

Beyond method, Anders Lindseth style: The quest to open up philosophical space in the consulting room

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Abstract

The “beyond method” approach is pivotal to the Norwegian philosopher Anders Lindseth, who pioneered philosophical counseling in Norway, and has been a mentor to other counselors. Being himself influenced by Gerd Achenbach, Lindseth has a distaste for method and therapy, advocating instead the principle of “touched not-knowing.” During a seminar in Oslo last year Lindseth discussed these concepts with students of philosophical counseling, and had a demonstration session to be assessed. Based on the seminary, this article presents the Lindseth position, and looks critically into the notion of “beyond method.” Instead of eschewing method altogether, the author claims that philosophical counselors might employ method in a limited sense without succumbing to “therapy” in the professional, pejorative sense of the word.

Keywords: *The beyond method approach, the mode of touched not-knowing, creating a “free space” for thinking, focusing on the guest’s vulnerability, the metaphor of a creek of sighs, the “structive” working mode, the disdain for method and therapy*

Introduction

The philosopher and professor Anders Lindseth is the pioneer of philosophical counseling in Norway, starting up his practice in Tromsø, the northernmost University City in the world, in 1988. Lindseth developed his way of counseling under the influence of Gerd Achenbach, the German philosophy professor and European pioneer of the “philosophical practice” movement. Being a champion of the “beyond method” approach to philosophical counseling, propagated by Achenbach, Lindseth has in turn influenced the next generation of Norwegian philosophical counselors, among whom the Oslo school of philosophical counseling appeared in the late 1990s.¹

Lindseth does not live in Oslo, but holds a professorial post at the University College in Bodø. He has thus become somewhat distant to the members of the Oslo school and its third generation students, this author being one of them. Having been a mentor to the second generation of practitioners, Lindseth’s considerable influence has in turn been conveyed to the third generation students by these practitioners, and not by himself, which has had the result of making the third generation students sometimes believe that they knew more about the “Lindseth position” than they actually did. What, for instance, did his renowned notions of beyond method and “the principle of touched not-knowing” amount to, apart from what was briefly described by the second generation of practitioners? Another

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obstacle to finding out more about this is that Lindseth mostly writes his articles in German, a language that few Norwegians read.²

It was with great excitement, then, that a group of third generation students finally made contact with the much-in-demand professor from the high north, and talked him into having a weekend seminar in Oslo in February 2005. Now we grandchildren of philosophical counseling would at last meet our grandfather,³ and find out a thing or two about the genealogy.

For two full days, Lindseth talked about his outlook on philosophical counseling, on both practical and theoretical levels. He also agreed to perform demonstration sessions with students as his guests, and with the rest of the attendees as bystanders, thus providing an opportunity to see how his principles were applied in practice. These sessions were then commented upon and discussed.

This essay intends to sum up the Lindseth position, based on his February 2005 seminar. Lindseth has reviewed and reworked the various drafts of this paper, and this one meets with his approval. Obviously he is not very keen to being pinned down on paper, as this may fix him into a “position” that he finds too rigid to do justice to his practice. At the same time he understands this author's intention to come to grips with what his position (or rather, his practical and theoretical stance) amounts to.

What has also become obvious is that the practical and theoretical stance of this author might differ from that of Lindseth's on some points. Thus, at the end of this paper, difficulties with this position are discussed, especially concerning the notion of method. What the beyond method approach of Lindseth and Achenbach amounts to, and to what extent this approach goes against other practitioner's attempts to develop some methodologically based stances and tools of the trade, is a core issue to be discussed.

Creating a “free space” for thinking

Right from the start of the seminar, Lindseth emphasized that to create, or to open up, the philosophical space in a consultation is a primary concern in his practice. Such a philosophical space is supposed to be a free space where thoughts can appear in a spontaneous way, and be elaborated on, without restrictions regarding what can or cannot be said, and in which ways things can be expressed.

The guest⁴ is granted unrestricted freedom of speech. The counselor must subject himself to some basic concerns in order to create the all-important philosophical space where real philosophizing, which means a close-to-life kind of philosophizing quite different from pure academic philosophizing removed from actual life, can happen. To be able to create this free space for thinking, which Lindseth also labels “a luxury” viewed against the ordinary situations in life where people do not allow for any kind of “free space” and are probably unaware of such a possibility, is what the aspiring philosophical counselor must above all strive to achieve.

