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**1) The competence of philosophical counselors (lecture)**

**2) The Socratic attitude in philosophical counseling (workshop)**

**1) The competence of philosophical counselors (lecture)**

Presentation of a paper: 45 minutes

### Summary

I propose a presentation of a paper in which I will discuss my research into the competence of philosophical counselors, e.g. the ability to perform their work well. I performed a literature study and conducted a series of open interviews with philosophical counselors and opinion leaders in philosophical practice in The Netherlands and Flanders. I could distinguish three major competences (questioning, interpreting and lifestyle) specific for philosophical counseling and encountered a set of non specific competences for counseling in general (discussion techniques, psychology, management). My results will give you some insight into the way philosophical counseling developed in The Netherlands. This development could be described and analyzed by the paradigm theory of Thomas Kuhn. The results of my research can be used for developing trainings and post graduate education programs for philosophical counseling.

### Abstract

The philosophical practice is an emerging paradigm in counseling. It originated in the late 1970-s from a critic on academical philosophy and psychotherapy. With a social utility in mind philosophers started counseling aimed at individuals, groups and organizations. The practices of Achenbach, Marinoff, Schuster and Brenifier are, although very different in nature, considered important examples. In due course the sociological characteristics of a paradigm emerged, such as professional organizations, journals, textbooks, meetings and

trainings. For example, in The Netherlands, philosophical counselors founded the Dutch Association for Philosophical Practice in 1989. The philosophical practice can be called a *new* paradigm too, because of the ongoing fundamental discussion. There still is no consensus on nature or method of philosophical practice. This hinders education and training. In the Netherlands, there is no officially approved educational program for philosophical practice up to date. For developing such a program, we need to know which competences underlie philosophical practice in order to define education in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude.

What competence do we need for philosophical counseling? This question was the impetus for my research. I conducted a literature study and a series of open interviews with philosophical counselors and opinion leaders of philosophical practice in The Netherlands. There appeared to be three basic competences for philosophical practice: (i) the art of questioning, (ii) the art of interpreting and (iii) the art of being/life style. These competences are sets of mutually related skills used by a counselor during a dialogue with a client, group or organization. Questioning, interpreting or discussing life style is something counselors *do* when meeting guests or clients. These actions are grounded in philosophy and thereby distinguish philosophical practice from other activities such as psychotherapy or coaching. The philosophical questioning requires a Socratic attitude of “not-knowing”, interpreting is grounded in the anglo-saxon tradition of ordinary language philosophy or in the continental tradition of hermeneutics, and the art of being requires a broad knowledge of philosophical biographies and ideas. These competences can be called *arts* as they result from mastering a technique already acquired during the academical study of philosophy. However applying them to human beings in stead of texts requires additional training in psychology, discussion techniques or management of a practice. Different styles of philosophical practice emerge by more or less accentuating the different basic competences, such as the Socratic style by accent on questioning, the interpretative style by accent on revealing philosophical content of the guest’s thoughts, and the more therapeutic style by accent on rational analysis of the client’s problems or life style. The basic competences become a distinguishing feature of a philosophical practice when used in a reflexive way, e.g. a conscious application of a sequence of questioning, answer, interpretation, understanding (way of being), questioning the understanding, etc... The results of this research can be used for developing educational programs or trainings of philosophical counselors. Such trainings appear to differ from the usual training programs. They are not only a functional program resulting in a degree to be

used for differentiating oneself from others, but they interfere with the existence and life of the student. Training in philosophical practice is a way of life.

## 2) The Socratic attitude in philosophical counseling

Workshop: 90 minutes, 12 participants, language: English

Socrates is an important example for philosophical counseling. His way of questioning, his dialogue with the inhabitants of Athens, and his way of life inspire or even guide our work with guests or clients in philosophical practice. As an example, Socrates exemplifies an attitude, “The Socratic attitude”, which can distinguish philosophical practice from therapy or from other forms of counseling. Socrates didn’t leave us any explicit thoughts on this attitude himself. It has to be reconstructed from the works of Plato. In this reconstruction lies a valuable experience for philosophical counselors. The goal of this workshop is to facilitate this in order to train philosophical counselors.

In this workshop we explore different aspects of the Socratic attitude as they emerge from the works of Plato. We will proceed as follows:

- (i) Six different text fragments from the works of Plato are handed out. Two by two participants study one of the text fragments;
- (ii) They try to find the *question* which suits the text fragment best. No interpretation is allowed (yet), only questioning. The couples have to brainstorm, come up with questions and reach consensus on the *best* question;
- (iii) The couples present their solution to the group;
- (iv) The group questions the couple as much as possible. *Why* do they think the question they put forward, suits the text fragment best? The couple defends their opinion against the group;
- (v) After each couple has presented their solution to the group, we compare the different solutions and explore the corresponding aspect of the Socratic attitude;
- (vi) We evaluate the result.

An attitude is a set of interacting beliefs and desires, underlying our thoughts and actions. Each text fragment used in this workshop represents a different aspect of the Socratic attitude. Participants learn about these different aspects of the Socratic attitude in a Socratic way, e.g. by practicing the art of questioning. Thus, they *experience* the Socratic attitude. They also experience the Socratic way of life, e.g. what it means to question people.

By presenting it on this meeting, I hope to develop the workshop further as a tool for training philosophical counselors in the Socratic attitude. I want to evaluate the selected text fragments and the way we proceed with the participants.

**About the author:**

Peter Harteloh (1960) is a philosopher. He wrote a PhD thesis on quality management (2000) in which he explored the philosophical origins of the quality concept and the principles of quality management. He worked as a quality manager in health care organizations and taught quality management and ethics at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. He is currently working as a philosophical counselor in the city of Rotterdam, The Netherlands. He is secretary of the Dutch Association of Philosophical Practice (VFP)/member of the IGPP.