

# PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

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Special Issue on Philosophical Counselling:  
Concepts, Methods, and Debates

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## Inputs for Philosophical Counselling from Murdoch and Rosenberg<sup>1</sup>

RAJA ROSENHAGEN  
ASHOKA UNIVERSITY, INDIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH, USA

### Abstract

In this article, I suggest that combining resources from philosophy and psychology can yield useful tools for philosophical counselling. More specifically, I argue for three theses: a) Iris Murdoch's notion of *just attention* and Marshall Rosenberg's method of *non-violent communication* are interestingly compatible; b) engaging in *non-violent communication* serves to support one's endeavors to acquire the kind of clear vision Murdoch thinks doing well by others requires; and c) *non-violent just communication* would be beneficial to both counsellors and counselees and thus a useful resource for philosophical counsellors.

**Keywords:** *Iris Murdoch, just attention, Marshall Rosenberg, non-violent communication, philosophical counselling*

In the growing literature on philosophical counselling, one frequently sees attacks on diagnostic frameworks used in clinical psychology, on psychotherapeutic approaches—especially ones, like psychoanalysis, that are time-consuming and costly—and on what is typically framed as the overly medicalized approach pursued by psychiatrists (see, e.g., Raabe 2001, 2002; Marinoff 1999). Practitioners in these professions who fit such stereotypes are easily found (that their number is legion helps), but corresponding stereotypes are not as easily pinned on philosophical counsellors. This may be due partly to the fact that as a group, philosophical counsellors are not as numerous, that philosophical counselling is as of yet less well known, and that philosophical practitioners are far from united concerning the methods they follow, the philosophical traditions they draw on, and how they construe what aim, if any, they take philosophical counselling to have. Arguably, what unites philosophical counsellors may well reduce to no more than some amount of rigorous philosophical training. And given the stupendous variety of philosophical positions that logical space accommodates, that there is a corresponding variety in approaches pursued by philosophical counsellors hardly comes as a surprise.

Such lack of uniformity has its downsides. Forming lasting professional associations becomes challenging, as these need to be inclusive enough to accommodate a maximally diverse set of philosophical outlooks, and at the same time develop shared conceptions of best practices and provide services to their members that go beyond certification and help them navigate what in many ways is still uncharted terrain. That said, for philosophical and other reasons, diversity in the approaches philosophical counsellors adopt is welcome, not least because it helps serve a clientele whose members are likely to constitute a group as diverse in their outlooks as that of philosophical practitioners themselves. As long as philosophical practitioners benefit a growing number of clients, manage to stick together regardless of theoretical differences, and enable each other to get a foot in the door, as it were, the prospects of future professionalization should not be too bleak. But even as the motley bunch that they are, philosophical practitioners increase in numbers, as do, accordingly, their

forays into what is currently the sole dominion of psychotherapists and psychiatrists. And the response to such forays by the rulers of the land may not always be friendly. It is thus understandable when practitioners feel the need to aggressively stake their claim in what has become a huge mental health economy, one associated with substantial financial interests. It seems both opportune and justifiable if practitioners entering it increasingly endorse a certain narrative, according to which philosophical counsellors are simply reclaiming what psychology once took from them, e.g., a focus on counselling that is individual-centered, empathetic, and that addresses the implicit philosophical frameworks within which counselees operate. Contemporary psychology, the narrative continues, began to turn its back on such approaches when it began to increasingly refashion itself as a clinical, experimental and quantitative discipline, inching ever closer towards the social and natural sciences and thus moving away from and weakening their connection with its origins in the humanities. Also, it seems simply right that philosophers are uniquely qualified to help counselees make philosophical frameworks and assumptions explicit to then assess, and, where opportune and beneficial, modify them.

Such a narrative is a powerful means to help philosophical counsellors form a collective identity. However, in it, psychological and philosophical practitioners are cast as opposing forces. This poses the risk of tempting philosophical counsellors to underestimate the many ways they may benefit from the considerable resources—e.g., regarding best practices, methods of client selection, and therapeutic methods overall—that during the extraordinary growth of professional psychotherapy during the last century psychotherapists have collectively gathered.

