

Socrates, Philosophical Counselling and Thinking Through Dialogue ⁱ

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1) Introduction

Socrates has been cited as the most important precursor of philosophical counselling (Schefczyk, 1995). Certainly Plato's portrayal of Socrates, as a philosopher who uses dialogue to help people examine their lives, inevitably invites comparisons with philosophical counselling. Yet there are also apparent differences in the context, assumptions, purpose, style and technique of Socrates and many modern philosophical counsellors. This paper aims to explore both these similarities and differences. To provide a focus, *Euthyphro* (Plato, 1959), a relatively early¹, short, two-person dialogue concerning one of the participant's "problem in living", will be discussed in the context of philosophical counselling. Although it is recognised that *Euthyphro* was written by Plato and may be largely fictional, it will be instructive to consider the dialogue as if it portrays Socrates at work accurately. In so doing it is hoped some light will be shed Socrates, philosophical counselling and the relationship between them.

2) Summary of Euthyphro

Socrates and Euthyphro meet outside the Athenian law courts. Euthyphro is bringing a charge of manslaughter against his father, who left to die a labourer who had killed a co-worker. Socrates himself is facing the charge of impiety brought by Meletus which will all too soon lead to his execution. Euthyphro complains that his relatives have accused him too of impiety, but he's sure they are wrong. Euthyphro's certainty about the nature of piety provokes Socrates into asking Euthyphro to share his wisdom, ostensibly so that Socrates can defend himself better though the reader expects any instruction provided to be entirely in the opposite direction.

Socrates asks Euthyphro to define piety, and rejects each answer given in turn. Euthyphro's first attempt "piety is prosecuting a wrong-doer for manslaughter or temple-robbery or any such crime - whether the offender happens to be your father or your mother or anybody else" (5e) is rejected because Socrates does not want examples of piety, he wants its essence - "the actual feature that makes all actions pious" (6e). Euthyphro's second definition - "what is agreeable to the gods" (7a) - is the right sort of answer but is refuted by the observation that the gods don't necessarily find the same things agreeable. Euthyphro amends his definition to "piety is what all the gods love" (9e). This definition is rejected on the grounds that Euthyphro has given an attribute of piety (being loved by the gods), not its essence. Socrates asks whether something is pious because the gods love it or is loved by the gods because it is pious. The gods don't think it's pious for no reason, and *these* reasons are what makes it pious, not the fact that the gods love it. (10a - 11a). Euthyphro does not follow this explanation very well, and complains about the confusion Socrates has caused, "whatever we put forward keeps shifting its position" (11b). Socrates tries to help by suggesting that piety is a kind of moral rectitude - Euthyphro adding that it is that part of moral rectitude concerned with the care of the gods (12e). Socrates refutes this by asking "Is piety a benefit to the gods, and does it make them better?" (13c), the point being that the gods don't need any help from *us*. So Euthyphro formulates his fifth and final definition of piety as "If a man understands how to say and do, in prayer and sacrifice, what is pleasing to the gods, this is piety" (14b). Socrates reformulates this as "a science of asking

¹ Socrates is usually thought of as being represented more accurately in the early dialogues (Charmides, Crito, Euthydemus, Euthyphro, Gorgias, Hippias Major, Hippias Minor, Ion, Laches, Lysis, Menexenus, Meno, Protagoras, Republic I) than the middle and later dialogues, where Plato uses him more as a mouthpiece for his own ideas. As Benson says "One is a moral philosopher identified with a method of question and answer known as the *elenchus*. The latter Socrates is more elitist, uses hypothesis not *elenchus* and claims knowledge." (Benson, 1992)

and giving" (14d) . But this falls to a similar objection as the fourth definition - if piety is trade between us and the gods, it is an unfair one since we have nothing to give the gods that they would need. Finally Euthyphro comes round almost full circle, going back to saying that piety is what is dear to the gods (15b). The dialogue concludes with Socrates ironically urging Euthyphro to tell him what piety really is, since as he is prosecuting his own father he *must* know - Euthyphro has had enough, makes his excuses and leaves.

Euthyphro is an example of Socrates' method, the *elenchus* (refutation or scrutiny) . Socrates begins by requesting the definition of a key term, in this case piety. The definition must allow us to both distinguish pious from impious acts and explain why an act is pious. The first hurdle a proposed definition has to negotiate is whether it is the right type of answer - Euthyphro's first and third proposals fail as they are examples and attributes of piety respectively, not its essence. If the answer does seem to be of the right type, Socrates asks further questions until Euthyphro admits something which counts against his own definition. The method is supposed to be continued until a satisfactory definition is found, although usually, as with Euthyphro, Socrates' interlocutor finishes in a state of confusion (*aporia*).