For a philosophical counselor it may initially be difficult to know what the guest is talking about if she allows herself to philosophize freely about personal matters. Usually that is because the guest is not likely to know right away what she is thinking. She may put forward some fragments of thought, or maybe some odd-sounding convictions in need of discussion and clarification. For the philosophical counselor, this is legitimate and is in fact to be expected. In order to get the conversation off the ground, he then has to *see* the guest in a way that makes her recognize that she really *is* seen, in a way that is both sympathetic and caring.

These two demands might be conceived of as over-protective, and with a strong ethical bias. But Lindseth is not moralizing while stating this. He is bringing into focus a basic, pre-ethical level of human existence, which is to be grasped phenomenologically. We must realize, such basic conditions of human relations are *given*, and not morally imposed. As the celebrated Danish theologian and philosopher K. E. Løgstrup has stated,⁵ we hold a part of the other person's life in our hand just by relating to him or her, whether we like it or not. This is a fact, and not something we can choose to do or not to do, even if we should withdraw completely from other people.

Most people acknowledge that they relate to others in ways that differ, some relationships being more important than others. At any moment, the part of the other person's life we hold in our hand may be just a tiny part, as when we choose to give a fellow passenger on a crowded bus a glancing smile instead of a glare. It can be said that the smile will affect him in way that is different than if we had stared angrily, even if this is likely to be of minor importance to him (yet this we cannot know). However, there will be instances when the part of another's life that we hold in our hand matters greatly to the other, and may even be of such a paramount importance that the success or failure of their life depends on it.

Whether a philosophical counselor holds a bigger or lesser part of the guest's life in his hand is not possible to say, at least not in the beginning of the first consultation. But, as Lindseth explained, there is always *something* at stake within the guest's expression, and the counselor's sensing this something, even before he has a chance to get an idea of what it is, will in almost every case evoke the feeling of sympathy. It happens spontaneously when this mode of awareness is sought after, as the guest's vulnerability is perceived as a fact which cannot be hidden, not even if the guest struggles to maintain control over her speech and body language. Then she is even less in control, paradoxical as it may seem.

In order to create the free space in the counselor's office, where the guest can express her thoughts and concerns, the counselor must possess an attentiveness and a willingness to show a caring interest that amounts to a *recognition* of the guest: both of her presence and of the importance of what she tries to convey. To recognize the guest in such a way is, as Lindseth sees it, nothing less than a precondition for making the free space appear, and only then can philosophical consultation be an exciting enterprise.

A creek of sighs

Listening attentively to what the guest says is to *show* her that you listen, in terms of body language as well as remarks. The physical, bodily aspect is not to be ignored, Lindseth points out, as philosophical counseling can only thrive when thoughts become concrete and embodied in the guest by way of her manner of speech, tone of voice, and body language. The same thing goes for the counselor, and it is to a large extent by way of his concrete, bodily expressions that he conveys the attentive and accepting attitude which is a precondition for making close-to-life philosophizing happen.

To be concrete on this point, Lindseth tells about a female guest of his who told him a story of what she had experienced during some difficult years in her life. Even though the story dealt with quite disturbing and sad events, Lindseth noticed that she told it in a hasty, distant manner. The discrepancy between content and mode of presentation was so explicit that Lindseth found it appropriate to point this out. "I think there is more in your story than you make it seem to contain," he remarked. She then became alarmed, and asked if he had discovered something hidden. "I did not mean that," he answered, "only that there was quite a lot in your story that feels weighty, and heavy to relate to." That evening (she told

him at her next visit), she had allowed herself to feel what was difficult in her story, and had been moved to tears. This opened up a new dimension for the rest of the consultations.

This example of how Lindseth allows himself to make the guest's expression create an impression on him, in a physical way, may look therapeutic in a psychological manner. But Lindseth vigorously denies that he is doing some quasi-psychological therapy. What a psychotherapist would be likely to do is to say something like "That must have been very difficult for you," or "I feel pain in your story." But the empathetic dealing with the other's feelings is not the issue in philosophical counseling. Lindseth was just showing his guest something about herself that she had not yet realized, while keeping an open mind as to what would happen next.

Lindseth has a critical view of the paradigmatic therapeutic attitude, as it is often found within the professional mental care industry, characterized by the eagerness to categorize mental states as ailments before an open-minded understanding of the verbal and bodily expression of the person can be established. In contrast to such an institutionalized narrow-mindedness, the free space of philosophical counseling can only emerge through open-mindedness beyond any attempt to categorize.