My project in this paper may be construed as an attempt to help counteract this kind of risk. As I will propose, we can draw on the philosophical work of philosopher and novelist Dame Iris Murdoch and the approach to non-violent communication developed by the American clinical psychologist and peacemaker Marshall Rosenberg (see especially Rosenberg 2005), and combine both into an interesting resource for philosophical counselling. In making this suggestion, I take myself to be pursuing a project that Murdoch, too, might have approved. After all, in *The Sovereignty of Good*, she insists that “[a] working philosophical psychology is needed which can at least attempt to connect modern psychological terminology with a terminology concerned with virtue” (Murdoch, 1970: 46). Presumably, thus, Murdoch would have agreed that philosophy stands to gain from increasing its interactions with psychology. One reason to think so is that for philosophers to engage with psychology may serve as a reality check of sorts. More specifically, such interactions may coax philosophers out of the sort of quasi-Kantian voluntaristic conceptions of the self that Murdoch opposes. On such conceptions, she thinks, the self is undercomplex as it too narrowly reduces to an overtly moving will. Likewise, such interactions may also serve as antidotes to quasi-Hegelian conceptions, on which the self appears as a mere node in the totality of the social network, whose nature is largely (if not fully) determined by the various relations in which it stands with other such nodes (see Antonaccio, 2001, chapter 4; also: her discussion of the so-called Liberal view and the Natural Law view in Antonaccio 2012, chapter 2.1).<sup>2</sup>

Regarding the reverse direction, Murdoch’s insistence that psychological terminology ought to be connected with the terminology of virtue resonates well with a trope prevalent in the contemporary literature on philosophical counselling. According to it, many of the ever-growing number of recognized psychological conditions, conditions that psychologists and psychiatrists, it is alleged, fail to properly address by prescribing either a (potentially never-ending) series of psychoanalytic

sessions or some drug regimen or other, are actually problems of a moral nature (see, e.g., Marinoff 1998 for a vivid articulation of this trope)—problems that arise out of the need for clarification or, simply, the need for a perspective on moral questions which in a post-metaphysical and comparatively secular time such as ours is much harder to acquire. If this is accurate, Murdoch's project of connecting psychological terminology with that of virtue may well serve to equip practitioners (in philosophy and psychology alike) to address such moral issues better. In sum, establishing communications between Murdoch's point of view and suitable interlocutors from psychology may be beneficial for philosophy, psychology, and philosophical counselling alike.

With these general points on the table, let us turn to a concrete suggestion. More specifically, I wish to propose that Murdoch's concept of *just attention* (which she takes from Simone Weil, see, e.g., Broackes 2011, introduction) and her emphasis on the need to develop both a *clear vision* and a *realistic imagination*, on the one hand, and Rosenberg's account of *non-violent communication*, on the other, can be productively fused. Doing so yields the notion of a practice that I call *non-violent just communication* and that philosophical counsellors may engage in with their counselees to their mutual benefit.

As indicated above, what philosophical counselling aims at and what we should thus take its characteristic *telos* to be is itself a contentious issue. A prominent view—held, e.g., by Martha Lang—is that philosophical counsellors “work for the sake of the well-being of their clients”, by helping “people to become more aware of their own thinking, [...] the buried premises and underlying assumptions that lead us to act or feel in particular ways [...] to overcome our irrational or destructive behaviors and feelings” (Lang 2018). Lang's is not the only view on offer—in fact, some practitioners insist that philosophical counselling should not be seen as therapeutic at all. However, it does seem fair to assume that most philosophical counsellors hope that through engaging with them, counselees will eventually be able to improve their ability to cope with whatever brings them to the counsellor's doorstep.

How exactly such improvement is to be achieved is, of course, a matter of dispute and naturally, individual counselling strategies will differ significantly. A number of authors and practitioners recommend, for example, that the process of counselling focus on finding hidden fallacies in the counselee's ways of reasoning about the world (e.g., Elliot D. Cohen's logic-based therapy), which will also frequently involve unearthing presuppositions in the counselee's conceptions of, e.g., what they want, of what happiness and success amount to, and of what they can and cannot control.

