

# Practising “Dissentient Philosophical Counselling” Underpinned by African Conversationalism and Pyrrhonian Scepticism: Provisional Theory and Practice

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## Abstract

Method in philosophical counselling is still a contentious topic. That is, there is no consensus on whether the philosophical counsellor should have a method in her practice to help the counsellee resolve philosophical problems. Some philosophical counsellors claim that there should not be any rigid adherence to method(s) as this will render philosophy too dogmatic. Philosophical counselling, in light of this view, promotes a kind of mutual philosophising sans definite goal with the counsellee. What I call “dissentient philosophical counselling” takes this claim even further: the philosophical counsellor lives/practices her philosophical counselling, that is, she embodies and practices philosophy as a way of life. This view is posed as a response to contemporary conceptualisations of philosophical counselling where the philosophical counsellor might stand in a disembodied relationship with her method(s) and tries to have a conversation “from nowhere”. Dissentient philosophical counselling, even though more focused on living philosophically, still suffers from certain shortcomings. In this paper, I firstly showcase how even the seemingly innocuous but important question “How might one live?” suffers from a lack of much needed nuance. And secondly, I introduce, via a fictional narrative, a provisional way of practicing this reworked dissentient philosophical counselling. I do this by, firstly, introducing African conversational philosophy, via its method of conversationalism, and secondly, I introduce a peculiar version of Pyrrhonian scepticism especially regarding the notion of *bios adoxastōs* (life without dogma).

## About the author

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## 1. Introduction: Initial Clarifications and Definitions

### 1.1. Philosophical counselling

Philosophical counselling (henceforth PC)<sup>1</sup> struggles from a crisis of definition (Raabe, 2001: xv, 43; Louw, 2021a: 1-2). There are said to be as many definitions of PC as there are practitioners of PC (Tillmanns, 2005: 2). One consequence of this crisis of definition is the lack of agreement on method(s).<sup>2</sup> One might view the position of the philosophical counsellor on this matter on a continuum: on the one end, there is the total rejection of method(s)<sup>3</sup> and on the other end, there is the rigid adherence to method(s).<sup>4</sup> In this article, I place myself in the middle of this continuum by promoting a view called *improvisation*.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.2. Pyrrhonian scepticism

Pyrrhonian scepticism is an ancient form of scepticism that seeks a state of mind free from anxieties caused by dogmatically adhering to theories/philosophies/beliefs. It is often misunderstood.<sup>6</sup> However, this creates a space for creative and peculiar readings of Pyrrhonism. For instance, Pyrrhonism can be read as a *therapeutic philosophy*, i.e., using philosophy outside of the parameters of academic space. The

potential benefit of Pyrrhonism, for example, in the mental health professions<sup>7</sup> has been noted by various authors.<sup>8</sup> In fact, Sextus Empiricus writes: “Because of his love of humanity the Skeptic wishes to cure by argument, so far as he can, the conceit and precipitancy of the Dogmatist” (PH 3.280).<sup>9</sup> Sparse research on the viability of Pyrrhonism in PC exists. In this paper, I will use a peculiar and creative reading of Pyrrhonism, especially regarding how Pyrrhonian sceptics (henceforth Pyrrhonists) regarded/held their beliefs, i.e., *adoxastōs*/without dogma. I also use two important notions I gather from Pyrrhonism, viz., (i) non-commitment (nomadism) from a (ii) non-position.

### 1.3. African conversational philosophy

African conversational philosophy methodised a specific understanding<sup>10</sup> of “relationship” or “interdependence” into a method called conversationalism. This method promises to sustain a critical and continually revitalised conversation through a “creative struggle” between two parties by stifling the need for a “synthesis” (as there might be in dialogue). Furthermore, this method<sup>11</sup> emphasises the situated nature of the participants in this conversation. Importantly, conversationalism begins to equalise the playing field between philosophies (and conversational partners)

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<sup>1</sup> I use philosophical *counselling* and philosophical *practice* interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> Method(s) in this case referring to identifiable and repeatable steps taken by a philosophical counsellor to reach a particular outcome/goal beyond that of philosophising. See, for example, Staude’s (2015: 39-41) *Path of consideration* which is a conception of PC with both identifiable and repeatable steps and a particular outcome/goal beyond that of philosophising.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Gerd Achenbach who uses a “beyond-method” method. In short, he does not adhere to any fixed method. Nor does he promote any talk about theories which might explain a counsellor’s problem/situation (e.g., Achenbach, 1995: 73).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Cohen who practices logic-based therapy (LBT), a variant of rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT). In short, his brand of PC adheres to a specific theory and method with specific goals/outcomes (e.g., Cohen, 2013: 113-114).

