

Release as philosophy

Abstract The virtue of non-willing – or release, as I propose to call it – involves letting go of evaluations that create our perceptual and existential focus. It contrasts with vices that spring from strong and multiple desires and aversions. Release engenders tranquility and joy of life as well as makes us capable of an impersonal way of perceiving the world. Non-judgmental, preferably unfocused awareness as a philosophical exercise for enhancing openness to release can be supplemented with arguments to the conclusion that we may not be able to know what we have a reason to will. Will-quieting philosophical counseling does not accordingly seek to find and organize aims but to elicit not-knowing regarding the right path of life. Counselors can also suggest that there may be several equally good ways to proceed, and we can choose between them with a released attitude towards our first-order desires.

Keywords release, simplicity, virtue, tranquility, joy, unfocused awareness, philosophical exercises, philosophical counseling

Introduction

Philosophy as a way of life with an emphasis on love of wisdom may include practicing a virtue we can call release. I will here describe this virtue and the reasons we have for embracing it. I will also reflect on how release can be fostered in philosophical exercises and in philosophical counseling.

Release as non-willing

Release is a state of non-willing, or a process of letting oneself enter such a state. Non-willing should not be confused with unwillingness. Unwillingness is negative willing in which a person is averse to something. Resistance, fear, hate and loathing are examples of unwillingness. Positive forms of willing imply a relationship of attraction. Preference, desire, grasping and addiction can be cited as examples. Release resembles yielding and bending one's will in the respect that all of these involve non-opposition and non-contention. It is also similar to conforming one's will to the prevailing situation. Release should nevertheless be seen as a different phenomenon, because only something that exists can yield, bend or conform to something else; and in release there is no will at all.

If the object of our desire is not in our own power, we often speak of wishing or hoping instead of willing; but for our current purposes wishing and hoping can be considered kinds of willing. Grief, regrets and a bad conscience can similarly be seen as forms of unwillingness even if the past cannot be altered except in our memories. It should be noted that even if the thing we want is in our control, our will itself may not be. In this respect willing and unwilling are not always voluntary: we may not be able to have the will we want (Frankfurt 1971). Our feelings of frustration and anger, for example, are frequently not in our power, and neither are tendencies like greed, lust, envy and ambition.

Willing and non-willing are not necessarily temporally separate but rather overlapping phases of our lives: we can continue willing and at the same time enjoy some degree of release with respect to our willing. For instance, a person may have a desire for a cake and an ice cream, but if he prefers neither of these, he can be said to be in state of release with respect to his desires. This could be called second-order release. Second-order release can also concern second-order unwillingness like fear of desire or even fear of fear.

Willing embodies evaluations in the sense that our will moves us towards states of affairs that we consider good, and turns away from seemingly bad things. Release as non-willing is accordingly a state of letting things happen without judging them either good or bad. We neither praise nor curse them. This attitude can be described as acceptance, acquiescence and even indifference, and it can concern both our environment and our internal states such as thoughts and feelings. Release cannot be brought about without abandoning evaluative thinking and evaluative attitudes; and in fact the process of leaving evaluative attitudes aside is identical with release.

Released events in, or from, our minds and bodies are not directed by aims. Released thinking, for instance, is not goal-directed. It does not seek any theoretical or practical result. Associations and musings without ostensible motives are released kind of thinking (see Kenkô 1998 for a classic literary example), and sometimes release can also manifest as absence of thoughts. Since there is no premeditation of ends and means in release, we can regard it as a kind of spontaneity and naturalness. To the extent that willing and ends are essential elements of our concept of action, released processes are not actions at all.¹ If by 'passion' we mean an internal event that happens despite and even contrary to our will, these processes are not passions either, for there is no will for them to oppose or to encourage.

Willing is an essentially temporal phenomenon that connects our thoughts, attitudes and feelings to specific past or future states of affairs. Even a simple evaluation that the present condition should continue is temporal and leads our thoughts towards the future. Release tends to let us dwell on the events of the present moment, and our sense of the passage of time as well as of causal relations may weaken. We may still think about the past or the future, but these thoughts are not linked to positive or negative evaluations. This corresponds to the way in which we entertain relations of willingness and unwillingness to other places and to events that do not occur where we are. We can for instance wish that we were somewhere else. Non-willing has a propensity to let us think about the events of our present place; but if we happen to think about other places, it cleanses these thoughts of value comparisons.

