WHAT MAKES A CONSULTANCY "PHILOSOPHICAL"? AND WHAT MAKES IT "GOOD"?

¿QUÉ HACE QUE UNA CONSULTA SEA "FILOSÓFICA"? ¿Y QUÉ LA HACE "BUENA"?

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Abstract: In the realm of Philosophical Practice, there remains a lack of clarity surrounding the essential characteristics that define a practice as "philosophical". This paper aims to establish seven minimal criteria that must be met by a philosophical consultancy in order to be considered genuinely "philosophical". Additionally, it explores the question of how one can assess the quality of such a philosophical consultancy. I provide a (non-exhaustive) answer from an Aristotelian point of view, according to which goodness is a matter of balance. In the context of philosophical consultancy, the consultant should find this balance in two respects: first, between their concern for the topic and their concern for the individual seeking counsel, and, secondly, between a hermeneutical and a critical attitude in dialogue. Finally, I present a visual representation of my findings that can serve as a tool for evaluating whether a consultancy is philosophical and whether it is balanced.
Keywords: Philosophical counselling, philosophical consultancy, definition of philosophy, Aristotelian ethics, hermeneutics, critical thinking.

Abstract: En el ámbito de la práctica filosófica, sigue habiendo una falta de claridad en torno a las características esenciales que definen una práctica como "filosófica". Este artículo pretende establecer siete criterios mínimos que debe cumplir una consultoría filosófica para ser considerada genuinamente "filosófica". Además, explora la cuestión de cómo se puede evaluar la calidad de dicha consultoría filosófica. Aporto una respuesta (no exhaustiva) desde un punto de vista aristotélico, según el cual la bondad es una cuestión de equilibrio. En el contexto de la consultoría filosófica, el consultor debe encontrar este equilibrio en

dos aspectos: en primer lugar, entre su preocupación por el tema y su preocupación por el individuo que busca consejo, y, en segundo lugar, entre una actitud hermenéutica y una actitud crítica en el diálogo. Por último, presento una representación visual de mis conclusiones que puede servir de herramienta para evaluar si una consultoría es filosófica y si está equilibrada.

Palabras clave: Orientación filosófica, consulta filosófica, definición de filosofía, ética aristotélica, hermenéutica, critical thinking.

> Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject-matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions […]
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> We must be content, then, in speaking of such subjects and with such premises to indicate the truth roughly and in outline, and in speaking about things which are only for the most part true and with premises of the same kind to reach conclusions that are no better. In the same spirit, therefore, should each type of statement be received; for it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits.[1]

Introduction: Philosophical Practice between anarchy and dogmatism

Since its inception approximately 40 years ago, Philosophical Practice has been oscillating between anarchy and dogmatism.

Gerd Achenbach, widely regarded as the founder of Philosophical Practice[2], understands "Philosophical Practice" (or philosophical consultancy, as he actually means) as simply the practice of

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[1] Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics I,* 3, 1094b 12-14; 20-25, translated by R.C. Bartlett and S.D. Collins. University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2011. I take here, as a matter of preference, the translation by W. D. Ross from *The Internet Classics Archive*: http://classics.mit.edu//Aristotle/nicomachaen.html. The Bekker numbering and further references to the *Nicomachean Ethics* in this paper refer to the translation by R.C. Bartlett and S.D. Collins.

[2] The question of when exactly Philosophical Practice was founded and by whom is controversial, but this is not relevant for this paper.

philosophy by a philosopher and their guest, only with two specific traits: (i) it begins with and focuses on life experience and life issues as the primary subject of shared philosophical reflection, and (ii) it takes place outside the confines of academia and usually addresses individuals who are not already familiar with philosophy[3]. Besides this very general idea, Achenbach famously refuses to specify a method for Philosophical Practice[4]. He argues that philosophical dialogues should not adhere to any method at all for two main reasons: first, because philosophy, unlike science, does not work *with* methods, but at the most *on* methods; second, because philosophical consultancy, unlike psychotherapy, recognizes and respects the individuality of the counselee by avoiding the application of general categories (e.g. seeing the counselee as "a case of…") and rules to their unique encounters.[5] At the same time, Achenbach clearly conceived of Philosophical Practice as a new profession for philosophers seeking to work outside academia.[6] While the openness of Achenbach's approach aligns with the multifaceted nature and indeterminate identity of Philosophy itself,[7] it presents a methodological anarchy that hinders its establishment

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[3] Achenbach, Gerd: *Zur Einführung der Philosophischen Praxis. Vorträge, Aufsätze, Gespräche und Essays, mit denen sich die Philosophische Praxis 1982 bis 2009 vorstellte*, Dinter, Köln, 2010.

[4] Achenbach's position, which is sometimes confusingly called "the no-method-method", has been adopted by some practitioners in their practice and defended by some in the literature, e.g., Schuster, Shlomit: *Philosophy Practice. An Alternative to Counseling and Psychotherapy*, Praeger, Westport, 1999, Pollastri, Neri: *Il pensiero e la vita*, Apogeo, Milano, 2004, and Gutknecht, Thomas: "Das Philosophische Philosophischer Praxis", in Burckhart, Holger and Sikora, Jürgen (eds.): *Praktische Philosophie. Philosophische Praxis*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 2005, p. 187.

[5] Achenbach: *Zur Einführung der Philosophischen Praxis,* p. 17.

[6] Achenbach, *Zur Einführung der Philosophischen Praxis,* Part II: „Philosophy as a profession".

[7] Schnädelbach, Herbert and Keil, Geert (eds.): *Philosophie der Gegenwart. Gegenwart der Philosophie*, Junius, Hamburg, 1993, p. 19.

as a recognized profession. Achenbach's foundation of
Philosophical Practice has resulted in a situation where anyone can
proclaim themselves as a philosopher practicing philosophy, and the
absence of a distinct profile of Philosophical Practice impedes
laypeople from discerning whether some practice is a genuinely
Philosophical Practice, or not[8].

On the other end of the spectrum, several specific methods and
'schools' have emerged, offering distinct approaches to
Philosophical Practice, whether in the form of philosophical
consultancy[9] or a group-based philosophical engagement in various
settings[10], or both[11]. Here, by „method", I refer to a systematic

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[8] Romizi, Donata: "Philosophische Praxis: Eine Standortbestimmung", in
Information Philosophie, *4,* Lörrach, 2019, pp. 86-93.

[9] See e.g. Lou Marinoff's PEACE-method: Marinoff, Lou: *Plato, not Prozac!*,
Harper Collins Publishers, New York et al., 1999, Peter Raabe's method in four
stages: Raabe, Peter: *Philosophical Counseling: Theory and Practice*, Praeger,
Westport, 2000, pp. 128-166, and Lydia Amir's systematic method for
counselling: Amir, Lydia: "A Method and Three Cases", in *Practical Philosophy,
6*(1), spring 2003, pp. 36-41.

