LIFE-PHILOSOPHICAL LECTURING AS A SYSTEMS-INTELLIGENT TECHNOLOGY OF THE SELF

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ABSTRACT: This paper describes life-philosophical lecturing, as developed by the author, as a form of performing art and as a positive, oral and non-directive philosophical practice that revitalizes the Socratic ideal of philosophy. Life-philosophical lecturing is explicated as a systems-intelligent technology of the self.

Can one do philosophy in a way that is truly relevant to human concerns? Can one find ways to revitalize the Socratic ideal of a philosopher as a midwife? Is it possible to envision philosophy as serving others? Would it be possible to distance oneself from philosophy as a set of doctrines, theories, analyses and positions, and establish an invigorating connection between philosophy and the actual lives of people? What might a philosophical practice or technique,that would help people in their daily lives, look like?

For over twenty years I have approached these questions from within the context of lecturing. I've come to view *life-philosophical lecturing* as a philosophical practice or technique of tremendous promise that can answer some of those questions and make philosophy more relevant. I am convinced of the transformative possibilities of philosophy, and driven by a kind of artistic passion to create through the lecture a rich experience for the listeners. However I had no clear, explicit, theoretical foundation on which to build the effort, and proceeded instead purely empirically, through hundreds of experiments and interventions at universities, in work contexts, as well as at a special project in Cyprus called the "Paphos Seminar."

My aim in this presentation is to identify some features of life-philosophical lecturing of the kind I have practiced in recent decades, with the hope of giving a stimulating alternative to the prevailing way in which philosophy is conducted. Here, I will not analyse the scholarly aspects of the practice in much detail, nor

will I make an effort to examine its connections to parallel undertakings in fields such as positive psychology, cognitive science, developmental studies, the learning sciences, interaction research, mindfulness, psychotherapy, organizational science, performing arts, music, pro-sociality, research on leadership or applied complexity theory, all of which have been sources of inspiration for the kind of approach to philosophical practice described here. (For some of my own efforts to link my philosophical lecturing to the scholarly tradition, see Saarinen and Slotte 2003; Saarinen 2008; 2013a; 2013b; Saarinen and Lehti 2014).

POSITIVE PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

By life-philosophical lecturing I refer to a particular kind of oral pedagogical practice that uses the lecture situation for the benefit of providing the listeners with an enhanced possibility of life-philosophical reflection. I see it as a continuation of the Socratic project of a better life as based on the subject's own insights and movement of thought. Life-philosophical lecturing can be perceived as a "technology of the self" which affords the listener an effective means of cultivating herself through reflection (Foucault 1985; Hadot 2002).

Life-philosophical lecturing differs rather markedly from some of the dominant lecturing practices. Its aim is not to seek to function as a channel for predetermined knowledge, theories or learning. The idea is not to get listeners to echo or adopt the insights, scholarship or philosophy of the lecturer. Instead, the paramount aim is to facilitate, stimulate and vitalize the participants' own life-philosophical thinking in the first-person—his or her use of "the reflective mind." (I use the term intuitively but take note of the forceful articulations by Keith Stanovich, in Stanovich 2010, and a series of other writings.) The point is to create a living environment for the listeners to connect with their own thinking, in the service of reflective, life-philosophical purposes.

At my home university in Finland, life-philosophical lecturing has grown into something of a phenomenon in the course of its fourteen years of history. 500–600 students attend my series of seven to eight lectures each spring. In a small country like Finland, the number of participants is unusual for a course that is not compulsory for anyone. The response is nothing short of tremendous. Students do appreciate the chance for life-philosophical reflection offered in a way that suits them. Similarly, my Paphos Seminar, organized 43 times in Cyprus since 1995, has been attended by over 3000 people, many coming repeatedly: executives and employees, professionals and non-professionals, students, retirees, whole families, work teams, celebrities, artists, relatives and loved ones of previous participants—a highly heterogeneous group of individuals from different walks of life. Again, the overwhelming impression is that people from all walks of life appreciate the ensuing vibrant platform for life-philosophical reflection. Furthermore, hundreds of lectures I've given at commercial companies and other organizations point to the exact same conclusion. Life-philosophical lecturing meets a high demand when conducted in a way that is fitting for the environment and fosters the right kind of rapport with the people involved.