Willing directs our focus: we are interested in those areas of our internal and external world that appear to be conducive to the satisfaction of our will. We can for instance concentrate on some object we are able hear or see, and exclude other possible objects to a faint and indistinct area of awareness. Or perhaps we pay particular attention to a thought or an emotion, and are scarcely aware of the fact that there are birds singing. In this case we can also say that our focus expresses our sense of what is important, or expresses in a concrete form a judgment of value. Still another formulation could be that concentration is a function of willing, which in its turn is a function of evaluations. Moreover, willing can be considered a kind of focus itself, because it attaches us to quite specific states of affairs that we would like to see realized. Willing, like all forms of attention, gives our minds and lives a certain direction both in time and in space. It connects us to the world, but it also narrows and closes off our minds through its focusing power.

Release is state of unfocused receptivity or openness in which our minds are widely aware of everything that we are capable of experiencing. In an ultimately unfocused state of awareness we are equally aware of everything in the external world and in our inner being. Since all kinds of foci may not be influenced by our will, release does not necessarily take us to complete openness but rather to a state in which our focus wanders aimlessly; but to the extent that willing either directs our focus, or is a kind of focus itself, release induces receptivity to the world. It enables us to experience the world more comprehensively than in a condition of will-directed concentration.

Many spiritual traditions and philosophers have referred in their writings to phenomena that resemble the disposition I have here called release. Without going into a detailed discussion of similarities and differences between the idea of release and these related concepts, let me first of all mention Buddhist non-attachment and Jain equanimity. These notions refer to the importance of not clinging to transient phenomena, and according to many interpretations they also signify a non-evaluative attitude towards the events of our lives. Taoist *wu wei* means not forcing things through will-power, and often this concept is associated with non-purposive behavior. In the Christian Europe Meister Eckhart praised the virtue of detachment which is essentially non-willing (1981, pp. 285-294). The quietist current within Christianity has similarly emphasized release from willing. In the history of philosophy, Stoic indifference towards that which does not depend on us is a clear example of setting aside evaluative thinking. One of Schopenhauer's main themes was cessation of willing as a kind of liberation (1966, fourth book), and Heidegger's translators use the word 'releasement' to denote *Gelassenheit* (2010; on *Gelassenheit* see also Achenbach 2000), a state that involves non-willing. Krishnamurti's (1975, ch. 3) idea of indiscriminating awareness comes close to my conception of release as unfocused awareness. Ernst Jünger's (1995) image of an anarchist exemplifies mental distance to social roles and norms. I do not wish to suggest that these writers and traditions have the same concept of release as I have described, but to recognize the fact that my idea of release as non-willing is not a completely original notion.

Reasons for release: peace, joy, and experiencing the world as it is

We do not necessarily get what we want, or succeed in avoiding the things we are averse to; the material or non-material price of achieving the objects of our will can be higher than we expected or wished for; the satisfaction we get from those objects may be less intense or more ephemeral than we foresaw. These points do not imply that we should not will at all. Our own interests and the interests of other beings are possible sources of reasons for willing, and in practice most people seem to recognize the motivating power of at least those reasons that relate to their own primal, mostly inborn necessities of life such as nutrition and shelter: we have to will and develop plans if we are to survive and to live the kinds of lives we consider good. This implies that we need to exercise focused perception and focused thinking (see Rand 1964, ch. 1). However, willing does expose us to a variety of cares, anxieties, frustrations and other negative moods and emotions. To a great extent this exposure is caused by the unavoidable fact that our power is limited. We are inescapably helpless in the face of the events of our environment and of our own bodies and minds.

Letting go of the burden of willing is essential for relaxation and tranquility. This is why the word 'release' seems appropriate for non-willing: non-willing as letting go of one's grip sets one free from anxiety about the world and one's own being. Willing is a bond that connects us to the world, and freedom from this bondage appears as peace. We live effortlessly or at least without forcing things in a state of non-attachment to our self and the world. Since we do not have any wish to control the events of the world and to make them conform to our will, there is no fear of loss or failure either. Release is lightness and airiness of spirit.

The peace of mind brought about by non-evaluation can be accompanied by a joy that has no cause or reason apart from the fact of one's existence.² This joy is not about any specific person, thing or event but concerns the world as such. The feelings that resemble it the least are such as sorrow and anxiety about particular states of affairs in the world. Often these non-released feelings exclude and repel release, but sometimes we can feel sorrow or anxiety together with second-order released joy. This combination expresses the idea that even if the details of our lives are not as they should be, we can still accept our existence as such.