Within such a free space there may be a lot of sighing. Just letting the sad or troublesome or bleak aspect of the theme discussed resonate in a moment of silence, where it sinks in as an experience shared by the guest and the counselor, can have a considerable significance for the further course of the consultation. Life *is* difficult, there are fundamental problems that we *have* to live with, and there is often no easy solution ready at hand.

So what is there then to be said? Not much more, sometimes, than "Ach...!" This German way of sighing, similar to the Norwegian "Akk...!" has a *schwung* which makes Lindseth say, as Gerd Achenbach has said before him: "There are lots of 'Ach's' in philosophical counseling."

That exclamation is one of the reasons why the founder of philosophical counseling in Germany, whose original name is Gerd Bötcher, took the name "Achenbach" when starting up his practice. Since Bach means creek in German, Achenbach evokes the metaphor of a creek of sighs. All these sighs streaming down the creek of life, as Achenbach and Lindseth see them, lie at the core of the big reconciliation project which philosophical counseling aspires to be.

What is the story about?

Although there might be a hard and direct way to find out what really troubles the guest, performed as an interrogative style of consultation,⁶ Achenbach and Lindseth propagate a gentle and indirect conversational style, where a harsh Socratic investigative style is to be avoided. (This is not to say that friendly provocations are not allowed.) Patiently waiting for the moment where the guest's and the counselor's combined attempt to philosophize gets off the ground, the counselor silently focuses on the core question in every philosophical consultation: *What is this person expressing? What is her story about?*

The counselor must not succumb to impatience and try to rush the guest into stating such a thing. What he should do is to express his reactions to the guest's expressions by making interpretative suggestions that might be labeled trial balloons, in order to inspire the guest to be aware of other aspects of the theme discussed. Lindseth can play a quite active part in doing this, as he showed us during the demonstration sessions. Lindseth permits himself to think *with* the guest in ferreting out what the issue at stake may be. He gladly puts his whole arsenal of philosophical knowledge, and personal experiences, at the guest's

disposal. His personality as well as personal style accounts for how, and to what extent, this is done.

This is totally in line with Achenbach's approach, Lindseth tells us, as Achenbach likes to state that "When people come to a philosophical consultation, *I* am the one they meet." And Achenbach likes to put elements of what he has read (which is a great deal) on philosophy and literature and other thoughts into play, in order to make something happen in the consultation room.

This exchange of ideas can also be regarded as an exchange of gifts. Lindseth speaks about the guest's giving him a gift when she lets go of her thoughts, including the way these thoughts are presented. Then he would like to give her a gift in return, which is his own response to these thoughts. By listening and reacting at the same time, by making use of his own arsenal of philosophical thoughts embedded in his own personal life experience, he gives something back to the guest that will hopefully be useful.

Another aspect of the counselor's attitude is to put factual matters "in brackets" and suspend judgment when it comes to statements like "My husband does not take me seriously." Then he should not try to find out if this really is the case, but instead find out what such a phrase is expressing as an element in the story the guest tells. In order to do this, he must adopt a skeptical attitude of a Pyrrhonian kind, by suspending judgment so that both the practitioner and the guest herself can grasp the story, and the meaning it conveys.

The principle of "touched not-knowing"

When sensing the "something is at stake" factor that vibrates within the guest's expression, the counselor may put forward reactions and suggestions that reveal his being touched by this expression. Within the free space the counselor must tune in to what this "something being at stake" can be, even before he possibly can know that for sure.

By letting himself be touched by the guest's expression (by allowing her expression to make an impression on him) the counselor puts himself in a mode of what Lindseth labels touched not-knowing. This mode of touched not-knowing has become a core principle in his practice. By way of this principle he is put into the seemingly contradictory position of "not yet knowing" and "having nevertheless to express one's ideas on the subject." Instead of conceiving these concerns as the two horns of a dilemma, Lindseth sticks to Løgstrup in saying that they constitute a "uniting opposition" which can indeed be reconciled by acknowledging both concerns. Provided that one does not conceive them as two fixed alternatives, but as the two working sides of the movement of thought in a hermeneutic endeavor, this "uniting opposition" breaks out of the familiar dichotomy active-passive to create a third category which Lindseth calls "structive."