3) Is Socrates a philosophical counsellor?

Clearly there are differences in the context in which modern philosophical counsellors and Socrates operate. The former are normally professionals who charge a fee to willing clients who come for one or more counselling sessions held in private. Socrates actively seeks out fellow citizens and conducts on them a one-off moral examination for which there is no charge. Yet there are striking similarities too, in terms of aims and methods. Both Socrates and modern philosophical counsellors hope to help people lead an "examined life", and both do this through dialogue. Neither Socrates nor modern philosophical counsellors claim to know the answers themselves, but they do imply that argument and reason will help. Both respect the autonomy of their partner in dialogue insisting that the resulting views are their respondents, not those of Socrates, the counsellor or other authorities. In short, both aim to facilitate "thinking through dialogue".

The view that Socrates is doing something that strongly resembles philosophical counselling can be examined further by considering Paden's definition of philosophical counselling (Paden, 1998, p.11)

"Philosophical Counselling is that helping profession which seeks to understand critically the ideas and world-views associated with clients' presenting life problems".

Three apparently strong objections to Socrates' being classified as a philosophical counsellor suggest themselves.

(i) Philosophical Counsellors are helping professionals, Socrates is not

Socrates is not a professional at all let alone a member of the helping professions. However philosophical counsellors can work without payment and still be philosophical counsellors, so this cannot be an essential part of being a philosophical counsellor. Perhaps there is something about Socrates though that makes him different even from unpaid counsellors. After all, he goes out of his way to get people to participate in the *elenchus*, and some commentators have pointed out that there is something of the preacher in Socrates (e.g. Vlastos (1980) p.12). This explains why Socrates feels justified in tricking people into participating in the *elenchus*- it is for their own benefit. So, the argument goes, the difference is that Socrates wants to save souls, philosophical counsellors - like the Sophists - want to make money. As far as I know, no survey has been carried out concerning the motivation of philosophical counsellors. However my experience suggests that many are as altruistic as Socrates. Maybe the difference then is that modern counsellors have the "informed consent" of the client. Socrates never explains what he is doing, and his interlocutors do not know what they are letting themselves in for. However the informed consent of the client is more a feature of good, ethical

philosophical counselling, than philosophical counselling *per se*. I conclude therefore that though professionalism points to important differences, it is not one that would in itself stop me saying Socrates is doing philosophical counselling.

(ii) Philosophical counsellors interpret worldviews, Socrates seeks after truth

Socrates is not happy to accept people's initial views; he wants to put them to the test, and he has the *elenchus* to achieve this. It is true that Socrates differs from *some* philosophical counsellors in that he seeks after truth rather than merely maps out worldviews. But the difference should not be overstated. Socrates is at the "critical" extreme of Lahav's "critical/descriptive" dimension. (Lahav, 1995, see section 4 below), which allows counsellors who are critical of their client's worldviews to still to be categorised as counsellors. Crucially Socrates, like modern philosophical counsellors, treats his interlocutors' views as central; certainly they can be criticised, but they are never ignored. Socrates' critics have pointed out that this means that the *elenchus* cannot achieve reliable results, since it depends on the opinions of the particular interlocutor and the skill and insight of Socrates. (Robinson, (1953), p. 174). If this is a deficiency it is one that Socrates and modern philosophical counsellors share.

(iii) Socrates cannot be a philosophical counsellor because he does not fulfil Rogers's "core conditions"

Socrates cannot be a philosophical counsellor, on this view, because he does not behave like a counsellor. Carl Rogers (Rogers, 1990) suggests that there are three "core conditions" of genuineness, unconditional positive regard and empathy which are necessary and sufficient for counselling to be effective. Certainly it does not seem as if Socrates exhibits any of these core conditions.

a) Genuineness

Whilst the purpose of the *elenchus* is to seek after truth, paradoxically Socrates is not entirely honest himself. He tricks people into taking part in the *elenchus* (e.g. "the best thing I could you, Euthyphro, is to become your pupil" (5a)) and is ironic rather than genuine when his interlocutors fail. (e.g. "you have no inclination to instruct me ..you know (what piety is) if any man does" (14e)).

