

*Morten Fastvold, 07.08.06:*

## Wish you were here, where you don't want to be: on the aristocratic nature of philosophical consultations, Oscar Brenifier style

### 1. Getting beyond a mere conversation

Understanding more of the Oscar Brenifier way of questioning is always a pleasure. During his one week seminary in Burgundy in July '06 I undoubtedly got a better grasp of his major points than I previously had, thanks to the numerous and quite intense sessions of exercises, both of group discussions and of one-to-one consultations. As an aspiring counselor I will focus on the latter field in these reflexions on the "Oscar approach," as I now see it. Since Oscar and I have developed a friendly as well as a professional relationship, I permit myself to write this paper in a quite informal way, using his first name only.

#### **No elaborations, please**

Not surprisingly, I found Oscar just as uncompromising in his counseling work as ever before, and with good justifications for his unyielding attitude. I particularly noticed a remark of his that in my opinion highlighted this. It was when Oscar pointed out that we as philosophical counselors *should guide people to places where they don't want to be*.

Surely this is what usually happens during an Oscar consultation; the subject is quickly dragged away from the story or the elaboration of the problem she initially puts forward, as Oscar's way of questioning gives the dialogue quite another direction than the subject had anticipated. She gets a no-no-no when she wants to contextualize her answer, or to give further informations, or to explore the complexity of the issue. "Just answer the question" is Oscar's conversation-killing response, followed up with interruptions like "No yes, but," or "Yes, it depends, but what is the most likely?" Sooner or later, dependant of how much the subject resists the rules Oscar imposes (which he does not explain in beforehand), she is brought into foreign ground, unpleasantly surprised by the turns and twists of the dialogue.

Having to abandon her life story, or the talk about her own feelings and everyday worries, is surely not what a subject unfamiliar to the Oscar approach expects a philosophical consultation to be. She surely wants to stay within the realm of what Oscar labels "the empirical self," where she feels at home and in reasonable control of the conversation. But, as Oscar has stated several times earlier on: if you as a counselor allow the subject to plunge back to her empirical self, she will take you for a ride. Then you are finished, then you can do nothing but follow her whims.

#### **The banker attitude**

Being a good listener, in the sense of letting the subject speak freely, and more or less passively try to grasp what her speech is all about, is thus to be far off the mark. The typical question of the Oslo school counselors, "Can you tell me more about this?", is an absolute no-no in Oscar's way of counseling. According to Oscar, you should instead lead the subject up to the realm of the transcendental self, namely the realm of reason, which is interpersonal, and thus without a subject.

Unlike the realm of the empirical self, where the subject is very much at home, and can hide in well-established trenches, familiar to herself but strange ground to the counselor, the realm of the transcendental self is unfamiliar to the subject, and awfully transparent. When you are up there, in the realm of pure conceptual thinking, you are not allowed to hide behind

your words, but are instead confronted with these very words. Here – just like Socrates – the philosophical counselor should feel at home, and exercise his craft.

While an Oslo school counselor feels free to add ideas of his own during the consultation, in order to make something happen in the subject, Oscar totally abstains from such a charitable move. To him, philosophical counseling is not about conducting an enlightened, well-mannered conversation based on an exchange of ideas. He instead adopts a banker's attitude, which is to count the assets brought on the table by the subject, without presupposing or counting in something that is not already there. It is, after all, the subject's ideas that are to be investigated, and not his own.

The counselor then has to be as strict with his own urge to converse as with that of the subject. He cannot allow himself to be carried away by some special, personal interest in the issue in question, but must remain a sober banker. The only valid assets in the dialogue are the subject's assets, which are her own words. To confront the subject with her own words is what the counselor must restrict himself to do in his questioning.

### **The urge to drown the fish**

Unlike what one might initially believe, being confronted with one's own words is not a pleasant experience at all. What we tend to like about words, is that they vanish the next moment after we have uttered them, almost like breath, thus allowing us to express ourselves, and at the same time have full options to rephrase our message, or deny or lie or forget about what we have said.

The combined liberty to express ourselves, and to hide away from what we have expressed, is of course the prerogative of the spoken word, which, unlike the written word, is only stored in our faulty memory, and thus is out of reach to a banker style investigation. Even if the listener has a good banker's memory and can quote the other accurately, the other may flatly deny that she said so and so by accusing the listener of a faulty memory. As long as he cannot prove that she did say so and so, the case rests with her word against his. Sometimes she is so unaware of what she has said that she does so without dubious intentions, but often she remembers what she said, but will not admit it. Instead, she claims that she did phrase it differently or tries to drown her initial statement in lots of other words.

“To drown the fish” (*noyer le poisson*) is a French expression Oscar puts forward to characterize this all too human attempt to get away from what we have said by adding more and more words, to confuse the other's memory and get away with it by exhausting the other. But, as a fish cannot be drowned, in spite of all our efforts to do so, we cannot make the initial words unsaid, however much we try.

### **Write it down, slow down the pace**

If these words are written down in the first place – which is something Oscar always does, and then makes the subject agree that this is indeed what she says – the subject puts herself in the awkward situation of allowing the counselor to confront her with these very words at a later moment, when she has become less happier about them.

Counselors may be reluctant to write the subject's initial question and key words down because this creates a pause in the dialogue, and thus a moment of silence which they may conceive of as embarrassing, and even unprofessional (in my former career as a journalist, this surely was a no-no – then you proved your craftsmanship by maintaining the fluidity of the interview, without demanding any pauses when taking notes).

What the counselor must assure himself of, is that it is not only permitted, but recommended, to take pauses for writing notes, and even to stop the subject from keeping on with her speech while you are writing. To allow yourself to take your time while writing down the subject's question, and thus making the subject wait, has, as Oscar explains, both a

symbolic and a practical function. It emphasizes the words uttered, it creates suspense, it slows down the pace of the conversation, and it makes you sure that you have got the question (so that the subject cannot alter it later on and accuse you of misquoting her). You must thus accept the silence, and turn it into something useful.

As Oscar states: Words tend to be too cheap and numerous in our culture, so in a consultation we have to make them fewer and more expensive.

Not accepting answers given too quickly is another way of slowing down the pace of the dialogue. A verbal ping pong between questions and answers must not occur, because then there is no thinking going on, just instant reactions, which is a very different exercise from that of Oscar's. Don't react too fast to the subject's answers, Oscar warns us. You can very well say "Don't answer too quickly," thus making the subject think instead of merely react.

