

# The philosophical questions of the counselees

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**Abstract:** I propose the view that the philosophical counselling has to be “client oriented” that is, oriented by the counselees’ philosophical questions. Counselees are not always aware of the philosophical aspects of the dilemmas, confusions, conflicts etc. behind their sense of inability to deal satisfactorily with their difficulties. Unless they are already philosophers, they do not tend to conceive their personal philosophical problem as a particular instance of a general philosophical problem. Even if they do, they are not always capable to formulate philosophical questions. Yet they do have philosophical questions. They have such questions because, whatever have caused them to conceive something as a problem in their problem-situation, some ready-made, mostly inherited unexamined, taken for granted philosophical answers to possible philosophical questions are, so to speak, “called into question”. People, including philosophers, learn such answers unknowingly (of course, not as answers but as “evident truths”, “facts”, “moral imperatives” etc.), before it occurs to them that such questions can be asked. Most of our beliefs, including the philosophical ones, belong to that category of answers to unasked questions. The pretension to be able to hold only examined beliefs is, therefore, non-realistic, and it is mistaken to assume that the unexamined ideas are the cause of our difficulties. The philosophical counsellor, as a trained philosopher, should know how to help the counselees realize what is at stake, formulate explicitly their questions, examine the unsatisfactory answers and explore alternatives ones - that is what philosophers normally do when they want to help colleagues,

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students (or past philosophers) who “got stuck” in their philosophical projects. I deal with the implications of that conviction for philosophical counselling.

**Key-words:** philosophical competence; philosophical questions; unexamined beliefs;

### **“The most important philosophical question”**

Heidegger once mentioned Leibnitz’ question: “Why is there something rather than nothing?” as the most important philosophical question (Heidegger, 1953, 7-8). His remark implied that a philosopher who fails to ask it does not deserve to be called philosopher. However, Heidegger had no copyright on the term ‘philosopher’, and some thinkers who are considered philosophers by some or other criteria claim that it is rather Heidegger who failed to ask some philosophical questions, including some questions which had intrigued Leibniz and led him to pose the famous question (Leibnitz, 1976, art. 7). Most philosophers, even if they share some of Leibniz’ concerns, do not ask that question. Some of them go further and claim that it is philosophically mistaken to ask it, either because answering it is, as Kant claimed, beyond the capacity of human reason (Kant, 1999, 422-29), or because asking it betrays, as some analytical philosophers, starting with Locke’s studies of the follies of human understanding (Locke, 1975, book II, Ch. XXXIII), have been insistently claiming, it betrays a conceptual confusion. Many among the latter, for example G.E. Moore or B. Russell, considered the existence of the world a “brute fact”, about which one does not sensibly ask “whether?”, “why?” or “what for?”, (Moore, 1993; Russell, 1948). Few among them, for example the young Wittgenstein, thought that wondering with awe that something exists at all may be a deeply meaningful experience, yet insisted that, verbally, asking such questions is going beyond the limits of language, and it is therefore meaningless (Wittgenstein, 1922, 6.44). Bergson, who was detached from both rationalists and empiricists, shared the opinion that the question is meaningless, although his reasons were not logical but metaphysical: he thought that the alternative to “something” can never be

"nothing" but rather "something else" (Bergson, 1962, 266-7). Other philosophers, for example the American pragmatists, recommended accordingly to replace such a question with a psychological question: "Why people ask such questions?", just as they recommended to replace the question "Does God exists?" with the question "Why people ask whether God exists?" or "What is the nature of the religious experience?". (Dewey, 1929; James, 2012, 2017).

Philosophers who reject Heidegger's or Leibniz' question as unanswerable or meaningless are not just criticizing the question, they actually disagree with Heidegger's or Leibniz' philosophical claims and presuppositions in light of which the question seems to be reasonable, and their disagreement is based on their alternative background conceptions. In fact, their effort to cast doubt on the meaningfulness of that question is part of their attempt to show the advantages of their own philosophical conceptions. Similarly, the philosophical counsellors who belittle the counselees' concerns actually try to convert the counselees to the "right" philosophical conception of life, i.e., to their own creed.