b)Empathy

Empathy is putting oneself into the shoes of another person, on an emotional as well as intellectual level. Socrates has no interest in providing emotional support for his interlocutors. For example when Euthyphro is confused after his third definition has been refuted (" it strikes me that you are the Daedalus" (11b)) Socrates argues with him and then "rescues" him by starting him off on the fourth definition rather than exploring what it's like for Euthyphro to be confused.

c) Unconditional Positive Regard

Rogerian counsellors aspire to exhibiting positive regard regardless of a client's statements or actions. Socrates' regard is conditional on their wisdom and virtue. The best example is at the end of the dialogue, where Socrates lectures Euthyphro "If you didn't know all about piety and impiety you would never have prosecuted your aged father for manslaughter of behalf of a mere labourer ..". Note the use of "aged" and "mere" to increase Euthyphro's shame .

The core conditions are not the only features of (allegedly) good counselling practice that Socrates does not adhere to. We have already seen that he does not ensure he has the informed consent of his interlocutors. Neither does he always ensure privacy, or provide provision for sufficient sessions to resolve the issue. Moreover the balance is very different to what one would expect in counselling,

where the client usually does most of the talking. In contrast (in the *Euthyphro*) Socrates does over three-quarters of the talking.²

The above considerations may be important but all seem more related to *good* counselling practice rather than the question of whether counselling is taken place. If counselling is defined to be whatever (psychological) counsellors do, then extremely wide variations occur. If we consider philosophical counselling there is even more reason for caution. It's actually an issue as to whether philosophical counselling really is a form of counselling - some philosophical counsellors prefer to call themselves philosophical consultants, practitioners or mentors. If we stipulated that practitioners have to be Rogerian to be considered philosophical counsellors, we would be excluding not just Socrates but many usually thought of as philosophical counsellors.

The three objections considered point to Socrates being a different type of counsellor to some moderns, and may have a bearing on his effectiveness. Whether there is a sufficient resemblance to say that Socrates was doing was a type of philosophical counselling, or whether it is more appropriate to say he was doing something akin to philosophical counselling, is debatable. For convenience, I will refer to Socrates as a philosophical counsellor in the next two sections. Readers who disagree may substitute "a modern philosophical counsellor who follows Socratic methods" if they so wish.

4) What sort of philosophical counsellor is Socrates ?

If Socrates is a philosophical counsellor, this does not mean he is a typical one, and indeed one of the hopes of this paper is to gain Socratic insights into modern philosophical counselling. To shed some light on this point it is very useful to consider Ran Lahav's five dimensions which he thinks encapsulate differences in the way philosophical counsellors practice. (Lahav, 1995, p. 19-23)

1. Subject matter.

For example, should counselling extend to emotional matters or confine itself to philosophical questions ?

2. Problem-oriented versus person-oriented

Is counselling directed at specific problems, or the person as a whole ?

3. Open-endedness

Is the aim of counselling the resolution of a problem, or is it an open-ended process ?

4. Autonomous versus imposed interpretations

Is the client considered the final authority, or does the philosopher's expertise mean that they will recommend a solution, possibly from a specific philosophical model ?

5. Critical versus descriptive interpretations

Is the counsellor critically demolishing the client's worldview, or is their aim mainly to describe it, making the implicit explicit ?

I would like to add two more dimensions, particularly relevant when considering Socrates.

6. Active, directive versus client-centred method.

Is counselling directive, in the sense that the counsellor dictates the method, or, as in client-centred counselling, does the client determine the direction counselling takes ? This dimension refers to method and should not be confused with the fourth dimension above, which refers to content.

7. Psychological awareness

Does the philosophical counsellor take account of the psychological effects of what she is doing (e.g. by using counselling skills), or does she think them irrelevant ? Note that this is a completely separate issue from whether the *content* of sessions is psychological, which is covered by the first dimension.

How should Socrates be categorised in each dimension ?

² The word count is Socrates 5089 to Euthyphro 1700 words (75%/25%). However this includes the preamble where the balance is more even - as the dialogue continues Socrates is increasingly dominant.