To ask "Did you hear the question?" may also be used to set the pace of the consultation. To slow down the pace in this way may be useful when the subject answers too quickly. Then she should be led to think her answer through before answering.

### **Accepting the sense of awkwardness**

A sense of awkwardness is likely to show in the subject because of the slowed down pace. It is not only because the counselor then challenges social conventions that tell us to make a conversation easy-going and agreeable, but mostly because the subject then has no place to hide. She cannot start drowning the fish, as in a regular conversation, and her attempts to not answer the questions become all too visible.

Then the subject surely has been taken to a place where she does not want to be. By taking her out of the private realm by emphasizing the intersubjectivity of reason, he has de-subjected the subject. This may not be very pleasant, as she then cannot speak freely about herself, but has to answer general questions like "How would you qualify a person who does/says so and so?" The realm of the transcendental self is harsh and transparent, and makes us expose our stupidity right away, because our efforts to escape ourselves get transparent too. We are made to look ourselves in the mirror in broad daylight, where everything shows.

Or, to quote Nietzsche, as Oscar does: We are made to look into the abyss, and the abyss looks back at us. That is what Oscar calls "a philosophical moment," which is what a counselor should strive to achieve.

### **Resisting the temptation to be nice**

Such an enterprise is likely to be quite appealing to most philosophical counselors. Yes, they might say, in this respect we are sympathetic to Oscar's project. But when it comes to achieving this goal in an actual practice, they are reluctant to see that this does not go together with our all too human inclinations to give concessions to the other, either by what we say or by the way we say it.

The Oscarian counselor must resist this inclination, and not be disturbed by the subject's expressed awkwardness. He must know that this is to be expected, maybe in the same way as a physician expects an outburst of pain when performing an examination of the patient's body. This is not a moment for excuse, but for accepting what has to do.

In short: The counselor must resist the temptation to be nice, as this is understood in social conventions. He must be persistent in his questioning, and have no qualms about its slowed down pace and its interrogation style. Again: this is no kind of conversation, but a highly artificial kind of exercise that it takes a specially trained philosopher to conduct.

### **The need to sugar the pill**

This does not imply that the counselor should feel free to adopt a Stasi-like attitude when questioning the subject. That would have made the session unbearable, and probably have

caused the subject to leave the office in fury and disgust. The big pedagogical question, then, is how to make it bearable to the subject to be lead where she does not want to be.

Oscar's answer to this is to sugar the pill by employing good humour and a playful attitude. He can be stern and good fun at the same time, which is very hard indeed. We might say that this is a personal trait that comes in very handy, but which cannot be taught, or at least to a much lesser degree than his rules of thumb for the procedure of questioning.

An aspiring counselor, Oscar style, nevertheless has to develop, in one way or the other, some sugaring of the pill he wants the subject to swallow. If not, the questioning will quickly get an interrogation character that reminds the subject of a stern, authoritarian examiner, which in turn triggers emotions of inferiority, and even humiliation.

### **No small talk, please**

Apart from the necessity of sugaring the pill, Oscar refuses to be "nice" by way of pleasing the subject with small-talk and be visibly concerned about her well-being. He even states that he has no respect for the empirical person, as empirical persons constantly lie and deceive the counselor, and often themselves as well. (But he does have respect for the transcendental person, which is something bigger than the empirical person.)

Like Plato, Oscar wants the subject to take off her shirt, metaphorically speaking, and play a good, friendly game of dialogue with him. Then the subject must be up to it, and if she agrees to have a try, the counselor has no reason to be worrisome on her behalf. That would, in fact, rather be insulting than benevolent.

So, as a rule of thumb: Don't indulge in much easygoing talk in the beginning of a consultation. Set the tone right away, just like Socrates does when he starts questioning his interlocutor.

### **Don't try to solve the problem**

A third basic point in Oscar's approach, which he repeatedly stressed during the seminary, is that he does not consider it to be the counselor's task to solve the subject's problem. Solving problems is not the issue in his counseling sessions. They are instead about *seeing* the problem, about making the subject become really aware of it. Maybe there is no solution to the problem disclosed, or maybe the subject manages to solve it by herself later on. Any pragmatic approach is thus a no-no to the Oscar way of counseling.

I recall a session in Copenhagen a couple of years ago, when the subject's question was whether she should buy a car, or not. Having a car would make it much easier for her children to visit their grandparents, but a car also pollutes the air, which worried her a lot. During the session, Oscar did no attempt to solve the problem, but highlighted why this rather practical question imposed such qualms in her that she really agonized about it. Exposing the philosophical drama behind this down to earth question was the issue, not to work out a solution together.

This attitude of Oscar's astonished most of the bystanders, who themselves dealt with philosophical counseling. Some of them clearly expressed that solving the problem should have been the issue – which, as Oscar pointed out, has become a typical American way of dealing with questions of any kind. This, however, is not in tune with what Socrates did on the agora, and for good reasons.

To reestablish the Socratic approach thus goes against the teaching of the many pragmatic and the holistic influenced counselors of today.

### **Avoid creating hope**

If a counselor wants to solve the subject's problem, he also creates hope, Oscar points out. The counselor must then be just as particular about not creating hope as of not trying to solve

the problem. Hope is, within the frame of a consultation, a terrible thing, Oscar states, so it has to be avoided.

This does not mean, as I understand it, that the counselor should kill any hope the subject might have of solving her problem, or of getting a better life. It should not be written on the counselor's door what is written at the entrance gate of Dante's *Inferno*, namely that the one who enters here must let go of all his hope. Quite different from this, hope simply is not the issue in a philosophical consultation.

Surely, hope can be the topic discussed, as when the subject poses a question like "Why have I no hope for the future?" or creates an antinomy where hope is set against e.g. despair. Then the counselor should deal with it as with any other theme of discussion. But what he should not do, is to convey, directly or indirectly, an expectation of solving the question or of improving the subject's life. "Come to me, and you will manage to cope better with your life" is thus an advertisement the philosophical counselor should not make – unlike what most other counselors certainly do. Even if the problem might be solved as the result of a philosophical consultation, in the short or the long run, the counselor cannot promise this, and should therefore abstain from dealing with the effects of his counseling.

## 2. Some late night pragmatical qualms

Before I comment any further on Oscar's work, I would like to deal with a dilemma that his approach poses, should we nevertheless, and just for a moment, allow ourselves to adopt a pragmatical look upon our trade. One late evening during the seminary, on my way back to sleep, I could not help having some heretical thoughts on the whole Oscar enterprise. Wanting to guide people to places where they don't want to go, combined with an unwillingness to be nice, and not wanting to solve the subject's problem – well, I have heard of a better business idea. Just having said that, the term "business idea" seemed so inappropriate that I could not help laughing. It got the flavour of a joke, even if the matter is, to an aspiring professional counselor, no joke at all.

