Philosophy as practices of virtue
La filosofía como práctica de la virtud

Arto Tukiainen
Critical Academy, Helsinki, Finlandia
info@artotukiainen.net

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Abstract: My purpose is to examine the concept of philosophical practice. I will first elucidate the three different meanings of 'practice' (discussion, exercise and way of life), and then proceed to provide an account of what makes these practices philosophical. My proposal for the defining characteristic of philosophical practices is that they recognise virtues and encourage their development. I will specifically describe three core virtues: disinterestedness, openness, and independence.
Keywords: philosophical counselling, philosophical exercises, philosophical way of life, virtues

Resumen: Mi propósito es examinar el concepto de práctica filosófica. Primeramente aclararé los tres diferentes significados de la 'práctica' filosófica: discusión, ejercicio y modo de vida. Después, procederé a plantear los factores primarios que determinan que estas prácticas sean filosóficas. Mi sugerencia consiste en que las prácticas filosóficas poseen como característica determinante el reconocimiento y la estimulación de virtudes. En particular, voy a describir tres virtudes esenciales: desinterés, mente abierta e independencia.
Palabras clave: orientación filosófica, ejercicios filosóficos, modo de vida filosófico, virtudes

Introduction

Let us begin by distinguishing the phenomenon of philosophy as theory-producing work from the idea of philosophy as a set of practices. Philosophy as a set of practices embodies the ancient conception of philosophy as love of wisdom, and wisdom in its turn can be approached from the perspective of such virtues as disinterestedness, openness and independence.

Philosophy as theory-oriented work versus philosophy as practices

An influential and perhaps even dominating view of philosophy in contemporary academic environments can be formulated as "theory-oriented work".[1] Often the concept of philosophy is also used to refer to the theories themselves in addition to the process of developing them.[2] Theory-producing philosophy is divided into fields that are defined by central questions and at least some inherited ways of answering them. These divisions are reflected in the phrase "philosophy of x", where x can be for instance mind, science, language, logic, values, or some narrower speciality. Since no one can master all of these fields, theory-oriented philosophy is characterised by division of labour analogously with the sciences.

The contemporary philosophical practice movement incorporates an understanding of philosophy as a practice or set of practices that need not result in theories. Three different meanings of the word 'practice' can be discerned.

The first meaning of 'practice' is discussion, or talking. Philosophical counselling as private discussion between a counsellor and a single counsellee is an example of philosophical practices. Many kinds of formal and non-formal group discussions are also referred to as philosophical practice, and even lecturing can been seen in this light.[3] Whatever the specific format of philosophical practice as talking, it typically gets its motivation from the concerns of the participants rather than the needs of theoretical work. Philosophers hope to be of some help in concrete problems of life.

[1] Research into the history of philosophy (including what we call contemporary philosophy) is not philosophy as such but a part of the science of history. Since one can of course develop one's philosophical views in discussion with historical figures, the difference between history of philosophy and philosophy proper is not always clear.

[2] A theory is a description or explanation of some part of the world or of the world as a whole, a prediction of future events, or a view of the desirable future direction of some aspect of the world. The truth of philosophical theories cannot typically be ascertained by simple observation but requires inferences. Verificationism in philosophy of language and utilitarianism in moral philosophy are examples of philosophical theories.

[3] Saarinen, Esa, and Slotte, Sebastian: "Philosophical lecturing as a philosophical practice", in *Practical Philosophy* 6, 2, 2003.

While theory-oriented philosophy tends to emphasise written works, most of the language of philosophical practice as discussion is spoken. Written material is of course often *used* in these discussions for the purpose of creating new ways of seeing ourselves and our worlds.

The language of philosophical practice is more varied than that of philosophy as theory-oriented work. In the latter the primary form of language-use is argumentation: a theory is a proposition or set of propositions which is defended against opposing views by means of arguments. Philosophical counsellors, for instance, may occasionally develop an argument, but the general atmosphere of the situation is one of enquiring and probing rather than argumentation. Counselling involves predicting and evaluating the long-term outcomes of possible choices. Counsellors may encourage and console their counsellees, and many practitioners tell anecdotes and jokes in order to elicit fruitful ideas in the minds of their discussion partners.

The second meaning of 'practice' is exercise. To some extent philosophical exercises prepare us for something that comes after them, but often they are also done for their own sake and for immediate gratification. Although we will return to these exercises later on, let us here mention that they may include discussions in which one tries to distance oneself from partiality and egoism; practicing detached awareness; facing ordeals as opportunities for learning how to bend one's will; thinking about possible misfortunes in order to prepare oneself for them in a spirit of acquiescence and to increase one's gratitude for one's present condition; accustoming oneself to the things one fears in order to broaden one's range of choices; cleansing one's mind of diversions and opening oneself to transformative influences; writing to oneself as an effort to clarify one's thoughts, to influence one's attitudes, and to persuade oneself to follow certain courses of action; reading philosophical texts for edification and renewal; taking an imaginary view from above the Earth's surface in order to promote objectivity; contemplating one's finitude in an attempt to heighten one's consciousness of what ultimately matters in life. I will claim that even some physical exercises can be seen as philosophical insofar as they enable us to live more wisely.