<sup>5</sup> In short, the philosophical counsellor uses different methods without dogmatic adherence to any of them.

<sup>6</sup> One reason for this is the often-hostile translations of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (authored by Sextus Empiricus). Mates (1996) is one of the few charitable translations.

<sup>7</sup> Amongst others, counselling psychology, psychotherapy, and psychiatry.

<sup>8</sup> See, inter alia, Heaton (1997; 2003), Fischer (2011), and Greenslade (2014).

<sup>9</sup> Benson Mates’s (1996) translation of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (PH = Pyrrhōneioi hypotyposēis) is used. Furthermore, the notation PH 1.1 is used to indicate the book number and paragraph number, respectively.

<sup>10</sup> See Chimakonam (2017a: 115; 2017b: 11) who calls this an “under-explored sub-Saharan African notion of relationship or communion or interdependence.”

<sup>11</sup> The method of conversationalism has both identifiable and repeatable steps and a particular outcome/goal which is discussed in section 3. Utilised in PC, the method is used to sustain a conversation characterised by the so-called “creative struggle”.

thus preventing hegemonisation of any particular philosophy. Conversationalism plays a key theoretical role in the embodiment of a philosophical disposition which is actualised from a specific *philosophical place*.

#### 1.4. Dissident philosophical counselling

In this paper, I will argue as follows. Relying on what I call “dissident PC,” I argue that the philosophical counsellor is “in control of methods,” and is constantly and creatively improvising. This contrasts with conventional philosophical counsellors who might be “controlled by method(s)” and who “dispense” or prescribe different philosophical texts as medicine or a cure.<sup>12</sup> Following the notion of dissident PC, I argue that the philosophical counsellor does not rigidly/dogmatically hold onto method(s)/philosophies that might have worked<sup>13</sup> in the past. What worked in the past for counsellee A might not work in the future for counsellee B. The philosophical counsellor in this view is thus always vigilant against dogmatically following a method and she continually professes a kind of philosophical ignorance. Dissident PC was proposed as a solution to certain shortcomings in contemporary PC (see Louw, 2021a). However, dissident PC still lacks a much-needed nuance regarding the actualising from a specific *philosophical place*, particularly regarding the important and seemingly innocuous question “How might one live?”. Subsequently, I introduce conversationalism and Pyrrhonism as two key theoretical underpinnings that might start to counter this lack.

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<sup>12</sup> Sivil (2009: 205-207) uses the formulation of “prescribing philosophical texts”. Marinoff’s (1999) popular book on PC, *Plato, not Prozac!*, for example, plays into both these problems, viz., (i) uncritically prescribing philosophical texts, and (ii) being controlled by a quasi-method he introduces to his counsellees which he has no commitment to (cf., Marinoff, 2002: 167).

<sup>13</sup> A successful method in one case might be unsuccessful in another. What constitutes a successful method is problematic for the dissident philosophical counsellor due to the realisation that situational factors will fundamentally change method(s) from counsellee to counsellee. Hence, the necessity of the dissident philosophical counsellor to be in control of various methods.

## 2. Dissident Philosophical Counselling<sup>14</sup> and the Lack of Nuance

### 2.1. Dissident philosophical counselling

The dissident philosophical counsellor (shortened as the dissident) is in control of multiple methods (Svare, 2006: 31-32). Being *context-sensitive*,<sup>15</sup> the dissident moves seamlessly between different methods. She “aspires to be something of a *methodological anarchist* prepared to challenge the authority of theoretical constructs and time-honoured convictions” (Swazo, 2000: 46; emphasis added). She avoids holding method(s) dogmatically which might have worked in the past. Dogma scares her.

Philosophy that takes its own assumptions for granted – ceases to critically challenge, and thereby to go beyond itself – is no longer philosophy, it’s dogma, ideology – a dead twig, not a living vine (Robertson, 1998: 10).

The dissident knows that there are various methods at her disposal.<sup>16</sup> There will, consequently, be a need for constant *improvisation*.<sup>17</sup> As the musician<sup>18</sup> needs to play her instrument so to say “spontaneously’ with [...] her fingers moving to the right place at the right time without even knowing it” (Louw, 2021a: 98), so also the dissident will weave her way through philosophical discussions and methods without conscious or reflective awareness.

<sup>14</sup> This section is based on Louw (2021a: 95-103, 128).

<sup>15</sup> That is, having a keen sense of awareness to the counsellee’s needs and not being controlled by method(s) (Svare, 2006: 32).