In the best of all possible worlds, people would know what is good for them, and pursue these good things, even if this should imply some hardship and not any gentle approach by professionals performing their services. But we clearly don't live in the best of all possible worlds, but in a quite imperfect one, where one significant trait – especially in our modern western culture – is an infantilisation of the population by way of the more and more intrusive marketplace way of thinking about most aspects of life.

"May we tempt you with anything right now?" a huge advertisement poster typically shouts out at a shopping-mall in Oslo. "Aren't you a little hungry?" a smaller poster outside my local bakery hopefully asks. In a world where more and more people earn a living by selling goods and services to each other, and where old-fashioned blue-collar workers are becoming an endangered species, the urge to arouse potential customer's needs of any kind gets more and more predominant at the agora. You don't have to be a Marxist to realize that this mainstream way of earning a living affects us all in the end by making us feel more entitled to satisfy our even smallest needs whenever they occur, as the social, material world does have a pivotal role in shaping our mental life.

### **Unlearning our childhood lessons**

What characterizes an infant, is, among other things, its very little tolerance for any delay between a felt need, be it bodily or mental, and its satisfaction. The small child finds it unbearable when his need isn't satisfied right away, and a major task in bringing up kids is to make them tolerate some time gap between a felt need and its satisfaction. They must learn to

wait, to live with their need for some time before it is appropriate or practically possible to satisfy it. Maybe it cannot be satisfied at all, and then they also must learn to cope with that.

In our present society, however, where scarcity of material goods no longer exists – which, by the way is a new historical experience – these lessons from our upbringing are constantly undermined. No, the advertisements tell us, you don't have to, and should not, accept any delay between a felt need and its satisfaction. You should revive the small, egoistic child in yourself and demand – that is: buy – satisfaction right away.

You have to be about fifty years old these days to remember the good bad old days, where scarcity of material goods was a major concern, even in the western societies. Then our parents had to save money for weeks, or even months, to buy clothes or household equipment that we now put in the shopping bag right away, and pay for them by handing out our credit card whether we can afford it or not. The old device of “First you earn, then you consume” is since long abolished, and replaced with “Buy now, and pay later on.”

Or, as a widespread slogan puts it: “Because I deserve it.” Which you apriori do, whoever you are. That is because you, first of all, have become a consumer in our modern society, and then are entitled to mindless flattery and an easy-going life. Occasionally you may also be a citizen, as on election day, but your everyday role and social duty is to be a consumer, and thus to consume.

As the philosopher Arnold Shopenhauer states: “I consume, therefore I am – but that doesn't make me any happier.”

### **The assumed right to be satisfied**

Being a consumer, you quickly learn to exercise your rights without bothering about duties, as the customer's privilege is to have rights without duties. The customer has above all the right to be satisfied, or pleased, right away. To assume that someone would pay good money for not being satisfied, and without any guarantee that they at least will be happier after some initial pain, as when attending a gym, would be absurd. Professional people *must* please us; if not, we demand our money back.

If they are in the counseling business, they are obliged to listen to us, to help us with whatever problem we want to solve, and to be really nice and understanding. Like monkeys in the zoo, customers want to be groomed – be it by their peers or by a professional who is so good at it that they are willing to pay for his service. Thus, a nice and understanding counselor who allows us to speak freely and make a good impression, at least in our own eyes, is the one we are most likely to choose.

Interestingly, this grooming approach is also considered to be the ethical correct one by most philosophical counselors – while interrupting the subject and leading the exchange of words in a direction where she doesn't want to go is looked upon as quite unethical. The grooming attitude is supposed to respect the subject's autonomy, while a “not nice,” confronting attitude is considered intrusive and disrespectful. Thus, the grooming attitude has become both the commercially and ethically correct one.

According to this reasoning, Oscar's Socratic approach must be considered ethically dubious, and economically disadvantageous as well. Who could in his right mind think that he will make a living by doing consultations the Oscar way? Even Oscar does not earn much money from one-to-one counseling; he gets most of his income from his other work.

On the other hand, Oscar's approach is very appealing from a philosophical point of view, and we should be happy for his firm and uncompromising stance. Seeing him in action, any kind of softening his way of questioning would appear to chicken out. Which means that we probably have to make a choice between being a nice or an Oscarian counselor – which, when speaking in the term of business idea, means a lot.

So let's face it: If philosophical counseling, Oscar style, is a disastrous business idea, so be it. Then you cannot think in terms of earning a living while aspiring to be a hardcore Oscarian counselor. These two concerns do not go together, plain and simple.

### **The need to be aristocratic**

That is why I put the word "aristocratic" in the heading of these notes. As I see it, Oscar's way of counseling has an aristocratic nature because of its incompatibility with any kind of business idea. It is beyond all that, it is an enterprise you must entertain for its own sake, without any concern for money. Socrates surely did not charge anyone for his questioning, and Plato and Aristotle would insist that philosophy is something you do for its own sake, because it is the best a man can do – while a concern for money, as the sophists had, was below any proper kind of philosophical activity.

But then you must get your income elsewhere, or be blessed with an inheritance or a financial support that allows you to spend the time you need on your philosophical practice. You must have sufficient means to be liberated from the ordinary man's task of earning a living from a regular job that may not be very interesting, and surely not what you would have preferred to do, if you could choose to do whatever you liked.

An aristocrat, on the other hand, does have the opportunity to devote his time to what he prefers to do. To me, this is the most important aspect by being an aristocrat, and not the nonsense of "blue blood" and noble ancestors, and of the infamous aristocratical snobbism. I also find it less important that an aristocrat should be very rich and live in luxury in a big castle. The important thing is that he has enough means to get by without having to take regular jobs. He may very well be modest in his material needs, as he quite likely will be if he prefers to spend his time and efforts on philosophical inquiries. Socrates probably was not very rich, but he had enough to get by, and that's the point.

Our need to be aristocratic, then, is not about acquiring fine manners and having rich friends, but about acquiring an *aristocratical attitude* to those activities we are devoting ourselves to, how modest they may be, and how modest our income may be. This of course poses some stern practical problems to people who are not so fortunate as having rich parents or a money-making spouse, or who has not already paid his loans by having had a regular job a considerable number of years.