[10] See e.g. Marc Sautet's concept of café-philo (Sautet, Marc: *Un café pour
Socrate: comment la philosophie peut nous aider à comprendre le monde
d'aujourd'hui*, R. Laffont, Paris, 1995), the Neo-Socratic dialogue as it was
developed by Leonard Nelson and Gustav Heckmann (Birnbacher, Dieter:
"Schule des Selbstdenkens - Das Sokratische Gespräch", in Meyer, Kirsten (ed.):
Texte zur Didaktik der Philosophie, Reclam, Stuttgart, 2010, p. 215-236), and in
its newer variants (Weiss, Michael Noah (ed.): *The Socratic Handbook. Dialogue
Methods for Philosophical Practice*, LIT, Vienna, 2015), as well as Ran Lahav's
philosophical companionships and Deep Philosophy groups (Lahav, Ran:
*Handbook of philosophical-contemplative companionships. Principles,
procedures, exercises*, Solfanelli, Chieti, 2016, Id.: *What Is Deep Philosophy?
Philosophy from Our Inner Depth,* Loyev Books, Hardwick, Varmont, 2021).

[11] Oscar Brenifier, for example, practices philosophy with individuals and with
groups in a quite similar way: Brenifier, Oscar: *The Art of Philosophical Practice*,
Editions Alcofribas, 2020, available in http://www.pratiques-
philosophiques.fr/wp-content/uploads//2022/08/artpp.pdf, last access July 9th,
2023.

approach employed in Philosophical Practice that (i) pursues specific aims; (ii) adheres to a more or less structured framework, a sequential order or set of rules; and, most importantly, (iii) explicitly articulates these aims and framework in advance. By "school", I mean a collective of practitioners who practice philosophy in a distinct manner that is recognizable as belonging to that particular group and can be acquired through training with that group.

Most attempts to define a method or a specific approach in Philosophical Practice stem from the desire to avoid an "anything goes" mentality. This concern is legitimate for several reasons. First, it is very philosophical. Working out a method is an endeavor that roots in very philosophical aspirations such as the inclination to impose constraints to thinking, avoid arbitrariness, recognize, systematize, universalize forms and concepts, and, most importantly, to reflect upon the thinking process itself. As Achenbach himself acknowledges, philosophy has often deliberated *on* methods, and Philosophical Practitioners may reasonably and legitimately pursue the same deliberation. Furthermore, contrary to Achenbach's assertion, philosophy indeed employs its own methods, just like any other established discipline, including conceptual analysis, phenomenological inquiry, dialectics, transcendental deduction, hermeneutics, deconstruction, thought experiments, methodological doubt, etc.[12]

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[12] This is not to say that philosophical methods can be easily identified and classified. Attempts to identify and list the main methods in Philosophy have been made in many German-speaking texts on the didactics of philosophy (see e.g., Martens, Ekkehard: *Methodik des Ethik- und Philosophieunterrichts. Philosophieren als elementare Kulturtechnik*, Siebert, Hannover, 2003; and Rohbeck, Johannes: *Didaktik der Philosophie und Ethik*, Thelem, Dresden, 2008), since in German-speaking countries the teaching of Philosophy and Ethics focuses nowadays mainly on the training of skills rather than the transmission of contents. On the methods of philosophy see also Daly, Chris: *An Introduction to Philosophical Methods*, Broadview Press, Guelth, 2010, Eder, Anna-Maria, Lawler, Insa and van Riel, Raphael: "Philosophical Methods", in *Synthese, 197*(3),

Finally, a pragmatic reason that legitimizes attempts to define methods in Philosophical Practice is to establish its recognition as a profession, especially by potential clients who seek an understanding of how practitioners operate and what unique philosophical competences they possess[13].

However, the development and adherence to a specific method can sometimes lead to an 'unphilosophical' stance, especially if accompanied by a dogmatic attitude. At international conferences for Philosophical Practice such as the *ICPPs,* prominent philosophy practitioners have often associated their adherence to a method with harsh criticism of other (legitimate) ways of practicing philosophy, or with claims of representing the 'true' way of doing philosophy.[14]

In fact, unlike other disciplines, philosophy encompasses a broad range of methods and objectives, and frequently casts doubt on its very foundations. Consequently, metaphilosophical questions such as "What is philosophy?" or "What does it mean to work philosophically?" are themselves subjects of ongoing philosophical debates and remain far from settled.

In light of the aforementioned considerations, it becomes an important *desideratum* for the theoretical foundations of Philosophical Practice to strive for a systematic framework and some constrains without restricting the range of possible aims and methods beyond what is compatible with the pluralism and open-endedness inherent to philosophy. A way must be found for navigating between Scylla and Charybdis, between anarchy and dogmatism.

2020, pp. 915-923, and Schönwälder-Kuntze, Tatjana: *Philosophische Methoden. Zur Einführung*, Junius, Hamburg, 2015. The latter also includes a chapter on the possibility and the limits of the application of methods in philosophy.

[13] Romizi, Donata: "Prenderla con filosofia", in *Robinson - suppl. culturale di "La Repubblica"*, Rome, 2017, pp. 12-13.

[14] A report on the ICPP that took place in 2018 in Mexico City, written by the visiting anthropologist Lydia Ginzburg, gives a sense of the tensions among philosophical practitioners: https://philopractice.org/pp/an-anthropologist-at-the-icpp-in-mexico/, last access: 8th July 2023.

In the subsequent sections, I aim to establish such a navigational space, focusing primarily on philosophical consultancy[15]: In Section 2, I outline some minimal criteria that any form of philosophical consultancy must satisfy to be deemed philosophical. In Section 3, I provide two main parameters for assessing the quality of a philosophical consultancy, relating to the consultant's primary concern and their attitude during philosophical dialogue. Lastly, in Section 4, I employ the findings from the previous sections to design a visual tool that aids in evaluating the philosophical nature and the quality of a general conception of philosophical consultancy (type) or an individual session of philosophical consultancy (token).

What criteria must philosophical consultancy satisfy to be legitimately considered "philosophical"?

As previously mentioned, the question "What is philosophy?" itself sparks controversy within the field. Consequently, determining when a specific form of consultancy can be labeled "philosophical" does not have a definitive and unambiguous answer. However, given that this uncertainty applies to many significant inquiries worth investigating, it is insufficient grounds to dismiss any attempts at providing a tentative response.

