹⁴ but also from the lived experiences and perspectives contributed by each other.¹⁵ Here, a dynamic interplay and merging of both these components allows for transformative and new modes of becoming to potentially emerge, fertilising and taking root in both the philosophical counsellor and the counselee. In this moment, both participants play a crucial and intertwined role in facilitating this fertile conversation. The philosophical counsellor engages with both the counselee and the history of philosophy itself by posing different questions, incorporating alternative conceptual frameworks, and cultivating an open environment for the conversation to organically unfold in manifold directions. Simultaneously, the counselee must embrace their co-constitutive role in maintaining this creative conversation by actively participating in the open-ended conversation and inquiry into alternative ways of living philosophically.

2. A few critical remarks

While these mechanisms of the hermeneutical happening and collaborative philosophising seem crucial to this understanding of philosophical counselling, I want to recognise their lack of nuance in two distinct ways. Firstly, the role and active contribution of the counselee toward the philosophical conversation is not always made sufficiently clear, especially when framing

¹¹ Schuster (1999:34) states that the philosophical counsellor (re-)interprets the counselee's situation within a philosophical framework.

¹² See, for example, Fastvold (2005:175) and Raabe (2001:143, 155-156) who all state something similar.

¹³ Collaborative philosophising is mentioned in brief by, inter alia, Allen (2002:5, 11-12); Marinoff (2002:81); Pollastri (2006:111); Raabe (2001:143); Sivil (2019:8-9); Tukiainen (2010:52); Schuster (1999:33); and Fastvold (2005:175).

¹⁴ Robert Walsh (2005: 497-498), drawing on Heidegger, suggests that the history of philosophy is a long path best navigated together with others through open conversations with the various voices of these traditions.

¹⁵ Sivil (2010:151) argues that the counselee in actively providing a truthful account of their lives, becomes a fellow "truth seeker" alongside the philosophical counsellor. The counselee can thus not passively receive knowledge from the philosophical counsellor.

the philosophical counsellor as the primary catalyst and locus of interpretation for the conversation. There is a risk that the hermeneutical happening becomes overly reliant on the one-sided expertise of the philosophical counsellor. And secondly, there seems to be a flawed emphasis placed on the philosophical counsellor being an unprejudiced listening partner or value-neutral educator. The notion that the philosophical counsellor can act as a blank slate without preconceptions or biases is highly problematic. To concretise and illustrate these critiques, I briefly examine some statements made by the philosophical counsellor Shlomit Schuster, whose practice exemplifies the flaws in maintaining that the philosophical counsellor should be an unprejudiced listening partner who does not impose their own views onto the counselee – a view that various philosophical counsellors uphold.¹⁶

Schuster, whose work is inspired by, amongst others, the so-called founder of the contemporary philosophical counselling movement, Gerd Achenbach, provides what she calls philosophy¹⁷ practice, which is an alternative *to* therapy and not just an alternative therapy. She proports to de-diagnose¹⁸ and de-psychoanalyse¹⁹ counselees through reinterpreting their unique situations²⁰ in a philosophically value-neutral framework.²¹ In fact, she advocates that philosophical counsellors diagnose, that is, her aim is to get to the root cause of the counselee's problem.²² This activity of a so-called philosophical diagnosis, she claims, follows from her reinterpretation of the phrase "to diagnose" outside of the medical model, or a non-clinical sense,²³ and thus somehow becomes devoid of its medical and authoritative connotations. Schuster implicitly professes that the philosophical counsellor embodies several ideals during the counselling process. They are to provide a form of unbiased listening²⁴ as an unprejudiced discussion partner.²⁵ They are to serve as a passive philosophical friend²⁶ offering no

¹⁶ See, for example, Ran Lahav (1995:21-22).

¹⁷ This is opposed to a mere "philosophical" approach, which she explicitly rejects, and hence the title of her book, viz., *Philosophy Practice*.

¹⁸ See, for example, Schuster (1996).

¹⁹ See, for example, Schuster (1999:14).

²⁰ Schuster (1992:587; 1999:35) maintains that the counselee's situation is "unique" and cannot be understood through theory or with the help of rigid methods.

²¹ Schuster (2013:132) writes, for example, that humans have come to understand themselves primarily through theory-laden, "technical and systematic" approaches, such as those provided by the DSM.

²² See Schuster (1997; 1999:12, 14).

²³ See Schuster (1999:14).

²⁴ Schuster (1999:15), for example, writes that "[s]ince I showed a *neutral attitude* toward her explanation, she did not experience telling me her story as exposing a secret of immense importance" (emphasis mine).