Hence the dilemma, which arises from the egalitarian convictions of our modern society, especially in Scandinavia. People in a more class-divided society might not see any dilemma at all, but just acknowledge the fact that the world is not one of egalitarian justice, and that some people happen to be more privileged than others. Which means, once more, that we don't live in the best of all possible worlds, but in a quite imperfect one.

### **Accepting the limits of the imperfect world**

If we had lived in the best of all possible worlds, most people would have renounced the advertisement indoctrination, because there they would have known what was in their own interest, and gladly have taken care of their personal development. There, people also would have wanted to be guided to places where they don't want to be. They would even have paid good money for it, by being counseled in an Oscarian, Socratic way.

This, in turn, would mean that the philosopher might be uncompromising in his work, and still get paid, even if he did not care much about money. Which means that anybody with the proper interest in becoming a counselor could acquire the necessary aristocratic approach, regardless of his economical situation.

We must, of course, reconcile ourselves with our present and far from perfect world, instead of getting sour from thoughts on how things should have been, when it is not in our power to change them. Then each one of us will get a better understanding of what we are up

to, should we be persistent enough to attend another Oscar seminar. This might even be the theme for a philosophical consultation.

Or maybe we should print postcards that said “Wish you were here, where you don’t want to be,” and have a pile of them at our office. Then a client who might be happy with the consultation, despite of all its hardship, could grab a few and mail them to friends. I surely unmask the pragmatism by proposing such a public relation idea, but I guess I can’t help it. Hope is something you must have when aspiring to be a counselor, even if hope, as Oscar puts it, is a terrible thing during a consultation.

### 3. The first rule of the game: be stupid

Returning to Oscar’s way of questioning, I once more would like to stress what I find very appealing with it, namely the fact that he has developed it into a craft that to a considerable extent can be taught. The different sessions of the seminar thus dealt with the art of questioning, and how to conduct a consultation. Oscar conveyed a lot of dos and don’ts, which were very concrete and practical-minded (and not of a general ethical character, as often is the case with Norwegian and other counselors).

Oscar also focused on the attitude issue – also this in a concrete, practical way. On the last day of the seminar, the discussion dealt (among other things) with the all too human fear of looking stupid, or of making our interlocutor look stupid. In general, we would rather appear smart than stupid, often out of vanity. Besides, there is a sense of losing face when one is exposed as stupid. No wonder, then, that we try very hard to avoid such a moment.

What made the theme of being stupid surface, was, as one participant demonstrated, the big temptation to accept gestures or unfinished sentences from the subject during consulting exercises. This participant even did the same thing as a counselor, and to such an extent that Oscar pointed it out. Then we all acknowledged the inadequacy, and even silliness, of such a way to conduct a session – which we all to a more or less degree had been guilty of.

#### **The pitfalls of ordinary short-hand language**

Why, Oscar asked, would one accept gestures and unfinished sentences from the subject? I suggested the fear of looking stupid as the culprit, and Oscar agreed. I also pointed out the widespread use of short-hand language in everyday life, where people often don’t bother to finish sentences, and make a gesture instead, both to save time and to express themselves through a certain jargon.

Thus, our ability to get the message through some short hand jargon proves that we are in tune with the other, which in turn proves that we possess a certain amount of smartness and social adaptation. If we don’t get the message, we are very much tempted to play along and pretend that we did, as this prevents us from looking stupid. We would rather misunderstand than expose our lack of smartness, in order to avoid a moment’s embarrassment. Our inner embarrassment of not really understanding the other is more bearable.

This also works the other way around. If we ourselves are lengthy and complete in our speech, the other may think that we underestimate him, and take it as an insult. “I know what you’re getting at,” he may say before you have finished your sentence. So, in order not to insinuate that the other is somewhat slow in his head, or not tuned in socially, you should rather show trust in him by employing short-hand language and gestures yourself.

Of course this leads to a lot of misunderstandings and faulty communication. Abiding to short-hand language and gestures may also be an act of courtesy to the other when we notice some uncertainty in her, because it is supposed to be considerate to allow the other to be vague or escape her own words in such a moment. Arresting the other and demand a clear,



unambiguous answer, would be looked upon as taking advantage of the other's vulnerability, and thus to be rude. Then other people would frown upon us.

Intellectuals like ourselves are no less insistent on our right to be unclear than non-intellectuals are. During our university studies, understanding lectures is a constant demand which we cannot always live up to. Instead of asking stupid questions in such feeble moments, we rather keep quiet and try to hide our lack of comprehension, because, once more, such an inner embarrassment is more bearable than a moment's exposed embarrassment, even if the latter would have brought the former, more lasting embarrassment to a halt.

In line with this, university peers have developed a tacit pact of not asking each other stupid questions during the awkward silence after the lecture is completed. Exposing your own lack of comprehension would be bad enough, but since you at the same time expose the other's similar shortcoming, it becomes unforgivable. Then you are shyed away from, since you have proved to be a loose cannon on deck.

### **Facing the taboo of exposing stupidity**

No wonder, then, that even philosophical counselors succumb to the temptation to accept the unclarity of a gesture or an unfinished sentence from time to time. But according to Oscar, this should never be allowed during a consultation – just as we should never allow the dialogue to turn into a regular conversation. To achieve clarity of thought and speech is what we must strive for, at any cost.

This implies, as a rock bottom rule, that we must face the taboo of exposing stupidity head on, and get rid of it. We must always feel at liberty to ask stupid questions, such as asking the subject what her gesture means, or to finish her sentence. This, by the way, will be much easier when we abandon the conversational style of counseling and adopt the quite unnatural Socratic way of questioning.

We may even deploy some Socratic irony, as Oscar sometimes does, by saying that "I'm just a simple philosopher, so I don't know what X means" when the subject employs a word X in a way that presupposes the counselor's understanding, even if it is not quite clear what the subject means when saying X. Or, if the subject employs lofty concepts at a considerable speed, and connects them with intricate twists and turns, Oscar may stop her by saying "Hey hey, this is getting way too complicated to me. I am a simple-minded man, so could you please try to say it more slowly, and with simple words?"

It is, however, not easy to be ironic in such a straight-forward way. In order to achieve this kind of irony, you must have absolutely no qualms about making such statements. If you do have qualms, a shivering in your voice or a flickering in your eyes will give you away, and the effect is not irony, but false pretensions. Then you undermine your credibility, which is really a stupid thing to do.

Killing your own pride in being smart is thus a presupposition for conducting a consultation with doses of irony that expose and disarm the other's pretensions of smartness. Then you have deprived him of his favourite hiding place, and led him out in the open, where fewer and simpler words will reveal the stupidity he tries to hide. The subject instinctively understands this, and accordingly refuses or resists the rules of the exercise imposed by the counselor.