By being structive, the practitioner exercises a working mode that transcends the dichotomy active-passive, and thus the notion of causality. Opening up the thinking space by being receptive to the guest's expression is a good example of what structivity is about, as this invites the guest to come forward with her story. This might have the power to dissolve a rigid understanding of what the guest's problem is. To make the guest's expression resonate in the room (where the free space is a sounding board) by way of exploring several possible meanings, is the task, and the experience, which unites the guest and the counselor in an enterprise of structivity. Then it is possible to work out (to structure) an understanding of the different levels of the guest's expression: an expression that relates to the life the guest is living.

Both the guest and the counselor have to realize that to make sense of the guest's expression by subjecting it to thought is a task that takes time. We should, however, take our time, as the task of hanging words on our experience is to shape it into something that we can make use of later on, and hence to structure it through words. This is, in the last instance, to make sense of our life.

An actual session—some excerpts and reactions

The first of the three demonstration sessions Lindseth performed during the seminar has been selected to illustrate what kind of reactions and suggestions a beyond method practitioner may put forward during a consultation. The following is not a transcript of the session but mainly samples of Lindseth's suggestions, plus comments from other students after the session was finished.

The female guest, a single woman in her early 30s, presented her sense of being ill-at-ease concerning where she lives and works, as the theme for discussion. She had moved to another city because of her job, where she found it unexpectedly hard to find friends that she can have meaningful conversations with, and to settle down, mentally speaking. Being nice to people who are nice to her in a superficial way has become tiresome, and she really has had enough of that. In short, she wondered if she has grown too old to settle down in another place.

Addressing the issue of tiresome social relations, Lindseth asked: "What would have made social relations less tiresome?", prompting the guest to introduce the term *belonging*. "It is a big issue, this theme of belonging," Lindseth remarked, then asked: "What is belonging? Is belonging only where you physically live, or can belonging also mean something like 'I belong to philosophy'? Could you say to this group of aspiring counselors, for instance, that '*This* is where I belong'?"

Not being particularly triggered by these suggestions, the first "Akk. . .!" of resentment appeared. Lindseth made sure to highlight this moment, to make a sigh himself and point it out to the guest.

When the guest confessed a sense of failure, of "I didn't manage to do this and that in life," Lindseth replied with a smile that: "In order to convincingly say a thing like that, you have to look a little older than you do." He found it appropriate to point out that she still was sufficiently young to have another try at settling down, finding a meaningful occupation, and so on.

As the guest kept pondering her difficulties of adjusting to her new environment, Lindseth launched the idea of the "brutality of life" which from time to time comes out in the open, as when one moves to a new place and finds it hard to fit in. Making the guest reflect upon this, he went on to ask if she had a profound sense of having gotten lost where she now lived.

He then interpreted some of the guest's earlier remarks in order to connect the elements of her story: "What about staying where you now are, settling down and holding your job until you get old?" "That would be tragic!" the guest spontaneously answered, as she did not care much for her job, which had nothing to do with what she really cared for: doing philosophy. She also claimed to be bad at what she was paid to do. "You cannot be *that* bad at it," Lindseth replied, "as you still have the job."

Then they slid into the issue of feeling at home, and Lindseth asked: "What do you need in order to feel at home?" Not believing that she could find what she needs in order to feel at home where she now lives, she and Lindseth shared another moment of "Akk. . .!"

Lindseth then told her a similar experience of his own, when he had moved from his native town to another town up north, interpreting it as a kind of escape, and finally suggested: “What is important is, I would think, to be significant in relations or situations.” When the guest did not deny this, he went on by speaking of people’s glances showing that they are happy to see you. “Maybe you should have a dog?” “No!” the guest instantly replied. “Well,” Lindseth said, “You then need somebody without a tail, but who nevertheless wags a bit. . .?” The guest responded with a slightly embarrassed “Maybe.”

Moving back and forth among topics that surfaced during the conversation is what Lindseth tends to do. He thus returned to the topic of the brutality of life, by pointing out the frequent need to move in our modern society as an instance of such a brutality (the guest had had to move because of her job). In primitive societies one lives and dies in the same place, and departing from one’s peers would not occur. This has become very different in our modern society, where having a professional career is pivotal.