Such broadly Socratic, logic-based, or Stoic approaches can no doubt be very useful. Here, however, is something I find rather remarkable: as far as I can see, the majority of the methods and techniques proposed in the literature are geared at increasing the counselee's understanding of *themselves*, at improving their abilities either to control things they can control or to accept their limits, and at polishing their reasoning skills. Among those who think about philosophical counselling, many, it seems to me, are overly impressed by the Delphic maxim that one ought to know oneself (*γνώθι σεαυτόν*). Or rather, while they may have been suitably impressed by it, they may have overlooked that knowledge of the self, while excellent to have, is hard to get by oneself. As Aristotle points out, such knowledge is more difficult to acquire than knowledge of others (see Aristotle, EN IX.9). Trying to acquire it *solo* may come with its own risks; as Murdoch puts the matter: the “self is such a dazzling object that if one looks there one may see nothing else” (Murdoch, 1970: 31).

The simple point is that while self-knowledge is good, knowledge of others is highly important, too. It may indeed be what is required to acquire certain kinds of self-knowledge, in a somewhat roundabout way (see Rosenhagen 2019 for a Murdochian reading of Aristotle's notion of friendship to that effect). But even if we bracket such subtleties, it strikes me as clear that there will be cases in which it would seem futile and detrimental to the project of addressing the issues the counsellee faces if the counsellor exclusively focused on helping the counsellee improve their understanding of themselves. Notably, these would be cases in which what the counsellee really appears to lack is the ability to see and imagine others empathetically. What I find surprising, thus, is that while there is no shortage of approaches geared at increasing the counsellee's self-understanding, comparatively little emphasis appears to be placed on methods that enable counsellees to acquire what may be an equally important skill: that of realistically appreciating their circumstances, including, crucially, the reality of *other* individuals that feature in them.

This impression, I think, is not completely off. Consider, for example, the *NPCA Standards of Ethical Practice*, a document published by the National Philosophical Counseling Association. According to it, the list of activities in which philosophical counsellors may engage includes the following: the examination of clients' arguments and justifications; the clarification, analysis, and definition of important terms and concepts; the exposure and examination of underlying assumptions & logical implications; the exposure of conflicts and inconsistencies; the exploration of traditional philosophical theories and their significance for client issues; the initiation of projects for common goods; all other related activities that have historically been identified as philosophical (see National Philosophical Counseling Association. *NPCA Standards of Ethical Practice*). Of course, this list is vague, pitched as illustrative and certainly does not purport to be anywhere near exhaustive. And yet, it is striking that the examination of the client's understanding of their circumstances and of the other individuals that inhabit them remains conspicuously absent.

Granted, an excessive preoccupation with the self *does* appear as a condition that those who write on methods of philosophical counselling occasionally think about. An example is Elliot D. Cohen's so-called *Egocentric Fallacy*. Listed as the category of informal fallacies, he characterizes it as follows:

One type of demanding perfection involves demanding that others share one's same desires, preferences, beliefs, or values or that reality itself conform to one's desires, preferences, beliefs, or values. Since this kind of demanding perfection is ego-centered, it can aptly be called the egocentric fallacy. Any inference of the following type would commit this fallacy:

I want (desire, prefer, believe, or value) x.

Therefore, you too must want (desire, prefer, believe, or value) x.

(Cohen 2009: 279-280, *footnote omitted*)

In calling attention to egocentrism—or, as he calls it elsewhere: the “world revolves around me” fallacy (cf. Cohen 2007)—Cohen highlights a serious and pervasive issue. But in a way characteristic of his logic-based approach, his recommended response is to focus on the self and its reasoning patterns. Presumably, the antidotes Cohen would find suitable to prescribe against this kind of fallacy would be designed to help make the counsellee aware of it so that they may be enabled to avoid

it in the future and replace the faulty forms of reasoning with better ones. However, I think that by way of characterizing egocentrism in terms of a fallacy, moreover as an instance of demanding perfection, Cohen obscures significant parts of what I think is a much larger issue. For one, egocentrism need not and often does not come in the form of implicit demands. I need not demand, but may still believe (consciously or not) that others are like me, have the same or very similar desires as I do, would act as I do, and so on. As we will see below, it is one of Iris Murdoch's signature claims that the realization that others are different from us, while extremely difficult, is necessary for us to become better at acting well towards them. It also seems to me that addressing issues that self-centered counselees might face will require more than helping them weed out fallacious reasoning and unreasonable demands and replace them by better ways of reasoning. Something else must be put in its place, habits need to be established that go beyond those of proper reasoning, viz. habits that—if things go well—manifest as the counselee's increased ability to pay close and unselfish attention to what other people are like, to what they want, hope, and to what legitimate demands others may have on them. Acquiring this ability may involve a more realistic conception of certain general ways in which others may be quite like us, but we should be ready to entertain Murdoch's contention that it will also involve realizing the various ways in which others may *differ* from us—both in their individual outlooks and in terms of what options for action, circumstanced as they are, they can see.