Tranquility and joy as reasons for release cannot in practice be separated from perceptual reasons relating to the fact that wide awareness enables us to experience the world as it is in itself instead of merely experiencing it as a resource for our desires and projects (see Hadot 1995, p. 254; Lahav 2008). If our minds are purified from willing, we are able to experience the world in an impersonal way: release *from* the world is at the same a release *into* the world as such. It lets the world be as it is independently of our focused take on it. This world is not necessarily *my* world; or to express this even more pointedly, this life does not have to be my life.

In a state of wide awareness useful spatial distinctions lose their relevance, and even the possibility of making them cannot be taken for granted, for there is no focused awareness that would offer a starting point for these orientations. This concerns the distinctions between up and down and left and right. Unfocused awareness of everything that happens can also develop into a sense that the distinction between the internal and the external blurs. These two aspects of our lives are always an inseparable whole. There cannot logically be any inside without an outside, or outside without an inside, and the temporal end of the internal world is also the end of the external world (and we have no way of knowing what, if anything, remains of the world as such after the internal world has vanished). But sometimes the internal aspect of our lives is so near to the external world that there is no clear difference between these two at all. In this state it is difficult to say whether something is within or without us. The dimension of depth that usually exists between the observing subject and the observed object becomes less distinct. Ego as a separate point or entity vanishes together with focused awareness and the inside it creates. Since the possibility of openness requires an inside and an outside, the fuzziness of this distinction implies that the applicability of the concepts of openness and receptivity becomes suspect.

I mentioned above that release tends to let us dwell on the events of the present moment. However, often it would be more appropriate to say that in the same way as release reduces the applicability of spatial concepts, it makes the distinctions between the past, the present and the future less useful than they are in a state of willing. In many cases release is more accurately described as a timeless or non-temporal experience, for to the extent that the past and the future cease to concern us, we do not think of our experience as happening in the present either. The experience occurs, but not in time.

Release as a virtue

If we regard virtues as the mental dispositions that increase the probability of our being able to live well (Tukiainen 2012), release should be counted among the virtues. It contrasts with will-related virtues such as productiveness, carefulness, resilience and desire for justice. Many virtues have both will-related and released aspects. Mercy, for instance, is willingness to overlook wrongs and defects, but it can also be released kind of letting things be. Courage can imply both resolute action in fear-inspiring circumstances and a resigned readiness to let frightful things happen. Accepting this possibility may lead to release from fear. Temperance can mean leaving things undone or alone; and this form of release has become even more central than before in our times of disastrous exploitation of nature.

The vices that correspond to release derive from, or are identical with, excessively strong or excessively numerous attractions and aversions. The concept of excessiveness often refers either to unhealthiness or to immorality. Thus a desire for food is not commonly regarded as a vice unless it endangers one's health or is directed towards impermissible objects; and whereas slight irritation is not usually called a vice, constant anger that causes harm to others can be seen as one. Nevertheless, the

roots of vice are in the will itself, however weak and simple it may be.

Attractions and aversions that signal addiction to worldly states of affairs are vices. Addiction means inability to let go of one's will and its object: an addicted person cannot change his will if he wants to, and in this sense he is not free. Desires that uphold our health are usually not called addictions although we are unwilling and unable to let go of their objects. Desire for nutrition, for instance, is not regarded as an addiction even if it makes us extremely dependent on the world. The less secure the conditions of the satisfaction of our will are, the more serious this vice is. Although exercises and preoccupations of the mind can be obsessions, they are typically less precarious and thus less vicious than addictions in the world of senses. The virtue that is opposed to addiction is independence. Increasing independence means increasing virtuousness.

Stubbornness is another vice of strong will. A stubborn person clings to his projects even in circumstances that evidently do not favor their completion. He may also be so keenly attached to his thoughts that no evidence will convince him to abandon them. The virtue that corresponds to this vice is flexibility. A flexible person is ready to change his plans whenever it becomes apparent that his original wishes are going to be thwarted, and keeps his mind open to new ideas and perspectives when faced with evidence and rational arguments.

Strong and numerous bonds of will to the world are vicious, but excessive release can also be a vice. The vice of negligence is lack of care about one's own vital interests and the vital interests of other beings. Negligence about eating, for example, means not paying proper attention to one's health. Extreme negligence about the well-being of other people can be considered immoral.