I am sharing these experiences in order to highlight the possibility that life-philosophical lecturing, as an oral practice, can serve a vital function in the actual lives of people struggling to make sense of the complex transient contexts in which their life takes place.

The idea of an empathically oral practice is nothing new in philosophy, of course. Indeed, Socrates, the original master of the philosophical craft, conducted all his philosophy orally, face-to-face, and demonstrated his philosophy in a concrete context with fellow citizens. While a claim can be made for Socrates as the forerunner of esoteric critical thinking and for theoretical positions he might have held, the fact remains that documents about Socrates do not indicate any great passion for the formation of abstract theories and for non-contextual expert communication in his work.

Without wanting to dismiss the significance of prevailing approaches to philosophy, life-philosophical lecturing of the kind I have made an effort to develop seeks to revitalize the Socratic midwife legacy by approaching people from the point of view of a *service attitude*. The non-philosopher, or lecture participant, is assumed to be pregnant with new life (in a sense that finds a beautiful echo in the *Nature of Order* by the architect-thinker Christopher Alexander). Instead of approaching the listeners from the viewpoint of deficiency, they are met as *bearers of abundance*. Thus conceived, life-philosophical lecturing is a form of *positive philosophical practice* and seeks key inspiration from the breakthroughs of the positive psychology movement (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; Fredrickson 2009; Seligman 2011; Snyder and Lopez 2002; Sheldon et al. 2011).

PHILOSOPHY AS A PERFORMING ART

If a philosopher has something valuable to say, why would he or she *only* say it, as opposed to writing it down? Surely one wants to express in writing one's most illuminating insights, in order to subject them to the scrutiny of others, and in order to guarantee their magnitude and reach.

Yet a life-philosophical lecture is not primarily seeking the spread of the ideas expressed. The material of a life-philosophical lecture is presented with the hope that it would create reflective impact when coming into contact with, and being evaluated and reinterpreted by the listeners. The underlying essence is to catalyse, stimulate and inspire the thinking of the participants.

Life-philosophical lecturing, the way I see it, is therefore illuminating to view as one of the *performing arts*.

This means that its chief mode of existence is in the here and now (cf. Stern 2003; 2010) and almost music-like (cf. Byrne 2012). Its ontology is not one of thing-like, semi-stable entities such as theories, conceptualizations or arguments. In the same vein, its arsenal of expressive instruments is wide, pluralistic and heterogeneous, with imagination, rather than a scholarly community, setting the limits.

Obviously, the expressive armory is not limited to those methods that resonate with the listeners through the rational realm only. On the contrary, the full range

of human sensibilities, with their multi-layered, emotionally charged compartments and non-conscious power fields, are acknowledged as potential sources of life-philosophically significant reverberation. Written language, explicitly defined concepts, logical arguments, separate identifiable themes and rational lines of thought are only some of the instruments in the orchestra. For life-philosophical impact in the service of reflective thought, it makes sense to turn to the whole of the orchestra, not just to some of the instruments.

THE PRINCIPLE OF NON TEACHING

Three particular features of life-philosophical lecturing call for attention.

The first concerns life-philosophical lecturing as necessarily being essentially more than teaching *about* some specific "life-philosophy" (say Epicurean or Stoic).

The way I think of life-philosophical lecturing does not imply the addressing of an audience with the idea of delivering to the listeners any propositional description of some specific life-philosophies. The overriding experience from thousands of life-philosophically oriented lectures, for audiences ranging from blue-collar workers to university students and company executives, is that people are *extremely reluctant* to engage in any pre-determined life-philosophical doctrines. For creating a space for personally engaging life-philosophical reflection, a didactic approach simply does not fly. In order to gain the benefits of a spiritual practice such as meditation, a retreat or philosophical reflection, the key point is to get the person to actually *practice.* Describing its chief features might be a first step towards execution, but in most cases a statement-based elaboration of a practice does not carry much transformative power.