### **"The philosophically worthy life"**

Despite the fact that many philosophers would agree that one should aim to live a life that is not "merely" subjectively good, but also worthy of being considered as such by philosophical criteria, philosophers never agreed about the worthy philosophical criteria for such a life. Moreover, there is no such agreement even when the range of possible conceptions of life are restrained by some narrower frame, for example that of a specific religion: When a Jewish, Christian or Muslim preacher tries to convince his audience to live a worthy life according to his respective religion, he can never be sure that there are no preachers in the name of the same religion who recommend as worthy ways of life ways that to his best religious understanding are not just unworthy, but sinful and criminal. Unfortunately, extreme interpretations, for instance the views of Bin Laden, which are abhorred by his more moderate coreligionists, is not unique to Islamic fundamentalism, nor is Islam exceptional in this respect among the Abrahamic religions. I am less well acquainted with the canonical texts, the interpretative debates and conflicts in other creeds, so I do not relate to them, but can assure you that

the so-called holy scriptures of the Abrahamic religions, or the texts of their sanctified interpreters, contain enough ambiguities, if not explicit contradictions, which permit, even without the ambivalent contributions of later generations, to justify, in the name of God's Love, Will or Law, all kinds of assertions and deeds: cruel and merciful, tolerant and pedantic, belligerent or peace-loving, ascetic or sybaritic etc. It is, of course, not unique to religion – think of Stalinist, Maoist or Khmer Rouge communists in contrast to the moderates or the revisionists within the Marxist movement; think even of the Nazis, those among the supporters of the national socialist movement who followed Hitler, in contrast to the more moderate among the Pan-Germanists. Marx' and Engel's writings as well as the sources that inspired the Pan Germanic ideology, (from Herder, Hegel, Schelling, and Fichte to their critics Schopenhauer and Nietzsche) allow for contradictory interpretations. Philosophy is a still larger and more controversial field; since the pre-Socratic disagreements and the sophists' debates, it has never created even an illusion of a univocal conception of a worthy life, or an agreement on reliable criteria for such a conception.

### **Relevance to philosophical counselling**

Some philosophical counsellors are inspired by such approaches and borrow from them tools to “deconstruct” the counselees' questions. Some of them think, like Heidegger (op. cit.), and more recently Hadot, whose approach seems to be more relevant to counselling (Hadot, 2005), that they know what the questions that philosophers should ask are. Others maintain that philosophizing should heal people from the tendency to ask irrelevant and pointless philosophical questions. In both cases the counselors try to convince their counselees that they should not be concerned with the questions that initially, or *prima facies*, bother them, and should explore instead something else. Some try to divert the counselee's attention from his mundane concerns, like economic success, fame, popularity or carnal pleasures to aims that to their mind are more spiritual or moral, while others insist, on the contrary, on the abandonment of celestial aspirations and the longing for perfection for more earthly targets; some try to divert the counselees' concerns from self-centered ideals and dreams to altruistic activities, while others try to

liberate the counselees from the influence of others and teach them, despite the blatant paradox, how to become more authentic.

### **The scandal: the unexamined beliefs**

Many philosophical counselors prefer to be oriented by their counselees' concerns. Yet some among them do not deal with the counselees' philosophical questions. They rather believe that their role is to ask the counselees, who are allegedly stuck in their psychological or other mondain problems, the liberating philosophical questions that one may ask in such situations. They do not assume that the counselees, even if they are not able to formalize them in philosophical terms, already have their own philosophical questions.

Several groups among them claim that the source of the psychological difficulties of their clients are their unexamined beliefs. But as most of our background presuppositions (beliefs, conceptual schemes, values, principles or ways of thinking) were adopted uncritically, whether as unwarranted conjectures from prior personal experiences, blindly accepted interpretations (or misinterpretations) of the prejudices of our parents and teachers or as conformist adherence to conventions in our social environment, all of us, including the most sophisticated philosophers, have many unexamined assumptions. To believe that unexamined beliefs are the causes of human troubles and problems is to believe that the Gods punish us for failing to be radical philosophers, who should cast doubt on any unproven assumptions. But the truth is that, on the one hand, we do not know whether the Gods care about human assumptions when the latter do not threat their Divine dominion, and, on the other hand, we know that radical philosophers, such as Socrates or Descartes, who believed to be able to cast doubt on any unexamined doxa, are criticized by other philosophers, who identify many tacit assumptions under their explicit, examined, assertions. Whatever other critics have discovered, I, from my present perspective as a philosophical counsellor, do not care whether Socrates examined the belief that a condemned man should remember to sacrifice a cock to Asclepius (Plato, 1942), nor whether Descartes should have bothered to examine in depth the presuppositions of Saint Augustine's proof for the existence of God, a proof which he presented as his own (Descartes, 1985).