Since the opposite of non-willing is strongly willing a multiplicity of things, the virtue of release can also be called simplicity. Simplicity helps us to avoid complications of life that arise from our having too many aims. It is not self-restraint or self-control but rather absence of desires that need to be modified and moderated by will. An attitude of simplicity cannot be one of self-importance or self-assertion, and neither is it compatible with duplicity. Simplicity is openness and lack of premeditation. It eschews hurry and status competition. In fact simplicity excludes all kinds of value comparisons between one's own situation and that of others. Complete simplicity may not be possible because of our primal desires and aversions, and the same applies to the virtue of release.

Openness to release: the way of perception and the way of thinking

Becoming released cannot in the end signify a will to quit willing, because willing release is still willing. Although we cannot directly bring about release by deliberations and actions that aim at non-willing, we can nevertheless attune ourselves to experiences and conditions of life that make us open to being released. Openness to release increases the probability of release.

Release requires suspending evaluative judgments and attitudes. There are at least two ways to exercise this suspension: the way of perception and the way of thinking.

The way of perception to openness to release is unfocused, indiscriminating awareness: while willing directs, or is, our focus, unfocused awareness of our internal events and the external world is, or tends to produce, release. Perceptual indiscrimination means that we do not divide things into the important and the unimportant, into those that are worth noticing and those that can be ignored. We cease to affirm relations of perceptual preference and thus wean ourselves from willing and unwillingness. Our thoughts and feelings change freely without aims, and our awareness does not pay specific attention

either to them or to their possible correlates in the sensory world. It does not give a spotlight to painful and destructive currents, and there is no encouraging engagement with pleasurable and constructive movements either. This disengagement allows attractions and aversions to take their course to their end; and continual exercise of unfocused awareness hopefully makes our streams of positive and negative willing weaker not only while we are exercising release but when we are active and focused.

Wide awareness can perhaps best be practiced in a state of immobility (sitting or lying, for example), but it is also compatible with movements and bodily exercises that do not require thinking ahead. The movements may be physically demanding, but they should be well-practiced and even automatic. Examples could include walking, running, swimming, gymnastics, stretching, cross-country skiing, archery, and tai chi chuan. Eating and drinking can be ritualized to an extent that allows for release. More generally, any process of our lives that does not call for planning or other forms of anticipation of the future can be an occasion for practicing wide awareness. Peaceful sights and flowing soundscapes such as breaking ocean waves and electronic ambient music can increase the probability of a released state of mind. Solitude is a benefit but not a requirement. (The way of perception to openness to release enables us to see distinctly that philosophical practice does not always have to include talking. It does not even have to involve thinking about some specific issue.)

The practice of unfocused perception requires tenacity but becomes gradually easier and more natural; and in fact it can become so integrated to our life that calling it an exercise makes it sound too separate and replaceable. After some years of practice we can spend several hours on end in a state of relatively wide awareness. With practice we can also alternate between focused and unfocused modes of consciousness more and more quickly.

The temporal boundary lines between focused and unfocused awareness are not sharp: our thoughts, feelings and senses can be at different distances from the two extremes of being completely focused or completely unfocused. For instance, we can concentrate our thoughts while our sense of sight remains unfocused, and even our thoughts can be less than totally focused. This means that our exercise of non-willing can partly continue while we are performing our worldly tasks in a more or less focused state and exercising our will; and practice can liberate larger areas of our consciousness from the grip of focused attention.

All of our desires and aversions may not disappear from our minds while we are exercising unfocused awareness, but these promptings do not lead to action. Wide awareness thus weakens the connection between the will and its expression in action. One essential benefit of this exercise for our periods of focused awareness is that it creates room for deliberating whether we should act on our impulses or merely pay attention to them. Wide awareness makes us capable of enduring non-action, and this is beneficial in case our actions would be harmful either to us or the rest of the biosphere. Neglect of desires and aversions can also lead to their withering.

It is advisable to exercise non-judgmental awareness when we observe in our thoughts or feelings awnings and beginnings of what we suspect might develop into strong attractions or aversions, and avoid feeding and inflating them by our evaluations. Stilling a strong will is more uncertain and takes more time than letting a young and undeveloped will dwindle and vanish.

Focusing on some feature of our experience typically implies that we consider it worth concentrating on, but it does not necessarily mean judging that feature good or bad. We can for instance be specifically aware of our state of fear without trying to avoid it. This kind of focused, yet non-judgmental awareness is a midway point between unfocused awareness and focused awareness with

evaluations and willing. We can practice it if we are unable to exercise fully unfocused perception.