Personally I go for consciously *non-directive guidance* (reminiscent of the approach of Carl Rogers [Rogers 1951; 1961]). It builds a communal setting for people to engage in a *living present and a shared space for emergent, unfolding thinking and attentiveness.* I struggle to create a *felt sense of relevance in a stream of continuing attention.* All content is explicitly framed as *suggestive* rather than instructional. It can be viewed as a kind of a mindfulness intervention (Saarinen and Lehti, 2014; for mindfulness see Langer 1989a; 1989b; Langer et al. 2010; Kabat-Zinn 2003; Wallace and Shapiro 2006; Shapiro and Carlson 2009; Wallace 2009; 2011; 2012).

The paramount point to appreciate is that the life-philosophical lecture, like an artistic performance, needs to stay heedful of the possibilities of multiple interpretations, remaining constantly mindful of openness and the call of the unexpected. Life-philosophical lecturing, like art, seldom works if it involves the programmatic exclamation of some single absolutistic positions. Life-philosophical lecturing, of the kind I am proposing, does not amount to the advocacy of a specific life-philosophical stance, any more than the practices of Socrates in his dialogues with fellow Athenians implied the exaltation of a particular position. Indeed, the case is beyond the call of *any* cognitive positions or -isms. It reaches deep into the humanity of the philosopher herself, including her ability of being fully present during the lecture, and to feel real feelings and think real thoughts (cf. Weston

1996). She needs to embrace the challenges of conducting, in the sense in which "the greatest conductors move us not by special effects and dazzling surprise, but by a quality of cohesion and insight which lives within and above the entire work" (Barber 2003, p. 20).

FROM RHETORIC TO MOTIVATION

A second essential feature of life-philosophical lecturing is that it goes beyond lecturing philosophically with an additional twist of rhetoric and the demonstration of oratorical skills.

Rhetoric and oratory are certainly relevant for any lecture, but the value added of life-philosophical lecturing needs to be distinguished from the qualities of masterful speaking per se.

Recall that the intention is not to convince the listener of a specific view, but *to assist the listener* with her inner processes of life-philosophical reflection and self-examination. The effort is reminiscent of psychotherapy here, and in some respects coaching, where few would suggest that the effort in question is reduced to rhetoric, even if mastery of spoken discourse is certainly involved.

Because potentially one's innermost core identity is at stake, a listener is likely to be highly sensitive to influence and manipulation, and quite rightly so. Anything direct is potentially suspect and might carry objectifying, totalizing overtones that put off the self-respecting listener. Direct talk might work as one of the modes of a lecture, but it needs to be carefully tuned and held in place, because for most people directness is dysfunctional as a stimulant to sustainable reflection.

It is better to be oblique (cf. Kay 2010). An indirect approach, one that is respectful and friendly, encouraging and engaging, offering constantly multiple entryways to the material that is studied, is liberating, and after all, one of the aims of life-philosophical lecturing is the *liberation of thought*. The lecture should serve as an abundant base for reflective imagination, encouraging the participants to associate, with the result of constantly finding new layers within their thinking and experience.

The *theatrical side* of the lecture becomes significant (cf. Weston 1996; Bogart 2001) along with *improvisation* (cf. Bailey 1992). The more one encourages the listeners to associate, the more the speaker is put into the background. There needs to be a fresh and vibrant incentive to stay tuned to the lecture, in spite of the apparent lack of explicit subject matter or clear-cut goals. When the channeling of specific pre-fixed themes is rejected in favour of an expanding galaxy of possibilities, the stream of lecture as a *safe haven of return* becomes crucial. This involves integrated use of the diverse elements of the lecture from oratory and the melody of one's voice to content and the right timing, but as subjected to the overall aims of the lecture as a performance and as a projection towards reflection.

A third essential feature emphasizes life-philosophical lecturing as being something more than only inspirational, motivational speaking with a philosophical root and spark.