### **To reconcile oneself with nothingness**

According to Oscar, it is a significant philosophical task to make people see their own stupidity. This also goes for the philosopher himself. One should be able to look oneself in the mirror each morning and say "Hey, stupid" – not as some self-diminishing ritual, but as an act of accepting oneself. To recognize the value of being stupid in the right way, and not to take oneself too seriously, is all-important to the philosophical counselor.

Such an acknowledgement of one's stupidity is also the way to reconcile oneself with nothingness, in the sense that you then learn how little you are, in order to be free. This is basic in Asian and African religions, and a general and very banal insight in the art of living.

I think that the aristocratic nature of Oscar's way of consultation also is shown in this coming to terms with one's own stupidity. When you are not afraid of breaking the taboo of exposing stupidity, but can do this without qualms, then you are above most person's concerns of looking smart, rooted in their pride and vanity. You can permit yourself what they cannot do, and there is a grandeur in doing that – just like it is a grandeur in being above money when you devote your time to counseling, even if your income might be very modest. Here we see how a modest attitude turns into grandness when it is real, and not mere pretense.

In short, you have to be quite sure of yourself in order to admit right away that you are not sure of what the other person means by saying so and so. That is a prerogative you have over all those people who are rather unsure of themselves, often to such an extent that they would not dare to admit their uncertainty.

#### 4. Philosophy as a way to stop living

We have so far established that an Oscarian counselor

- should guide the subject to places where she doesn't want to be
- should not be nice, but set the tone of Socratic questioning right away
- should not be concerned with solving the subject's problem, but rather make her look into the abyss, which hopefully stares back at her
- should be at liberty to ask stupid questions, and make the subject acknowledge her own stupidity

We must now add another major point to this bleak list, and that is that the counselor

- should realize that philosophy is a way to stop living

Or, as Oscar also puts it: In philosophy you learn about finitude, and thus you learn to die.

What this amounts to in practice, is, once more, to halt the urge to tell one's life story, to elaborate on a problem, and to contextualize it. Life surely consists of story, narration, desires and their fulfillment (or lack of fulfillment) – in short of events with a subject in its center. Philosophy, on the other hand, consists of concepts that do not tell any story, and that have no subject. Nor has philosophy any desires, apart from its pivotal urge to find the truth.

#### **Countering the urge to express oneself**

During a philosophical consultation or a group discussion, people frequently display an inner pressure to express themselves, and they get very frustrated if they are not given the opportunity to speak their mind freely, without interruption. Quite contrary to what a nice counselor would do, Oscar quickly stops this flow of speech and, as we have already seen, has no qualms about making the subject annoyed and frustrated. To him, philosophy is to stop the urge to tell stories, and to express one's feelings and opinions – which means to stop living. Telling a story is not a philosophical task, but explaining the story is.

There are no rules without exceptions, however. I recall a seemingly different approach by the philosophical counselor Petra von Morstein, who during her visit in Oslo a couple of years ago said that: "If the person starts talking in very abstract, non-narrative terms, it is difficult to see what his problem is. Then I ask him: 'Tell me a story.' When the person is given the task to tell a story which exemplifies his major point, we get something to work on."

Oscar does not disagree with this approach. Demanding a story can sometimes be a useful move, he admits, for the same reasons that Petra gives – provided that the story is quite short and sticks to the problem the subject wants to put forward. As soon as it has become clear what the subject wants to talk about, we can start the philosophical work by making the subject explain her own story, or by condensing it to a question.

This minor modification does not change the fact that philosophy is at odds with life. Life is full of desires which we seek to satisfy, and then to rest, while philosophizing is to impose a censorship on our desires, be it to express our feelings and opinions and to tell stories about ourselves. By bringing these desires to a halt, we in a way learn to die. Death is present in life, which is not just about accepting death in the end. It is also about stopping to want something – if not necessarily for the rest of our lifetime, so at least for the rest of the consultation session.

Philosophy is also to stop repeating principles and maxims in a rigid way – like “The future belongs to those who rise early.” Then we must say “Wait a minute, let’s examine it,” which is what Socrates did. This kind of examination is not very natural, and it can be very costly in a “psychological” way, as it prompts resistance, and maybe embarrassment, in the other when something one firmly believes to be true proves to be a problem – and on top of that is exposed as a mere opinion.

### **The philosophical schizophrenia**

Here we encounter a major difference between a philosophical and a psychological approach to the subject’s problem. The psychologist tends to say: “Stop speaking universally, start talking about yourself,” thus inviting a talk on intimate issues. The philosopher says the opposite: “Stop talking about yourself, start speaking universally.” While feelings do have a subject, namely the person who feels, reasoning is impersonal – or rather interpersonal – and has thus no subject. At the same time, it is basically human to be rational, cf. Aristoteles’ definition of man as a rational animal.

In order to philosophize you have to step outside of yourself. This leads, as Oscar states it, to what we can call the philosophical schizophrenia. It is painful to step outside oneself, not to be one. Then you leave the familiar kind of speech which is the house of the (empirical) self. Then you speak about your speech, which means that you reason about your own reasoning, as you cannot separate speech from reasoning. When you have left your empirical self in this way, you are not yourself anymore, but other. Then there is a fracture of being. Philosophy is thus also about the death of the self.

### **Killing the alternative**

During a consultation or a group discussion, Oscar often stops a person by saying “You think too much.” This is because people tend to make the answer much more complicated than what is called for in Oscar’s question. The tendency to think too much when confronted with a quite simple question of reasoning is another instance of the very human urge to express oneself. Or, quite often: to escape one’s own words by drowning the fish. When a person thinks too much, he surely creates confusion, which very well might be a strategy to get out of the fix his own words have put him into.

To reason is also about killing the alternative. In his questioning Oscar forces the subject to answer yes or no, or to make a choice between two alternatives, thus killing the alternative that is not chosen. Killing the alternative is another way to learn about finitude and death, he states. Then we realize that all options are not really open to us, as we tend to imagine in daily life.

To add a point of my own: A widespread self-deceptive way of thinking is to add up all the options we have to for instance take a job. “But if I don’t take the job,” we may say, “I

can devote myself to philosophy, and travel to Latin America, and spend time renovating my flat, and enjoy my freedom to look for a more interesting job,” and so on, thus making the prospect of not taking the job much more attractive than it actually is.