<sup>16</sup> See Pollastri (2006: 109): “philosophy [...] has several methods, not a specific one.”

<sup>17</sup> Regarding *improvisation*, see Pollastri (2006) and Raabe (2001: 44-45).

<sup>18</sup> Pollastri (2006: 110-111) uses the metaphor of a musician to equate the philosophical counsellor characterised by improvisation.

The dissentient knows, furthermore, that to live philosophically<sup>19</sup> requires the relational/mutual practicing of philosophy through, inter alia, a joint inquiry, investigation, and reasoning. Rejecting the idea of synthesis as in a dialectical relationship,<sup>20</sup> the dissentient does not try to find an “ultimate answer” to the counsellee’s problem.

In fact, the philosopher will enter more fully into the spirit of the inquiry if [she] does not believe that [she] knows the answer sought by the [counsellee] (Allen, 2002: 5).

A “joint-creative-struggle” ensues in which the dissentient and the counsellee see “the problem as point of departure”<sup>21</sup> and not in need of immediate resolution. The outcome of dissentient philosophical inquiry is not “inside” the philosophical counsellor, nor in the counsellee; it emerges “from the dialectic between them” (Allen, 2002: 11-12). PC subsequently becomes a *shared and relational experience* (Walsh, 2005: 500). Philosophical counselling “is not something the [dissentient] *does*, it is rather what she *cannot help but do*” (Louw, 2021a: 99).<sup>22</sup>

This “doing” (*praxis*) can be linked to *phronesis*. In fact, the backbone of PC is *phronesis* (Weiss, 2018: 12). The *phronetic dissentient* is characterised by having “an ability to adapt to a new and unfamiliar situation without the [conscious] need to refer to a method” (Louw, 2021a: 100).

[A] person of practical wisdom [*phronesis*] must be prepared to encounter new cases, with responsiveness and imagination, using what she has learned from her study of the past, but cultivating as well the sort of flexibility and perceptiveness that will permit her [...] to “*improvise what is required*” (Nussbaum, 2018: 67; emphasis added).

Ultimately, what interests the dissentient is the question: “How might one live?”<sup>23</sup> Therefore the dissentient will embody her philosophical practice in such a way as to guide the counsellee on the quest/journey to help formulate possible answers to this perplexing question of how one might live.<sup>24</sup> The dissentient views philosophy in a peculiar manner in order to facilitate a continuous conversation, to edify the counsellee’s life, and ultimately to get rid of philosophy itself.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the dissentient wants to turn the counsellee into a mutual/fellow philosopher<sup>26</sup> so that they might mutually and continually philosophise about the counsellee’s problem. However, the dissentient will profess that “we shall proceed as if I know, I really don’t know” (Swazo, 2000: 50-51). The way in which the dissentient lives her philosophical practice might lead the counsellee to have a *terrible experience* and it can possibly be an inherently *dangerous relationship* (ibid.). Philosophy might also be “bad medicine” as Jopling (2008: 162) appropriately argued.<sup>27</sup> But the dissentient will not profess philosophy to be

<sup>19</sup> Hadot (1999) revitalised the notion of a lived philosophy, especially in *Philosophy as a way of life*.

<sup>20</sup> See section three on Chimakonam for more detail on the rejection/stifling of a synthesis.

<sup>21</sup> See Louw (2021b) for a discussion in which the counsellee’s problem is seen as point of departure in contrast to the more conventional view of finding a solution to the counsellee’s problem.

<sup>22</sup> See also Walsh (2005: 505) who states that “[t]o enter into [the philosophical counsellor’s] life at all is to enter into [her] philosophical counselling practice.”

<sup>23</sup> See May (2005: 1-2) who mentions modern academic philosophy’s neglect of this question.

<sup>24</sup> See Vansielegem (2013: 602, 608, 611).

<sup>25</sup> Pyrrhonian therapy purges philosophy at some point. See section 4 below.

<sup>26</sup> See Raabe (2001: 147).

<sup>27</sup> In short, philosophy is bad medicine because it can potentially create or intellectualise problems, provide the counsellee an easy escape from tough emotional work, or philosophy might give the counsellee “pseudo-insight”, which is “sophisticated patter with little intrinsic philosophical content” (Jopling, 2008: 161-162).

medicine, nor will she proclaim that there are any discernible goals beyond merely philosophising for the sake of philosophising.