The benefits that accrue from acquiring such an ability should be obvious: only if counselees acquire a realistic understanding of others will they be able to act well towards them, i.e., in ways that truly benefit them. Arguably, whether or not one is able to truly benefit others is something one should care about—even if only for mostly selfish reasons. After all, the collaboration of others is frequently crucial to the success of our endeavors. As such, the ability to see others well, to be aware of and properly responsive to their reasonable hopes and desires is likely to be conducive not just to *their* well-being, but to the promotion of *our* aims, too.<sup>3</sup>

Improving one's ability to see and imagine others realistically would seem to be important not just for counselees. Quite obviously, counsellors, too, to succeed in their work, will need to relate with their counselees *as they are* as opposed to with some fantastic caricature of them that they may conjure up in their minds. In other words, counsellors, too, stand to benefit significantly from developing their ability to look at others and to see and imagine them realistically. For arguably, only if they truly see their counselees can they acquire a fair understanding and a proper appreciation of the *gestalt* of the issues the latter may struggle with, which will in turn be essential to the counsellors' ability to act towards their counselees in ways that are indeed truly responsive to their struggles and sensitive to the options for acting as they present themselves to *them*.

Assuming, then, that the ability to acquire a clear vision of one's circumstances and of the other individuals that inhabit them is a skill quite relevant to philosophical counselling, how can drawing on the works of Iris Murdoch and Marshall Rosenberg be of use in developing it? To begin with, note that the moral desideratum of acquiring a clear vision of others is already a central feature of Murdoch's position. In general, she thinks that *vision*, not movement, is the metaphor apt for the discussion of moral activity. Moral activity, she thus insists, is not best conceptualized in terms of the movements of an isolated will that occur when, in moments of choice, subjects throw their weight behind certain publicly available options rather than behind others, thereby both constituting and embracing their values. In Murdoch's view, moral activity is not as discontinuous as such a

conception suggests, nor does she think that the subject's options for action are publicly available. For her, moral activity is largely a matter of "the constant quiet work of attention and imagination" (Murdoch 1998: 200). "I can only choose within the world I can see," she claims (Murdoch, 1970: 37). To understand the point of this seemingly trivial statement, the following qualification is crucial:

The world which we confront is not just a world of 'facts' but a world upon which our imagination has, at any given moment, already worked; and although such working may often be 'fantasy' and may constitute a barrier to our seeing 'what is really there,' this is not necessarily so. (Murdoch 1998: 199)

As this passage indicates, Murdoch thinks that a subject's options for action are not open to all. It could be that it is open to all in some sense, viz. in the sense in which we could characterize options in a merely physical way. But this sense, in and of itself, is of no moral consequence. At any rate, the options between which we choose are not characterized in a purely physical way. Rather, they are built up, as it were, through the continuous moral activity involved in attending to others—through an activity, as she says, that is "usually and often inevitably, an activity of evaluation" (ibid.). Through continuous acts of attention and imagination, we conceptualize and re-conceptualize our environment, the situations we are in, and the people we interact with. The quality of the attention involved in this activity determines *what* we see, *how well* we see it, and, relatedly, whether our vision of others is *muddied* by fantasy or (given that non-fantastical seeing is deemed possible) *clear*.