²⁵ See Schuster (1999:51) who writes that "a philosophical practitioner may be chosen because he or she is considered an unprejudiced partner in conversations."

²⁶ See Schuster (1997; 1999:20).

substantive insights of their own,²⁷ merely to provide the counselee all that philosophy has to offer unaffected by their own biases and prejudices.²⁸ They are to be a neutral, value-free educator²⁹ or guide – merely a “pilot” assisting the counselee, who is posited as the “captain” regaining control of their own ship, that is, life.³⁰ Schuster claims that through this dialectical, hermeneutical approach, along with all that philosophy has to offer,³¹ the philosophical counsellor can help unearth the root cause of the counselee’s problems.

The claim that the philosophical counsellor is a value-neutral, unprejudiced interlocutor, as purported by Schuster’s practice, however, is markedly flawed and requires serious consideration. This contrived stance of the philosophical counsellor as a passive friend and neutral educator actively ignores and strips away the crucial situated, contextual factors that should be central to the open-ended conversation and the practice of collaborative philosophising. Rather than the mutual co-exploration of lived experiences of distinct horizons and lifeworlds, the philosophical counsellor in this practice attempts to guide the counselee in an abstract conversation divorced from the rich lifeworlds of both participants. The very notion that a philosophical counsellor can shed their own embodied lenses, biases, and perspectival limitations to achieve an impartial and unbiased listening is highly flawed. More damning is the perpetual erasure of conversations that engage with situational factors like race, class, gender, power dynamics, and other points of positionality that fundamentally shape both the counselee and philosophical counsellor’s experiences and interpretations.³²

²⁷ Schuster (1999:97) in reading Achenbach, writes that “[i]nstead of working with a priori methods and scientific knowledge, the philosophical practitioner works *together* with the client on knowledge of the self and life” (emphasis mine).

²⁸ It is interesting to note the glimmer of intellectual humility in Schuster who changed an earlier draft of one of her central theoretical tenets. She first wrote that “[p]hilosophical practice offers, at least potentially, what philosophy itself was [sic.] to offer: freedom from the preconceived, the ill-conceived, the prejudiced, and the unconscious,” (Schuster, 1992:598). After some time, she changed this to read that “[p]hilosophical practice offers, at least potentially, what philosophy itself is supposed to offer: freedom from the preconceived, the ill-conceived, the prejudiced, and *the hubris of knowing it all*,” (Schuster, 1999:62; emphasis mine).

²⁹ See Schuster (1999:12) who writes that the “philosophical counselor’s place in the conflict of interests between physicians, psychologists, and patients is that of a neutral philosophical educator”.

³⁰ See Schuster (2013:132).

³¹ See Schuster (1995:101).

³² Norman Swazo (2000:45-46) and Peter Raabe (2001:22) critique Schuster’s unprejudiced listening partner. Kate Meheron (2015:1568) explicitly problematizes her supposed value-neutral practice, writing that “[t]he western philosophical tradition has raised to a normative pinnacle the ideal of decontextualized objective rationality, a norm that is detrimental to the depathologizing impetus of philosophical counseling. [...] Practitioners need to shun philosophical disciplinary norms that decree a disengagement from the analysis of power relations, especially with respect to race, class, gender, and the histories of colonial and imperialist domination. This disengagement *deprives* the counselor and client of the *rich array of cultural criticism* that has, in recent times, altered the disciplinary norms of philosophy itself,” (emphasis mine).

While Schuster advocates for the philosophical counsellor to engage in genuine listening to the counselee – a core tenet of the hermeneutical happening – her underlying stance of aspiring to value-neutrality and presuppositionless abstraction fundamentally subverts the ideals of collaborative philosophising. By positing the counsellor as a facilitator consciously suspending their biases and prejudices, Schuster’s practice precludes substantive and lasting engagement with the deeply embodied lifeworlds and horizons that both participants inherently inhabit and co-constitute. It is for this reason that I turn to the philosophical approaches of Serequeberhan and Chimakonam, whose work, I argue, could help cultivate a philosophy practice that engages with both the embedded counselee and the philosophical counsellor’s own groundedness in more substantive and beneficial ways.