Moreover, the dissentient will go about this journey in a rather contradictory fashion and with a curious philosophical ignorance. Contradictory because she might carry on as if the answer/solution to the counsellee's problem is around every corner, and at the same time, she might carry on as if there is no solution/answer. Curious because she is vigilant to the fact that the answer could potentially be *anywhere*. It might lurk in the cursory reading of a philosophical text,<sup>28</sup> or revealed after a rigorous and continuous conversation, or it might even be gained through the purging of philosophy itself.

## 2.2. The lack of nuance

An apparent lack of nuance arrives as the dissentient practices her philosophical counselling when she posits the question "How might one live?". This question does not explicitly ask what I call situating questions. The epistemic subject looks rather empty, and the conversation presumably takes place from "nowhere", as I will showcase below.

## 3. Conversational African Philosophy

### 3.1. An empty epistemic subject and a conversation from nowhere

I contended earlier that the dissentient will be preoccupied with the question "How might one live?". I now argue that this question lacks nuance, that its epistemic subject is possibly empty, and that it promotes a conversation from nowhere. This is the case because *from where, when, by and for whom*, and *how* one asks this question is not necessarily sufficiently

addressed.<sup>29</sup> Chimakonam (2016: 15) states similarly that various strands of African philosophy are not sufficiently "engage[d] [...] in fruitful conversations on issues that would seek to unveil the African lifeworld." Simply put, philosophical conversations (read: philosophical counselling) that lack the nuance provided by a situatedness might not help the counsellee to cultivate and illuminate beneficial ways of living from a particular *philosophical place*. Nor will counsellees gain meaningful insight about their ways of being in the world from philosophies "in which the epistemic subject has no sexuality, gender, ethnicity, race, class, spirituality, language, or epistemic location within power relations" (Grosfoguel, 2012: 89). Chimakonam introduces the idea of philosophical *place* in contrast to philosophical *space* which might start to trouble the idea of asking the question "How might one live?" from nowhere.

### 3.2. Philosophical space vs. philosophical place

Chimakonam (2016: 15) uses a distinction provided by Janz between African philosophy as being either *platial* or *spatial*. The latter (i.e., spatial) refers to when Africa is seen as something akin to borders on a map and when African philosophers try to reclaim the stolen "intellectual territory" from the colonisers.<sup>30</sup> Chimakonam (2016: 32) subsequently calls this philosophical space. The former (i.e., platial) refers to what Chimakonam via Janz refers to as phenomenological issues/concerns. Simply put, platial African (conversational) philosophy, in part, deals with "issues that are present in the lifeworld or in the day-to-day experiences of a people" and is subsequently called philosophical place (ibid., 9, 15, 32).

Philosophical space for Chimakonam (2016: 37-38) becomes an "abstract meeting point of world philosophies". That is, different concrete philosophical places

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<sup>28</sup> See Dußel (1996) who endorses this "per chance" style PC.

<sup>29</sup> These questions are loosely based on those asked by Mignolo (2021: xii). Paul Ricoeur also famously asked his students: "Where are you speaking from?" (as quoted in Du Toit, 2019: 227).

<sup>30</sup> That is, making Western hegemonic philosophy aware of its own situatedness and historicalness.

from an equal/horizontal footing meet up in this abstract philosophical space.<sup>31</sup> Importantly, Chimakonam (2016: 37) notes that philosophical places “in a sustained movement towards the universal, converges with other philosophical traditions at a comparative level”. All philosophy thus should start from a philosophical place (i.e., embedded in a specific place or lifeworld) and ascend to this abstract philosophical space “where it initiates further conversations with other traditions” Chimakonam (2016: 38). The goal of particular philosophies (i.e., philosophical places) is to strive to have conversations with other particular philosophies in the universal philosophical space. The “ultimate goal of philosophy” for Chimakonam (2016: 40) is the “continuous unfolding of reason from the particular places to the universal space.”

The dissentient addressing the question “How might one live?” from nowhere might implicitly/explicitly practice her PC in the abstract philosophical space; it is not actualised from a concrete and embedded philosophical place. Conversationalism can start to add much needed nuance to this question.

### 3.3. Conversationalism: Arumaristics, the creative struggle, a disregard of synthesis, and context upsetting facts

Chimakonam, in providing an alternative understanding of philosophising, problematises the use of Western dialectical (i.e., Hegelian) thinking. He, instead, proposes a relational African paradigm in which a sustained and critical conversation can be held. He calls this method *conversationalism* (2017a; 2017b). The philosopher using conversationalism is explicitly aware of her own situatedness and context. Philosophising in this manner always explicitly situates itself. Furthermore, it is concretely embedded in a historical and

geographical frame that honours the embodied presence and living voices of the participants.