As I am oriented by the philosophical problems of nonphilosophers, I am intrigued by Socrates' taking for granted that the fate of his future orphans is Xanthippe's problem while he should not take into account his parental responsibility in his suicidal decision not to escape the unjust verdict. From the same point of view, I agree with Wittgenstein's critics of Descartes' assumption that philosophizing in the isolation of a room at the top of some tower is the correct context for dealing with the question whether the seemingly humans walking back and fourths down in the street are more than just automata (Wittgenstein, 1953). It is the same perspective that Voltaire and Bergson took when they criticized Leibnitz' effort to justify God, as the creator in general, and the creator of the best of the possible worlds in particular: The issue is not to prove God's goodness, but to listen to the questions of the victims of the "unavoidable" bad aspects of his alleged choice. (Voltaire, 2011, Bergson, 1962)

### **Philosophers are not different than others**

Philosophers, like other, more "ordinary" humans, are not immune to those bad or confusing aspects, whether they are the results of providential calculations or just the hazards of life: Having a mentally impeded relative, losing a beloved person, a job, faith or face may seem to some philosophers as less philosophically dramatic than being arrested, like Socrates, for a dissident stand in spiritual questions or having momentarily, as Descartes perhaps had, real doubts in the existence of others. Philosophers are not less perplexed than others when they find themselves in problematic situations where their existing tools for coping do not enable them to find satisfactory solutions, consolations or distractions. The problematic situation may be related to practical issues or to theoretical queries, personal or public, mundane or sublime; it may be a difficulty to solve an abstract and general philosophical dilemma while writing an academic paper, or a practical conflict between the care for the immediate well-being of one's family and the concern for a political cause, a struggle whose future consequences are uncertain; it may be a confusion about one's identity (or rather identification) in cases of conflicts between groups, or uncertainty with regards to one's worth, meaningfulness, values or aims in times of crisis.

New perspectives, new ways of thinking, new ideas may perhaps be helpful, and some presuppositions which are taken for granted should, perhaps, be called into question in order to widen the horizon of possibilities of the perplexed person. But that does not mean that the assumptions that should perhaps be re-thought were unexamined beliefs, nor should that many irrelevant unexamined beliefs not be ignored. It certainly does not mean that a satisfactory solution must be based on examined, let alone true, beliefs. Socrates, Plato, Saint Augustine or Boethius, with their parallels in other cultures, may speculate about religious or metaphysical truths; Kant, with his respective parallels, may discuss the rationality of their consolations. Other philosophers, from Aristotle to Popper, through Montaigne and Pascal and parallel wise in other culture, know that, practically, every mundane belief that is based on generalizations and expectations cannot be a well-examined belief. Psychologists, and before them, myth creators and religious thinkers as well as skeptic philosophers added reasons for doubting the possibility of examining the veracity of one's beliefs about oneself (and one's Self). Yet we cannot act or even just react without such beliefs.

This should be part of the general knowledge of every modern philosopher. Indeed, even admirers of philosophers like Bergson, Husserl or Heidegger, who encourage reliance in some matters on "immediate experience" and "intuitive insights", should admit that the reduction of uncertainty with regards to general laws, future events or the intentions of others is not among the promised contributions of their respective approaches. Moreover, even those who believe, like the Stoics, some Western as well as Eastern religious guides and psychotherapists, that the cure for human anxieties should be found in a change of attitude, must admit that they do not have formulae for solving the problems of life: they are just offering methods to deal with obstacles which allegedly prevent "wise", "pious", "sane" or "mature" attempts to deal with them.

### **The psychotherapists' version of the scandal of the unexamined beliefs**

Nevertheless, there are philosophical counsellors who are concentrated in the search of the sources of their counselee's difficulties in habits that were once useful but now are obsolete or in wrong beliefs

which were allegedly acquired in childhood and continue to be held uncritically. Despite their blaming of psychotherapists for their “scientific or medical bias” and “causal thinking”, and their accusation of those professionals with the neglect of the “philosophical questions”, those philosophical counselors are actually following the two dominant groups in psychotherapy, the behaviorist and psychoanalytic. That does not mean that they necessarily understand what those groups are trying to do, that they can identify the philosophical roots of some of their basic ideas or that they realize that those groups do not try to “cure” their patients by offering causal explanations, but rather endeavor to change their opinions and attitudes. Of course, there is a great difference between the methods of those philosophical counsellors, who rely on reasoning or discussion of ideas of philosophers and the behaviorist attempt to help the patient to “unlearn” his obsolete habits by “conditioning” of which the patient is not always aware, or the psychoanalytic or dynamic attempts at persuasion while the induced emotional state of the patient and the therapist explanations that disagreement is just “defensive resistance” reduce her capacity for critical judgment of the therapist’s claims. But those philosophical counsellors share the dogma that wrong beliefs and inadequate ways of thinking are the sources of the counselees’ difficulties. Thus, they are tuned to the counselee’s concerns, but instead of listening to the philosophical questions of the counselees, they assume that they, by their “Socratic questioning”, enable the counselees to get rid of their false infantile doxas or otherwise obsolete doxas, and fallacious ways of thinking. I believe that one should realize that the counselees have their Aristotelian wondering