The third and most inclusive meaning of 'practice' is way of life. (The German word 'Lebenspraxis' brings out well this meaning of 'practice'.) The philosophical life is composed of actions and omissions as well as the thoughts, attitudes and feelings that motivate them; and it essentially involves reflecting on one's view of life in order to improve it. Philosophy in this sense is not a part-time activity like counselling or lecturing.

From the standpoint of the idea of philosophy as a way of life, private philosophical counselling has some advantages over lecturing and group discussions as forms of philosophical practice. Firstly, philosophy as a way of life must in the end be the philosophy of some individual, and counselling enables us to concentrate on a particular person with a possibly unique way of thinking in a concrete situation of life. Different people need different words and gestures.[4] Secondly, many life issues are seen as too sensitive to be discussed with a group or an audience. Thirdly, in a private conversation one does not feel that one ought to say something merely to satisfy the perceived expectations of a group. These points do not imply that other forms of philosophical practice as talking are suspect. Group discussions, for example, are good when we need multiple perspectives on some issue, and lectures give us a chance to be inspired and uplifted by the views of a single interesting person in a way that group discussions do not often allow.

Philosophical practice as exercises and as a way of life is not merely work. This is firstly related to the fact that although philosophers are entitled to ask for a financial compensation for their services just like physicians or musicians, it makes no sense to say that philosophy is always paid, or that it should always be paid. The analogy with religions is appealing: a person may be get paid for doing some work related to a religion, but a religion is clearly not merely paid time but also an outlook on life and a way of life. Secondly, the ideas of specialisation and division of labour do not apply to philosophy as a way of life:

[4] This aspect of private philosophical discussions was stressed by many ancient authors. See Nussbaum, Martha: *The therapy of desire*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1994, esp. pp. 335-341. A widely used analogy was that just like a good doctor does not prescribe medication without examining the patient, philosophical advice must be based on first-hand understanding of the counsellee's perspective. One does not send prescriptions through mail but must feel the pulse.

philosophers are philosophers in relation to everything in their lives, and they cannot delegate parts of this philosophy to others in the way that work tasks can often be divided and performed by more than one person. Having pointed out these facts, we should remind ourselves that all kinds of work, whether intellectual or manual, scientific or non-scientific, can benefit from philosophy as practices of virtue.

The notions of philosophy as exercises and as a way of life correct the verbal bias of the prevailing views of philosophy.[5] While discussions certainly belong to the philosophical way of life, large parts of philosophy are not verbal but rather actions and experiences. Moreover, the language of philosophy is not always intersubjective: silently conversing with oneself in one's mind and writing to oneself are also important forms of philosophy.

Philosophy as practice nevertheless appears to have a characteristic literary genre, namely accounts of good practices.[6] If philosophy is a set a practices, there is obviously a need to reflect on those practices, to investigate the reasons for their goodness, and to inform others of their specific nature. Philosophy as practice is essentially experimental philosophy where the goodness of the results is a crucial indicator of the goodness of the ideas that lead to them - and we want to read reports of successful experiments in order to gain from them in our own practices.[7] There is no reason why these reports could not be academic for instance in the sense that they include comparisons of contemporary practices with similar examples from the history of philosophy. Although much of contemporary academic philosophy is theory-oriented, we should not see any necessary conflict between philosophical practice and academic philosophy.

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[5] In ancient Greece and Rome many statesmen, for example, were called philosophers on account of their attitudes and actions even if they didn't spend much time discussing philosophical doctrines or writing about them. Hadot, Pierre: *What is ancient philosophy?*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2004, p. 173.

[6] This includes case studies. Many philosophers have also published videos of their counselling sessions. See for example Ran Lahav's videos at http://vimeo.com (last access 23rd April 2011).

[7] On the idea of experimental philosophy, see Raabe, Peter: *Issues in Philosophical Counseling*, Praeger Publishers, Westport, Conn., 2002, ch. 3. The history of philosophy is replete with insights that have been tested in all kinds of circumstances; but we have to be able to choose the ideas that suit our current situations. We also have to formulate them in an effective, natural way that enables us to see their contemporary relevance.

Philosophy as practices of virtue

It may perhaps be said that the motives of philosophy as practice derive from problems of life that are often accompanied by negative states of mind such as anxiety.[8] Philosophy is an attempt either to circumvent those problems, to solve them, or to accustom oneself to their insolvability. As has been seen since ancient times, this implies that philosophy must be true to its name and aim at wisdom, because wisdom is precisely the understanding one needs in order to live well". In the previous version it was "As has been seen since ancient times, this implies that philosophy must aim at wisdom, because wisdom is precisely the understanding one needs in order to live well”.[9] Stated more cautiously, wisdom increases the likelihood of a tolerable or even satisfactory life. It does not guarantee the goodness of one's life, but makes it more probable, just like observing some guidelines for good physical health increases the likelihood of one's being able to avoid diseases and infirmity.

The notion that wisdom is the understanding we need in order to live well is insufficiently concrete. I propose that the concept of virtue offers a good way of making our idea of wisdom more comprehensible.[10] If

[8] For a similar formulation, see Schmid, Wilhelm: *Mit sich selbst befreundet sein,* Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 2007, pp. 24-35. The idea that philosophy springs from a need to ease worries of all kinds dates back to antiquity. Epicurus and Epictetus, among many others, voiced versions of this view. It does not mean that philosophers have to exclude scientific questions from their minds. A philosophical (i.e. an open, disinterested, and independent) attitude towards scientific problems enables us to do better science. Similarly, this idea does not mean that philosophers should stop thinking about logic, but suggests that what we need is not necessarily a theory of logic but logic in practice, good reasoning in all kinds of circumstances.