Chimakonam (2017b: 22) claims that traditionally, within the mainstream Western philosophical tradition, dialogue favoured a Hegelian dialectic where two sides, thesis and antithesis, form a new synthesis. The two opposing sides can form a new unit, i.e., synthesis, when they go into dialogue to “sort things out” and where the synthesis equates to a higher form of understanding. However, Chimakonam through conversationalism does not want to promote this as the ideal outcome. Disregarding synthesis, Chimakonam wants to keep the thesis and antithesis separate. There is no final goal of a successful synthesis, as in the case of dialogue. Conversation is “more than dialogue” (Chimakonam, 2016: 20). There is instead, a continual “sustenance of the conversation” for its own sake (Chimakonam, 2017b: 22) and a constant “reshuffling of thesis and antithesis” to create a new, more sophisticated and “fresh” thesis and antithesis (Chimakonam, 2017a: 116, 121).

This notion of conversation is based on *arumaristics* which, in turn, is based on the Igbo idea of conversation, *arumaru-uka*. This roughly translates to “engaging in a relationship of doubt” (Egbai & Chimakonam, 2019: 181) or “engaging in critical and creative conversation” (Chimakonam, 2017a: 120). In this conversation, there are two sides: *nwa-nsa* or the defender of a position (thesis) and *nwa-nju* or the person rivalling the position (antithesis). The duty of *nwa-nju* is to relentlessly attack *nwa-nsa* to “reveal its loopholes and creatively fill up the lacunas” (ibid., 121). This creates a “frustration” because of a thwarted expectation of a synthesis that can be called “creative surrender” (Chimakonam, 2017b: 17-18). Conversationalism is instead called a “creative struggle” between *nwa-nsa* and *nwa-nju* because there is constant reshuffling of thesis

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<sup>31</sup> This abstract space is comparative or intercultural philosophy proper. The basic tenet of especially intercultural philosophy is that once universal and hegemonic philosophy is situated (i.e., purged from the philosophical space and reduced to philosophical

place) more meaningful conversations can be held from various philosophical *places* in the abstract philosophical *space*.

and antithesis which is not itself a synthesis. *Nwa-nsa* re-invents the thesis position *due to* the relentless attacks of *nwa-nju*. It never truly stops, it has a “transgenerational life-span [... that] keeps being re-invented and grows in sophistication” (Chimakonam, 2017a: 122). In dialogue, there might be a need to concede to the demands of a synthesis which inevitably ends. Instead, conversationalism stifles synthesis and seeks a continual conversation.

Ultimately, conversation plays the role of facilitating the context in which *nwa-nsa* and *nwa-nju* has this creative struggle through which meaning is *produced* (Chimakonam, 2021: 11). That is, meaning is not necessarily inherent to thoughts or words, but rather dependent on the context in which they are expressed (Chimakonam, 2021: 20). A catchphrase of sorts is used: “context upsets facts” (Chimakonam, 2017b: 20; 2021: 11).

This promotes a crude or weak form of relativism which aligns with Pyrrhonism.<sup>32</sup> The question, “How might one live?”, situated in conversationalism cannot meaningfully be answered when the philosophical counsellor tries to answer it with so-called universalised philosophy devoid of a “human” subject and situatedness. To use the above catchphrase, context (read: the counsellee’s unique situation) upsets facts (read: proclaimed universal philosophy). I now turn to Pyrrhonism.

## 4. Ancient Greek Pyrrhonian Scepticism

### 4.1. The nomadic Pyrrhonian occupying a non-position

I introduce two strange tenets of Pyrrhonism,<sup>33</sup> viz., (i) non-commitment (nomadism) from a (ii) non-position. The Pyrrhonist is a *nomadic philosopher*<sup>34</sup> which allows for what I call a *non-position*. That is, she is nomadic because she does not have a “fixed territory” (read: dogma/theory/philosophy) which she needs to constantly defend against the onslaught of others (read: philosophers with different dogma/theory/philosophy). The need to constantly defend a position disturbs the Pyrrhonist’s peace of mind (*ataraxia*).<sup>35</sup> The Pyrrhonist philosophises precisely to get rid of these disturbances. Sextus Empiricus reminds us that the dogmatist who needs to always defend and fend off enemies is perpetually troubled and does not have peace of mind (see PH 1.27).