Inspiration and motivation are indeed relevant in any kind of teaching, but the question is: motivation and inspiration for what? In the context of life-philosophical lecturing the aim is to reflect upon one's life, to analyse one's presumptions, to study one's life from alternative viewpoints, with attention strong enough and held for long enough for sufficiently rich personal meanings to emerge. A lecture might be highly motivating without leading to enhanced, sustainable reflection. The point of life-philosophical lecturing is to bypass the epistemological bias in philosophy in favour of promoting an active intention in the listener to reflect over an extended period of time. More than motivational speaking is needed for that.

FROM CONCEPTS TO EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

Examining one's life as it is, is different from examining theories of human conduct. It is one thing to analyse theories of thinking, emotions and aspirations, and another to study one's own thoughts, emotions and aspirations with the intention of making them serve oneself better. Life-philosophical lecturing attempts to create platforms for intensified, energized, and enriched reflection on one's own life. It is philosophical in using reason as a chief instrument, and in looking behind assumptions, presumptions and conventional wisdom.

With due respect, the role of tradition is being re-evaluated dramatically. Because the movement of thought in the participants is assigned the leading role, the already completed thoughts by authorities only play a walk-on part in the supporting cast.

This means that the expressive arsenal of a life-philosophical lecturer *necessarily expands* beyond theories, positions, conceptual analysis and criticism.

In particular, *the emotional realm* becomes crucial along with the dimensions of the implicit, the non-verbal, the non-conscious and the non-conceptual. The life-philosophical lecturer wants to communicate with the Type 1 thinking system of the listeners, as dual process theorists would put it, not only the Type 2 system. (Stanovich 2010; Evans 2010; Kahneman 2011). In particular, and in spite of one's overall reliance on reason, it will not suffice for the philosopher to address the listeners as conceptual thinkers only. Life-philosophical lecturing of the kind I am advocating here respects the heritage of conceptuality and the realm of the explicit (type 2 thinking) as a powerhouse of Western philosophy. At the same time, life-philosophical lecturing is a naturalistic effort, one that addresses the participants as natural creatures and as they are in the real world rather than some ideal world. Life-philosophical lecturing seeks to enhance the reflective processes of people as evolutionary beings with a constitution and a nature—something which empirical science also seeks to uncover.

The role of positive emotions is particularly paramount, emotions such as gratitude, interest, joy, respect and elevation (cf. the ground-breaking work of Barbara Fredrickson in Fredrickson 1998; 2001; 2009, and subsequent works). In order for reflective thinking to flourish, I believe on empirical grounds, the ratio of positivity to negativity needs to be high enough (cf. Fredrickson and Losada 2005; Fredrickson 2009). This is a tough call for much of the academic philosophy given its emphasis on criticism, argument culture (Tannen 1998), and implicit cynicism.

From the viewpoint of psychology and cognitive science, humans come across as fundamentally opaque creatures. Human self-perception is biased, partial and distorted. We are "strangers to ourselves," using Timothy D. Wilson's (2002) apt title. In the life-philosophical domain this means that conceptuality is not often useful for creating a space for rewarding life-philosophical reflection. The fact that excessive conceptuality can paralyze one's life-philosophical reflection does not indicate sluggishness or intellectual laziness. On the contrary, it is a blessing to have abilities to gain life-philosophically relevant insights from non-conceptual quarters. (Some of the themes involved come up with particular force in a therapy context, see e.g., Stolorow et al. 2002; Boston Change Process Study Group 2010; Martela and Saarinen 2013.)

It should be clear by now that in enriching life-philosophical reflection, one's *experience* is more important than one's abilities for conceptual thinking. I refer particularly to John Dewey's writings here (cf. Dewey 1934; 1948; see also Saarinen 2013b and Wilk 2013). Whatever the "folk philosophy" of an individual might be, it is not reducible to anything neat, clear and conceptually explicit. One's intuitive thinking on life, self and the general nature of things is bound to be multi-layered, multidimensional, manifold, highly complex, multifaceted, idiosyncratic and largely tacit. One's intuitive thinking on life is a tissue and a web, a network of multi-layered compounds of elements of diverse nature and origin. Its various parts resonate to different degrees with explicit, conceptual, rational communication, and some are beyond its reach. To the extent that the task of life-philosophical lecturing is to facilitate the movement of thought in the participants, stories, personal narratives, jokes, testimonials, historical facts, photos, video clips and music are likely to be useful. They create connection and provide material for the listeners to relate to, to be used as gateways and springboards creating projections forward when combined with one's own experience.

