

The subject of my PhD dissertation is philosophical counseling. It is to be understood as a kind of social practice in which philosophical theories and tools are used to help individuals in dealing with their everyday problems. If we take a look at the very long history of philosophy, the history of philosophical counseling seems to be less than a minute. On the other hand, from its beginning philosophy was seen not only as a theoretical discipline, but also as a way of life. But although the idea of living philosophically is ancient, philosophical counseling is relatively new. It was created in 1981 by Gerd Achenbach, who set up the first philosophical practice in Germany. It was the first step made to let philosophy go out from the university walls and to offer it to people who ask such questions as "why", "what for" and "what is the meaning of it". Some people ask these questions just in critical moments, others look for the answer all their lives. Very quickly philosophical counseling has become popular in Western Europe and in the United States. Now it is practiced all around the world, and there are thousands of philosophical counselors, who organize courses, international conferences, write articles and books, have their own journals and associations. Philosophical counseling is said to be an alternative to psychotherapy and psychological counseling and philosophical counselors believe that it can be also much more effective in many cases because philosophy is the only discipline that answers the most difficult questions of life, that offers theories and tools unavailable in any other practice.

My dissertation aims at reconstructing philosophical notions and assumptions that underlie philosophical counseling. I want to answer the question: "What is philosophical in philosophical counseling?". The reconstruction consists of two stages. First I find philosophical concepts and ideas that constitute the basis of the practice of philosophical counseling. This stage is based on the analysis of the literature on philosophical counseling. The second stage is to find some sources of those ideas in the history of philosophy. For it is obvious that those ideas have not been created in the last 40 years by philosophical counselors and they have been debated for centuries during philosophical discussions aimed at answering the most difficult questions that concern every human being.

My dissertation consists of four chapters. Chapter I sketches a theoretical and historical background of philosophical counseling in order to show what philosophical counseling is: its origin and development, forms of institutionalization, the subject and aims of philosophical counseling, various definitions of that practice; to conclude the chapter I indicate similarities and differences between philosophical counseling and other forms of philosophical practice, such as philosophical cafes or philosophical psychotherapy. Chapter II is to analyze the concepts of happiness, wisdom, morality, suffering and the meaning of life as they are understood in philosophical counseling. This task is important for two reasons: first, it can be shown that any

problem with which a client comes to a philosophical counselor can be grasped by means of one of these categories; secondly, these categories are used by counselors themselves to formulate concrete aims of sessions of philosophical counseling. It is also obvious that those issues from its beginning constitute philosophy's key topics. Chapter III aims at reconstructing the vision of human nature assumed in philosophical counseling. It is done by the analysis of the following issues: the relationship between reason and passions, free will and autonomy, human individuality and uniqueness, the spiritual dimension of human being and social aspects of human life. Those issues are crucial for grasping how philosophical counseling understands human person, and that understanding determines also the way of working with a client and ethical standards for the practice. Chapter IV develops my own criticism, doubts and questions that are consequences of previous analysis. I first consider the place of philosophical counseling among other forms of helping people such as psychology, psychiatry and psychotherapy, as these forms are widely criticized by philosophical counselors. The question then arises: is philosophical counseling a real alternative for those other forms? maybe it is a new name for the old practices like in psychology and just slightly changed and enriched by philosophical theories to give hope to those who are disappointed with their experiences with psychologists, psychiatrists and psychotherapists? I show also the isolationist attitude of counselors, who ignore a large part of the history of philosophy, and do not benefit from achievements of other disciplines. I also consider the relationship between philosophical counseling and academic philosophy, pointing out that it is more art than applied philosophy. I cast doubts whether in the form it has now philosophical counseling is able to answer real human need, especially there are no way to measure the effectiveness of philosophical counseling. The chapter ends with an analysis of role's of philosophy in individual and social life as seen in philosophical counseling.

My analysis allows me to draw a few general conclusions. First, the main notions of philosophical counseling are imprecise and unclear. It seems that philosophical counseling does not have any conceptions of happiness, wisdom, morality, rationality, suffering etc. but it uses rather an eclectic collection of theses extracted from various philosophical traditions, common sense, and even personal experience of an individual counselor. Secondly, philosophical counseling accepts the idea of human being as a rational, free, autonomous, unique being with many potentialities and with a spiritual dimension. Thus, it seems to accept the view of human being as person. Yet, it does not provide any justification for that view, nor any roots in a consistent philosophical tradition. Theses about human being seem to play a role of motivation for a client's self-development rather than a foundation for practice. Third, in philosophical counseling the question of the truth of philosophical theses does not arise. The main criterion for employing a thesis during a counseling session is its usefulness for developing a satisfactory solution to a client's problem. So, philosophy seems to be

treated as a “supermarket with ideas”. This approach creates not only epistemic but also ethical problems for counselors. The above conclusions, together with the lexical understanding of the term “counseling”, cast doubts on the very name: philosophical counseling is not very much philosophical and not really counseling. As it is now, it has a very low methodological awareness and practically there are no publications dealing directly with the problems I indicated. Yet, I do not reject philosophical counseling as a potentially good form of helping people with their life problems. I hope that my work will start a discussion which would result in developing philosophical counseling to make it a good option for those who search for answers to vital questions.