Lindseth then tested out the topic of falling in love, to see if this triggered something in the guest. Not so, it turned out. The guest was not particularly keen on discussing this, but Lindseth gave it a second try: If you fall in love without any reservations, it is like an intoxication. Now I am loved, and I love, it’s mutual. But then the doubt arises: Am I really sure that I am loved?

Lindseth’s prolonged enthusiasm for this topic did not manage to trigger the guest very much. Nor did his questioning her why she did not find a boyfriend, or rather a life companion, lead to anything other than her quite embarrassed dismissal of the topic. The conversation then slid back to the question of belonging. Lindseth suggested that life itself might be a search for belonging, prompting the guest to realize that she in fact had moved away from her entire social network. This had not struck her until now. “Why not?” Lindseth asked. “Because I have grown old,” she once more replied.

Then Lindseth suggested that “Life seems to be wide open when one is young, but when one grows older, this sense of openness is not fitting anymore.” When the guest conceded this, he went on to tell a story of a colleague in Tromsø, who still “resided” in Oslo even if she had actually lived in Tromsø for 20 years.

He then put forward the notion of “life project.” Where can one fulfill one’s longings? What is one’s life project? Often we do not know this, but what we *can* know, is that “This is *not* my life project.” There are two main issues here: To feel that I am on the right path, and to have a relationship where I feel that somebody loves me. This “somebody,” by the way, does not have to be a spouse, but may be friends, or even pupils if you choose to be a teacher. You might feel it vital to be in a position where you can *serve* somebody. Then we have to make these two issues fit together. At this point Lindseth had most of the scene to himself, while the guest mostly listened attentively, and uttered “Yes” and “No” or other short responses to his ideas.

When the guest recalled her pleasant birthday party as breaking her feeling of being ill at ease, Lindseth jokingly stated that “You might impose something like ‘I will celebrate my birthday twice a year!’”

The next topic Lindseth suggested for investigation, prompted by another low-key remark of the guest, was the notion of resignation. This, he contended, hurts even more than despair, as you can let the pain come out in the open while despairing. Resignation does not contain this perspective. One gets sour instead. It is interesting to focus on: What does this resignation mean? You give up a project, put it aside. But then two problems arise: you are not where you should have been and, on another level, you can’t bear to have lost what you miss. Then you are in a kind of nothingness, as you still inhabit a reality in which

you are missing something. The question is then: What do I want in life? If I am in what I am missing, I have not given up yet, but if I will not even let this sink in, I am nowhere.

The guest pondered on this insight, letting it sink in. But then she shrugged: "I cannot expose this kind of pain to other people." This prompted Lindseth to say, rather lightheartedly, "This is what philosophical counselors are for."

Returning to the topic of modern versus traditional society, Lindseth pointed out that in a society where the son inherited the farm or his father's profession, much more was "given by life" than it is these days. The guest once more stated that doing philosophy was what she really wanted, instead of being stuck with her not very interesting job. Which made Lindseth ask her what it is to be a philosopher.

The notion of "the good life" was then briefly discussed, until Lindseth ended the session by contemplating the connectedness of our different choices in life: "It is no accident that you chose to work with the ancient concept of *eudaimonia* in your master's thesis, as there is an underlying connection between what you now do, and your life project. Also a *lack* of connectedness can be a connectedness. Example: The philosopher Carl Jaspers occupied himself constantly with the question of communication, despite his being quite incapable of communicating well to other people."

Assessments

Assessment of this demonstration session of Lindseth's depends much on how each one of us bystanders perceived it, which proved to be in quite different ways. For instance, did Lindseth really create a free space during his sessions, both for the guest and for himself? Or was he rather using up the space by furnishing it with mostly his own ideas? Both views were put forward in the evaluation discussion.

Before quoting some responses, it should be said that the artificiality of such a demonstration consultation became quite evident. Having more than a dozen bystanders, who were also fellow students, surely affected the guest in a way that probably made her less inclined to speak freely about her concerns than she might have done in a true one-on-one consultation. Lindseth thus had to address a guest who was not quite ready to fully explore the theme she put forward, largely due to the presence of bystanders. This not only called for an investigative approach to discover what her concerns amounted to, but also for a protective approach (as Lindseth told me afterwards), as his numerous reflections also aimed at shielding the guest from having to expose her uncertainty right there in front of her peers. These two concerns might have caused him to be more active than he usually is. In addition to that, he wanted to show us his way of counseling, which made him play an even more active part during the session.