In my endeavor to answer the question of what constitutes a "philosophical" consultancy, I aspire to be as objective as possible by minimizing arbitrariness and one-sidedness. To this end, one should avoid sticking to personal preferences regarding the way of practicing philosophy or to one's favorite conception of what philosophy is. Relying on academic philosophy as a standard would

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[15] I use the term "consultancy" instead of the more common "counselling" in order to emphasize the difference between a genuine philosophical dialogue and forms of dialogue in which philosophical methods or contents are merely tools among others in pursuing non-philosophical activities like psychotherapy and coaching.

be problematic as well, since Philosophical Practice has traditionally positioned itself outside academia. Instead, I propose referring to what has been called "philosophy" since the inception of the concept in ancient Greece and what we commonly refer to as the "philosophical tradition". Although this approach is not without limitations − given the imprecision, cultural dependency and temporal variability of the concept of "philosophical tradition"[16] − I am confident that a generic reference to the philosophical tradition serves as a reasonably approximate reference point. Moreover, I believe that we currently lack better alternatives for defining the meaning of "philosophy" and "philosophical" with some objectivity. Consequently, a consultancy (or a philosophical practice in general) can be deemed "philosophical" if and only if it bears a significant "family resemblance" to what has been the philosophical tradition so far[17]. This resemblance encompasses both the typical philosophical *contents* and the characteristic philosophical *ways to addressing* questions and dealing with them.

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[16] A further objection may be that this solution comes with a historistic bias and is therefore conservative: it identifies philosophy with what it has been so far, reducing it more or less to its history. It may even be seen as a naturalistic fallacy, suggesting that philosophy *should* be what it *has been* so far. In what follows it will become clear that my conception of the philosophical tradition is open and pluralistic enough to allow for change and does not imply that future philosophy (or Philosophical Practice) must be a mere reproduction of the past.

[17] I refer here to Wittgenstein's famous concept of "family resemblance" as developed in 'his' (posthumously published) *Philosophical Investigations*: "[…] for instance the kinds of number form a family in the same way. Why do we call something a 'number'? Well, perhaps because it has a – direct – relationship with several things that have hitherto been called a number; and this can be said to give it an indirect relationship to other things we call the same name. And we extend our concept of number as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres" (Wittgenstein, Ludwig: *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed. transl. by G.E.M. Anscombe, Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, 1958, § 67).

Philosophical Contents

Regarding philosophical contents, a consultant offering a genuinely philosophical consultancy engages with the philosophical tradition in two distinct ways: First, they make use (among other things) of contents from this tradition to provide a theoretical foundation for their own practice [*Contents, i: framework*]. This foundation consists of inevitable assumptions about aspects such as the nature of human beings, the human condition, the nature of a good life, the limits of knowledge, the conditions for authentic dialogue, the nature of philosophy, the right approach to philosophical questions, etc. Following Leon De Haas, we could say that a philosophical consultant should be able to connect with the philosophical tradition and draw on philosophical theories to justify[18] their practice:

> […] the question must be asked, 'In what philosophical tradition(s) are you doing your interventions?' […]. The practitioner himself must be asked to be explicit about his roots. He is supposed to identify his philosophical profile in professional writings and discussions. In such a professional justification, the practitioner shows how and why he interpreted the philosophers he has been inspired by, and how his interpretation is working in his interventions.[19]

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[18] The concept of "justification" (*logon didonai*; *reddere rationem*) is of course itself a key concept in the philosophical tradition. To justify one's own beliefs and actions by giving good reasons for them is perhaps the most original trait of a philosophical way of life. When are those reasons "good"? When they reach a good degree of intersubjective validity within a group of people competent with respect to the issue at stake – in our case, other philosophers. A specific form of consultancy is "philosophical" when the practitioner is able to give good reasons about why it should be considered as such; these reasons should be acceptable for most people who are competent in the field of philosophy, including philosophical practitioners who work in a different way (the philosophical tradition is broad enough for different form of consultancy to be equally philosophical).

[19] De Haas, Leon: „An Essay on the Justification of Philosophical Practice", in De Haas, Leon (ed.): *Skeptical Interventions. A Critical View of Philosophical Practice*, digital booklet, 2018, p. 14.

A genuinely philosophical practitioner strives to be as aware as possible of their assumptions, making them explicit and subjecting them to critical reflection and improvement. While they draw on theories from the philosophical tradition, they also move beyond mere reception and reproduction. Importantly, their attitude towards their own assumptions remains non-dogmatic, as these assumptions are open to possible criticism and revision, even if the practitioner considers them to be the most plausible ideas thus far.

Secondly, contents from the philosophical tradition come into play as thought-provoking stimuli for reflection on the subject matter of the consultancy *[Contents, ii: materials]*. For example, a consultant may use Aristotle's ideas on friendship to prompt the counselee to reflect on their assumptions and expectations regarding their friendships[20], or employ Kierkegaard's thoughts on forgiveness to encourage reconsideration of the opportunity of forgiving one's parents[21]. The practitioner may also take such contents as impulses for their own thinking on the issues discussed in the consultancy without necessarily sharing them with the counselee. In any case, a genuinely philosophical practitioner maintains a non-dogmatic attitude towards the philosophical contents they refer to. It is crucial that the philosophical consultant refrains from presenting philosophical ideas as if they were definitive truths meant to 'enlighten' the counselee[22]. Philosophy and philosophical practice,

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[20] Amir: "A Method and Three Cases", p. 38.

[21] Schuster: *Philosophy Practice*, p. 129.

[22] This seems to happen, for example, in Marinoff's consultation with Vincent (Marinoff: *Plato, not Prozac*, Ch. 3), where the consultant 'teaches' the counselee the right (Stoic) way to understand what it means to be hurt, how to deal with emotions etc. However, this impression may be due to the concise form in which the consultancy is described in the book. Caution is always needed in judging some practice from its description.

distinct from religion, *cannot be a matter of transmitting wisdom* without encouraging critical examination at some point[23].

Philosophical Approach

Now let us turn to the *philosophical approach* to questions: as mentioned above, to be "philosophical", a consultancy should exhibit a family resemblance to the philosophical tradition in terms of the way questions are approached and dealt with. Looking back to the variety of methods within the philosophical tradition, one may ask whether there are *general* features shared by a substantial portion of this tradition, despite its multifarious nature. I think that it is possible to identify some of these general features. Although they can only be defined with approximation and their fulfillment is a matter of degree, they offer significant guidance for evaluating whether a consultancy can be labeled "philosophical".