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Instead of speaking generally and abstractly, I shall start with an example, borrowed from the cognitivist psychologist Albert Ellis and the philosophical counselor Elliott Cohen. It is a case of a person who failed an examination and feels depressed.

Ellis (Ellis, 1994) “diagnoses” it as a case of “musturbation”: The person indeed wishes to pass the examination, but he mistakenly thinks that “I want” means “I must”, and does not take into account the possibility of “I cannot”. That is, she has a “cognitive bias”, which causes her to



wrongly infer from one modality to another: It is a bias, “I must” presupposes perhaps that “I can”, but from “I want” one can infer neither “I can” nor “I must”. The alleged cognitive bias is perhaps even greater if the premise is “my parents want me to pass the examination” and she concludes that she “must pass it” even if she does not want it, and even if she did, she would not be able to pass it. Actually, Ellis does not really try to correct fallacies in modal logic even if he believes that what the patient thinks is that she “must” pass the exam in order to please her parents. Instead, he tries to convince the patient “to be realistic”, acknowledge her wish, but accept the possibility of not being able to fulfil it, and stop thinking of it in terms of “I must get it, and if I do not... I am good for nothing, I am going to lose everything, my life is not worth living” and similar thoughts that are the reason for her depressive mood.

In contrast, Cohen (Cohen, 1988) claims that the problem is not wrong inferences from one modality to the other, or, in Hume’s terms, from an “is” to an “ought” or vice versa, but inference by a valid, though tacit, practical syllogism, of which the major premise is an “ought”, but that premise, or chain of premises, is childish and stupid. Cohen does not use the terms “ought” and “is”, or “want” and “must”. Instead he argues that there is no causal relation between the fact the counselee failed the examination and the fact that he feels depressed. There is a logical relation between the tacit belief “If I fail an examination I am a failure” which is a value judgment, the empirical realization: “I failed the examination” to the evaluative conclusion: “I am a failure” which is the reason for the counselee’s depression. The stupid value premise follows from other value judgments, and eventually from general premises such as “one is worthless if one is not successful” or “one is worthless if one is not considered always successful by others”. Cohen claims that such “venomous” premises are acquired uncritically in childhood, and the role of the philosophical counselor is to offer philosophical antidotes: invite the counselee to read and discuss philosophical theories about human worth.

So, Ellis and Cohen do not dismiss the counselee’s concern: They do not tell the counselee to think about the beauty of nature, the philosophically good life or the goodness of God instead of being concerned with his examinations. They try to convince him to interpret differently the fact that he failed an examination. Ellis seems to want his patient to “become realistic” and give up the idea that she should try again, or at least

re-consider whether she should insist on it. Cohen seems to want his counselee to try again, but instead of concluding that he is a failure Cohen wants him to explore why he failed that time and perhaps prepare himself better, or use a better strategy. Their counseling is sensible, although psychologists have never detected a “cognitive bias of exchanging modalities”, and Cohen does not know what are the real stupid thoughts in his counselee’s mind. The disturbance called “musturbation” is Ellis’ invention, and it is Cohen who makes the conjecture that if the counselee says “I failed the exams therefore I am a failure” than the counselee must have had the prior belief: “If I fail the examination I am a failure”: Logically, the same conclusion can be inferred from different sets of premises; psychologically, the connection can be associative and not logical: whenever he failed an examination his father told him he was a failure, and the present event revived in him the memory of his father’s reprimands. The counseling is sensible because the event of failing an examination can be interpreted and evaluated in more than one way, and there is more than one plausible reaction to such an event. Is it philosophical? Cohen, who acknowledges his debt to Ellis, thinks that at least his is philosophical. Cohen’s treatment is indeed more philosophical than that of Ellis, but not because he deals with syllogism and its premises while Ellis seems to go back to Freud’s reality principle (only seems, because Freud’s reality principle demands to give up forbidden wishes and not hard-to-get aims): It is not more philosophical because Cohen uses philosophical texts in order to neutralize the “stupid premises” while Ellis does not: The opinion that one should not insist on achieving hard-to-get aims is not less philosophical than the conviction that one should strive despite all difficulties, or any other idea that one may find in philosophical texts. Cohen approach is more philosophical because he is aware of a philosophical prejudice, and invites exploration of several philosophical alternatives. Yet it is not philosophical enough, because it is Cohen who considers which alternative to offer to the counselee: should it be Heidegger’s, Mill’s or Kant’s conception of human worth. He does not let the counselee explore alternatives and chooses reasonably which he prefers, if at all. He does not even tell him that there are alternatives. Of course, he does not tell him that the belief that “If I fail the examination I am a failure”, stupid as it is, is itself a philosophical belief and not a mathematical axiom or biological necessity. He also does not tell his