That is because we cannot at the same time devote ourselves to philosophy *and* travel to Latin America *and* renovate our flat *and* look for a more interesting job. We then have to choose between these other options, and looked upon in isolation, each of them may not be that more appealing than taking the job, as when they are lumped together.

Nevertheless we tend to put them together, and avoid as long as possible the necessity to kill any of them by making a choice. “Think of everything we shall do when I can quit my job and get my pension,” the workaholic husband typically says to his wife. Very often he ends up utterly frustrated in his leisure years, doing nothing.

### **To challenge the sense of omnipotency**

Oscar thinks that there is a sense of omnipotency in our tendency to avoid making choices, or distinctions – which also is to leave something out instead of putting everything together. Reasoning, he points out, is much about making distinctions. Without distinctions everything tend to merge into some kind of quasi-identity which is not clear at all. Then, as Hegel says, we get into the night where all cows are black.

One of Oscar’s favorite quotations from Plato also deals with this. When we are children, Plato says, we want everything at the same time. But when we grow up, we realize that we must choose.

A person’s unwillingness to realize the tension between different concept thus reveals an omnipotent urge to unite everything. Then we, as Oscar quotes Hegel, invite ourselves too quickly at the table of the divine, where everything is united. If you want to unite two different concepts – which according to Hegel is possible indeed – you must do that through a third concept, and not just state that e.g. security and freedom basically go together, because a certain amount of security is required in order to have freedom. Is there a new concept in your synthetic moment, or not? If not, please leave the table and try again.

Basically, to acknowledge a problem is to accept the finiteness of things. When you cannot unite two concepts, like security and freedom, right away, you are faced with a problem. Either you must choose one of them as the most important one, or you must find a third concept that bridges the gap you have discovered by realizing the unresolved tension between security and freedom. This is how problems are linked to finiteness, to one’s own finitude, which eventually is death.

### **To reconcile the subject with the problem**

A revealing question that Oscar asks from time to time, is: “Do you like problems, or not?” Then the other often makes an awkward smile, hesitates and utters a “maybe,” or “I don’t know.” Whereupon Oscar asks the eventual bystanders: “Who thinks that she likes problems?” Not surprisingly, nobody thinks she does – while most of them raise their hands when Oscar asks “Who thinks that she does *not* like problems?”

As he tells us, Oscar repeatedly experiences that most people don’t like problems. He believes that their reluctance to face a problem is that problems mean pain. This is why people quickly want to fill the gap, or even the abyss, that a problem reveals, in order to preserve their sense of omnipotency from the sobering fact of finitude. Then they are likely to pretend that the gap isn’t there at all.

The philosopher’s job thus is to reconcile the person with the problem. If not, the person will do everything to deny the problem. That is why it is so important to make the subject see the problem, head on, and why the counselor should not try to solve it, at least not

before it is fully acknowledged. Because, if the subject is not made to really see her problem, how can she be reconciled with it?

As Oscar demonstrated through a taped consultation session he played to us and commented upon, it can be really hard to make people see a problem within their own thinking – which usually is something else than their initial question, which may be a bogus question.

Bad faith is then a notion we should be aware of: that the subject, in spite of her reasoning capacities, repeatedly denies the existence of a problem in her thinking, even if this problem is evident for those who might listen to the dialogue. She denies it because she will not acknowledge the problem, as this might prompt a reconsideration of several deeply entrenched beliefs of her. That would be too painful, and quite frightening, too.

Oscar is, however, content if he realizes that the subject has had “a philosophical moment,” as he calls it, when she is made to see the problem. She may not admit that she has seen it, but when it to him (and to eventual bystanders) is evident that she has done so, the mission is accomplished – at least for the session in question. That may be as far as the subject can get at the present time. What then happens is up to the subject. She might try to forget about it and pretend that the moment never happened, or think about it and open up to a revised understanding of herself – which might make her ready for a new consultation after some time.

### **To relieve the subject of her will-power**

As Oscar points out, it takes a lot of will-power to maintain one’s bad faith during a consultation, or to repeatedly avoid answering the question. A die-hard subject will not play with the rules Oscar imposes, but insist on answering in her own way, and will do everything she can to get the upper hand and take the counselor for a ride.

Thus, too much will-power in the subject is not good thing during a consultation. Then the counselor must make the subject overcome her will-power, make her let go of it. This might be considered an attack on the person’s autonomy in a society where will-power is hailed as a favorable personal trait, and even as a precondition for autonomy. How can it be good for the subject to give in, and without resistance go along with answering the questions?

Again, this giving in is about the death of the self, and an acknowledgement of finitude. But since the dialogue takes place on the transcendental level of reason, where there is no (empirical) self, the letting go of one’s will-power makes sense. As long as the dialogue does not deal with intimate issues – as long as it has a personal and not private character – the momentary letting go of one’s will-power could in fact enable the subject to see herself in a new way than the usual one, and thus to expand her understanding of herself.

### **Resisting the demand to contextualize**

Two very common maneuvers to resist the rules of Oscar’s exercise is to answer “Yes, but ...” or “It depends ...” to a question that demands a clear choice or distinctions between two alternatives. Oscar then is very firm in his “No yes, but ... ,” as the subject’s urge to elaborate on, and thus contextualize her answer – which becomes evident with her “but” – must be silenced. It is then important to make the subject face the pain of having to make a choice which kills the alternative, and thus limits her further possibilities. The same goes with “It depends ... ,” which also is a demand to contextualize.

But, as Oscar warns us: “If you accept a contextualized answer to a general question, you are finished.” The urge to elaborate further on the issue is in most instances an urge to explain away the problem which emerges through the questioning. So if you allow the subject to explain away an upcoming problem, you allow her to take you for a ride. The objection “It

depends ...” should therefore be met with a “Yes, it depends, but if you have to make a choice between A and B, what would it be?”

What is, then, the urge to explain further and to contextualize before answering a general question? It is, again, the effort to avoid the pain of being confronted with a problem of one’s own thinking. As we have seen, most people don’t like problems for this reason. That is why Oscar’s insistence on clear, short general answers to equally clear and short general questions so often is met with the “yes, but” and the “it depends” objection. Which ventilates the frustration of not being allowed to drown the fish in a massive contextualized complexity.

“You make it too simple!” is a common accusation, or “You banalize the problem, as real life is much more complex than this!” Sure it is, when it comes to our empirical lives. But now our empirical life is not the issue; it is our way of reasoning Oscar’s exercise deals with.