I take it as self-evident that as life-philosophical thinkers everyone is equipped with myriad capabilities for growth. Drawing on many humanistic thinkers from John Dewey to Martin Seligman, from William James to Howard Gardner, from Emmanuel Levinas to Richard Rorty, from the Dalai Lama to B. Alan Wallace, from Carl Rogers to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, from Luce Irigaray to Barbara Fredrickson, life-philosophical lecturing builds on the human capability for radical life-transforming change.

LIVE PHILOSOPHY IS ABOUT DYNAMISM

Instead of regarding the lecture as a platform for intellectual exercise, both the lecturer and the listeners find themselves in an emerging *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total experience that vibrates and communicates through the plethora of sensibilities each human being possesses. The wide and wild human capacities to appreciate and to respond, to be impressed and to wonder, are launched in support of the dynamism that prepares us for what Pierre Hadot in his discussion of ancient philosophy calls the "metamorphosis of our inner self" (Hadot 1995; 2002).

Notions such as rhythm, build-up, accent, anticipation, repetition, climax, over-ture, cadence (familiar from music), or preparation, atmosphere, staging, punch line (from the performing arts), or emotional energy (Collins 2004), or equilibrium, interlevel causality, feedback loops, self-organizing (from theories of complex systems, see Juarrero 1999, for a powerful elucidation), or bi-directional causality, co-construction, mutual regulation (from infant research, see Beebe and Lachmann 2002), or diversity, co-evolution, niche, and re-circulation (from Holland 2012) are potentially relevant as meta-concepts. For understanding issues of relatedness between the dyadic pair of the lecturer and the audience, we are referred to study-ing themes such as synchronicity, attunement, tone, bond, connectivity, sharing, mutuality, and micro-interaction (see Fogel 1993; Beebe and Lachmann 2002; Malloch and Thevarthen 2010; Gottman 2011; Gallese et al. 2007; Martela 2012).

Such meta-level concepts point to the essential features of a life-philosophical lecture. Dynamic phenomena are not just accidental manifestations of something that could in principle be reified into a thing-like entity and, for instance, presented in a written form. Just like thematic content gives way to an affordance or portfolios of varied materials, and conceptuality to experience, *dynamism is highlighted* in place of static images. The capacity of the lecture to create reflective thrill, internal drama and electrifying tension becomes crucial.

SYSTEMS INTELLIGENCE

Systems thinking is an effort to conceptualize dynamic holistic structures and the functioning of interdependencies (Senge 1990; Hammond 2003; Jackson 2003; Midgley 2003; Bossel 2007). As a science of wholes, systems thinking deals with co-creativity and change, which I believe is useful when conceptualizing life-philosophical lecturing as a system.

Systems intelligence, as developed by Raimo Hämäläinen and myself in our research group, provides an updated version of systems thinking (Saarinen and Hämäläinen 2004; 2010; Hämäläinen and Saarinen 2008). The point is to acknowl-edge the situational, embedded nature of the human condition, along with the orientation to act intelligently in the absence of complete knowledge in contexts that are systemic. The systems intelligence perspective seeks to shed light on action that perceives itself as taking place from within wholes that remain partly invisible. What we consider fundamental is the human endowment to operate intelligently in the midst of complex interdependent compounds that are cognitively opaque.

As the phrase suggests, systems intelligence is about systems. This opens the door to the discourse of *dynamic wholes*. With the concept of intelligence the perspective operates *from within*, unlike systems thinking which looks at systems from the outside.

Thus conceived, running a life-philosophical lecture calls for *systems intelli-gence* on the part of the lecturer. The lecturer, unable to step outside the situation, needs to be intelligent from within the system as it unfolds in the living present. Knowledge of the objective features of the system is of limited value. The bulk of what's crucial is invisible, hidden within the listeners and lurking in the future.