Perhaps not fully aware of these concerns, the first comment by a student after the session was quite harsh: "The counselor talked more than the guest; he played the role of an old sage keen on speaking himself. But the counselor should not give the answers, he should instead enable the guest to think for herself. Nor should he conclude on the guest's behalf, or give good advice, or let the guest get away with not answering the question. In short: It is important to have another conception of a counselor than that of a guru."

Lindseth contested this criticism. He surely did enable the guest to think for herself, he contended, and could not quite see why this accusation was made, even if some other students agreed with the harsh judgment. He did not want to "do something with the guest," he maintained, and could not see that he had given any advice. He had only put forward suggestions, and that is something else.

Other comments were more benevolent, such as: “The counselor managed very well to be attentive to the vulnerability of the guest, and this made the session into something other than a regular conversation.” And: “I liked that the counselor was very present, subjectively speaking, let himself be touched, and acted as a subject with all his experiences and knowledge, stating ‘This I feel here and now,’ without feeling any duty to help or anything like that. I found that quite revealing.”

There were also some concerns that Lindseth did not contest, such as: “If the counselor may build a protecting wall around the guest, its height must not block the guest’s view.” And: “Words can be pulled in several directions. Here they were maybe pulled too fast up to a universal level. What the guest meant with her key concepts could have been more deeply investigated.” To this last remark Lindseth replied that he might indeed have probed a little further into these words, letting them “sound” a little more before interjecting his own thoughts on the topic.

Personal style obviously has a great impact on how a consultation is performed, especially by beyond method counselors. There is no correct way of performing a session, apart from abiding by the rules prescribed in these counselors’ theoretical foundation, as spelled out by Lindseth. This allows for a variety of styles, among them the performance Lindseth showed us. Hence, to assess his style is not to assess the beyond method approach in its entirety.

This also leads to the question asked by some students: How to implement the principles Lindseth has presented into an actual practice? Is this not a methodological question that we should look into more carefully? Lindseth agrees that it is, but did not go further into this question during the seminar.

The distaste for method and therapy

What became evident during the seminar is that Lindseth’s disdain for methodological matters has a Heideggerian aspect which also is closely linked to his distaste for therapy, as this concept supposedly is known within the professional mental health care industry. This distaste is linked to the view that professionalism, as it usually is seen among therapists within the health care industry, prevents one from seeing what really is the client’s problem, and thus does not give the client what she most needs. The main reason for this is that the therapist is too quick in his understanding of what the client’s problem is; he thinks he has understood it before he really has had a chance to do so.

In order to describe a therapist in a Weberian ideal-type manner, Lindseth focuses on the quest for objectivity: to gather factual information considered relevant, to sort out the problem by way of categorizing it within a fixed scheme of categories, and to prescribe a therapy by way of standard procedures ready at hand. All this is supposed to take place in an efficient manner, directed at results that can be measured in “problem solved” or at least “problem diminished” terms.

Thus, working within the health care industry is likely to make you an agent of this apparatus rather than the client’s helper. There the therapist is alienated from the client because of his intention to “do something with” the client. He views the problem as the client having a problem with anxiety, or sleeplessness, and seeks to relieve her of these alleged problems by way of prescribing some kind of treatment, or exercises, or medication. He does not, as Lindseth himself would have done, take his time to ask what the issue in question is all about.

What, for instance, is sleeplessness all about? And what is sleeping all about? It might very well have something to do with feeling safe, allowing oneself to trust one’s surroundings so much as to confidently give in to sleep, and hence to vulnerability, while being sleepless is a

way of being enslaved. If you do not allow yourself to see how the client's expression is connected to her experiences, and in the last instance to her life, you are performing therapy in the professional but pejorative sense of the word.

This is why Lindseth never intends to "do something with" the guest by judging for himself what the guest "really needs" and then advising her to do whatever it takes to fulfill this need. At this point he distances himself from counselors who adopt a commonsensical holistic view on these matters. Such counselors tend to view the fact that a problem has a psychological and a bodily aspect, as well as a philosophical aspect, as a reason to say that "you should rather see a psychotherapist," or that "you should try to be more in your body by developing your bodily awareness," instead of discussing the problem's philosophical aspect. Such a commonsensical approach is foreign to Lindseth, who would not abstain from discussing a problem philosophically, even if the guest might be "too much in her head" and "too little in her body" from a commonsensical point of view. He firmly believes that a philosophical investigation of a problem eventually will affect its bodily and psychological aspects. Then it is misguided to tell the guest that she should seek psychological or bodily treatment *rather than* philosophical counseling. That would be a concession to the therapeutically motivated urge to "do something with" the guest, which is quite foreign to the struvtive approach to philosophical counseling.