[9] Robert Nozick writes: "Wisdom is what you need to understand in order to live well and cope with the central problems and avoid the dangers in the predicament(s) human beings find themselves in." *The Examined Life*, Touchstone Press, New York, 1989, p. 267. See also Achenbach, Gerd: *Lebenskönnerschaft*, Herder Verlag, Freiburg. 2001. Achenbach clearly sees a connection between the concept of wisdom and the idea of living well.

[10] There are of course dozens of dispositions that have been regarded as virtues by some sizable group of people. An encyclopedia-article on virtues lists the following, among many others: acceptance, altruism, assertiveness, attention, autonomy, balance, candor, caring, charity, creativity, curiosity, detachment, diligence, fairness, friendliness, hopefulness, humility, humor, independence, logic, mercy, mindfulness, non-violence, openness, optimism, patience, prudence, resilience, stability, vigilance and wit. See Wikipedia: "Virtue", available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtue (last access April 1st 2011). Different spiritual traditions emphasise different virtues. For example, Confucianism lays great stress on humanity, sincerity and justice, whereas the Three Jewels of

wisdom is composed of the dispositions or character traits we call virtues (and if foolishness is composed of vices), saying that we need wisdom in order to live well equals saying that we need virtues in order to live well.[11]

I now intend to discuss three virtues that seem to me to be of some special significance in philosophical practices, namely disinterestedness, openness, and independence. These are fairly general virtues in the sense that they have lots of constituent and consequent virtues.[12] My justification for emphasising just these three virtues is twofold. Firstly, they have been hugely influential in the history of philosophy as a history of pursuit of wisdom. Secondly, I have found them fruitful in my own philosophical practices.

Practices in the three senses of this term can be seen as philosophical insofar as they involve and foster these cardinal virtues. For instance, philosophical counselling is based on the conviction that all kinds of confusions, dangers and predicaments are opportunities for our virtues to grow and to show their force. Philosophical exercises aim at a living relationship with these virtues, and philosophy as a way of life as a whole is a long process of practising them.[13] In brief, the philosophical life is a life defined by love of such virtues. It is evident that none of us are ever completely virtuous – and it is difficult to imagine what such perfection could even mean.

Taoism are compassion, simplicity, and not wanting to put oneself ahead of everybody else. (These are not the only possible translations. Old Chinese virtue concepts are even more difficult to translate into English than, say, ancient Greek terms relating to virtues.) The concepts of way and virtue connect philosophy as a western tradition with Taoism and Confucianism.

[11] For related views in the contemporary philosophical practice movement, see Achenbach, Gerd: "Philosophical practice opens up the trace to Lebenskönnerschaft", in Herrestad, Henning, Holt, Anders, and Svare, Helge (eds.): *Philosophy in society*, Unipub Forlag, Oslo, 2002; and Cohen, Elliot: "The Metaphysics of Logic-Based Therapy", *International Journal of Philosophical Practice* 3, 1, 2005. Cohen, for example, says that temperance, authenticity, and ability to accept imperfections in ourselves and the world, are some of the cardinal virtues of philosophical practice. For a more general view of the virtues that have been associated with wisdom, see www.wisdompage.com (last access April 2rd 2011).

[12] Since these three virtues imply so many other virtues, they could even be called "cardinal". We will see, for instance, that the classical cardinal virtues of prudence (good judgement in practical affairs), justice, temperance, and courage are closely related to them.

[13] As Aristotle said, one becomes virtuous by practising virtues.

Disinterestedness

Disinterestedness first of all means impartiality, and impartiality is a disposition not to grant one's own desires automatic preference before the needs and aspirations of other human beings, animals, or even plants. Minimally such impartiality manifests as cautiousness and as a tendency to refrain from doing harm. In discussions impartiality includes a readiness to submit one's plans and views to the appraisal of others. One has to take into account the possibility of having erroneous or one-sided notions, and try to see oneself through the eyes of another person - an impartial discussion is not a negotiation or a verbal fight where one tries to make one's predefined ideas prevail without wanting to take a critical look at them. Discussion as an attempt to distance oneself from one's conceptions and to scrutinise them from the viewpoints of others can be considered a philosophical exercise.

Impartiality is closely related to objectivity, a virtue of distance that can be visualised by the aid of the age-old philosophical exercise of imagining oneself hovering above Earth's surface and seeing oneself and one's worries in a larger perspective.[14] Impartiality and objectivity are essential elements in our notion of justice, and insincerity, cruelty, greed, malice, ingratitude, treachery, thoughtlessness and manipulativeness are all forms of thinking and behaving in which a just relationship to the world is shattered. Lack of objectivity can also manifest as boundless impatience that cannot bear any delay, inconvenience, or obstruction.