3. African philosophy through African hermeneutics and conversational philosophy

3.1. A reading of Serequeberhan’s radical African hermeneutics

Similar to the multifaceted quality of philosophical counselling, there are many different schools of thought and approaches to, and therefore many different understandings of, African philosophy. Through Serequeberhan (1994:7), African philosophy becomes a radical hermeneutical endeavour, aiming to understand and interpret the experience of the confrontation of the post-colonial present or neo-colonial situation. This dire situation, for Serequeberhan (1994:8; 2000:2; 2009:44), is marked by a type of gap or in-betweenness. Though the formerly colonised have regained their physical territory from the unjust occupation of the coloniser, they have yet to fully reclaim their minds, ways of living, and modes of thinking. According to Serequeberhan (2009:44; 2013:147; 2021:35-36), this residual effect of colonialism continues to fundamentally shape the world of the formerly colonised, with Africa playing the willing victim of being a servile appendage for the West.

Serequeberhan presents various processes by which African philosophers, through theoretical resistance or cultural violence,³³ can both de-struct the neo-colonial situation and then re-construct and develop new concepts and ways of living. This follows Fanon’s proclamation (as quoted by Serequeberhan, 1994:9) in that we should “turn over a new leaf” and “work out new concepts”. Here, I have a specific interest in mainly two elements as found throughout Serequeberhan’s work, namely, the indigenisation and appropriation of texts or ideas originating from a different lifeworld, and the process of sifting and sieving or a cultural

³³ Ibuot (2011:219) uses this phrase.

filtration and fertilisation. These ideas will particularly help me reformulate a hermeneutical happening into an *interpretative actualisation*.

Throughout his body of work, Serequeberhan interweaves the perspectives of non-indigenous thinkers from varied lifeworlds, such as Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, with the voices emerging from an African context, including Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral, and Marcien Towa. This involves a process of organically appropriating and indigenising concepts and ideas, wherein he malleable shapes the existentially aware positions of philosophers like Heidegger and Gadamer, especially in coming to an understanding of the neo-colonial situation (Serequeberhan 1994:2-4). In Serequeberhan's (1998:14, 2000:17) hands, philosophical ideas and approaches are akin to clay, functionally moulded and shaped in the context where they are employed.³⁴ The philosopher thus stands in a dynamic, reciprocal relationship with the concepts and philosophical ideas with which they engage and interact. This could be regarded as the first task of African philosophy – the de-structive reading of a text or philosophy to lay bare its inner workings, especially in critiquing Euro- and Westerncentric modes of thought (Serequeberhan, 2010:28-29). The second task, the creative and (re-)constructive endeavour of African philosophy, can be illustrated through the second element I want to discuss, namely, the process of sifting and sieving or a cultural filtration and fertilisation.

Not all ideas and concepts are beneficial or essential to retain, especially after the de-structive and critical reading. Through a process of sifting and sieving or a cultural filtration and fertilisation, Serequeberhan (1994:5, 109; 2015:52-53; 2021:38) underscores the importance of carefully scrutinising the past and the residues of coloniality, so that one might fertilise the present and future. The past is revered and approached with respect. However, anything that might hinder the liberation process, as Serequeberhan argues, is discarded. This is akin to an archival³⁵ and archaeological or inventory³⁶ endeavour – a process of uncovering and disclosing indigenous ways of living and becoming, and modes of thought, the very elements the colonial project attempted to erase and destroy. Employing this process, African philosophy can extract the necessary concepts and ideas to comprehend the present neo-colonial situation, with the aim of overcoming it through a creative, constructive, indigenising, and appropriating approach.

³⁴ Bruce Janz (2015:481; 2016:44) maintains a similar position, stating that concepts “travel”.

³⁵ Siseko Kumalo (2020; Black Archive Visual Podcast, 2023), recently launched the black archive project, potentially being a practical example of Serequeberhan's project.

³⁶ See, e.g., Serequeberhan (1994:23; 2000:55; 2010:36) regarding the required inventory.

Building upon these ideas, I propose that a hermeneutical happening can be positively expanded into what I term an *interpretative actualisation*. Whereas the former may exclude or disregard contextual and situational factors, the latter actively attunes itself not just to the counselee's problem or question being interpreted but also to the very place and circumstances from which this interpretation emerges. One could say that interpretative actualisation listens to the needs of the present moment, in addition to the counselee themselves. More specifically, the counselee is understood within the embeddedness of their lived experience, while the interpretive conversation is cross-fertilised and enriched by the indigenised and appropriated cultural inventory that informs one's interpretive lens.