First and foremost, philosophy has from its origins and for the greatest part of its tradition relied on *[i] reason and reasoning*. The concept of "reason" poses itself a complex philosophical question. Philosophical reasoning encompasses logical inferences and arguments, as well as other forms such as symbolic reasoning and

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[23] For example, Pierre Hadot's concept of "spiritual exercises" (Hadot, Pierre: *Philosophy as a Way of Life. Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, transl. by Michael Chase, Basil Blackwell, Oxford/Cambridge (Mass.), 1995) has been very influential on Philosophical Practice, and many practitioners propose philosophical exercises of some kind in their practice (see e.g. those by Lydia Amir and those by Michael Niehaus in Weiss (ed.): *The Socratic Handbook,* pp. 19-33 and pp. 97-128, Le Bon, Tim: *365 Ways to be More Stoic: A day-by-day guide to practical stoicism*, John Murray One Publisher, London, 2022, and Barrientos-Rastrojo, José: *Experiential Philosophy and Prison*, Philosophical Practitioners' Association of India, Delhi, 2023). This form of application is indeed interesting and helpful for truly understanding certain ideas; also, such exercises have mostly a positive psychological impact. However, in order for such a practice to be philosophical (instead of mental self care or indoctrination), these ideas must be opened to critical examination at some point.

experiential reasoning[24]. However, the reference to reason and reasoning allows to exclude some activities that are sometimes – wrongly – labeled "Philosophical Practice": activities like physical exercises, meditation, imaginary journeys, artistic activities, the sharing of emotions, storytelling, thought associations, or intuitions, while they may serve as starting points or objects of philosophical reasoning, cannot be considered "philosophical" practices in themselves. A dialogue or practice becomes genuinely "philosophical" when reasoning is employed.[25] From the very beginning of the philosophical tradition, philosophical reasoning has typically involved efforts to (at least) make oneself understandable to the reason of others and (at best) to reach some provisional truths that are recognized as such by others.[26] Therefore, a dialogue or a practice can be deemed genuinely "philosophical" only when the

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[24] Barrientos-Rastrojo: "L'orientamento esperienziale nella Filosofia Applicata come ampliamento della tendenza logico-argomentativa", in *Rivista Italiana di Counselling Filosofico, 11*, Turin, July 2015, pp. 9-31.

[25] In his (legitimate) criticism of a purely logical-argumentative Philosophical Practice, Barrientos-Rastrojo emphasizes the already mentioned plurality of methods in philosophy (*Experiential Philosophy and Prison*, p. 37): "Contemporary thought contains phenomenological, hermeneutic, existentialist, vitalist, personalist, structuralist, post-modern and Marxist philosophies, as well as the sociology of knowledge or critical theory. The list grows because each of these fields integrates specific modalities […]". However, he then (*ibid.,* pp. 37-38) seems to open the concept of philosophy to any form of "thinking", "understanding", or "reflection". I would like to emphasize that not every form of thinking, understanding or reflection is philosophical in nature. As every other discipline, philosophy has its own form of thinking and understanding. And even if philosophy encompasses, for example, something like the "body approach (Merlau-Ponty)" (*ibid.,* p. 37), Merlau-Ponty himself did not practice philosophy in form of bodily exercises, but in form of a *reasoning* on the body, bodily perception etc.

[26] In contemporary philosophy, this intersubjective dimension of reason has been famously emphasized by Jürgen Habermas. In the field of Philosophical Practice it is 'operationalized' especially in the rules of Neo-Socratic dialogue: Birnbacher, Dieter: "Schule des Selbstdenkens - Das Sokratische Gespräch".

participants *[ii] strive to achieve a minimal level of intersubjectivity*, rather than settling for the expression of purely subjective convictions, states of mind, emotions, intuitions, and the like.

This pursuit of intersubjective intelligibility or truth, in turn, implies the *[iii] possibility of criticism*. Criticism arises when other people involved in dialogue do not recognize a claim to intersubjective intelligibility or truth as being fulfilled. Consequently, *responsiveness* to criticism is a prerequisite for engaging in philosophical dialogue[27]. Neither in the context of consultancy nor in other genuine philosophical practices is it appropriate to merely express oneself and present one's speech as immune from criticism and revision – for example, by appealing to its mere subjective character or relying on authority. In the context of philosophical consultancy, this holds both for the consultant and for the counselee. It is worth emphasizing that criticism has two opposing sides that are interconnected in a dialectical manner. Both of these sides are essential for criticism to exist: *doubt* and what I will call *provisional dogmatism***.** To criticize means to cast doubt on the truth of something, and the habit of doubting plays a central role in the philosophical tradition. Here, it takes various, often radical forms, such as the aporetic endings of the Socratic dialogues in Plato, philosophical Skepticism, the method of *epoché*, the use of methodological doubt, the tendency to raise fundamental questions (which means to cast doubt on our very fundamental believes), practices of deconstruction and denaturalization, questioning the obvious, anticipating objections, and even forms of existential

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[27] Mijuskovic, Ben: "Some Reflections on Philosophical Counseling and Psychotherapy", in Lahav, Ran, da Venza Tillmanns, Maria (eds.): *Essays on Philosophical Counseling*, University Press of America, Lanham et al., 1995, p. 88, and Picard, Michael: "But Is It Philosophy? Critical Reflections on Social Reasoning and Café Philosophy", in Fatic, Aleksandar and Amir, Lydia (eds.): *Practicing Philosophy*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015, pp. 174-181.

despair[28] or lostness described by figures such as Augustine, Kierkegaard or Sartre. Practicing and fostering doubt and self-doubt is deeply ingrained in philosophical tradition and cannot be separated from its practice of consultancy. However, as Wittgenstein has emphasized in his famous theory of hinge beliefs, "The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty"[29]:

> That is to say, the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from *doubt*, are as it were like *hinges on which those turn.*[30] (*Wittgenstein* 1969, §341).

One cannot cast doubt on anything without at the same time taking the truth of something else as granted – at least provisionally. One cannot criticize anything without assuming the truth of some normative criterion for doing it. Thus, criticizing or doubting implies at least a provisional form of dogmatism. As everyone else, philosophical consultants legitimately have their own beliefs and theories, and they assume their truth while working with counselees. They have probably worked hard to build them up, and they work *with* them (see above, contents as framework), they are integral to their philosophical job. Also the counselee may need some clear and fix reference points in the beginning. Furthermore, ideas and thoughts must be properly understood before they can be questioned: This may require an initial 'hermeneutical phase' of believing. However, while provisional dogmatism is necessary to establish a framework and provide reference points for the dialogue, it is the philosophical practitioner's duty to eventually and competently expose the counselee to the possibility of questioning or criticizing previously held and new beliefs and ideas, acknowledging

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[28] In German the words "doubt" (*Zweifel*) and the word "despair" (*Verzweiflung*) are semantically related.

[29] Wittgenstein, Ludwig: *On certainty,* Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1969, §115.