Objectivity is tightly linked to a lofty virtue we call greatness of soul, which involves an awareness of the shortness of our lives, of the puniness of our physical aspect, and of the importance of overcoming all limited viewpoints.[15] It's opposites include pettiness, mawkishness, narcissism, recklessness, irascibility, stubbornness, deceitfulness, bitterness and

[14] On soul's flight and the view from above, see Hadot, Pierre: *Philosophy as a way of life*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1995, ch 9. Nowadays we could speak of "satellite perspective" or "helicopter perspective".

[15] Bertrand Russell writes that a person with greatness of soul sees "himself and life and the world as truly as our human limitations will permit", and realises "the brevity and minuteness of human life". Russell also says that a person "who has once perceived, however temporarily and however briefly, what makes greatness of soul, can no longer be happy if he allows himself to be petty, self-seeking, troubled by trivial misfortunes, dreading what fate may have in store for him." *The Conquest of Happiness,* Routledge, London, 2006, p. 159.

hubris. Developing objectivity about oneself can also enhance courage, by which we mean not giving up in situations of real or imagined danger that cause fear. Our subjective tendency to exaggerate the number and size of our dangers makes us unable to act as we should in the name of our own long-term interests and the interests of others.

Disinterestedness as impartiality and objectivity often calls for the virtue of avoiding hasty conclusions, and even suspension of judgment. For instance, we cannot easily determine whether we should see our lives (or some parts of our lives) as good or bad. This is partly because it is next to impossible to know all the facts upon which such evaluations depend. We cannot for example predict the total consequences of our past and present actions. Events that at first sight appeared like good fortune can ultimately lead to our ruin, and things that initially seem like a disaster can eventually give us strength and make us happier. Moreover, evaluations are relative in the sense that things can always get better or worse than they are: even a situation that seems hopeless is better than an even more hopeless one. It is therefore difficult to say how much we should ultimately lament or rejoice the events of our lives.

Detachment is yet another facet of disinterestedness.[16] Detachment (or non-attachment) as a virtue is a disposition to let go of evaluations and to experience the world as it is *in itself* and not as it is *for us* and our projects.[17] ('World' here refers both to the external world and the internal world of our bodies and minds - insofar as such a distinction between the inner and the outer exists.) A detached mind neither praises nor condemns, and can even be described as being in a state of indifference – although this familiar word from Stoic scriptures is bound to sound suspicious to many of us. Indifference does not here mean cold-heartedness but a condition of letting things happen as they happen without judging them. Since willing derives from evaluations, detachment can further be characterised as a state of non-willing; and a consciousness in a state of non-willing and non-choosing is unfocused, equally close to, and aware of, everything in the world (as experienced).[18]

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[16] For a classical treatise on detachment, see Meister Eckhart: *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*. Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1981, pp. 285-294.

[17] Hadot, ibid, p. 254.

[18] Detachment as non-focused awareness typically blurs the distinction between the ego and non-ego.

Detachment as non-willing also accentuates the present moment – or even a sense of timelessness - and enables the mind to free itself from many regrets of the past and cares about the future. Practicing detachment is a philosophical exercise that enhances, or even *is*, peace of mind.

There are many painful and detestable things in our external and internal lives that we cannot avoid in any way, and such ordeals require the virtue of disinterestedness in the form of acceptance.[19] Acceptance (or resignation) is a mode of detachment where one has to conquer some unwillingness.[20] It does not necessarily mean considering one's ordeal a good thing, but rather conforming to one's situation and refusing to make it worse by distorting its true nature, or by complaining about it. The ordeal demands bending one's will, and the better one is able to do this, the lighter the ordeal becomes.

Practicing acceptance is a philosophical exercise. Socrates, for example, saw his marital life with the hot-tempered Xanthippe as an ordeal, and said that it makes other comparable ordeals easier to endure.[21] Many ordeals are provided to us independently of our will, but sometimes it may be prudent to choose short-term ordeals for oneself. This is the case when our range of possible choices becomes too limited due to our reluctance to face certain kinds of anxiety-producing situations, or when we cannot enjoy peace of mind in the present because of our fear of some future misfortune. Seemingly terrible conditions of life often appear more tolerable when we familiarise ourselves with them.

Praemeditatio malorum, an ancient philosophical exercise of acceptance, means that we picture in our minds all kinds of disasters, losses, and unpleasant episodes that we may be required to undergo.[22] First of all, this exercise creates a contrast between a good present and a possible bad future, and thus makes us more grateful for the things we now have and enjoy. Secondly it trains our minds for these bad things -

[19] Some of the ordeals are accidents, and some belong to the general course of human life. Sometimes their inescapability depends on our having adopted aims that we deem too fundamental to sacrifice so as to circumvent the problematic points along the ways of our lives.

[20] One form of acceptance is mercifulness in relation to our own inescapable faults and those of others.

[21] Socrates famously quipped that if one marries, one will regret it, but if one remains unmarried, one will regret it too. Here is another unavoidable contradiction of life, at least for some of us.

[22] On this exercise, see Irvine, William: *A Guide to the Good Life. The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009.

unexpected disasters are usually more difficult to bear than ones we have braced ourselves for, just like unexpected military actions tend to cause more havoc than ones for which soldiers have prepared themselves.[23] *Praemeditatio malorum* therefore strengthens the attitude acceptance both in the present and in possible futures.