The lecturer's from-above control over the lecture is abandoned in favour of a systems intelligent depiction of a co-created whole in which the parts influence the whole and the whole influences the parts. On the face of it, the lecturer appears as the central figure of the lecture. In reality, the lecturer is only one subsystem in the higher-level system with a complex interplay relating the manifold levels with bi-directional causality.

For instance, the speaker needs to reflect and anticipate, guide and live subtly with the multiplicity of the processes of the listeners, subjecting oneself to their impact. When this happens as a "complex responsive process" (Stacey 2001), the lecturer influences the audience while being influenced by it. The lecturer fine-tunes the lecture while being herself fine-tuned. Without a possibility to know in advance exactly what is about to happen, while attentively focused on a projection forward, the lecturer lives functionally with the complex compound of themes, shared moments, anticipations, emotions, prospects for the future, bodily moments and insights, which only partially surface as external manifestations of the lecture. Engaged in the situation with its full manifold of transient, capricious, evanescent turns, the philosopher becomes a part of a dynamic system the function of which is to facilitate the reflective thrill of the listeners *precisely through its impermanence*.

Like a symphony orchestra conductor, the philosopher engages in the performing art of life-philosophical thought-conducting together with listeners who play their thought-instruments along with one another and from the point of view of life-philosophical reflection.

The concept of systems intelligence highlights the invisible aspects of the lecture system. The subtle, tacit and micro-interactional aspects of the situation are the key to the dynamics of the situation and to the success of the lecture. Here we see with particular force how misleading it is to envision a lecture in terms of its expressed contents and explicit subject matter. Creating a higher-level dynamic environment for the lower-level dynamisms of life-philosophical reflection within the participants is the pivotal point of the lecture, but none of that is apparent if the content is the sole focus. The seemingly magical universe of micro-interaction and the functioning of the dyadic structure of lecturer and audience are key to the dynamics of enhanced reflection in the life-philosophical lecture. It is a whole that will have to be addressed "systems intelligently."

ORALITY AND LITERACY

When the relevance of speech in one's expressive arsenal is increased, the fixity of the conceptual realm melts in the air. As emphasized eloquently by Walter Ong, speech is temporary by its nature (Ong 1982). Writing resists time, but speech takes place in time. Speech defies stabilization. It is less thing-like than is the literary. The dynamics of speech brings the potencies of the present moment to the life-philosophical lecture.

Anything that is said now is already half gone. The listener needs to stay attentive for an emergent point or story that might be thrilling. With stability and thing-like entities losing ground, mindfulness to the present moment gets an additional

stimulus, moments of vitality emerge (in the sense of Daniel Stern, 2003; 2010), but only if the speaker manages to create sufficient interest for the listener actually to follow. Because the listener is free to associate, and is likely to get distracted as a result of sudden personal flashes of insight, the speaker needs to create an atmosphere where a brilliant opening or astonishing story might be emerging at any moment. The back and forth movement between the speaker's spoken line of thought and the listener's associations generates the creative tension in the life-philosophical theatre. It makes life-philosophical lecturing vulnerable, time-bound and potentially transformative as an experience.

I emphatically believe that the feature just mentioned points to a fundamental, often disregarded prospect. The dual forces of one's own thoughts and the speaker's thoughts that interact in an inner dialogue create the reflective projection. The movement within might be jumpy, but is not idle or sloppy. It signals attentive force. It is imperative that the listener manage to stay attentive over a sufficiently lengthy period of time for the reflective process to bear fruit. The more intensive the process, the more likely it is to have edifying force (cf. Rorty 1979).

The psychodynamics of life-philosophical lecturing are unique. No new knowledge needs to be introduced. On the contrary, particularly forceful life-philosophical reflection is likely to involve *revisiting* old memories, experiences, themes and stories (cf. Gardner 2011).