[30] Wittgenstein: *On certainty,* §341.

exceptions, relativizing viewpoints, or recognizing limitations. Although this approach may be challenging for psychological-emotional well-being (people are usually more comfortable with settledness than with unsettledness), it aligns with the philosophical tradition that has historically prioritized critical examination over psychological comfort.[31]

To distinguish philosophical consultancy from psychotherapy, I propose an additional criterion called *[iv] "anti-psychologism"*. In philosophy, ideas are considered and discussed based on their own merits, rather than being attributed to psychological processes or traits of their proponents. For instance, implicit or explicit considerations about a speaker's psychological traits should not be used to dismiss their ideas, as this falls in the category of pseudo-objections *ad hominem*. In a genuinely philosophical consultancy, if a counselee questions the meaning of life due to a perceived lack thereof, the discussion should revolve around the concept of meaning in life, rather than the presumed (or real) depression of the counselee. Also, the consultant should refrain from employing a 'strategic' approach in the dialogue, such as selectively presenting or omitting information based on its presumed psychological impact[32]. From a philosophical perspective, such a strategic way of conducting dialogue is manipulative and paternalistic. This does not mean, of course, that what the counselee says *is not* the product of their psychological traits and processes: it certainly is. My criterion of "anti-psychologism" means that it is a transcendental condition of

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[31] Of course, there are some exceptions: typically, Hellenistic philosophy (Nussbaum, Martha: *The Therapy of Desire. Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1995), which is an important, but not a salient part of the whole philosophical tradition. Much of Hellenistic philosophy would nowadays fall under the domain of psychotherapy or mental coaching.

[32] Of course, they may still do it to some extent as a tactful human being who is relating to another human being.

possibility (in a Kantian sense) of a philosophical dialogue – that is: it is *constitutive* of a philosophical dialogue – to avoid psychologizing what is said[33]. It is certainly legitimate to explicitly refer to knowledge from psychology and psychotherapy in a philosophical consultancy, if considered appropriate: but this should be made for *reasoning* together about them, which is different from *applying* them[34]. Moreover, psychological self-knowledge may be indirectly gained through the philosophical dialogue: for example, if some of the counselee's beliefs turn out to be implausible, the question can be raised about why the counselee tends to stick to them. However, once the inquiry shifts from *reasons* for some belief to its *causes*, it ventures into the domain of psychology; it not only becomes unphilosophical, it also necessitates the presence of a practitioner with competence in psychology, as well as the counselee's consent to this kind of work. The tenet of anti-psychologism (iv), along with the possibility of criticism (iii), emphasizes respect for the counselee's *autonomy*, aligning with a value traditionally cherished in philosophy[35].

Lastly, an essential feature across the philosophical tradition is a significant amount of attention given to *[v] general, fundamental questions and universal concepts or theories.* Even existentialist philosophers who emphasized the meaning of individual existence

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[33] Mijuskovic, Ben: "Some Reflections on Philosophical Counseling and Psychotherapy", pp. 88-89.

[34] Pollastri, Neri: *Il pensiero e la vita*, Apogeo, Milano, 2004, p. 100.

[35] On the topic of the counselee's autonomy, see the valuable reflection by Amir, Lydia: *Taking Philosophy Seriously*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2018, pp. 395-398. However, I disagree with her claim according to which "In practice, most counselees are likely to be heteronomous, for fully autonomous people are not likely to come to counseling, philosophical or otherwise" (*ibid,,* 395). I think that a concept of autonomy according to which people who ask for help in understanding some issues are not fully autonomous sets the bar too high. I also think that a philosophical counselor should resist counselee's expectations to get advice.

and the uniqueness of the individuum aspired to provide a *general* theory about the human condition. Accordingly, a genuinely "philosophical" Practice or consultancy does not solely address individual experiences of love, loss, friendship, injustice etc.[36], but also encompasses concepts and theories regarding these phenomena in more fundamental sense. The consultant and the counselee often engage in dialogue not only as the concrete individuals but also as human beings sharing their human condition[37]. To put it in philosophical terms, a genuinely philosophical consultancy never deals only with the particular, but always also with the universal.

To summarize, a consultancy (or any practice) can be deemed "philosophical" if and only if it bears a family resemblance with the philosophical tradition. This entails engaging with both philosophical contents and approaches that are characteristic of the philosophical tradition:

- [Contents, i: framework] The consultant works with ideas from the philosophical tradition to develop and improve the fundamental assumptions guiding their practice.

- [Contents, ii: materials] The consultant employs ideas from the philosophical tradition as thought-provoking stimuli to enrich joint reflections on the issues discussed in the consultancy.

- [Approach, i: reasoning] The consultant facilitates the dialogue as shared *reasoning* about the questions raised by the counselee; this implies that…

- [Approach, ii: intersubjectivity] …they encourage a shared striving for speaking and thinking in an intersubjectively intelligible way; this, in turn, implies that…

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[36] Concrete, individual experiences are of course central to the endeavor of Philosophical Practice, but they have not been of much interest to the most part of the philosophical tradition.

[37] Amir, Lydia: *Philosophy, Humor, and the Human Condition. Taking Ridicule Seriously*, Palgrave Macmillan Cham, New York, 2019.

- [Approach, iii: possibility of criticism] …they guarantee the possibility of expressing criticism when claims to intersubjective validity fall short. Criticism encompasses both doubt and provisional dogmatism.
- [Approach, iv: anti-psychologism] The philosophical consultant maintains an "anti-psychologism" stance, focusing on the questions and ideas expressed by the counselee rather than treating them as 'symptoms' of psychological states to be reconstructed or intentionally influenced.
- [Approach, v: universal concepts] A philosophical consultancy transcends individual concerns or problems by relating them to more general concepts and theories.

It is crucial to note that these criteria serve as necessary conditions for considering a consultancy to be *philosophical*, not as criteria for determining its quality (what makes a consultancy *good)*. Even if these conditions are met, a consultancy can be deemed bad (a bad philosophical consultancy), while a consultancy that does not meet these conditions can still be good (a good non-philosophical consultancy). The issue of what constitutes a good philosophical consultancy will be addressed in the next section.

When is a philosophical consultancy good? Goodness as a matter of balance

In the previous section, I have worked out certain criteria that a philosophical consultancy must meet in order to be considered genuinely philosophical. Obviously, a philosophical consultancy must satisfy these criteria in order to be good as a *philosophical* consultancy. These criteria are, however, not sufficient for a philosophical consultancy to be *good*. In this section, I will specify two further conditions for goodness that pertain to the way in which the consultant facilitates the philosophical dialogue. Specifically, I

will examine two fundamental aspects: *(i) the consultant's main concern* during the consultancy and *(ii) the consultant's attitude* towards what the counselee says. For each of these two aspects I will identify two opposing positions, and I will follow, generally speaking, the Aristotelian "doctrine of the mean", according to which goodness is a matter of finding a good balance between opposites[38].