Openness to release can also be enhanced by thinking about the fact that we do not necessarily know what we have a reason to will, and that we may not even be able to know this. There are two general, interrelated lines of argumentation for this conclusion. Firstly, we may not know all the facts that our evaluations should depend upon. We cannot predict the total consequences of the choices we can now make, and it is not possible to know all the details of the courses of action we could have chosen but in fact did not choose. Regretting our past choices is often based on the questionable ideas that we can compare the results of our actual choices with the results of some alternative choices, and that all of these possible lines of future events were to some sufficient degree within the reach of our cognitive powers at the time we had to make our choice. Regret could be replaced by mercy towards our former self. Secondly, even if we assume that we know all the non-evaluated facts, we may not be able to know how much value the possible objects of our will have in themselves and in relation to other potential aims of life. For example, it is not evident that we can know which of the available courses of action will have the most beneficial impact on our happiness. The things that we desire may turn out to be burdensome or otherwise less valuable than we anticipate, and the things that we fear might actually be sources of joy. Perhaps we have to sacrifice so many other valuable things in life in order to achieve our favored aims that it is questionable whether we should adopt them at all. Although our will cannot always be influenced by reasons, pondering these bewildering facts concerning the limits of our knowledge is likely to make us more receptive to release. Evaluative confusion can develop into a subsiding will.

Often we want to continue willing even if we do not have any certainty about the rightness of our will; and the aim of releasing arguments does not have to be complete non-willing and non-action but removal of excessive anxiety and sorrow from our minds by understanding the possibly unavoidable element of blindness about what we should will. If we cannot know what we should will, our choice must be to some extent random, and there is no reason to take it heavily. Second-order release through an acknowledgment of ignorance brings us distance and calmness with respect to our orientations.

Second-order release is especially natural in the frequent cases where several possible objects of our will appear to us equally good or equally bad. Since there is no reason to prefer any particular path, we can make our choice with equanimity. Even if there now appear to be differences of value between our options, we can try to adopt an even second-order temperament by reminding ourselves of the fact that we may not yet have all the information we need in order to form a balanced judgment of the issue. Perhaps further experiences will show that our preferential desires and aversions were based on mistakes. As Seneca optimistically says about seemingly bad circumstances (2004, p. 90): “In any situation of life you will find delights and pleasures and relaxations if you are prepared to make light of your troubles and not let them distress you [...] So you have to get used to your circumstances, complain about them as little as possible, and grasp whatever advantage they have to offer: no condition is so bitter that a stable mind cannot find some consolation in it.” Similar points apply to seemingly excellent conditions of life: it is quite possible that they are not as good as we now imagine them on the basis of the information that is available to us.

Moreover, it is useful to take into account beforehand all the conditions that we may end up in despite our plans, and to balance in our minds their positive sides with their adverse features to the extent that this is possible. This preparation enables us to be more open to release in the present, and to prevent excessive distress or elation if those unplanned events actually take place in the future. Balancing the good with the bad also increases our flexibility by detaching our minds from all predictable outcomes.

Release in philosophical counseling

From the standpoint of release philosophical counseling should be seen as a process of dissolving evaluative thoughts and attitudes that bring about problems of life. The purpose is not so much to solve them as to let go of them and to make them disappear: these philosophical problems are expressions of our will, and non-willing makes us free of them. To the extent that we can define our self as a cluster of aims and the patterns of life that these aims motivate, release counseling seeks to free us from the problematic parts of the selves that we have become. It should be emphasized that release is just one of the virtues that counseling seeks to encourage. Non-willing has to be complemented by virtues of willing (Tukiainen 2010).

Release-inducing counseling involves thinking about the fact that we may not be able to know how we should proceed in our lives, or how we ought to evaluate the present and the past. It also takes seriously the idea that there might not be any uniquely correct answers to our questions concerning the right path of life. These thoughts may paralyze the counselee's will, and she can become more attuned to release. Counseling thus includes what I have called the way of thinking to openness to release; and again it is crucial to notice that release does not always have to be first-order non-willing without aims and planning but rather a peaceful second-order attitude towards first-order life-orientations.

Although counseling requires some concentration and is therefore not an ideal time for exercising unfocused awareness, these sessions can inspire the counsees to enter the path of perception to openness to release and to stay on it despite distractions. Counseling is also a good occasion for bringing up the general idea of release and the reasons we have for practicing this virtue. Counselors can advocate ways of life that incorporate release, just like they encourage the development of will-related virtues.