Some remarks: How are we to understand the concept of method?

Regarding the discussion within the camp of philosophical counselors on the need to have a methodological approach, it is quite revealing that Lindseth so strongly has the professional health care industry in mind when he launches his attacks on method and "therapy." Then the question of having a method in philosophical counseling, or of being beyond method, might to some extent be rooted in slightly different conceptions of the terms method and "therapy." The following reflections are those of the author, not necessarily of Lindseth.

If counselors who pioneered the beyond method approach back in the 1980s had mainly wanted to distinguish themselves from professional therapists (and not from different approaches within the camp of philosophical counseling which is very likely as the beyond method approach was developed before dissident voices within their own camp were to be heard) then the gulf between those counselors eschewing method and counselors employing method might not be insurmountable after all. As no group of counselors advocates a methodological stance along the lines of the ideal-type therapist described above, but different kinds of methodological approaches which also are opposed to the ideal-type therapist's way, then we should rather consider ourselves as a community of believers who nevertheless have different views on the need for methods *within* the new field of philosophical counseling. Hence we should not confuse our stances on method addressed at external co-professionals, with our stances on method in the internal debate aimed at shaping a viable variety of practices.

Lindseth himself once admitted that in a way he does have a method, by saying: "I express my impression of my guest's expression, and *that* is my method!" But apart from such a hermeneutic way of active listening and interpreting, is there more to be said on the question of method?

There is a method, provided that we understand method as meaning nothing more than guidelines to be employed at certain points during a conversation, thus providing us with a path (or at least with some small alleys) to be walked once more (to speak with Gadamer, as Lindseth did during the seminar) in order to give the consultation a fruitful direction. By employing a method in this limited sense, we might be provided with a clue or two of what

to say or ask for next, should our capacity to respond to the guest's expression come to a halt, or fail to get things off the ground in the consultation room. Eventually we all develop some tricks of the trade to prevent us from being stuck, or to offer some friendly provocations in order to make the guest open up to a new mode of thinking, and why shouldn't we share these devices in a research-like way instead of concealing them as our little secrets?

Obviously the use of methods in a philosophical consultation cannot amount to algorithms of any kind. A fixed procedure that ensures a certain result is of course an inappropriate conception of method regarding philosophical counseling, just as the ideal type therapist is inappropriate as a role model. The reason is that every consultation is unique in character, and is supposed to be unique, as beyond method counselors like to stress. But do these counselors really rule out the algorithmic connotation when speaking about method in their usual dismissive way? Not so, it is strongly suspected here.

To highlight this point, here follows a passage by Achenbach which is quite problematic. In his speech at the Oslo conference on philosophical practice in 2001, Achenbach emphasized the need (as he sees it) for developing one's non-methodological approach to philosophical counseling by rhetorically asking "How does one 'learn' to compose?" His advice on this is:

Just listen to Beethoven's symphonies! Each of them stands for itself and has its own and unique character. The great work of art, each says, is *sui generis*, not a 'case of' a general kind (or rule), but rather a 'case for itself.' Science may strive for a 'theory of the symphony,' but the great musician composes *this one*. (...) What has enabled the composer to carry out his work? How did he become a master of music? He will hardly have composed his *one* symphony according to a 'theory of the symphony' of following a catalogue of rules on 'how to compose a symphony.' He does not orient himself to such a scheme. If he were to do so, he would simply be working mechanically. No, he has taken another way leaving aside skill, gift, and (as it was once called) genius. He has listened to and studied a lot of *masterpieces*, he knows all of the important works—in fact as *individuals*. He knows, in other words, examples without using them as patterns, and of course he won't 'copy' that which he admires. Beethoven looked very carefully at the way Bach and Mozart and Father Haydn composed. And what did he make out of Bach and Haydn and Mozart? Beethoven! (Achenbach, 2002, pp. 14–15).