Furthermore, having access to this non-position, she might rely on self-refuting arguments. When it is needed, she can go so far as to purge philosophy/reason itself to have peace of mind. Sextus Empiricus provides the well-known purgative example, stating that:

*just as purgatives after driving the fluids out of bodies eliminate themselves as well, so too the argument against demonstration, after doing away with all demonstration, can cancel itself as well* (M 8.480; emphasis added; cf. PH 1.206, 2.188).<sup>36, 37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Due to *isostheneia* or the assumed equal weightiness of arguments, the Pyrrhonist withholds assent (*epoché*). This necessarily creates at minimum a weak or crude relativism.

<sup>33</sup> See Louw (2021a: 21-37) for an eclectic reading of Pyrrhonism.

<sup>34</sup> Martha Nussbaum (2018: 281) introduces the nomadic metaphor regarding Pyrrhonism.

<sup>35</sup> Mates (1996: 61) translates *ataraxia* as “peace of mind” or “imperturbability”.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Betts’s (2005) translation of *Against the Logicians* (M) is used.

<sup>37</sup> This reminds one of the Wittgenstein’s (2002: 89) ladder: “He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it”.

I now turn to a peculiar use of this nomadic Pyrrhonism from a non-position in order to return to common life (*bios*) without dogma (*adoxastōs*).

#### 4.2. Eichornian Pyrrhonism and the return to common life *adoxastōs*<sup>38</sup>

Eichorn (2012: 16; 2014: 132; 2020: 337) views Pyrrhonism in a very particular manner, especially regarding *bios adoxastōs*. According to his reading, the Pyrrhonist holds her beliefs without dogma (*adoxastōs*) and without any real commitment (i.e., nomadism).<sup>39</sup> Before becoming a Pyrrhonist, i.e., proto-Pyrrhonist, she would have started her epistemic journey, firstly, as an everyday dogmatist and then, secondly, as a philosophical dogmatist. As an inquirer or sceptic,<sup>40</sup> she firstly questions the validity of common life knowledge, and then she questions the veracity of her own philosophical knowledge. The goal is to return to common life but without any commitment to it and to find *ataraxia*. To return to common life without dogma, the Pyrrhonist needs to go through five stages (with three accompanying caveats).<sup>41</sup>

*Caveat 1.* There is a distinction between common life presuppositions and theoretical presuppositions (Eichorn, 2013a; 2020: 338). The former relates to those unreflective assumptions one holds to make daily life possible (e.g., I act according to the belief that I cannot walk through a tree). The latter relates to unreflective assumptions that are held to make theory/frameworks

possible (e.g., historians need to assume that the world did not come into existence ten minutes ago).

*Caveat 2.* Philosophy leaves no stone unturned. Philosophical investigations are free to investigate both kinds of presuppositions (Eichorn, 2013a; 2020: 339). This is of utmost importance for dissentient PC.<sup>42</sup> Philosophising starts once presuppositions are questioned in this rather unrestricted/indiscriminate way.<sup>43</sup> For example, if the historian brings history into question via the idea that the world came into existence only ten minutes ago, philosophising consequently starts and the practicing of history stops.

*Caveat 3.* The philosopher, however, is “committed” to at least one presupposition which she does not/cannot scrutinise, viz., that credence/weight/preference is given to the conclusion of reason (Eichorn, 2013c). Eichorn (2012: 14-15; 2013c; 2014: 129) calls this the *philosophical epistemic-doxastic norm* (PEN).<sup>44</sup> If so, a philosopher who is committed to PEN will see philosophy as the “arbiter of epistemically responsible belief” (Eichorn, 2014: 129). Unlike the philosopher, the Pyrrhonist is not committed to PEN.

Keeping these caveats in mind, I will now discuss the five stages.

*Stage 1.* In the first stage, the proto-Pyrrhonist like the dogmatist is seen as an *everyday dogmatist*. That is, when sceptical challenges are launched at common life, it might be refuted with common life knowledge

<sup>38</sup> See Eichorn (2013a, 2013b, 2013c) for a more detailed version of this argument.

<sup>39</sup> This contrasts with popular readings of Pyrrhonism in which the Pyrrhonist does not hold *any* beliefs or only a few beliefs (cf., Frede, 1987).

<sup>40</sup> “The sceptic is an inquirer or a seeker, i.e., someone who *looks*. [...] *σκέπτομαι* (*sképtomai*), [...] means to look or examine, and *σκεπτικός* (*skeptikós*), [...] refers to the person doing the looking or examining” (Louw, 2021a: 23).

<sup>41</sup> This should not be seen as a “method”. Certain anomalies “forces” the proto-Pyrrhonist to become a Pyrrhonist. See, for example, Vogt (2011: 36-37) who writes about one’s “conversion” to Pyrrhonism, or DiCarlo (2009: 53) who states that the Pyrrhonist is “made”.