Concern for the person versus concern for the topic

The first important aspect of the way in which the consultant facilitates the philosophical dialogue with their counselee is their main concern during the consultancy. In the literature and practice of philosophical consultancy, two different positions can be identified regarding this issue: one emphasizes the concern for the *topic* of the philosophical dialogue, while the other emphasizes the concern for the *counselee*. A philosophical dialogue, according to Achenbach, should primarily focus on the *topic* (*Sache*) raised by the counselee, rather than on the person of the counselee[39]. This idea is cherished by many practitioners from continental Europe. Anders Lindseth, for example, emphasizes the importance of working out, "what is at stake" in a specific philosophical consultancy during the dialogue with the counselee[40]. "What is at stake" refers to a

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[38] Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics II,* 6, 1106a25-1106b28. Other than Aristoteles, with "mean" I do not refer to character traits (here, of the consultant), but to two very specific aspects of the consultant's way to provide consultancy. Whether they can also be considered "ethical virtues" of the consultant is an interesting question that, however, goes beyond the scope of this paper.

[39] Achenbach: *Zur Einführung der Philosophischen Praxis*, p. 574.

[40] Lindseth, Anders: "Philosophical Practice. What is at Stake?", in Herrestad Henning, Holt Anders and Helge Svare (eds.): *Philosophy in Society. Papers presented to The Sixth International Conference on Philosophy in Practice*, Unipub Forlag, Oslo, 2002, pp. 17-22, and Id.: "What is at Stake in the Narrative of the Guests of Philosophical Practice?", in *Synthesis Philosophica, 70*(2),

fundamental issue that, indeed, manifests itself in the counselee's experience but it also extends beyond it as a philosophical or existential question. Accordingly, Lindseth insists that philosophical practitioners, as philosophers, (should) work differently from therapists: their aim should be to inquire into philosophical and existential issues together with their guest, rather than to help their guest feel better or solve their problems. Neri Pollastri follows a similar path and conceives of philosophical consultancy as a joint philosophical inquiry into the counselee's ideas, and not as a form of psychological or practical help[41]. This conception of philosophical consultancy, centered on the object of inquiry rather than on the counselee, does well as a criterion for distinguishing philosophical consultancy from psychotherapy, aligning it more closely with teaching philosophy or conducting philosophy in an academic, scientific manner[42]. However, it may be less effective in attracting clients and convincing them of the value of philosophical consultancy if the aim is not to provide relief or problem-solving.

Perhaps for this reason, and due to the influence of pragmatism on English-speaking philosophy, English-speaking practitioners often emphasize the practical value of philosophical consultation, which they usually refer to as "counselling", as a practice aimed at problem-solving or improving the well-being of the counselee[43]. In

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Filozofski Fakultet, Zagreb, 2020, pp. 351-365.

[41] Pollastri: *Il pensiero e la vita*, Ch. 4.

[42] For example, describing her method of philosophical counselling, Lydia Amir writes: "I was seeing myself more as a tutor in philosophy than anything alse, whether I was teaching philosophy to big classes or counselling on a private basis. When done on a private basis, however, I thought that tutoring should be less didactical but not less clear in its outcomes than teaching big audiences. […] The method I found is the method I use in many things I write and read (seminar papers, for example)" (Amir: "A Method and Three Cases", p. 36).

[43] Marinoff: *Plato, not Prozac*, Raabe: *Philosophical Counseling,* and Id.: *Issues in Philosophical Counseling*, Praeger, Westport, 2002, *Issues in Philosophical Counseling*, Praeger, Westport, 2002, Le Bon, Tim: *Wise Therapy*, SAGE

fact, this conception attributes to philosophical consultancy a similar function as psychotherapies – improving well-being – but with different means. While English-speaking practitioners often criticize psychiatry and psychotherapies for their underlying assumptions, methods, or outcomes, they position philosophical counseling not as a radically different endeavor but rather as a superior alternative to achieving a similar goal.

Now, if philosophical consultancy is to be "philosophical", it must undoubtedly involve a shared philosophical inquiry into some questions and topics, and, as per the criteria specified in the previous section, it should strive to avoid psychologizing. However, the counselee typically does not seek philosophy lessons or the detached construction of a system of philosophical ideas. Otherwise, they would likely choose to attend a philosophy course on a life-relevant topic. Consequently, the consultant cannot ignore the concern for the person of the counselee and the relationship between the topics discussed in the dialogue and the concrete, specific life of the counselee. Goodness lies in striking a balance between the concern for the topic and the concern for the person, including a willingness to help in some way. This kind of help does not necessarily have to involve problem-solving or making the counselee feel better. It may, for example, lead to increased awareness for certain aspects of life, better understanding of a life issue, more conscious decision-making, or an improvement of the counselee's belief system.

Hermeneutical and critical attitude

Now, I turn to the second fundamental aspect of the way in which the consultant facilitates the philosophical dialogue with their

Publications Ltd., London et al., 2001, and Cohen, Elliot D. and Zinaich, Samuel Jr.: *Philosophy, Counseling and Psychotherapy*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2013.

counselee: their attitude towards what is being said, and particularly towards what the counselee says. In this regard, I argue that goodness is a matter of balance between a hermeneutical and a critical attitude towards the beliefs and ideas expressed in dialogue. As highlighted in the previous section, the possibility of criticism is an essential feature of philosophical dialogue, setting it apart from most dialogues in a psychotherapeutic context[44]. Plato, through the Socratic dialogues, has established the critical examination of ideas and systems of beliefs as a central element of philosophical inquiry. At the same time, due to the "conversational" nature of philosophy[45], hermeneutical skills have always been as essential to philosophical work as critical skills: every contribution to philosophy places the philosopher in the midst of shared reflections or debates in which other thinkers have participated. Therefore, any philosophical enterprise, particularly a face-to-face dialogue, requires a genuine effort to understand what others are saying and to reconstruct systems of ideas that may initially appear alien, implausible or unintelligible. The act of understanding, as taught by hermeneutics, necessitates temporarily suspending critical judgement and normative standards. When we are unable to follow or accept what the other person says, the hermeneutical "Principle of Charity" requires us to assume that what they say does indeed make sense, and that the problem lies in our own presuppositions and normative standards.

Thus, a hermeneutical attitude and a critical attitude cannot be simultaneously enacted, but both are essential to philosophical work. A philosophical consultant must strike a good balance between hermeneutical and critical attitude in dialogue, even though they will

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[44] Mijuskovic, Ben: "Some Reflections on Philosophical Counseling and Psychotherapy", pp. 88-89.