Helping the counselee towards release can be especially worthwhile in three kinds of situations that all feature concerns about life-orientation. First of all this is the case when the counselee has mutually incompatible directions of will and cannot decide between them; secondly, when it is not certain that she will reach her goals even if she manages to decide what she will do or what kind of attitude she will try to assume; and thirdly when it is unclear that she will really get happier by attaining her aims. These descriptions are almost always true to some extent; but even when they are evidently true, counselors may easily follow a habit of trying to find the uniquely best solution instead of promoting release.³ Metaphorically speaking we dream of foreseeable paths to known destinations even if reality is often more like a pathless terrain or at most beginnings of paths to uncertain destinations. Instead of trying to solve the counsees' problems with them by delineating a clear road ahead, counselors should sometimes push them further into uncertainty and to suggest release. This can be wise even if the counsees themselves would like to have definite goals and plans in their lives (see also Lahav 2006).

Freedom from thinking about our present aims and the available means of reaching them gives us more room for spontaneous ideas and attitudes. Release can therefore be an origin of unforeseeable changes in the counselee's life: instead of preoccupying herself with her pre-existing self and trying to find satisfaction in its terms, she becomes open to unexpected possibilities of thinking and being. Letting go of her self can lead to a transformed self. With some luck this transformation reflects a more authentic and truthful conception of the counselee's inner being, and enables some obscurely perceived but essential parts of it to enter a more clearly recognized area of reflection and action. Since released ways of understanding ourselves and our world do not emerge at will, receiving them often requires waiting and patience.

One important facet of philosophical counseling is showing what release is in practice: there can be pockets of aimlessness in the process of philosophical counseling itself. A released counselor lets the conversation develop without a preconceived agenda and remains open to new conceptions and meanings. Surprising associations between ideas and observations might motivate the counselee to try out something similar by herself. If the counseling session includes walking, taking unexpected turns can strengthen the seeds of release in the mind of the counselee. Suddenly pointing out something in the surroundings can also have a beneficial effect.

Conclusion

There is a difference between will-affirming and will-quieting philosophical counseling. While the former helps counsees towards more complete fulfillment in the pursuit of their aims, the latter reduces the harmful effects and concomitants of such pursuits by questioning the necessity of having aims. Whereas the former helps the counsees to examine their current self in an effort to construct a more coherent and better grounded self, the latter seeks to create distance to the self and to foster self-abandonment. Whereas will-affirming counseling often nurtures ideas of striving and success, will-quieting counseling inclines towards accepting, and even recommending, non-striving and indifference to success.

These two approaches to philosophical counseling correspond to different relationships to time. Will-affirming counseling incorporates the conception that life is a series of steps in time. Ultimately we have to ask ourselves what kinds of aims we should adopt during the course of our entire life. Will-quieting counseling reflects the notion that life is not primarily a matter of looking forward or backward in time, but a timeless event. We do not think about the moment of our death and the span of time it puts the last limit on.

Contemporary philosophers are often members of relatively will-affirming cultures, and might therefore exaggerate the weight they place on will-affirmation. Will-affirmation is necessary, but release as an attitude towards life may be worth serious consideration as well.⁴

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Tukiainen, A. (2012) Philosophy as practices of virtue. *HASER: International Journal on Philosophical Practice*, 3.

1 If we understand our self (or ego) as a set of aims that motivates us and gives direction to our lives, release as non-willing and non-action can be regarded as freedom from the self. I will return to this point.

2 We recall Rousseau's (2004, p. 88) description of the pure feeling of existence: "But if there is a state where the soul can find a resting-place secure enough to establish itself and concentrate its entire being there, with no need to remember the past or reach into the future, where time is nothing to it, where the present runs on indefinitely but this duration goes unnoticed, with no sign of the passing of time, and no other feeling of deprivation or enjoyment, pleasure or pain, desire or fear than the simple feeling of existence, a feeling that fills our soul entirely, as long as this state lasts, we can call ourselves happy, not with a poor, incomplete and relative happiness such as we find in the pleasures of life, but with a sufficient and perfect happiness which leaves no emptiness to be filled in the soul."

3 I do not claim to know that looking for solutions is a prevalent approach among philosophical counselors. There are to my knowledge no research results concerning this issue. Searching for solutions is nevertheless a possible way of seeing what counseling is essentially about, and on the basis of my experience I believe it is a fairly widespread phenomenon.

4 I would like to thank the anonymous referees of *Philosophical Practice* for their valuable comments on my article.