<sup>42</sup> See Louw (2021b: 26) in which the importance of this “unrestricted philosophising” is discussed. Subsequently, the counsellor can engage with PC and philosophy from a crucial and uniquely *critical position* that emerges from this type of philosophising.

<sup>43</sup> See Fogelin (2004: 67) regarding the consequences of unrestricted Pyrrhonian philosophising.

<sup>44</sup> That is, reason sways the philosopher’s arguments. The committed Christian, for example, would not be committed to PEN. She is not thereby rejecting reason as such. She might use reason in accordance with the *internal logic* of Christianity. However, reason as such will not necessarily sway her from religion. She does not give preference to reason but to religion.

(Eichorn, 2013b). For example, the sceptic might ask, “How do you know there is a tree?” to which the everyday dogmatist says, “I can see it.”

*Stage 2.* Soon the sceptical arguments might grow in sophistication. The everyday dogmatist’s assertion “I can see it” proves to be insufficient.<sup>45</sup> The everyday dogmatist cannot refute these more sophisticated sceptical challenges with common life knowledge because common life as a whole is being challenged (Eichorn, 2013b; 2020: 335).

*Stage 3.* The only way to refute these more sophisticated challenges is to call upon, what Eichorn (2013b) calls, *autonomous reason*. That is, the everyday dogmatist moves away from the trust she had in common life knowledge and commits herself to reason to refute the sceptical challenges. This in turn changes the everyday dogmatist into a *philosophical dogmatist*.

*Stage 4.* However, as in stage two, the sceptical challenges grow in sophistication to also challenge autonomous reason itself.<sup>46</sup> One cannot rely upon autonomous reason to rid this dissatisfaction and fend off the more sophisticated sceptical arguments. If one cannot call upon autonomous reason nor common knowledge to refute sceptical challenges, to what does one turn?

*Stage 5.* Here, Eichorn (2013c) rather cleverly introduces the self-refuting arguments of the Pyrrhonists. The Pyrrhonist returns to common life in this stage but *transformed* (Eichorn, 2013c). She returns to common life without the previous dogmatic reliance on it nor does she hold the notion that common life needs

philosophical underpinnings; it is groundless but at the same time self-standing (Eichorn, 2020: 340-341). Philosophy thus becomes

an ongoing, piecemeal effort to reorient ourselves with respect to our lives, to illuminate the self-standingness of everyday life, and to root out dogmatism wherever it crops up, whether in ourselves or in others (Eichorn, 2020: 355).

#### 4.3. A brief interlude: Enter Chimakonam’s conversationalism

Eichorn (2013c) states that there is no synthesis. I find in this exact moment an overlap with conversationalism. Common life (thesis, *nwa-nsa*) is reworked via the relentless attacks by sceptical challenges (antithesis, *nwa-nju*) and one returns *transformed* to common life (thesis, *nwa-nsa*). There is a clear stifling of a synthesis, no concession is given to the demands of a need to synthesise the thesis and antithesis positions. One returns to the original position but transformed.

This transformed position helps the dissentient to stand in a unique relation to the question “How might one live?”. Uncommitted and from a non-position,<sup>47</sup> the dissentient can begin to answer this perplexing question with more nuance, that is, actualised from a specific philosophical place and through a relational-creative struggle. I now provide a fictional narrative/encounter between a counsellee and a dissentient philosophical counsellor as to flesh out her practice.

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<sup>45</sup> See, for example, brain-in-a-vat type scenarios. In short, brain-in-a-vat type scenarios are thought experiments in which a “brain in a vat” has similar mental states than humans in “the real world”, however, one cannot easily distinguish between the two. It is, therefore, a type of sceptical argument to question, inter alia, the validity of one’s knowledge about the external world. See, for example, Putnam (1998: 5-8) for a more in-depth discussion.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, the Agrippan trilemma or the modern Münchhausen trilemma. The Agrippan trilemma or the modern Münchhausen trilemma are different sceptical devices to

showcase various epistemological claims’ reliance on assumptions which cannot be defended without either (i) infinite regression, (ii) dogmatic reliance, or (iii) circularity. In short, the sceptic might use these devices to showcase that one will always rely on assumptions that cannot be proven. See, for example, PH 1.164-177 for a more in-depth discussion, however, Sextus Empiricus refers to the five modes of Agrippa. This has been shortened to the Agrippan or Münchhausen trilemma.

<sup>47</sup> She is uncommitted due to her undergoing a purgative sceptical therapy and in a non-position because she is a nomad.