1. Socrates' concerns are mainly the nature of ethical concepts, such as courage, piety, and love. So his subject matter is relatively narrow, certainly compared to some philosophical counsellors who see clients with depression or anxiety.
2. Socrates focuses doggedly on one particular problem e.g. the nature of courage or piety. Note that for Socrates the "problem" is universal (e.g. "what is justice") whereas modern philosophical counsellors may consider more specific problems (e.g. "how can I be just in this situation?").
3. The dialogues are not open-ended in that they would finish when the original question had been answered satisfactorily.³
4. Above all, Socrates insists that answers are not imposed by him. His role is "midwifery", giving birth to peoples' own ideas. Of course sometimes he makes suggestions, and he does impose a method, but nevertheless Socrates aims for autonomous solutions.
5. Socrates is the paradigm of a persistent seeker-after-truth. Not only does he criticise his interlocutor's answers, he actually sets traps for them and sees difficulties they do not see. Socrates aims at finding general truths whereas some philosophical counsellors think of themselves more as helping the client (Marinoff, 1998).
6. Socrates has a method, the *elenchus*, which he imposes at every opportunity. The dialogues are very directive in the sense that Socrates is controlling the direction they take, although the interlocutor stays in command of the content of the solution (see 4 above).
7. Socrates is at the "non-psychological" extreme. As we have seen, he does not comply with what is considered good (psychological) counselling practice. His quarry is the truth, for which he would no doubt see emotional discomfort as a small price to pay..

If a philosophical counsellor were to model herself closely on Socrates then, she would rigorously pursue a method - the *elenchus*- searching for a general truth which could then be used to provide the client's autonomous solution to their presenting problem. She would not use counselling skills or consider the psychological impact of her interventions.

5) Is Socrates a good philosophical counsellor ?

It is important to be clear about what is and is not at stake here. No-one is querying Socrates' genius as a philosopher. What is being queried is the effect on Socrates' partner in dialogue, in other words the outcome of Socratic dialogues.

(a) The value of definitions

Just how useful would it be to get the sort of knowledge that Socrates is after e.g. to be able to define piety ? Socrates makes two assumptions which taken together imply that this knowledge is supremely useful. He thinks that knowledge is equivalent to being able to give a definition, and he also thinks that virtue and knowledge are identical. Both these assumptions are dubious. Brickhouse and Smith (p. 62-3) consider the case of a legislator who wants to consider whether a statute is pious or not. If it turned out that being pious meant doing what was pleasing to the Gods (piety is not this, but that is irrelevant) then the legislator would still need to know more, including what *actually* is pleasing to the Gods. They would, in short, need a sort of practical wisdom as recommended by Aristotle, a knowledge of specifics as well as universals and a knowledge of "how" as well as "that". Hence the *elenchus* gives only one sort of knowledge, not total knowledge. Worse, knowledge is not equivalent to virtue. As Vlastos (1980, p15) points out, giving an account is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for exemplifying a virtue. A courageous man may well not be able to give a definition of the type requested by Socrates, and someone who knows full well what courage is may not actually be courageous.

However even if these criticisms are valid successful *elenchus* could still be very worthwhile. At the conclusion of a successful *elenchus* you would know what (e.g.) piety was, which would be useful in considering cases like Euthyphro's. Although you *might* be pious without knowing what piety is, it's in just this sort of problem case that a definition is useful. R.M. Hare's distinction between intuitive

³ Socrates's denial of his own wisdom casts doubt on whether Socrates thinks this result is actually attainable

and critical thinking is valuable here (Hare, 1981). Hare suggests that most of the time we think and act intuitively - for example we normally wouldn't have to think twice about prosecuting a murderer. There exist some problem cases where our intuitions conflict - for example when it's not clear that it was intentional and when it's our father who has committed the "murder". In these cases we need to do what Hare calls "critical thinking", which includes gaining a full understanding of the meaning of the terms used. In these difficult cases - which are precisely the cases philosophical counsellors are most likely to have to deal with - intuition isn't enough. A critical examination of the meaning of words is called for - in these cases being able to define terms *is* a necessary (though not sufficient) condition of virtue

Some might argue that a search for the *essence* of piety is not valuable, because there are no such things as essences. A Wittgensteinian might think that actions we call "pious" resemble each other in the way that family members resemble each other. Hare (1982) argues that this criticism is not conclusive. "Granted that it may be the case that no one element will be found, nevertheless it remains important to seek to understand what we are saying, especially when we are arguing".⁴ The implication is that a modern Socrates would be wise not to be too dogmatic in assuming that there will be one essential definition, as otherwise *aporia* may result when it cannot be found. As to the extent to which *aporia* is a failure, that is the question we must now consider.