### **The necessity to label**

Another feature of Oscar’s very stripped down way of questioning is that it allows for labelling the issue in a seemingly crude way. If the subject has produced the antinomy Selfish – Generous, Oscar might ask “What would a selfish person say to so and so?”, and “What would a generous person say to so and so?”. It may seem quite rude, and out of touch with life’s many nuances, to label a person with only one adjective, as in these two questions. The subject may also feel herself being labeled, directly or indirectly, and consider this an insult. It is okay to put labels on jars that contain sugar, flour, etc. But to label people in a similar way? That’s outrageous!

Oscar nevertheless defends the necessity to label whatever it may be, as an act of thinking. This is a way of making distinctions, to ensure that sugar and flour is not mixed together in thought. If there is a tendency to oversimplify matters in question by way of labeling, it on the other hand helps us to clarify our thoughts by forcing us to make mutually exclusive distinctions, which is essential in thinking.

This does not imply that we once and for all must settle for fixed, rigid alternatives, labeled once and for all. Hegel has shown that this needs not be the case, because opposites may be reconciled by way of a third, unifying concept. But in order to get to this unifying moment, you have to label, to categorize, in the first place; if not, you get nowhere, but are stuck in the night where all cows are black. Making the complexity of empirical life an excuse to stay in this night is thus far off the mark.

The insulting flavour of the task of labeling is that this, too, challenges people’s sense of omnipotency. “I’m so complex and special that I cannot be labeled in such a crude way,” people tend to think, at least in the modern western culture. But is this really so when we look further into it? Oscar thinks no, and has stated that people are quite banal. If so, this is a harsh truth that most people would tend to escape, mainly by drowning this unagreeable fish in the many yes, but’s of empirical life.

This, I believe, is a question of vanity, as most people would like to be regarded as complex and special rather than simple and banal. To be complex and special is supposed to make us more interesting, both to ourselves and to other people, than if we were quite simple and banal. As is the case with the fear of looking stupid, the philosopher must overcome his wish to be complex and supposedly interesting, and be at ease with being simple, whether this is considered interesting or not.

## **5. Some vital technicalities**

During the seminary Oscar dealt with some vital technicalities which borders on the realm of informal logic. I have already touched upon some of them, particularly when I mentioned the “Yes, but ... ” and “It depends ...” objections.

In addition to these, the subject often takes refuge in the “Maybe” objection. To say “Maybe” is to imply that something is possible, without being specific on how likely or unlikely this is. If the counselor allows the subject to get away with such a “maybe,” Oscar states, he allows her to escape the choice between the two alternatives in question, and thus to take him for a ride.

### **What maybe may be, according to Leibniz**

The different ways in which the subject may use the “maybe” word is worth consideration. One way is to say “maybe” when it is obvious that the possibility implied is a very likely one. Then the maybe is only an attempt to escape a concession, and should be revealed as such.

Alternatively, the subject says “maybe” when the possibility implied is a very remote one. Then, Oscar advises, the counselor must go for what is probable: “Yes, maybe you will be struck by lightning, and maybe the Martians are coming, but what would you consider the most probable to be of A and B?” This will bring the subject back to the choice she is so reluctant to make.

There is, however, instances where the counselor should himself appeal to what is possible. These are when the subject flatly denies something to be the case, without having a good reason for doing so. Then Oscar suspects that what she denies, indeed is the case.

As Oscar points out, to say “No it’s not possible” is a very harsh statement. As a rule of thumb, he takes such a radical negation as a lie. It is, as he sees it, a defense response. Then it can be useful to introduce hypothetical situations by asking “Suppose you are ... could you then ... ?”, or: “Is it *possible* that so and so nevertheless *could* be the case?” In instances where such a possibility is not very farfetched, but something that is quite probable, such a move may be revealing.

Oscar leans on Leibniz in this respect, as this German rationalist philosopher developed a distinction between four logical categories that has proved to be very useful in consultations. According to Leibniz, there are degrees of being which can be categorized in this way:

- What is *impossible*, which is something that cannot be or happen
- What is *possible*, which is something that can be or happen, but which is next to the impossible
- What is *probable*, which is something that is or happens in general, but which does not exclude exceptions
- What is *necessary*, which is something that must be or happen

To be well aware of these four categories, and to counter confusion by making use of them, is vital to the counselor.

### **The difference between conceptualizing and problematizing**

Another well-known source of confusion during a consultation, is the subject’s – and in lots of cases also the counselor’s – inability to distinguish between conceptualizing and problematizing. But, as Oscar emphasizes, these are two different tasks that cannot be accomplished at the same time. The counselor must thus be very clear about what is going on at any time during a consultation: Do we now conceptualize, or do we problematize? Often, the subject is tempted to start problematizing before she has accomplished the task of conceptualizing, which must come first, and if the counselor allows her to do this, he is finished.

According to Kant, Oscar reminds us, what is problematic is a kind of statements that must not be mixed together with what is necessary, or what is merely an opinion. In order to know what we at any time deal with, Kant divides statements into three kinds:

- *Assertoric* statements, which give opinions, as in daily life where persons state what is or is not the case according to themselves, often without giving reasons
- *Apodictic* statements, which are of a scientific kind, where necessity plays a role
- *Problematic* statements, which are about what is merely possible

In daily life people tend to give assertoric statements a flavour of necessity that is unjustified, in order to avoid any problematisation of them. “The future belongs to those who rise early” is such an assertoric statement that a counselor should work on by counter-examples that disprove its claim of necessity, and throws it in the realm of problematic statements. Another instance is, as mentioned above, when the subject flatly denies something else to be possible than her own statement, even when it is of an assertoric kind.

As Oscar reminds us: when people agree upon something, they stop thinking. Assumed knowledge is one of the most terrible things that stop thinking, and that’s why Socrates insisted on his ignorance. It is confusion of the mind that makes us think. People may be reluctant to be brought into such a confusion, because they fear that they then will know less than before. But, as the philosopher must point out: Who knows more – the person who affirms, or the person who questions things?

### **The difference between objection and disagreement**

Quite related to the difference between conceptualizing and problematizing is the difference between an objection and another idea. Confusion in this respect is especially frequent in group discussions, but occurs also in one-to-one consultations. This confusion makes people object to an idea because it is different from their own idea, even if this idea does make sense.

In a loose sense of the verb, “to object” may also mean to disagree, but when employed in a philosophical discussion, the notions objection and disagreement must be kept apart. In order to object to an idea you must prove that there is something wrong/false with this idea, so that it does not make sense. If it, however, does make sense, you might disagree with it by offering a different idea. But then you don’t have an objection.