[45] Schnädelbach, Herbert: "Das Gespräch der Philosophie. Abschiedsvorlesung 18. Juli 2002", in Mlynek, Jürgen (ed.): *Öffentliche Vorlesungen,* Berlin, available in https://edoc.hu-berlin.de/handle/18452/2319, last access July 9th, 2023.

hardly be able to work hermeneutically and critically *at the same time*. It is likely that different phases of the dialogue will involve alternating between working critically and working hermeneutically. During hermeneutical phases, the consultant's primary intention will be to *understand* the counselee. For this purpose, the most valuable practical virtues in dialogue are having an open mind, listening carefully/attentively, and being curious about exploring the counselee's system of ideas. Philosophy equips the philosophical counselor with hermeneutical tools, such as the aforementioned "Principle of Charity" or the suspension of judgement (*epoché*)[46]. However, philosophy also offers tools for critically examining beliefs, which the consultant can employ when adopting a critical attitude towards what the counselee says. These tools can be taken from logic, argumentation theory and critical thinking. However, also ideas from the philosophical tradition of social criticism, or methods for de-constructing and de-naturalizing beliefs can serve the critical purpose. The critical attitude of the counselor reflects aspects of philosophy that differ from those reflected in the hermeneutical attitude. In particular, it involves applying normative constraints to set limits on arbitrariness, free speech, and groundless speculation. It also entails the application of standards of coherence, objectivity, and meaningfulness to assess the plausibility of beliefs and potentially reject them. Unlike the hermeneutical 'gesture', which is characterized by openness, the critical 'gesture' tends to close off certain avenues of inquiry. During the hermeneutical phases, the consultant must 'live up to' what the counselee says, meaning that the consultant needs to understand and interpret their client's

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[46] Two philosophical practitioners who cultivate the suspension of judgement are Anders Lindseth, in his philosophical consultancy: Lindseth, Anders: "Von der Methode der Philosophischen Praxis als dialogischer Beratung", in Staude, Detlef (ed.): *Methoden Philosophischer Praxis. Ein Handbuch*, transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 2010, pp. 67-100, and Ran Lahav, in his philosophical contemplations in group: Lahav: *Handbook of philosophical-contemplative companionships*.

perspective. On the other hand, during dialogue phases where the consultant adopts a critical attitude, it is the counselee who must 'live up to' the normative standards employed by the consultant for criticism. Both attitudes are equally important and fruitful, and they are essential in philosophical work. A philosophical consultancy should not lack either of these attitudes.

In the literature, some conceptions of philosophical consultancy appear to be imbalanced towards the hermeneutical attitude. For instance, in Lindseth's conception, the only form of critical examination of what the counselee says seems to be a verification "from within", in which the counselee themselves verifies if their words accurately capture their experience or what they want to express; if not, they seek better ways of expressing themselves[47]. In contrast, Oscar Brenifier's conception leans heavily towards the critical attitude[48]: there is no phase of free exploration of ideas in which the consultant listens for a while with an open mind and in a charitable way without immediately judging what the consultant is saying[49]. Other conceptions of philosophical consultancy, such as

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[47] Lindseth: "Von der Methode der Philosophischen Praxis als dialogischer Beratung", p. 96.

[48] In referring to Brenifier's form of consultancy I can use "is" instead of "seems" because I do not only rely on theoretical accounts and descriptions of the practice, but also on direct experience and videos of sessions. The videos are publicly available on the Internet.

[49] See Brenifier, Oscar: *Philosophical consultation*, Editions Alcofribas, 2020, available in http://www.pratiques-philosophiques.fr/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Philosophical-cons.pdf, last access July 9th, 2023, where he defines the philosophical activity as "determined by three operations: identification, criticism and conceptualization" (*ibid.,* 32-33). Hermeneutical understanding through the suspension of judgement and charitable listening plays no role. In fact, the counselee is systematically interrupted, and, if not able to immediately say what they mean, they are left alone with the "frustration of betrayal" of their words (*ibid.,* 45). When the counselee says something which is not immediately understandable, plausible or shareable, it is often traced back to some deficiency

those of Lydia Amir[50] or Shlomit Schuster[51], strike a better balance by incorporating both hermeneutical and critical approaches to the counselee's beliefs.

Returning to the Aristotelian framework mentioned earlier, two important points should be emphasized. Firstly, similar to the Aristotelian concept of "mean"[52], my concept of "balance" does not imply a single and precise balance that every counselor should aim for. What constitutes a good balance is somewhat individual and can vary depending on the context. Secondly, while general conceptions of philosophical consultancy (types) may be evaluated with respect to their general tendency to balance or imbalance, it is even more important to evaluate specific consultancies (tokens) in this regard. I follow here the Aristotelian idea according to which – when it comes to human *praxis* – some approximate general principles and reference points for orientation can well be formulated, but any understanding and evaluation of *praxis* must be situative and refer to a specific *praxis* in its specific context[53]. In sum, although some approximate general principles and reference points can guide orientation, the individual counselor must find the right balance taking into account their own style, the counselee, and the specific context.

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in character, and when they want to say more than two sentences, this tends to be identified as an illegitimate wish to "express oneself" (*ibid.,* 142-143).

[50] Amir: "A Method and Three Cases".

[51] Schuster: *Philosophy Practice*.

[52] Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics, II,* 6, 1106a25-b7.

[53] See the quotation at the beginning of this paper. Devereux summarizes the Aristotelian perspective as follows: "He eventually came to believe that *action* is both the goal and the subject matter of *phronesis* [practical wisdom]; and since action is concerned with particulars, *phronesis* must be primarily about particulars rather than universals" (Devereux, Daniel T.: "Particular and Universal in Aristotle's Conception of Practical Knowledge", in *The Review of metaphysics, 39*(3), Washington et al., 1986, p. 483.

In the next section, I will summarize the findings thus far and present them as a coordinate system that can serve as a tool for evaluating both the philosophical consultancy as a type (general conceptions of consultancy) and philosophical consultancy as a token (specific sessions of consultancy).

**A coordinate system for evaluating philosophical consultancy**

In Section 2, I have established some minimal criteria that must be met for a consultancy to be considered truly "philosophical":

- Contents, i: philosophical ideas as a framework
- Contents, ii: philosophical ideas as materials
- Approach, i: reasoning
- Approach, ii: intersubjectivity
- Approach, iii: possibility of criticism (including doubt and provisional dogmatism)
- Approach, iv: anti-psychologism
- Approach, v: universal concepts.