It should be clear why these revisits pay off. Obviously, the life-philosophical gravity of topics such as love, betrayal, trust and courage can never be exhausted. But perhaps even more importantly, the call for reinterpretation repeats itself with the upsurge of new life situations and the need to look for the next stage. New elucidations of familiar themes are constantly possible. At the centre is the quintessential human possibility to live in the present tense, drawing on the force field of one's own vitalized life-philosophical reflection.

OUTSOURCING GOES OUT OF BUSINESS

When it comes to treating cancer, the clinicians' expert judgment is far more relevant than any lay view. When choosing the right material for a bridge under construction, or calculating the value of a property, experts' views should be consulted. Experts pave the way to a rational future in many paths of life, but with *living* a life the logic is different. Everyone needs to live his or her own life. To do so wisely and prudently, with intelligence and with grace, calls for reflection, which can only be conducted by the person herself. As Jonathan Lear points out somewhere, at the heart of the Western intellectual tradition is the belief that human life is far too complex for there to be any one right answer to the question, "How should one live?" Life-philosophical reflection cannot be outsourced to an expert, any more than it can be reduced to a thing-like entity, like content. In life-philosophical reflection, there simply is no way to avoid the imperative of the individual to conduct his or her own thinking in the present tense.

In life-philosophy, reflective practice and first-person self-agency is an indispensable necessity. Another necessity is reflection as a continual process that

calls for a restart. Its results resist storing. Notwithstanding wishful thinking to the contrary, reflection loses its potency quickly and typically unwittingly and un-beknownst to the subject. A fresh touch is called for more than the person herself often realizes. The need to reactivate one's reflection muscles is there as long as there is life. Inherently an action that feeds other vital processes, life-philosophical reflection is not something that can be completed. There is always a better way, some next level.

For life-philosophical lecturing the observations just made are both good news and bad. The good news is that a potential need for such lecturing will last forever. The bad news is that the need might still not yield demand. Indeed, a key challenge for any life-philosophical lecturing is to justify itself again and again for people who are at best lukewarm towards an undertaking that can always be postponed and does not promise immediate, tangible results.

FROM DOUBTS TO THE DISPOSITION TO REFLECT

Why might professional philosophers be reluctant to provide life-philosophical lecturing?

One reason is that instead of explicit, solid, defined, authority-backed concepts and theories, life-philosophical lecturing mostly employs more vaguely defined words, stories and semi-structured narratives. Instead of abstract structures that are generic, it seeks contact with fleeting situations and personal histories that are coincidental and idiosyncratic. Instead of permanence and stability we stumble into evanescence and dissolution. Surely the self-respecting philosopher should avoid such a quagmire! Indeed the territory is generally avoided: the majority of all the university teaching in philosophy focuses on themes, methods and approaches that might be useful for reflecting branches of academic philosophy, but bypasses the effort of making the students reflect philosophically *on their personal life* in the context of the teaching.

Yet philosophy worthy of its grand past should find ways to enrich people's actual lives through reflection. This is what life-philosophical lecturing aims to help them to do. For that to be successful, the following criteria should be met:

1. It provides a context for the listeners to engage in reflection processes that are relevant and rewarding from the point of view of their personal lives.

2. It is sufficiently stimulating and enriching intellectually to facilitate the participants' dispositions towards contemplating alternative perspectives and seeking fresh points of view to personally relevant life-philosophical issues, situations, experiences, themes and approaches.

3. It is sufficiently engaging, exciting and energizing to make the participants sustain their attentive focus long enough for life-philosophically relevant reflection to get in motion.

4. It is encouraging, accepting and respectful enough for the lecture to become a secure base (in the sense of Bowlby 1969) that makes it possible for the participant to give up fear-and-risk-related perspectives in favour of more

trusting points of view that get elevation from the broaden-and-build nature of positive emotions (as stressed by Barbara Fredrickson; see Fredrickson 2001; 2009; Fredrickson and Losada 2005).

5. The participant perceives the lecture as a non-threatening and non-manipulative situation of unconditional respect in which there is no need to defend or prove oneself, demonstrate one's skills, learning or status.