A complementing exercise of acceptance is paying attention to everything that either is or has been good in our lives without introducing a contrast to a negative future.[24] Schopenhauer remarks that one small painful spot in our bodies makes us overlook the fact that we are otherwise healthy,[25] and in the same way we sometimes have a tendency to magnify the significance of our adversities and shortcomings at the expense of those things that rightly should be a cause of pleasure and joy.

Openness

The virtue of openness can be approached by distinguishing between temporal and spatial openness. The opposite of temporal openness is mechanical repetition, and the opposite of spatial openness is enclosure. The spatial meaning is primary, because escaping repetition seems to require breaking the enclosure and letting in influences.[26]

Much of what we think, feel, and do, is repetitive; and some of these patterns may cause us problems. For example, we interpret qualitatively

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[23] Seneca for example writes to Lucilius: "Everyone faces up more bravely to a thing for which he has long prepared himself [...] Those who are unprepared, on the other hand, are panic-stricken by most insignifcant happenings. We must see to it that nothing takes us by surprise." *Letters from a Stoic*, Penguin, London, 1969, p. 198. Getting our clue from the military analogies and examples often used by Seneca, we could see life as a training camp that constantly tests our endurance and makes us readier for further ordeals.

[24] The Epicureans favoured this exercise. Epicurus advises us to recall our past pleasures and think of our present ones. He also says that unless we have unnatural and unnecessary desires, it is likely that our pleasures will continue. See Hadot, ibid., p. 88.

[25] *Counsels and maxims*, Prometheus Books, Amherst, NY, p. 7

[26] It is a conceptual truth that spatial openness requires the distinction between the inside and the outside, just like temporal openness requires the distinction between the past and the future. If there are experiences where these forms of experience cease to apply (and I do not doubt that there are such experiences), openness is not possible. Saying that "you are in everything there is, and everything is in you", as Ran Lahav does, comes close to denying the relevance of the concept of openness. See "What Lu told me", at http://www.trans-sophia.net (last access May 6th 2011). It also seems to deny the relevance of the very distinction between the ego and non-ego.

new phenomena through the lens of our old conceptions and thus get them wrong. Repetition can lead to boredom, and depression is often a result of our repeatedly returning to painful thoughts and memories. Stubbornly clinging to one's original hopes and plans in circumstances that will not allow their fulfillment will lead to lamentation and despair. If the desires that connect our minds to the world are unchanging and inflexible, they will drag us down when the world suddenly starts moving in an unexpected direction.

Since repetitions express certain ways of understanding ourselves and the world, or a particular view of life, we occasionally need novel words and ideas that enrich our understanding and that may have the power to transform our emotions and our entire manner of existence – to turn us into something that we were not before. The course of our thoughts and feelings can naturally prove resistant to change, and in that case there may be no alternative to adopting a resigned, benign stance towards our present selves. Philosophy either alters our harmful patterns or lets us come to better terms with them.[27]

Openness is a state of receptivity in which mental mechanisms cease to operate at least momentarily.[28] Often the disposition of receptivity can be described as one of waiting, welcoming, inspiration and responsiveness. Wondering (or marvelling) is an attitude of openness in

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[27] Ran Lahav has a fairly pessimistic view of the powers of philosophy to affect our repetitions: "The forces that maintain our patterns and conceptions are extremely powerful, and mere philosophical understanding cannot usually overcome them." See http://www.trans-sophia.net, *Course on philosophical practice and trans-sophia* (last access May 6th 2011). Such an estimation may or may not be warranted, but as the Stoics of all times have pointed out, philosophy also shows in how we relate to things that are not in our control.

[28] Lahav, Ran: "Philosophical practice as contemplative philo-sophia", in *Practical Philosophy*, 8, 1, 2006, and "Philosophical practice: Have we gone far enough?", in *Practical Philosophy*, 9, 2, 2008. See also *Course on philosophical practice and trans-sophia*, where Lahav writes: "Our task, then, is to open in ourselves a small space that is empty of ourselves – empty of our usual patterns and conceptions, free from our normal attitudes and ego." "We do not criticize or analyze, we do not worry about correct or incorrect, we simply open ourselves for new understandings." Lahav tends to regard openness and the resulting enrichment of understanding as the sole defining feature of wisdom: "As human beings we have definite psychological and cultural structures. But while we live our normal life, we can also maintain an openness to beyond these structures. This state of mind is Sophia - wisdom. It is the state of mind that is open to the many fountains of understanding, of plenitude, of life." "A wise person is not limited to his self-centered concerns, but is in touch with a greater reality, with wider horizons of human existence." I think that there is a need for other virtues as well: wisdom is not exhausted by openness.

which one asks questions as well as encounters perplexities and causes of astonishment. In the enquiring mode of openness the mind actively seeks to be exposed to facts and ideas that can change it.