(b) *aporia* as an outcome

For Euthyphro, the outcome might well seem a failure. Far from reaching a positive conclusion, he ends the dialogue in *aporia* i.e. confusion. *Euthyphro* is not unrepresentative of the early, Socratic dialogues. Benson (1990a, p.141-1444) has gone so far as to suggest that *all* of the early dialogues are aporetic - Brickhouse and Smith (1994, p. 4) suggest that a majority are⁵

It is important to see that from a Socratic standpoint *aporia* is **not** a total failure. Socrates' interpretation of the Delphic oracle is that Socrates is wisest not because he knows more things, but because he alone is aware of his ignorance. Similarly Euthyphro is wiser after the dialogue because he now is aware of his ignorance (or should be). This ignorance is also valuable if it provides motivation for further enquiry.

The claim that *aporia* is not a failure rests on two assumptions, one empirical, the other philosophical. The empirical claim is that those in a state of *aporia* will be motivated to conduct further enquiries which will lead them nearer to wisdom and virtue. The examples of Critias, Charmides and Alcibiades suggest otherwise, and few readers of *Euthyphro* take his final words "Another time" as sincere. The philosophical claim is connected with Socrates' view that virtue is knowledge. If this is true, then it follows that *aporia* is indeed preferable to false knowledge. We have, however, already seen that this view is dubious, in which case *aporia* is surely best avoided as an end point of counselling. It might seem that *aporia* is acceptable in the case of Euthyphro because it should prevent impiety i.e. prosecuting his father. The danger is, though, that *aporia* will lead instead to anger at Socrates and to relativism about moral terms rather than the humility and curiosity that is desired.

How then should we rate Socrates ?

- (i) There is more to knowledge than that given by the *elenchus*, and there is more to virtue than any sort of knowledge. This does not mean a successful *elenchus* is useless - merely that one must be careful in the claims we make for its benefits.
- (ii) If an *elenchus* leads to *aporia*, as it often does, we must be even more cautious since there is no evidence that interlocutors will continue the enquiry.

⁴ Compare the attempt to decide whether Socrates is a philosophical counsellor in this paper. Paden's definition was used as the starting point, then, it is refined by considering counter-examples such as the volunteer counsellor. Though no final definition was arrived at, some light was shed on what being a philosophical counsellor is and whether Socrates can be classified as one.

⁵ Namely *Charmides*, *Euthyphro*, *Hippias Major*, *Hippias Minor*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Protagoras* and *Republic I*.

This conclusion is interesting in that no simple answer can be given as to how good a counsellor Socrates - or any anyone else - is without reference to disputable philosophical and empirical matters. If we don't share Socrates assumptions about knowledge and virtue, though, there seems a strong case for philosophical counsellors trying to take counselling further than an aporetic conclusion, for making the enquiry wider than the elenchus allows (e.g. considering the specific difficulties of the situation rather than just the general nature of virtue) and for not assuming the existence of essences.

6) How would a modern philosophical counsellor have dealt with Euthyphro ?

As we have seen, not all modern philosophical counsellors are alike. To the extent that they differ in the seven dimensions discussed in section 4) above, they would deal with Euthyphro in completely different ways. No doubt further dimensions could be identified, and to the extent that philosophical counselling is more an art than a science even the same counsellor might deal with Euthyphro in a variety of ways. Nevertheless it would enrich the discussion to be able to compare Socrates and modern counsellors more concretely. Since I cannot say how other counsellors would have dealt with Euthyphro, I will sketch how I might have done so. I do not mean to suggest that this is the only way a philosophical counsellor might have counselled him, nor that it is the best way.

The first point that needs to be made is that a modern philosophical counsellor would **not** have counselled Euthyphro - they would not have had the opportunity, because Euthyphro would not have sought counselling. To get started we must imagine a different Euthyphro, one who can already see more clearly that there actually is a moral difficulty in prosecuting one's own father. It must be admitted that Socrates' Euthyphro is not an easy client.

1)The beginning of counselling - establishing the contract

The first thing I would have done would have been to agree a "contract" with Euthyphro. This would have stipulated the frequency and length of sessions, fee, degree of confidentiality, and set a provisional aim for the sessions. The contract clarifies the aims, boundaries and conditions of counselling and is the first step in establishing a good therapeutic alliance. One would try to continue this throughout counselling by such good practice as making challenges tentatively and being sensitive to Euthyphro's emotional, as well as cognitive, state.