counselee that he, Cohen, believes that whatever were the childhood circumstances in which the counselee had adopted it, it is a rather a prevalent, sometimes even dominant, philosophical worldview in certain circles in competitive societies, whether in capitalistic America, Mandarin China, Jewish Yeshiva, a course for training ancient Egyptian priests, or criteria for being admitted to Plato's academy – all of which are frameworks in which moral virtues are not considered identical to epistemological excellence, but are nevertheless its by-products. Epicurus, Epictetus, Judean prophets, or Jesus, in ancient time, Heidegger's, Mill's, Kant's, and some other modern philosophers have other conceptions of merits, virtues and human worth. Be it as it may, Cohen's counselee's initial philosophical convictions deserve respect as unexamined philosophical conventions rather than just childish stupidity.

In what sense Heidegger's, Mill's, or Kant's conceptions of human worth are alternatives to the assumed belief of Cohen's counselee? Philosophical conceptions can be alternatives to one kind of thing: answers to philosophical questions. Cohen in fact presupposes that the counselee who believes that he is a failure accepts for granted that not only the ability but the performance of passing examinations is a major criterion for a person's worth. He does not ask explicitly the philosophical question "what is human worth?" because for him the answer, learned from others, is obvious. I do not know whether it is precisely success in examinations, being considered clever or being praised by demanding parents, but I guess that before the crisis of the failure he had no reason to doubt the validity of the ready-made answer as a criterion for his worth. He accepted that prejudice, which is an answer to an unasked question, an answer to a question that he did not need to ask. Perhaps he did not think explicitly of the question of his worth, having no prior reason to call his self-satisfaction into question. If Cohen analysis is correct, he is helping him to become aware of the philosophical question of his own worth as well as the question on the higher level of the criteria for worth, and offer him answers that are different than those he already knew. The counseling will be fully philosophical if the counselee realizes that his experience is a chance to become aware that the question "what is human worth?" which concerns him because his old convictions, which answered it, are no more satisfactory, and if he understands that as a philosophical question it has more than one possible answer, and it is up to him to critically explore

alternatives and reasonably decide which is preferable. If Cohen presupposes that the stupid initial “childish” beliefs echo parental opinions or social conventions instead of being the fruit of critical autonomous thinking, than the philosophical cure is not the replacement of one authority, which the counselor does not respect, by another authority; whether it is that of the chosen philosopher, or of the counselor who chooses a philosopher who, to his mind, is a good philosopher, or at least adequate for the counselee’s needs.

The counseling is philosophical and relevant to the counselee’s concerns when the counselor succeeds to detect the counselee asked or unasked philosophical questions, deal with it as a concrete instance of a general philosophical question, and examine answers that fit to the counselee’s specific situation. Normally the counselee has more than one philosophical question, and he often does not distinguish between them as a philosopher would do. Sometimes dealing with one question enables the emergence of another philosophical question. The process may be long and complicated. But the principle is, to be attentive to the counselee’s question, to enable her to become aware of it and to express it, not to tell her that what she should really ask – or avoid from asking - is “why there is something rather than nothing?”

#### *My favorite example*

How did I arrive to the idea that one should detect the counselee’s philosophical questions? I initially believed, like Socrates, that I should look for mistaken philosophical presuppositions which are relevant to the assumed difficulty of the counselee to deal with his declared problem, or the assumed problem behind it. But I have realized that sometimes I had helped the counselee to find an alternative to a seemingly obvious answer (for him) even before he or I realized that he had a question.