As to the the spatial meaning of openness, one can first of all be open to the external world that includes everything from the things, texts and people in one's vicinity to the outer space beyond the Earth's atmosphere. External openness means receptivity of the understanding to the transformative influences of the five senses that connect it to the surrounding world. Such openness may seem simple and easy, but in reality it offers endless challenges because of the mind's distractions and past-driven preoccupations. The opposite of external openness is self-centeredness. Self-centeredness is a vice not only because it frequently occasions displeasure in others and makes us less useful than we would otherwise be, but also because it ensnares us in our own problems and often makes them worse than they would be without constant attention. Sometimes problems of life are not so much solved as moved aside when we start concerning ourselves with something else.[29]

Openness to the senses can develop into curiosity and a search for knowledge. Even if philosophy is not a science in itself, interest in science belongs to philosophy, because knowledge may enable us to bypass all kinds of dangers and to pursue worthy ends more efficiently.[30] For example, knowledge of ecological threats and of possible ways of avoiding them can be considered a part of philosophy in our time. Much of what we call good judgment is simply useful knowledge - or often more precisely know-how - that one gains through being open to the world.[31] While a large part of the knowledge required by good judgment

[29] Leibniz for instance recommended gardening, research and collecting curiosities as remedies for painful passions. See Roinila, Markku: *Leibniz on Rational Decision-Making*, at http://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/4287/leibnizo.pdf?sequence=2, p. 223 (last access April 16th 2011). Rousseau embraced botany as a cure for his sense of having been rejected.

[30] See Maxwell, Nicholas: "Can Humanity Learn to Become Civilized? The Crisis of Science without Civilization", *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 17, 2000; and *From Knowledge to Wisdom: A revolution for science and the humanities*, London, Pentire Press, 2007. See also http://www.nick-maxwell.demon.co.uk (last access 2nd April 2011).

[31] The importance of worldly knowledge for good judgment in practical affairs has been recognised in philosophy at least since Aristotle. Hursthouse, Rosalind: "Practical wisdom: a mundane account", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 106, 1, 2007. Available at http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9264.2006.00149.x/pdf (last access June 3rd 2011).

is non-scientific, some of it may be modern technological knowledge that has been arrived at through scientific procedures.[32]

The second spatial direction of openness is inward, towards our own minds and bodies. Our minds contain aspects and layers that do not belong to what we can call our official, or mainstream, self - the cluster of thoughts, attitudes and feelings that we have grown accustomed to include in ourselves. Internal openness is receptivity to images, conceptions and emotions that have been excluded from this privileged circle of the ego. For example, it often appears as if our dreams brought us messages from the ignored or hidden parts of our minds.[33] Attuning ourselves to these signals might enlarge our self-conception and thus enable us to recognise our own nature more thoroughly.

Insofar as we identify ourselves with some specific part of our body (and in particular our head), internal openness also signifies receptivity to internal bodily sensations. Proprioception is an example of an area of human experience that one can become closed to. Feeling our stomachs and breathing is similarly a form of internal receptivity that may give us something new to understand.

Independence

Autarchy, or independence, is a crucial virtue.[34] I will here divide this virtue into independence of thought, independence of aims, and independence of emotions.[35]

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[32] See Lombardo, Thomas: "Creativity, wisdom, and our evolutionary future", at http://www.wisdompage.com/Lombardo--CreativityWisdomEvolFuture.pdf (last access June 2nd 2011).

[33] On dream interpretation as a part of philosophical practice, see Raabe, Peter: "Philosophical counseling and the interpretation of dreams", *International Journal of Philosophical Practice* 1, 3, 2002. The idea that interpreting dreams is a part of philosophy derives from Plato, Zeno of Citium, and other ancient philosophers. See Hadot, *What is ancient philosophy?*, p. 199.

[34] Hadot has shown that autarchy was a key ideal across the ancient philosophical scene from Epicureanism to Cynicism, Stoicism and Skepticism. *What is ancient philosophy?*, ch. 9, see esp. p. 221. Autarchy can also be defined as self-sufficiency.

[35] These are dimensions of mental or spiritual independence as opposed to material independence. The latter can be described by the phrase "of independent means", and there are two main forms of such independence. First of all, one can practice hunting, gathering, small-scale agriculture etc. in an effort to produce everything one needs by oneself. Another form of material independence is

Independence of thought means thinking according to one's own nature and enriching the ideas one already has. The stream of one's thoughts can be diverted from its true course, just like innumerable cultures have been destroyed by adopting too many foreign ways. Independence of thought is not stubbornness, but it is still an antidote to excessive openness: we need to be ourselves, not playgrounds for external influences. The vice that contrasts to independence of thought is suggestibility.

Firstly, a critical attitude is essential for independence of thought. Philosophers think for themselves and enquire after reasons of belief instead of simply believing whatever it is that someone asks them to believe. Critical thinking sculpts our minds so that we are finally left with only those ideas that we can truthfully recognise as our own. Another way to strengthen independent thinking is solitude, perhaps together with disconnection from communications media. Being alone creates a silent space where we are left free to think the kinds of thoughts that express our own nature, and, if necessary, to distinguish them from the thoughts of other individuals and the supposed thoughts of anonymous multitudes. Our ownmost thoughts partly define who we are, and there is no reason to neglect and lose ourselves under the - often imaginary - pressure of others.[36]

An independent person seeks to adopt aims that express her inner nature. Although she does not support social or political activities and currents without weighing them against her own ideals, we should not confuse her with a principled rebel who wants to be different from others and assert her individuality.[37] An independently aim-setting person wants to be solely responsible for the fulfillment of her aims whenever possible, and this implies that if she participates in a collective endeavor where her

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possessing wealth. If neither of these is possible, one has to sell one's labour either to customers or to employers.