During a consultation, the counselor is supposed to encourage a debate within the subject, in order to make her be at a distance from herself, and then to think. At such instances it might happen that the subject mixes objections and disagreements. Then the counselor must ask questions that makes her see the difference and let go of the confusion.

### **The difference between questions and hidden statements**

Since the counselor’s task is to ask questions, and not to add ideas of his own, he must be very conscious of posing real questions, and not make a statement hidden in a false question. Not every sentence that ends with a question mark is a real question, as the ancient masters of rhetorics knew. If a question is posed in such a way that the other is heavily inclined towards a specific answer, the question is rhetorical and should be avoided.

Hidden statements are opinions of one’s own lightly disguised as a question. A typical way of phrasing a hidden statement is to start the question with “Isn’t it so that ...?”. Then the so that usually is an opinion of one’s own, and not an open-minded inquiry.

The same goes for questions like “Are you in fact a guru, Oscar, and not a philosophical counselor?”. We don’t have to wonder much what a person posing such a question means about that.



During the seminary, we had an exercise in posing questions to specific answers, and it became evident that it is very easy to lapse into hidden statements. This kind of false questions should of course be abandoned during a consultation.

I would like to add an observation of my own, namely that Oscar phrases a typical question of his by saying “Is it so and so, or not?”. To me, to add “or not?” at the end heightens the question’s quality as a real question, because it allows the subject to answer more freely yes or no than if the question had been “Is it so and so?”. Then, I think, the subject would have been inclined to answer yes rather than no, even if this way of posing the question is not rhetorical. This little example shows how meticulous Oscar is in posing real questions in his own practice, which surely is an example to follow.

## 6. On world vision

As my remarks so far on Oscar’s work shows, he tends to be much more concerned about form than content in a philosophical dialogue. This is, I think, even more the case in a group discussion than in a one-to-one consultation. Since the seminary mostly dealt with group discussions, the emphasis on form was evident in many sessions. Oscar even stated once that the theme of discussion merely was an excuse to exercise on the formal element, as every discussion needs a content to get started. To people who really cares for the theme, this may be quite frustrating.

There was, however, sessions where the content played the main role, as when the theme for discussion was the world vision embedded in a statement. Early on in the seminary, Oscar stated his conviction that everyone carries a world vision, whether the person is aware of it or not. Then such a world vision may be conscious as well as unconscious.

Despite its psychological connotations, Oscar does not refrain from using the word unconscious in a philosophical context. But, as he points out, the unconscious is not the same to a philosopher as to a psychologist. To a philosopher, the concept “unconscious” deals with thoughts of a cognitive nature that are presupposed, even if they are not present in the person’s consciousness at a certain moment. To a psychologist, the unconscious deals with traumas from one’s personal experience, which are suppressed from consciousness to the point that the person is no longer consciously aware of them, even when she is encouraged to scan her memory for such experiences.

I suppose that the unconscious in the philosophical sense has to do with the fact that we cannot have all our thoughts and presuppositions present in our consciousness at the same time. Only what is requested for the situation we are in at the moment, which is a very limited number of all our thoughts and presuppositions, can be consciously present. When I sit in a room and am occupied with some work or some thinking or some discussion, I presuppose that the floor will carry me and the roof will not fall down in my head, and so on, even if I do not give these considerations a thought.

What is important to note here, is that such “unconscious” considerations keep influencing my thoughts and actions at every moment, even if they are not in my consciousness. They continue to be basic presuppositions of what I think and do, also when they are outside the very narrow field of my consciousness at a specific moment – and can we speak about consciousness in another way than of consciousness at a specific moment?

We must admit, however, that some propositions of our own are more reluctantly brought into consciousness than other propositions which we for some reason find less embarrassing or controversial. The subject’s refusal or resistance to admit certain thoughts, which repeatedly is exposed in Oscar’s consultations, clearly demonstrates this.

We may thus have reason to suppose that a person can keep some propositions of a cognitive, un-private nature outside his or her consciousness in a more systematic way than when the question is whether the roof will fall down or not, as the latter question is quite uncontroversial unless one is actually worried if the building is unsolid, which rarely is the case (at least in my life). The person's resistance to admit certain propositions is then quite similar to a person's resistance to bring some trauma of the past back into consciousness. This means that the border between the philosophically unconsciousness and the psychologically unconsciousness is blurred and cannot be drawn sharply.

This may shed some light on the seemingly paradoxical fact that a discussion of concepts or logical matters may trigger a considerable emotional resistance or upheaval in the subject. The paradoxical bit is that one could believe that conceptual or logical matters are of such an impersonal kind that they would not be able to trigger any emotions by themselves. We have learned to believe that only intimate matters can be capable of doing this, but the purely conceptual and logical questioning by Socrates and others proves that this is not the case.

Maybe the source of the resistance to bring thoughts as well as traumas into consciousness is that both thoughts and traumas may counter the person's preferred image of himself, which are often based on quite unrealistic or false presuppositions, if not to say wishful thinking. I believe that one's relationship with other people – the inevitable fact that we constantly are seen with the glance of others, to speak with Sartre, and to a large extent internalize the other's glance – very much constitutes our outlook on the world and on ourselves, which are the two sides of the same coin and cannot be completely separated.

To return to the seminar, Oscar prompted us to bring our world vision into consciousness by telling us to write our intellectual testament in a limited number of words, and, in another session, by explaining the morale of a fairy tale story (the Cinderella story) as each one of us saw it. By comparing each participant's work, and by conceptualizing the main differences, it became evident that our own way of thinking is not the only possible way, but that there are world visions quite different from our own, but very possible and reasonable ones all the same.

To be aware of different kinds of world visions, and to encounter a world vision different from our own in a consultation or in a group discussion, is what a counselor must train himself to do. Again, the counselor must not try to impose his own ideas on the subject, and certainly not his own world vision. Instead, he must make the subject more conscious of her own world vision, which is embedded in her own statements. Often, when he makes the subject counter her own argument by encouraging her to "think the unthinkable," as he calls it, an inquiry between two world visions may be detected within the same subject.

To make the subject realize this – as I did in Copenhagen two years ago, when Oscar questioned me in a consultation open to the public, and exposed a tension between a Kantian and an Epicurean approach in my thinking – should be a major aim of the consultation. Then the subject is given the opportunity to know herself better.

I will thus conclude these rather lengthy remarks by quoting Oscar from an earlier occasion, when he said that "Our job is to convert people to their own religion." To me this is a very precise, and condensed, formulation of what the Oscarian approach is all about.