Apart from bringing Beethoven and the other giant composers into the picture when dealing with philosophical counseling, which seems overly pretentious, there is an underlying algorithmic conception of method in this quotation that is troubling in the way. Leaving aside the talk of Beethoven symphonies (does Achenbach really imagine himself to perform the equivalent of a Beethoven symphony when counseling a guest?) we content ourselves with asking if a counselor is composing a counseling session in the same way a musician, according to Achenbach, composes a piece of music. Here the dichotomy of "working mechanically according to rules" and "working out of knowledge of individual masterpieces" seems to be rather shaky.

Beethoven surely did not only study the works of his predecessors. He also studied chords and scales and every mechanical device of music theory thoroughly and down to the last detail. He had internalized the mechanical rules so well that he could put them to use in a seemingly effortless way. He could also break these rules at will, because he knew which rules he was breaking, and why. This kind of technical knowledge is an indistinguishable part of what constitutes a master composer, and to believe that Beethoven could have

written his symphonies mainly by studying a lot of masterpieces would be far off the mark. How could he, incidentally, have managed to study these masterpieces if he had not known his musical grammar? Hopefully Achenbach is aware of this, but then we may ask why he conceals this aspect by making it irrelevant or seemingly non-existent.

Achenbach's own Beethoven analogy thus reveals somewhat unwittingly the problem with beyond method counselors' eagerness to oppose rules and technicalities to inspiration and uniqueness. He might have done better to compare the philosophical counselor with a jazz musician, as they both improvise during a session, thus rendering it a unique work of art. (Composing a symphony is a different matter; how can an analogy be drawn between such huge projects and performing an hour's counseling session?) As any competent jazz musician knows, the best improvisations are well prepared. To know the chord progressions, the scales, the many musical figures or clichés so well that they pop up the instant you need them because your *inspiration* tells you so, all this is necessary if you are to improvise well, and once in a while achieve a great work of art. Just listening to jazz recordings will not get you anywhere as an improviser of your own music.

Why, then, should it be different with philosophical counselors? Granted that we have no such tangible devices as scales or chord schemes to master, we nevertheless should develop an arsenal of small alleys we can walk once more, and test-walk them until we have them sufficiently internalized to make use of them, seemingly spontaneously, in the appropriate moment during a session. Achenbach and his peers should be reminded that one's mastery of philosophical counseling will not be diminished if we give it some technicalities to feed on.

Then we might also realize that we do not have to choose between a strictly beyond method approach and a strictly Socratic, or any other method-based, approach. It might be conceivable that a counselor could do both, thus creating a hybrid way of counseling where he can be attentive and touched by not-knowing in one part of the session, and be Socratically investigative in another part of it. Surely different guests have different needs, and having more than one way of approaching the guest's concerns is likely to be advantageous. Instead of being trapped in different ideal-type stances, and arguing for and against them, it might be more fruitful to account for the possibility of a *both-and*, instead of an *either-or*, in the actual field of philosophical counseling. Not merely wishing for a universal merger of the different approaches in an actual practice, which would be unrealistic and undesirable, we could at least hope for an increased cross over effect, both in the theoretical debate and in the consultation room.

Notes

- 1 The Oslo school is, however, a rather vague concept, as this school consists of no more than a loose association of counselors who share some basic views on how consultations are to be performed. These views are presented in the Norwegian book by Svare and Herrestad (2004), and in Helge Svare's essay (2002).
- 2 One exception is his essay *Philosophical practice: What is at stake?* in Herrestad, Holt, and Svare (2002). Also, Lindseth (2005), a collection of his essays on philosophical counseling.
- 3 Lindseth likes to call himself the grandfather of philosophical counseling in Norway, where the Oslo school founders are his children, and the Oslo school students his grandchildren.
- 4 Lindseth and the Oslo school prefer the term guest when referring to the consellee, as the term client connotes too strongly to the therapeutic setting of psychotherapy or psychiatry. As a philosophical counselor is not supposed to indulge in therapy in this sense, but conduct an open-minded dialogue between two people on an equal standing, the term guest is the preferred one, even if one might question whether a guest is really on equal terms with his host.
- 5 He does so in his best-known work *The ethical demand* (in Danish: *Den etiske fordring*, published in Copenhagen in 1956, and reprinted several times, e.g., the Gyldendal edition of 1991).

6 The French philosophical counselor Oscar Brenifier is a prominent example of such an interrogative style. Brenifier has visited Oslo several times during the last couple of years, and has inspired and influenced myself and some of my fellow students in quite another way than that of our Oslo school mentors.

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