Attending to others justly, seeing them clearly and imagining them realistically, Murdoch insists, is tremendously hard. It requires, *inter alia*, that we try to understand what, to others, the world within which they move and choose looks like—a world which they may partly share with us, but which may also be partly fabricated by the fantasies they engage in. In Murdoch's view, achieving a clear vision of others requires that in looking at them, we remove ourselves and our own desires, hopes, and motives from what we see in as completely a way as possible. In particular, in evaluatively characterizing what others do, it does not suffice to base such evaluations on a mere acknowledgement of what options for action are available to others if these options are considered under descriptions that *we* may find appropriate. Instead—and this is the hard part—we must imagine what these options will look like to *them*. After all, how others conceptualize their options, how they evaluatively characterize them—being circumstanced as they are, with all their idiosyncratic hopes, desires, fears, beliefs, and wishes—may well differ from how we conceptualize the same options. In fact, we may well say that in the sense that is most relevant to moral action, the options *they* see and the ones *we* might see were we to put ourselves in their place, will typically differ. For there are likely to be differences in evaluative characterization, differences in our orientation with respect to the question what overall good ought to be achieved, and, accordingly, differences both in what options for action are so much as considered and in how they are ranked in terms of which ones seem best.

What does it take for attempts to understand others to succeed? Murdoch's peculiar answer: *love*. Love, to her, is a technical concept. To properly understand it, we must suppress all its ordinary romantic and emotional connotations. Following Weil, Murdoch renders 'love' as *just attention*, as a quality of attachment and as a way of *looking and attending* to others that yields knowledge of the individual. It is worth pointing out how to such an activity, which is a blend of physical acts of look-

ing and of realistically imagining others in their respective circumstances, the category of justice applies. The idea is this: in evaluating the situations and people one attends to, one can do or fail to do justice to them, succeed or fail to realistically imagine their needs, desires, hopes, and beliefs, what good they seek to achieve (even if one may well disagree whether such good is worth striving for), and, as indicated above, what options are available to them from their respective points of view, and what to them, these options look like.

If seeing others (and even more so, *oneself*) justly or lovingly is difficult, and if love, as Murdoch famously states, is “the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real” (Murdoch 1959: 51), then to a large extent, this difficulty is due to the fact that attending to others justly requires that one direct one’s attention away from the self.<sup>4</sup> Ideally, we are to see others for who they are. To succeed, we must refrain from seeing them as the caricatures as which they may appear if looked at through the lenses of our own egoistic desires and fears, and refrain from focusing only on how they may promote or obstruct one’s own selfish goals. For if we look at others through such selfish lenses, there may be little need to actually see them. If, however, vision is purified in such a way as to become unselfish, Murdoch thinks, it promotes both the ability and the motivation to act virtuously. The latter will strike one as especially plausible if, like her, one thinks that “true vision occasions right conduct” (Murdoch, 1970: 66), and reads this as entailing that recognizing what one takes to be the morally best option in a given situation intrinsically yields a motivation to do it.<sup>5</sup>

For present purposes, we need not dwell on the subtle issue regarding how moral vision and motivation relate. For us, what matters is simply this: Suppose Murdoch is right and doing well by others requires, *inter alia*, a vision purified and made unselfish by love. Suppose, further, that for counselees to cope with the various issues they face frequently requires that they find ways of acting towards others that are based on a more realistic conception of who those others are. If so, the following seems like a reasonable suggestion: the philosophical counsellor’s toolbox should contain more than tools that help counselees engage in what one may call the philosophical analogue of psychoanalysis: logical navel-gazing. It should also contain tools that help counselees connect more realistically with their situation and with the others inhabiting it. Therefore, philosophical counsellors should consider that what it may take for their counselees to cope with their issues may at least sometimes be an increase in their capacity to love.

What techniques can help bring about such an increase? Citing Philippians 4:8, Murdoch recommends looking at what is true, honest, just, lovely, of good report, and pure (see Murdoch 1970: 56; cf. also Murdoch 1993: 301), pondering virtue, meditating (cf. Murdoch 1993: 337), and “the (daily, hourly, minutely) attempted purification of consciousness” (ibid.: 293). Are there further options? This, I think, is where drawing on Marshall Rosenberg’s method of *non-violent communication* is useful.

From a conceptual point of view, Rosenberg’s method of non-violent communication is quite simple. It is, however, rather difficult to put into practice. It has been applied in many areas, in mediation, parenting, education, and as an approach to intra-organizational communication. Moreover, as per Rosenberg’s reports (in Rosenberg 2005), he successfully employed it in contexts in which he was tasked to mediate between communities whose relations were shaped by a difficult, often violent history and were deeply fraught with negative emotions. Roughly, the method involves four steps: the first is to observe and state what one perceives as happening in non-evaluative terms. Next, one is to observe and state how one feels upon observing this. The third step involves stating

which of one's needs and, perhaps, hopes are connected to these feelings. The fourth step may then be to issue a request to the other which would help address one's needs and hopes, which, as Rosenberg insists, importantly differs from making a demand (cf. Rosenberg, 2005: 6f.).