[36] Rousseau's *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (Penguin Books, London, 2004) is a classic exposition of the importance of solitude for philosophers. Rousseau writes (p. 35): "These hours of solitude and meditation are the only ones in the day when I am completely myself and my own master, with nothing to distract or hinder me, the only ones when I can truly say that I am what nature meant me to be." An excellent recent account of the effects of solitude to one's way of thinking is Kull, Robert: *Solitude. Seeking wisdom in extremes*. New World Library, Novato, CA, 2008.

[37] Ernst Jünger's description of an anarch exemplifies the distinction between independence and being a rebel. *Eumeswil*, Marsilio Publishers, New York, NY, 2004.

own input is not decisive to the outcome, she evaluates her own performance on the basis of her motives rather than end-results. The opposite of independence of aims is heteronomy.

Independence of aims is benefited by meditating on one's life from the perspective of the last moment, the end of that world of which one has any knowledge. There should not be any reason to regret the way one lived and sigh: "Why did I not pursue goals I found worthwhile, why did I waste my time on inessential things and denied myself the joys of self-realisation?" On the one hand, meditation on death stresses the importance of each particular moment (our time is limited, and any moment could be the last), and on the other hand it creates a perspective on one's life as a whole in which all individual activities should find their considered places.

Self-knowledge as a virtue is necessitated by independence of aims: one cannot know where to go unless one knows who one is and where one stands. Philosophical practice as counselling has been described as "world-view interpretation" and "critical examination of life-directing conceptions",[38] and since our views (or conceptions) certainly belong to our selves, these characterisations are quite understandable from the standpoint of self-knowledge. Conceptual investigations can be a necessary part of such self-examinations, because we do not always know what the content, or meaning, of our views is. However, in order to avoid too cognition-centered views of self-knowledge in which the self is defined solely in terms of concepts and conceptions, we must recall that this virtue also concerns our bodies and emotions.

Writing to oneself is a philosophical exercise that can often be seen as an attempt to clarify one's understanding of one's thoughts and feelings. Monological philosophical writing may also mould one's motivations for action.[39] The difference between writing to oneself and writing to others is not always sharp, because it is possible to publish

[38] Lahav, Ran: "A conceptual framework for philosophical counseling: worldview interpretation"; Schefczyk, Michael: "Philosophical Counseling as a Critical Examination of Life-Directing Conceptions". Both in Lahav, Ran and Tillmanns, Maria (eds.): *Essays on Philosophical Counselling*, University Press of America, Lanham, MD, 1995. These descriptions of philosophical practice apply equally well to solitary thinking: we need to examine our thoughts by ourselves.

[39] Marcus Aurelius may be the most well-known example of such writers. See Hadot, Pierre: *Philosophy as a way of life,* ch. 6.

writings that one initially or primarily intended for self-reflection and self-formation, and conversely writing to some public often promotes one's own self-understanding and self-renewal.[40]

Independence of emotions means avoiding excessive worldly ties of craving and aversion. The more strongly one is bound to the vagaries of fortune, the more helpless one feels; and the more one thinks that one will manage in all kinds of circumstances, the more peaceful one's mind is.[41] Immoderately strong desires for wealth, power, fame, recognition or pleasure are forms of uneasiness and distress in themselves, and additionally they tend to cause us to lose the purity of our hearts and consciences.[42] Feelings like envy, jealousy, resentment and despair are similarly symptoms of a strong conative attachment to definite states of affairs. Independent emotions, by contrast, are caused by our own actions, can be fulfilled without special favours of the world, and lead us towards sources of harmless joy. Of course we all need many worldly things to survive and still more to live comfortably, but there clearly are degrees of bondage and freedom, of addiction and self-mastery, of turbulence and tranquility. For instance, a passion for music or research is much more independent in its terms of fulfillment than a passion for the top position in a race for possessions. It does not leave one at the mercy of the world.

Many of the philosophical practices that either prevent or combat dependent emotions derive from the virtues of disinterestedness and openness. Practices of detachment and impartiality are good medicine, as are opening oneself to the world and immersing oneself in some hobby or serious undertaking. Practices of solitude, critical thinking and independent aim-setting will amplify the effects of these exercises. The purpose of all of them is to consolidate temperate habits that gradually lessen the need for conscious effort.

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[40] Seneca says in one of his letters to Lucilius: "So listen to me as if I were speaking to myself." Ibid., p. 73.

[41] The sage as depicted by ancient philosophers did not typically have intensive and varied desires. When strolling in the nearness of shops, Socrates said: "How many things I do not need!" Epicureanism - with its distinction between the natural and the unnatural desires - is a life-style of simplicity. The Cynic spirit of ascetism is an extreme example of autarchy.

[42] This is related to yet another philosophical exercise, namely examination of one's conscience. There should be no reason to hide our motives and actions from anyone. On this exercise, see Hadot, Pierre: *What is ancient philosophy?*, pp. 198-202.

Conclusion: virtues in ways of life, in exercises, in counselling

Firstly, philosophical practice is a life of virtues. Whereas forward-looking virtues like good judgment, courage, and autonomous thinking enable us to circumvent many potential sources of confusion, irritation, anger, resentment and depression, backward-looking virtues like mercifulness with respect to our own imperfections and those of others make it more likely that we are able to recover from traumatic experiences - as in the practice of medicine, there are both preventive and healing philosophical practices.[43] Virtues also affect our relationship to the present moment. For instance, detachment, sense of relativity, flexibility, and mental independence increase our endurance and resilience while the disasters are upon us.