These criteria serve as a normative standard that can be applied to both general conceptions of philosophical consultancy (types) and individual sessions of consultancy (tokens). Following the adopted Aristotelian framework, they provide a general orientation and allow for exceptions in particular cases. To be considered "philosophical", a consultancy – generally and individually – should largely fulfill these criteria, which allow for philosophical pluralism while setting limits to anarchy (this was the *desideratum* formulated in Section 1). We can visualize a space of possibilities that comprehends all types or token of philosophical consultancy that satisfy (for the most part etc.) the criteria for being "philosophical":
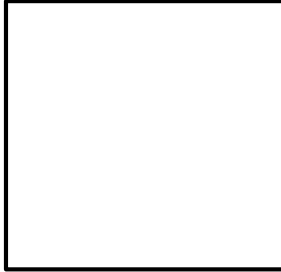
Next, we can introduce the criteria for goodness presented in Section 3 as two coordinates within this space of possibilities, each representing a spectrum between two opposites:
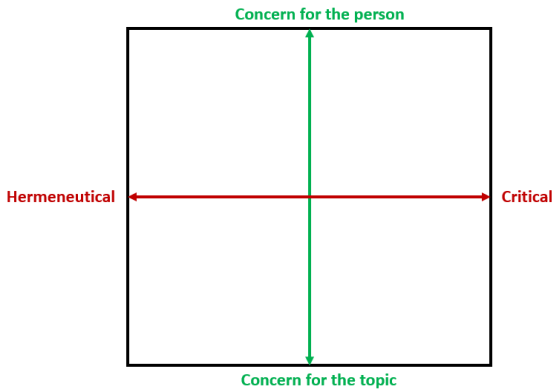
This scheme can be used to evaluate types or tokens of philosophical consultancy:

For any type or token of philosophical consultancy, it should (i) fall within the space of possibilities to be truly "philosophical", and (ii) generally fall near of the center field to be considered good. However, it should be noted that the balance between critical and hermeneutical attitude, as well as the balance between concern for the person and concern of the topic, corresponds to the Aristotelian concept of "mean", which differs from the arithmetical mean. Therefore, the central point of the coordinate system does not represent the perfect philosophical consultancy that every consultant should aim for in any case.

When evaluating a philosophical consultancy as a type (e.g., general conception of philosophical consultancy), we can consider its general characteristics as described in theory or displayed in case-studies. We can locate it on the coordinate system with a point (more or less thick!) representing its average position. For example, a conception of consultancy that is more hermeneutical than critical and more focused on the person than on the topic may be visualized as follows:
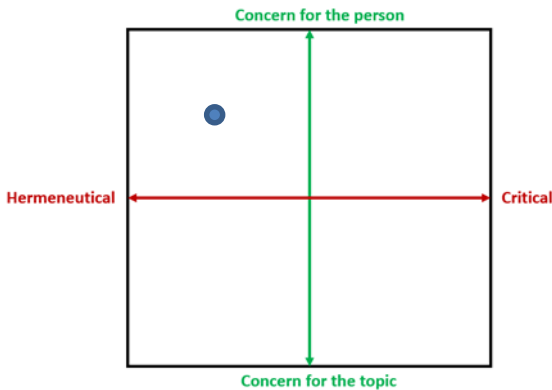

To gain insights into the effectiveness and balance of a practitioner's own approach to consultancy, it may be interesting for any practitioner who has already developed and described their own approach to consultancy to ask different people familiar with their approach to 'locate' it – independently from one another – on the scheme and compare the results. Divergent placements may suggest a lack of clarity in the approach while points clustered near the center field may indicate a well-balanced approach. The scheme can be used to compare, evaluate and discuss different conceptions of philosophical consultancy, or to reflect on one's own (ideal or real) approach to consultancy.

The scheme can also be used to reflect on individual sessions (tokens) of philosophical consultancy or to evaluate them. This can be done during or after the session, by the consultant themself, a

colleague-observer, or even together with the counselee, if the counselee is interested. It may be interesting to introduce a time dimension and represent the (approximate) development of the session in time by a line in the coordinate system. Since, in this case, the points connected by the line represent moments in time (and not types or tokens of consultancy), the question about whether the session is to be considered a philosophical consultancy must be visualized separately (if at all):

1) Does this session fall within the space of possibilities for philosophical consultancy?
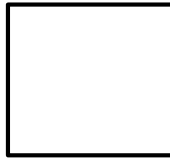
2) How does the session develop? Is it balanced?
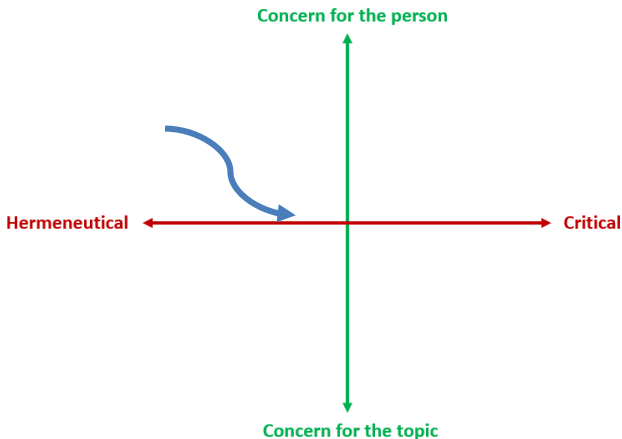
Finally, I would like to emphasize that the conception of a good philosophical consultancy, as developed it in this paper, is very substantial: it requires a great deal of acquaintance with the philosophical tradition, and it presupposes more than the mastering of some technique for facilitating dialogue. Following Barrientos-Rastrojo, I wish to distinguish between philosophical "technicians" (who can indeed be useful in some respects) from philosophical practitioners: the former just "carry out procedures" in facilitating dialogue, while the latter should be able to rely on "several years of study to gain access to the conceptual diversity of the History of Thought, its key concepts and its philosophical fabric"[54]. This distinction, which is clearer in other professions, is still evolving in the field of Philosophical Practice.

Conclusion

Philosophical Practice lacks a comprehensive theory that defines what makes a Practice "philosophical" while doing justice to the pluralism inherent in philosophy as a discipline. In this paper, I have attempted to establish normative requirements for philosophical consultancy. According to my proposal, a consultancy is "philosophical" if and only if it bears a "family resemblance" to the philosophical tradition, encompassing both contents and approaches to questions. I have formulated seven minimal criteria that must be fulfilled for a consultancy to be truly "philosophical" (Section 2). In Section 3, I have addressed the question of what makes a philosophical consultancy good. Drawing from an Aristotelian perspective on practical virtue, I have argued that a consultancy's goodness relies on achieving a balance between (i) the concern for the counselee and the concern for the topic of the dialogue, as well

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[54] Barrientos-Rastrojo: *Experiential Philosophy and Prison*, pp. 38-39.

as (ii) a critical and a hermeneutical attitude in dialogue. In light of the previous sections' findings, Section 4 introduces visual tools to evaluate whether a consultancy is (or was) "philosophical", and whether it is (or was) good. This evaluation can refer both to consultancy as a type (i.e. a general conception of consultancy) and to consultancy as a token (i.e. a single session).

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