## 5. Practicing Dissident Philosophical Counselling

The counsellee “might have left in the meantime, [...] not much happier than before, but not unhappy either”<sup>48</sup> but perhaps with a greater interest in how she might live. The counsellee initially sought out the dissident philosophical counsellor because she was dissatisfied with her current way of being in the world. From the start, the dissident warned the counsellee that to enter her philosophical practice might not yield many results, but at the same time it can edify the counsellee’s life in strange and somewhat uncomfortable ways.

The counsellee might have brought a practical problem to the dissident. A tough decision that she needs to make, ethical issues that creates uneasy feelings, being stuck in life with no prospect of moving forward, the list goes on. The dissident, informed by the vast network of philosophical texts and knowledge, intuitively provides a correlating piece of philosophical wisdom. Plato’s cave myth, Aristotle’s five intellectual virtues, Irigaray’s deconstruction of Plato’s cave myth, Buber’s I-Thou dialogue, Heidegger’s thrownness, the list seems endless. However, the dissident, unlike conventional philosophical counsellors,<sup>49</sup> does not dispense these philosophical ideas and texts to resolve the counsellee’s problem. Instead, she tries to turn the counsellee into a fellow philosopher.

This conversion is a crucial step. The counsellee can either accept the weighty invite,<sup>50</sup> or she can reject the offer.<sup>51</sup> But the dissident knows that this step cannot be skipped. She is not a dispenser of half-truths and philosophical slogans, nor is she a sophist.<sup>52</sup> To enter her philosophical practice, the counsellee agrees to be

interrogated but also to interrogate the dissident. Initially, the counsellee might be in a thesis/*nwa-nsa* position. Causing discomfort at first, the dissident might interrogate the counsellee’s problem with the help of philosophical texts and know-how/*phronesis*. But soon afterwards, the counsellee’s problem is seen as a point of departure. Being a fellow philosopher at this stage, the counsellee might interrogate the dissident (albeit sans in-depth philosophical know-how/*phronesis*). A creative struggle ensues in which the dissident and counsellee constantly switch positions from *nwa-nsa* to *nwa-nju* in an effort to continue the conversation and to return to the original problem *transformed* and edified.

It might not happen like this at all. The dissident does not follow this as a method, she is not controlled by method. Instead, she is in control of methods. Actualising the conversation from an embedded philosophical place, she has a specific context sensitivity that helps her intuitively know when she can enter the above-mentioned conversation with a counsellee. At a minimum, she knows how to facilitate a context in which the counsellee is brought into contact with the question, “How might one live *here, today?*” and how a concrete philosophy, one amongst many others that could have been equally valid in this situation, can act as a springboard from which to philosophise. Cognisant of the fact that the counsellee might request a short and quick answer without the need to interrogate/be interrogated, or without the need to go down this dangerous path of mutual philosophising, the dissident reverts to a hesitant and ignorant position:

[She] may wonder why the [therapist] did not tell [her] at once the simple truths that would have made [her] free.

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<sup>48</sup> See Dußel (1996: 337).

<sup>49</sup> See especially anecdotal evidence provided by Marinoff (1999: 83-256) and Schuster (1999: 127-180).

<sup>50</sup> I contend that the counsellee who visits the dissident philosophical counsellor qua philosopher should not merely seek a philosophical slogan or text to somehow solve their problem. Onus is on the philosophical counsellor to state this from the start.

<sup>51</sup> One of the few requirements of PC is that the counsellee should be able to have a rational dialogue and should not suffer from serious cognitive problems which might signify the need for psychological/medical rather than philosophical intervention.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Scruton (1998: 6-7) who states that Marinoff is a charlatan and sophist who disregards everything for which philosophy stands.

But as a therapist, I know that though the patient learns, I do not teach. Furthermore, *what is to be learned is too elusively simple to be grasped without struggle, surrender, and experiencing of how it is* (Kopp, 1994: 4; emphasis added).

## 6. Conclusion

Provisional theory and practice of dissentient philosophical counselling is proposed in contrast to (i) conventional philosophical counselling, and (ii) dissentient philosophical counselling without the necessary nuance and situating questions. The practice proposes to facilitate the question “How might one live?” with further situating questions that might make it more relevant to the counsellee embedded in a specific philosophical place and without dogmatic adherence to universalised (i.e., empty epistemic subject) philosophy. The theory, underpinned by conversationalism and Pyrrhonism, aims at (i) avoiding dogmatically adherence to method(s)/philosophies, (ii) a continued conversation actualised from a specific place, and (iii) to edify the counsellee’s life beyond that of uncritical prescription of a philosophical text or by purging philosophy itself.

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