A core assumption underlying Rosenberg's approach is that in conflict situations, it is most constructive to try and communicate in a way that is designed to de-escalate and empathically connect the communicating partners with both their own and each other's needs. This, in turn, more likely succeeds if participants manage to refrain from blaming their interlocutors. And if they avoid using evaluative labels that can be construed as hurtful. For communicative acts to generate opportunities for interlocutors to connect, Rosenberg insists, such acts must be as non-violent as possible. The strategy he suggests is two-pronged. For one, one must keep one's communications in line with the four-step method sketched above. For another, one is to try and listen to one's interlocutor carefully and in such a way as to not merely focus on the content of whatever they may say. In fact, to the extent possible, one is to try not to take such content personally, even if one's interlocutors articulate themselves in hurtful ways. Where one cannot do this, one should report—again in line with the method sketched above—how hearing such contents affects one. The point of doing this is to show oneself as vulnerable to the interlocutor's invectives and to respectfully ask them to refrain from using language that one perceives as hurtful. As a consequence, the interlocutor may be moved to shift to a less violent and more empathetic way of communicating. And even if their response is a further outburst, this, too, may be revealing. For according to Rosenberg, for the non-violent communicator, it is at least as important to also pay attention to the emotions that may underlie what one's interlocutor has to say. As Rosenberg would have it, such emotions are likely to be responses to the fact that some of the interlocutor's needs or hopes are frustrated or otherwise unmet. As a non-violent communicator, one's task is to recognize such feelings, their connection to underlying needs, have the interlocutor confirm these needs, and prompt the interlocutor, through explicitly recognizing them, to talk more about them. If this intervention succeeds, Rosenberg holds, the communication is likely to turn away from potentially hurtful expressions of feelings and to move towards the expression of what really matters—the needs, wishes, and hopes that underlie such expressions—and ultimately, towards ways in which the communicating parties may be able to assist each other in responding to them.

What I find interesting about this procedure, regardless of how difficult it is to engage in it, is this: A subject (henceforth: *S*) who pursues the non-violent style of communication that Rosenberg recommends is tasked with enabling their interlocutors, even in situations of crisis and tension, to see and understand *S*'s feelings and, more importantly, ways in which these reflect *S*'s needs, desires, hopes, etc. More generally, *S*, instead of responding to their interlocutor's verbal attacks in kind, will show them how *S*, given the situation at hand, is vulnerable, perhaps in pain, and offer them ways to understand and connect with *S* by taking concrete steps to address *S*'s needs. In doing so, the non-violent communicator engages in a continuous act of showing themselves to the other as an individual human being that has needs, hopes, and wishes, and, accordingly, as someone who is as vulnerable as their interlocutor to the extent that such needs, etc., are ignored or otherwise unmet. Moreover, for the non-violent communicator to show themselves in the right kind of way—i.e., nonviolently—they must characterize their responses in as evaluatively neutral a fashion as possible. In this regard, deceptively small-seeming things matter. Instead of saying “you make me feel angry,” which indicates that the cause of one's feeling is the interlocutor, one is to say something akin to the following: “When you say, ..., I think or hear ... This, in turn, makes me feel ... because I really need or hope that ... I would therefore like to request that you ...”

According to Rosenberg, when in situations of conflict we engage in, e.g., explicit or implicit moralizing evaluations, we are not properly taking cognizance and responsibility for what we feel and need.<sup>6</sup> As such, we fail to both realize and, subsequently, signal what others could do for us to enable us to connect with them and promote healing. Indeed, if we hide our feelings and needs both from ourselves and from others, Rosenberg thinks, this ultimately cuts off both us and our interlocutors from a significant part of what drives our respective interactions and prevents all parties involved from becoming aware of resources that could improve them. Positively put, it is precisely through taking responsibility for and showing ourselves with our vulnerabilities, feelings, needs, hopes, etc., that others are enabled to better see and understand us. And while, as we emphatically listen to others, we may not share all the specific needs, desires, hopes, etc., that motivate them, we can recognize many of them as of a kind with those we harbor as well. Moreover, we can understand what it is like, e.g., for such needs to be unsatisfied or for hopes to be crushed—such experiences are simply part of the human condition. And such understanding can, in turn, enable us to empathetically respond not to what others say, but to what needs and hopes are alive in them. Non-violent communication, Rosenberg thus puts it, employs the language of life.