The philosophical way of life undeniably confers therapeutic benefits, but at the same time the idea of philosophy as a comprehensive way of life breaks down the analogy between philosophy and therapy, because it is senseless to say that one's entire life is characterised by therapy. Therapy is a part-time activity, something one enters and leaves; philosophy is a whole-time preoccupation and an existential attitude. Moreover, the focus of modern psychotherapies has usually been on alleviating suffering and enhancing well-being. While the philosophical life certainly involves an effort to feel at least tolerably good about oneself and one's world, it also includes cognitive and moral virtues that do not necessarily enhance one's emotional well-being. The ability to think clearly and truthfully is an aspect of philosophy, and so is the readiness to accept the fact that we are accountable to a wider community of beings. Perhaps one could speak of a philosophical, virtue-related concept of health that is more inclusive than the one used in psychotherapies.[44]

[43] According to an ancient analogy philosophy takes care of our souls while medicine takes care of our bodies. Seneca for instance writes that "I am committed to writing some helpful recommendations, which might be compared to the formulae of successful medications." Ibid, p. 45. On the analogy between philosophy and medicine in ancient Greece and Rome, see Nussbaum, ibid.

[44] Philosophers do not typically employ modern psychological classifications of mental disorders (or diseases), and neither do they use psychological theories to explain those disorders, or psychological techniques to treat them. Vices can be called diseases of mind, but this does not imply that one should use some scientific procedure to classify, explain, or cure them.

Secondly, philosophical practice means exercising virtues. Exercises like writing to oneself, looking at oneself from above, detached awareness of everything that happens, *praemeditatio malorum*, examining one's conscience, thinking of one's life from the point of view of the last limit, opening one's self to the senses - these are ways to emphasise virtues, to make them effective and alive. The expression "exercising virtues" can also refer to a life where virtues have a central place, and in a way our lives are long processes of philosophical exercise.

The distinction between philosophical and physical exercises is not always sharp, and many physical exercises such as running and swimming can be seen as philosophical.[45] (Mental philosophical exercises can conversely have positive physical aspects and effects.) Firstly, physical exercises make our bodies stronger, more flexible, and more resistant to afflictions, and this accords with prudence and other virtues that relate to our present and long-term well-being. Secondly, physical exercises refresh and purify our minds. This prepares us for greater independence and openness as well as enables us to take a calmer, more detached view of our lives.[46]

Finally, as to the meaning of 'practice' as discussion: philosophical counsellors survey and foster their counsellees' powers of virtue - their objectivity, mercifulness, flexibility, openness to the world and new ideas, self-understanding, authentic thinking and independent goal-setting, ability to disengage from slavish dependencies, etc.[47] The point of counselling is to enable the counsellee's inner goodness to grow at the expense of her destructive tendencies in the specific problematic situation that she finds herself in: the situation should be recognised as it is and

[45] Socrates is reported to have taken his physical health seriously, Plato was a wrestler, and numerous later philosophers including Seneca and Schopenhauer have recommended physical exercise. Pierre Hadot remarks that "the notion of philosophical exercises has its roots in the ideal of athleticism and in the habitual practice of physical culture typical of the gymnasia." Ibid, p. 189. He also writes that "just as, by dint of repeated physical exercises, athletes give new form and strength to their bodies, so the philosopher develops his strength of soul, modifies his inner climate, transforms his vision of the world, and, finally, his entire being." *Philosophy as a way of life*, p. 102.

[46] Many philosophical counsellors operate outdoors instead of indoor spaces typical of psychotherapy. Some of these outdoor sessions involve movement, mainly walking. Walking and philosophy have a long common history dating back to ancient Greece.

[47] Tukiainen, Arto: "Philosophical counselling as a process of fostering wisdom in the form of virtues", *Practical Philosophy* 10, 1, 2010.

taken as an opportunity for virtues to develop and to rise to the challenge. While furthering the counsellee's self-knowledge can be regarded as an almost universally agreed-upon minimum aim of counselling among philosophers, we should see it as a mere example from a wide range of intellectual and practical virtues that counselling encourages. The virtues that the counsellee needs may be hidden from her mainstream thinking, and as the concept of fostering implies, philosophers ought to help their counsellees to want to open their minds and hearts to these ignored but nascent virtues. Of course, the purpose is usually not so much to talk about the required virtues *in abstracto* - often it is not even necessary to have any specific names for them - but rather to examine how they could help the counsellee forward on her way of life.

Philosophical counselling promotes mental health and can be called therapeutic to the extent that it succeeds in unearthing and strengthening virtues; but referring to philosophical counselling as *a* therapy (among others) would be a mistake, because philosophical discussions do not have a clearly delineated method or technique, and neither are they backed by a distinct theory that could be marketed and taught to students. The freedom and open-mindedness of philosophical counselling is an asset that we should not allow to get lost under any circumstances.

Philosophical counselling is an invitation to enter the path towards philosophical practice as exercises and as an entire way of life. At the same time counselling already is - or should be - an exercise of virtues like impartiality and critical thinking.

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