2)Clarification of the problem

Counselling would be likely to proceed by trying to clarify the nature of the issue. Euthyphro says "both my father and my other relatives are angry with me: because on the murderer's account I am prosecuting my father for manslaughter, whereas in the first place (as they maintain) he did not kill the man, and in the second, supposing that he did kill him, since the dead man was a murderer, one ought not to concern one's self in defence of such a person, because it is an act of impiety for a son to prosecute his father for manslaughter"(4a). Several different issues can be identified here :-

- (i) Is his father culpable ?
- (ii) Is it impious for a son to prosecute his father ?
- (iii) Even if it is impious for a son to prosecute his father, can it be the right thing to do ?

Separating these issues is an important first step, as is deciding the right order to tackle them. It seems that question (i) should be dealt with first, since it may be that on reflection Euthyphro may decide that his father was not culpable after all, in which case the other issues become irrelevant.

3)Worldview Interpretation

Assuming that initial clarification does not resolve the issue, it would be necessary to explore Euthyphro's worldview in more depth. Euthyphro says "It is funny that you should think that it makes any difference, Socrates, whether the dead man was an outsider or a member of my own household, and not realise that the only point at issue is whether the killer killed lawfully or not ... if you consciously associate with such a person and do not purify yourself and him by prosecuting him at law, you share equally in the pollution of his guilt (3a)" . Euthyphro's worldview appears to endorse

an impartial view of justice combined with the notion that you implicate yourself by not prosecuting the guilty. A philosophical counsellor might test and expand these views by asking such questions as

- (i) Would **you** want to be prosecuted by your son if you had killed a labourer ?
- (ii) How can you resolve moral disputes if people disagree ?
- (iii) What can make impious acts just?
- (iv) How do you know the stories about the gods are true ?
- (v) What is justice ?
- (vi) What is piety ?

So we might end up trying to define piety, just as Socrates does, but it is unlikely to be attempted so soon and would leave as an open question to whether the definition find an essence. Neither would I follow Socrates in disallowing examples⁶. Indeed one way of trying to define piety would be to borrow a technique from modern Socratic Dialogue, that of "regressive abstraction". Having elicited an example of piety from Euthyphro the counsellor would ask him what features piety must have for this to be a good example and furthermore what assumptions he is making. Euthyphro would then be asked for other examples of piety, against which his first definition could be tested and if necessary refined. I would follow Socrates in disallowing "prosecuting one's father" as an initial example, since this would beg the question. Though very similar to the elenchus, this method has the advantage that it makes Euthyphro a more active partner in dialogue.

4) Towards the conclusion of counselling - exploring the available options

Having described and tested Euthyphro's worldview sufficiently, the next step is explore his options in the light of his revised worldview (see Marinoff, 1995 for a somewhat similar procedure). Options might include

- (i) Prosecuting his father himself
- (ii) Dropping the prosecution
- (iii) Not prosecuting his father himself, but telling the labourer's friends and family about the situation and leaving it up to them
- (iv) Discussing the situation again with his family to try to persuade them that he is right

Which view would be most attractive would depend on Euthyphro's revised worldview and the facts about the case. If, for example, he decides that justice requires his father be prosecuted, option(iii) might be attractive to avoid impiety.

7) Discussion

The attempt to compare Socratic and modern treatments of Euthyphro cannot of course show which is "best", nor is it intended too. It, and the preceding discussion, does however provide some lessons for modern counsellors from Socrates and vice-versa, and also raises certain questions.

i). The importance of rigour for philosophical counselling

Socrates's ambition is to move from "right opinion" to knowledge. The search for definition is an excellent way of ensuring that worldviews are not merely superficial. Even if one does not share with Socrates and Plato the view that values are objective, reflection still has its benefits. The *elenchus* ensures one's ideas are consistent and survive a severe examination. Modern philosophical counsellors could perhaps expand it to use regressive abstraction and to use the method of counter-example and refutation more broadly than Socrates does whilst retaining his rigour. Philosophical counsellors who are more descriptive than critical may fall into the trap Scruton caricatures as "*parad(ing) before us a catalogue of "belief systems", help(ing) us to identify our own among them, up-to-date*". (Scruton, 1997). If counsellors and client can agree that truth is the agreed, joint goal of counselling then a

⁶ If indeed Socrates would always disallow examples. Vlastos cites *Laches* (191A-E) where Socrates seems to be adopting a strategy not unlike that used in modern Socratic Dialogue. If Vlastos is right, so much the better for Socrates's method and the benefits of its use by philosophical counsellors.

method not unlike the *elenchus* can be used to get the client to examine their views critically without the counsellor imposing their own views.