How, then, can Rosenberg's and Murdoch's work be combined into a source of help for philosophical counsellors? Murdochian clear vision, as we saw, is both beneficial and most difficult to achieve. Rosenberg's practical method, I propose, provides us with a way how we can get better at this that goes beyond Murdoch's own proposals. As we saw, Rosenberg, too, highlights the importance of empathetic listening. I take it, therefore, that he would be quite happy to take on board Murdoch's notion of *just attention*. But he adds an element that in Murdoch remains absent: the importance for non-violent communicators to show themselves. Indeed, and this is the crux of the matter, *Rosenberg invites non-violent communicators to reveal precisely what Murdochian just attention is supposed to make visible*: their being circumstanced in a context that is co-constituted by their feelings, needs, desires, aims, hopes, and beliefs, and as looking at others and their circumstances through the particular lens that this particular context affords. Murdoch's and Rosenberg's approaches are interestingly complementary.

Let us call those who engage in both just attention and non-violent communication *non-violent just communicators*. It is easy to see why engaging in *non-violent just communication* would serve both counselees and counsellors. As a non-violent style of communication that is designed to bring to the fore the core of the counsellee's needs, it helps *counsellors* to empathetically connect with their counselees, get a better sense of what issues the latter are facing, and what they look like to them. *Non-violent just communication* thus promotes Murdochian clear vision in the counsellor, which, in turn, is likely to enable them to connect better with their counselees and to act in ways that are in fact responsive to their counselees and to what moves them.

Practicing *non-violent just communication* in counselling sessions may have further benefits. Most importantly, it may indirectly introduce *counselees* to a way of communicating that they, too, may find useful to engage in. If they do, counselees may become increasingly able to elicit the kind of responses from those others who coinhabit the kind of problematic circumstances they find themselves in—responses that, in turn, enable them to obtain a more realistic appreciation of their circumstances and other individuals featuring in them. Of course, counsellors may serve as resources in this process, e.g., by raising or answering questions about specific interactions, by assisting counselees in finding as of yet unnoticed interpretations of their interlocutors' responses, or by providing different perspectives on things by suggesting tentative interpretations of their own.

Not every counsellee may be interested in or even capable of adopting *non-violent just communication* in their everyday communications, for engaging in it well takes both discipline and, arguably, substantial training. This latter fact may also constitute a non-negligible obstacle for philosophical counsellors. Moreover, counsellors may be hesitant to engage in *non-violent just communication* with their counsellees for yet another reason: doing so requires the willingness to show oneself as vulnerable—which some may think risks undermining the kind of professional relationship that should obtain between counsellors and counsellees.

Of these two obstacles, I suspect that the latter is less substantial, the former more so. I would be prepared to affirm that in a philosophical counsellor, the ability to show oneself (within reasonable limits) as vulnerable is likely to be indicative of the fact that the counsellor in question has a strong and stable personality, whereas I would hesitate to affirm the same about those who fear that showing oneself as such might undermine one's professional relationships. Acquiring a *non-violent communicative style*, on the other hand, is a difficult and, presumably, an ongoing task—quite like the task of trying to *attend* to others *justly*. However, in this paper, I have not tried to argue that either of them is easy. I have merely argued that they are interestingly complementary, that therefore, engaging in *non-violent communication* serves to support one's endeavors to acquire the kind of clear vision that Murdoch thinks doing well by others requires, and finally, that *non-violent just communication* would be beneficial to both counsellors and counsellees and thus a useful resource for philosophical counsellors to draw on.