Let me give you an example, whose lesson I learned only later, in light of wider experience: I was once asked to have an encouraging conversation with a patient who used to look for consolation in drinking. He was very depressed with his problems and mistrustful to those who tried to help him professionally. I could not develop even an initial conversation with him, as he took me as one of the psychotherapists or social workers in the clinic in which I worked as a volunteer, and responded with “I do not care” to all my questions, including the question

“what are you doing when Scud missiles are falling in your neighborhoods. (The conversation took place in 1991, during the Gulf War, while Sadam Hussien’s Scuds, suspected to be loaded with chemical poison, were awkwardly targeted to towns in Israel, and from time to time alarm horns were blaring, while the media were announcing that people should rush to hermetically closed shelters and put on gas masks). I tried to change the context and the fixed answer, and I thought of his childhood. As he was born in Iraq, the first question that occurred to me was whether he cared that Iraq is actually bombarded by the Americans and their allies. He was surprised by my unexpected question and said “Of course I care; they (the Iraqis) are good people!” I was surprised in my turn and spontaneously told him, “So, you are a liar, you said that you do not care about anything and you care about the Iraqis while most Israelis just care about themselves being endangered by the Iraqi Scuds, and do not give a damn about the people there”. Unintendingly, I managed to break thereby not only the routine but also the mistrust. In the next meeting he was in a different mood, and told me that “all the people” in his town ask him to pray for them. When I asked why, he told me “because I am a good person, and God listens to the prayers of good persons”. It took me a while to understand that his question was not the practical question “how am I going to help my sick wife, drug-addicted son and my talented daughter who was injured in a car accident and became paraplegic, while I myself am broken and going to lose completely my source of income?” but a philosophical question. I do not know whether that question was “what is the worth of a man who cannot take care of his family?” or “what is the worth of a probably sinful man whom God punishes with such disasters?” in both cases, my remark, in which I actually praised him for caring for the “bad others”, the Iraqi “enemies”, unlike the apparently “us, the good” Israelis, gave him an alternative answer: “I am still a worthy man, I am a good man praying for others, and therefore worthy of God’s attention”. With his unasked question thus answered, it became possible to discuss with him the possibility of being helped by others without the shame of being useless and worthless, as in a situation like his nobody, in fact, can cope satisfactorily alone. I did not need to work on the stupid or not so stupid prevalent criteria with tie one’s worth with the ability to always take care of one’s affairs or the popular religious conviction that one’s suffering proves that one is sinful, as God is always just. Whatever were his

prior conceptions, the circumstances had shaken some of them, and my question and remark led him to an alternative conception without calling any prior tacit belief explicitly into question.

I needed many conversations and the effort to explain in my book the importance to take into account the perspective of the counselees, in order to elaborate the idea of detecting the counselees' philosophical questions and not just obstructive philosophical prejudices. (See chapters 2 and 4 in Gruengard, 2023 for a detailed analyses of hypothetical and concrete cases of philosophical questions of counselees).

### **Some general conclusions**

For a non-philosopher, who does not ask just for fun philosophical questions such as "what is my worth? and meta-questions such as "what should be the criteria for a person's worth?", having a philosophical question means his realizing that some obvious pre-existing belief (which to my mind is philosophical) is called into question by his present problematic state of affairs or state of mind. A series of changes, perhaps not necessarily disasters, befell on him and he does not how to cope: death of beloved ones, separation from spouse or betrayal or falling in love while married with another person, loss of Job or professional deception, impairment of physical abilities, exile, winning a huge sum in a lottery, children leaving home, a dream is realized and there is no other aim to strive for, war etc. The question may regard human worth but may regard many other issues, such as the meaning and obligations of friendship, the limits of parental responsibility, the weight of opinions of others, the limits of scientific knowledge, siblings' envy, justice under unequal conditions, the meaning of courage or limits of loyalty, what does it mean knowing another person, or what is self-knowledge. They are philosophical questions even if some philosophers think that they are not as basic as the question "why there is something rather than nothing?", or the question "what is a worthy life?".

By saying that a philosophical counsellor should strive to detect, understand and help the counselee become aware and of his philosophical questions and deal with them, I answer at least one philosophical question: "What makes philosophical counseling conversation a philosophical dialogue?". My proposed answer is partial: "First of all, the understanding

of the counselor that the counselee is a partner in a dialogue with his concerns, confusions and questions, and the counselor is not a teacher but a friendly partner to a philosophical dialogue. After all, philosophy does not teach philosophers, who still have their unexamined prejudices and blind spots, how to practically cope with the hazards of life. The only thing they know as philosophers is to detect philosophical questions and the presuppositions behind them, deal with alternative answers, and be aware that we cannot prove that our own philosophical questions are the most important for everyone.

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