3.2. A reading of Chimakonam's conversationalism

I now turn to what Chimakonam terms conversational philosophy and its method of conversationalism as a viable alternative approach to practicing African philosophy. Building upon where Serequeberhan left off, my reading of conversational philosophy concretises the creative and reconstructive element of African philosophy, taking seriously the very place from which the philosopher speaks and how it shapes the ensuing discourse (Chimakonam, 2015e:463-464). From this initial premise, we can already discern how conversational philosophy problematises the transcendence and erasure of contextual and situational factors, drawing our attention to philosophise from this very groundedness and embeddedness. Moreover, Chimakonam's understanding and subsequent use of the term "conversation" diverges from both its colloquial meaning of a mere informal exchange of ideas, as well as the notion of dialogue that typically aims toward consensus, a fusion of horizons, or a synthesis of thesis and antithesis (Chimakonam, 2015e:463; 2017d:17). Rather, conversation here refers to a critical and sceptical encounter between two conversational partners, oriented toward creating and giving birth to new concepts through an ongoing, continually refreshed conversation that never truly ceases (Chimakonam, 2017d:15).

Within conversationalism, I read Chimakonam to propose various mechanisms to maintain the continual refreshment and vitality of the conversation. Two of these mechanisms are particularly relevant for my purposes, namely, *arumaristics* and the notion of a *creative struggle*. By elucidating these mechanisms, I aim to emphasise a specific understanding of collaborative philosophising, which will aid me in reworking this idea as expounded in Schuster's work I briefly discussed above.

Chimakonam identifies two conversational partners, namely, *nwa-nsa* or the proponent of a position, and *nwa-nju*, the opponent of a position (Chimakonam, 2015e:469; 2017a:121). The relationship between these conversational partners is undergirded by a concept termed *arumaristics*. This idea is derived from the Igbo word *arumarụ-ụka*, which can be translated as either “engaging in critical and creative conversation[s]” (Chimakonam, 2017a:120), or “engaging in a relationship of doubt” (Egbai & Chimakonam, 2019:181). Here, the encounter between the conversational partners, grounded in *arumaristics*, emphasises its critical, creative, and sceptical qualities. This encounter is not aimed at reaching a consensus or synthesis; instead, it aims at giving birth to new concepts through constructed creative tensions, productive misunderstandings, confrontations, and sustained disagreements (Chimakonam, 2017d:15, 17).

Building upon this understanding of the conversational relationship and *arumaristics*, the second key mechanism Chimakonam proposes is that of a *creative struggle*. This underscores the continual process through which *nwa-nju* challenges *nwa-nsa*, potentially resulting in the creation of new concepts or the reshaping of outmoded ones into more functional ideas (Chimakonam, 2017d:17; 2018:149). The creative struggle is not merely a fleeting component but rather the permanent driving force of conversationalism, emphasising the malleability and ever-evolving nature of ideas and concepts. It is called *creative* because it opens thought so that new concepts can be created. Yet, it is also a *struggle* because the encounter between the conversational partners is marked by an intellectual confrontation, a back-and-forth of continual disagreement (Chimakonam, 2017d:17-18). Moreover, Chimakonam (2014b:2-3) places emphasis on the reconstructive element of conversationalism, ensuring that the critical process leaves something tangible in its wake, as opposed to mere negative destruction. After each challenge from *nwa-nju*, *nwa-nsa* has the duty to creatively construct and build upon their original position. This stands in contrast to the notion of a thesis being relinquished in favour of a synthesis, fusion of horizons, or agreement.³⁷

Through the guiding principles of *arumaristics* and *creative struggle*, collaborative philosophising situated within Chimakonam’s conversational framework turns our attention to the profound rootedness and embeddedness of the conversational partners themselves. The sceptical tendencies of conversationalism, which demand that the partners engage in an open-ended conversation and embrace the influence of the very place from where they are speaking,

³⁷ Janz (2015:481), for example, critiques “dialogue” in a similar fashion through his Deleuzian lens.

further emphasise this rootedness. Moreover, the posited malleability of concepts and ideas emphasises that they are not static abstractions but are functionally moulded through different perspectives and lived experiences that the embedded conversational partners bring to the discourse, as they respond to their concrete lifeworlds and to each other's contributions.