## Notes

1. Since in Rosenhagen 2023, I draw on similar materials, it overlaps with this paper. In the former, I explore connections with debates on Philosophical Health and Epistemic Justice, while I am here more narrowly focused on bringing out why I think that combining resources from Murdoch and Rosenberg is possible and interesting for philosophical counsellors. In this paper, I thus stay closer to the material I originally presented at the International Conference on Philosophical Counselling: Concepts, Methods, & Debates in New Delhi, India (January 2022) and it may thus be taken as a somewhat extended report of that presentation. I thank the organizers of that conference for having me and the audience for stimulating questions and fruitful debate.
2. As Murdoch puts it, a “concern for the individual, for the contingent aspects of the world which are lost in the Idealist totality” (Murdoch 1993: 376) is anti-Hegelian—and, arguably, anti-Hegelian in precisely the way she, too, cares about both as a philosopher and as a novelist.
3. It is a claim familiar from, e.g., Aristotle that individual flourishing requires virtuous activity. Virtuous activity is geared at the common good and requires that one wish others well and act genuinely for their sake. Accordingly, the best way to secure individual happiness is to develop one's character such that one genuinely cares about enabling virtue and bringing about happiness in others by truly benefiting them.
4. In Murdoch's work, the connotations associated with the notion of self are predominantly negative. In the moral life, “the enemy is the fat relentless ego,” she says (Murdoch 1970: 52), so getting rid of the avaricious tentacles of the self (read: ego) is a moral task. As far as a positive notion of the self is concerned, Murdoch remains guarded. That said, she does provide some clues: in a letter to David Morgan from mid-January 1972, for example, she writes the following: ‘To be oneself, free, whole, is partly a matter of escape from obsession, neurosis, fear, compulsions etc.’ (see Murdoch, Horner & Rowe 2018). Elsewhere, she claims that “[t]o be free is something like this: to exist sanely without fear and to perceive what is real. I would be prepared to imply that one who perceives what is real will also act rightly” (Murdoch 1998: 201). Finally, she holds that “[t]he good (better) man is liberated from selfish fantasy, can see himself as others see him, imagine the needs of other people, love unselfishly, lucidly envisage and desire what is truly valuable. This is the

ideal picture.” (Murdoch 1993: 331) The idea of the ideal man who can see himself as others see him can also be found in the suggestion that a good man may be infinitely eccentric (cf. Murdoch 1970: 59). It may perhaps be present in Simone Weil’s work as well, who influenced Murdoch, when Weil indicates, with respect to supernatural love, that “[t]o love a stranger as oneself implies the reverse: to love oneself as a stranger” (cf. Weil on Love in Panichas 1977: 63). The positive picture of the self that emerges, I think, is that of a person who is eccentric in the sense that they do not consider themselves more important than others and can thus look at themselves from a distance akin to that which separates one from strangers. It is worth emphasizing that such a self is construed neither as free from desires nor as inactive, but rather as desiring only what is truly valuable and as being moved to act on what it recognizes as best.

5. As will be obvious, I read Murdoch as suggesting that not-so-true vision yields not-so-right action and that one is always attracted to the vision of the Good that one can see. Of course, things can go wrong in various ways and one may wonder how to address, on such a view, the problem of akrasia. I must bracket discussion of such matters here.

6. Evaluations, as Rosenberg has it, need not be couched in evaluative terms, but can also occur in the form of quantified expressions used in an accusatory spirit, such as in “You always do x”, “You never help me with y”, “You are completely unreliable...”, etc. (cf. Rosenberg, 2005: 30-1).

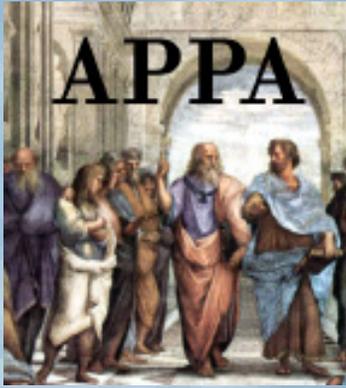
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**Raja Rosenhagen** is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Ashoka University and a Visiting Lecturer at the University of Pittsburgh. His background is in Philosophy, Indian Studies, and Psychology. His interests include philosophy of mind, science, love, moral psychology, cross-cultural philosophy, and philosophical counselling. He has taught in Germany, the US, and India, and his work has been published in prestigious journals, such as *Synthese* and *Analytic Philosophy*, and several edited volumes. He has a philosophical crush on Iris Murdoch and plans to write a cross-culturally informed book on how love matters to perception, epistemology, and semantics.

**Correspondence:** [raja.rosenhagen@ashoka.edu.in](mailto:raja.rosenhagen@ashoka.edu.in)





# PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

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