(ii) The importance of the therapeutic alliance

Socrates' dialogues serve as a warning that philosophical counsellors should not ignore the psychological dimension of their interactions. I concur with Paden who says that "the philosophical counsellor must ... use some techniques to create a therapeutic relationship within which philosophical counselling can proceed" (Paden, 1998, p13).

Forty years of experience from psychological counselling should surely not be ignored when considering how to achieve this. Socrates of course does not have the benefit of this, so it hardly surprising that he fails to following good counselling practice. It is arguable that *aporia* results as much from Socrates' failure to be explicit about his method and provide emotional support as the difficulty of the enterprise philosophically.

It is an open question whether philosophical counsellors are best served by *exactly* the same techniques to form a therapeutic relationship as Rogerian counsellors. The requirement is to adopt methods which foster a good therapeutic relationship but do not prevent the philosophical work being done. Paden thinks that genuineness and empathy are more appropriate than unconditional positive regard. There is nothing surprising about different forms of counselling requiring the use of different communications skills - philosophical counselling, being a relatively new discipline, needs to address itself to the question of which skills are appropriate for it.

(iii) What sort of client is suitable for philosophical counselling ?

The case of Euthyphro raises the question of how one determines which clients are suitable for philosophical counselling. I am thinking more here of the moral qualities of the client, rather than their presenting problem. Seeskin (1983, p3) suggests that *aporia* results partly through the moral failings of Socrates' respondents.

"*Elenchus*, then, has as much to do with honesty, reasonableness and courage as it does with logical acumen: the honesty to say what one really thinks, the reasonableness to admit what one does not know, and the courage to continue the investigation. Most of Socrates' respondents are lacking in all three. Protagoras becomes angry, Polus resorts to cheap rhetorical tricks, Callicles begins to sulk, Critias loses his self-control, Meno wants to quit"

It is possible that less onus is placed on the client's moral qualities if good counselling skills are used (for example, they are less likely to feel threatened). However it is still likely that not everyone will be suitable, and it would be preferable if these people did not start counselling rather than end it in a state of *aporia*. Every philosophical counsellor would be well served by considering what qualities they require from their clients.

(iv) The need for counsellors to consider their own assumptions and worldview

The examination of Socrates' assumptions showed their importance both in influencing his method and assessing the outcome of his work. It is likely that every philosophical counsellor is making assumptions which affect the way they work. For example, what is the aim of philosophical counselling? Should we take everything the client says at face value - or might there be something in Freud's suggestion that they could be "in denial"? What sort of knowledge, if any, is philosophical counselling giving? What sort of client can we help most?

Philosophical counsellors should be encouraged to reflect on their own worldview and presuppositions in training and supervision. As part of the accreditation of (psychological) counsellors in the UK, candidates write an essay on their philosophy of counselling. Considering such issues is even more appropriate for philosophical counsellors.

(v) Truth versus well-being as the goal of counselling

The Socratic worldview implies that truth and (real) well-being are equivalent, so no conflict arises. A modern philosophical counsellor who dissents may be forced to make a difficult choice between the

two. It is here that the two elements of "philosophical counselling" pull in different directions. Philosophy calls for the pursuit of the truth, regardless of the consequences. Counselling requires that close attention be paid to the welfare of the client. The viability of philosophical counselling, at least at the critical end of the critical/descriptive dimension, may depend on the extent to which well-being and the search for truth coincide in practice.

8) Conclusion

Commentators have been correct in seeing Socrates as the foremost precursor to philosophical counselling. It has been argued here that in many ways he can even be seen as a philosophical counsellor in his own right. Comparing him to modern day philosophical counsellors provides important lessons, and raises questions, both for Socrates and philosophical counsellors. It also provides a possible explanation of the paradox as to why the *elenchos* has been so admired and yet so little used since Socrates' death. Only since the advent of counselling have philosophers been able to provide the necessary psychological conditions which are a prerequisite for the successful conclusion of the tough, moral examination advocated by Socrates. Good philosophical counselling is the successful marriage of Socratic rigour and Rogerian humanity.

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