4. An interpretative actualisation and a reworked understanding of collaborative philosophising within a philosophical counselling practice

The philosophical counsellor and counselee are, in their encounter, intimately entangled within the present situation, spatially and temporally located in a concrete and potentially shared lifeworld. Speaking from this embedded "here", they co-creatively philosophise and co-cultivate alternative ways of living, producing novel perspectives tailored to the unique needs and nuances of what one might term a *conversational event*. This grounding of an interpretative actualisation within a conversational framework provides a rich soil from which concepts can be cooperatively birthed and functionally shaped by the very dynamics of their collaborative philosophical endeavour. The intimate link between this generative co-creation of concepts and the contextual "where" from which the encounter unfolds underscores the core notion that ideas are malleable and ever evolving. Drawing from the dynamic indigenising and appropriating processes discussed in Serequeberhan's work, the past can creatively be used and reinterpreted to shed light on the present situation, with outmoded concepts being reshaped into functional forms.³⁸

Transcending the mere provision of a fresh hermeneutical impulse, as characteristic of Schuster's approach, the very encounter between the philosophical counsellor and counselee serves as a catalyst for an ongoing, unfolding conversation. In this reimagined praxis, we might liken the initial moments of the session – typically marked by the counselee presenting their problem or question – to the position of *nwa-nsa* or the proponent within conversationalism. The philosophical counsellor, rather than assuming a solely interpretive role, can inhabit the stance of *nwa-nju* or the opponent at this stage. From this critical position, the philosophical counsellor does not simply offer an interpretation, but instead challenges the counselee's initial framing of their situation. Through *arumaristics*, or the "relationship of doubt", the philosophical counsellor might, for example, critically discuss underlying assumptions,

³⁸ Serequeberhan (1994:23), in especially his reading of Gramsci, maintains this position. In his later work, this idea is worked out in more detail, especially with his readings of Gadamer (see, e.g., Serequeberhan, 2015). It is also interesting to note the novelist Milan Kundera (2000:89), who through the mouthpiece of one of his characters, writes that: "Do you think that the past, because it has already occurred, is finished and unchangeable? Oh, no, it is clothed in mutable taffeta, and whenever we look back at it we see it in another color."

introduce alternative perspectives, or provoke the counselee to co-examine how their contextual ways of understanding shape the very conversation. This opening conversational exchange sets in motion a creative struggle, where the counselee's original position is not merely reinterpreted in Schuster's problematic value-neutral philosophical framework, but becomes malleable conceptual clay to be functionally reshaped through the to-and-fro of the collaborative encounter. The philosophical counsellor's sceptical challenges spur the counselee to re-articulate, refine, and potentially revise their initial framing as per the duty of *nwa-nsa* after a creative struggle.

This continual back-and-forth motion of the philosophical counselling session problematises the notion that the philosophical counsellor merely provides the counselee with insights, which highlights the problematic assumption that the philosophical counsellor is the sole locus of interpretation. However, it also problematises the idea that the philosophical counsellor is a kind of Socratic figure who helps the counselee give birth to concepts and ideas. Instead, I want to maintain that *philosophical counselling becomes event*.³⁹ The very encounter between the philosophical counsellor and the counselee facilitates a moment that could not have emerged otherwise.⁴⁰ Crucially, this transformation is bi-directional (or multi-directional),⁴¹ affecting and changing both the philosophical counsellor and the counselee. Most importantly, the collaborative philosophising practice – the event of philosophical counselling – is profoundly shared and co-constituted; the co-cultivation and co-creation of alternative philosophies, ways of becoming, or novel concepts emerge not exclusively from either the counselee or the philosophical counsellor, but from the interpretative actualisation within their collaborative philosophising endeavour.

Toward concluding: Establishing a philosophical village

This reimagined praxis takes philosophy beyond the academic stronghold and returns it to the agora, the marketplace, or what Chimakonam (2018:135-136) calls the “philosophical village”. Philosophical counsellors might emerge as so-called public or citizen philosophers, facilitating collaborative conversations with the lay public. Philosophical counselling thus becomes a vehicle through which philosophy is not merely explicated but constructively co-created and

³⁹ Janz (2016:44) writes about philosophising from a specific lifeworld, which he terms *place*, noting that this place is not a static backdrop. Instead, *place becomes event*. I use a similar argument to suggest that philosophical counselling becomes event – moment, happening.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Raabe (2001:143, 155-156) and Fastvold (2005:175) for more detailed discussions.

⁴¹ See, for example, Fatić (2013:1249-1250).

continually actualised through conversations that root themselves in concrete lifeworlds, taking seriously the contextual grounding from which they arise.

Within this philosophical village, philosophical conversations actualised in a philosophical counselling practice necessitate the presence of the other – not solely other philosophers, though that remains a possibility, but crucially, the perspectives and lived experiences of the lay public themselves. Envisioned this way, philosophical counselling becomes a fluid praxis attentive to the nuances of the present situation while drawing sustenance from the contextual rootedness of all participants, actively problematising decontextualised, ahistorical, and positionless, value-neutral conversations. Philosophical counsellors might thus truly begin to offer the lay public all that philosophy has to offer – a philosophy that emerges from lively and grounded conversations.

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