6. The participant is not pressurized towards particular goal-oriented activities, such as tasks, exercises or the making of conclusions, feeling free to associate and experience his or her experience in a non-task-oriented mode.

7. The participant feels his or her human core accepted as valuable in itself.

Life-philosophical lecturing, to repeat, is not about any identifiable, specific "life-philosophical" themes. The point is that the lecture provides a context or space for sustained life-philosophical reflection. The key question does not concern "what" life-philosophical reflection is, but *when* does it occur (I borrow here from Perkins and Ritchhart 2004). The dispositional view of thinking is at the heart of life-philosophical lecturing. Most programs to develop thinking do not address it, as Ritchhart and Perkins (2005) point out in their meta-study on the challenges of teaching thinking. "The dispositional side of thinking concerns noticing when to engage thinking seriously, which inherently does not come up in abilities-centered instruction that point-blank directs students to think about this or that problem using this or that strategy." (Perkins and Ritchhart 2004, p. 787.)

The intention of life-philosophical lecturing is to help to fill the gap identified by Perkins and Ritchhart. The aim is to create a platform for the participants to think seriously about their lives and to develop their reflective life-philosophical thinking in the mode of learning-by-doing. For the life-philosophical lecturer this presents a particular dual challenge:

1. To generate enough content for the participants to become enriched in their own life-philosophical reflections in the course of the lecture in a way that benefits the participant's life in ways that he or she deems rewarding.

2. To generate and facilitate a supportive and engaging environment that energizes the participants and helps them to sustain their intrinsic motivation to reflect on their lives, although external rewards are absent and the intensity is not invigorated through external goals, tasks and targets.

If and when these criteria are met, and the thrill of reflection is set in motion, the likely outcome is that the listeners activate their *disposition to reflect life-philosophically*. This is a dramatic outcome. The ensuing process is liable to create:

a. Positive energy with a moderately long tail;

b. Insights and decisions with at least a moderately long tail;

c. Intellectual and conceptual enrichment with at least a moderately long tail;

d. Dispositions for life-philosophical reflection with a potentially remarkably long tail.

Here the effect on the disposition to reflect is particularly noteworthy. It is from this space of possibilities, which cannot be predicted, calculated or evaluated in advance, that the most dramatic benefits of life-philosophical lecturing ensue. Future transformations have been made possible—in a way that might be intractable to the lecture itself. When becoming active at a later stage the disposition to reflect might give rise to transformative insights totally unrelated to what happened during the lecture. No obvious causal chain needs to exist to connect the ensuing alterations to the lecture that primed it. What results is a dissipative structure, as the form that made the later transformation possible is lost in the conversion (cf. Prigogine 1997). The essential humility of life-philosophical lecturing amounts to not claiming credit for what it makes possible.

LIFE-PHILOSOPHICAL LECTURE IS A SOCIAL CREATION

A life-philosophical lecture of the kind suggested here is a platform for *initiating change and for cultivating the self*, a theme Hadot (2002) emphasizes as the core of ancient philosophy. As such, it seems to me appropriate to envision a life-philosophical lecture as something Foucault described in *Uses of Pleasure* as "technique of the self," or "technology of the self" (Foucault 1985). Life-philosophical lecturing amounts to *uses of reflection* that make possible the crafting of one's life as a work of art, continuing the Socratic project of a life that is better lived when more thoroughly examined.

The relevant uses of reflection are made possible by a constructed environment with particular directed patterns of behaviour, modes of orientation, value structures, intentions and dispositions of its own. Of particular relevance are arrangements that relate to the tripartite interplay of:

1. Motivation to reflect;
2. Communal support for continuing and excelling in the reflective process;
3. Cognitive incitement, as integrated with non-cognitive and non-verbal stimulus, to feed inspiration, imagination and forms of mindfulness when reflecting on one's life.

Notably, the environment for conducting reflection that emerges through life-philosophical lecturing is *social* rather than solitary. Rodin's famous statue "The Thinker" does not portray the life-philosophically relevant paradigm. Much of the reflection that ensues is thinking about one's life in the company of others as made possible by those others.

Accordingly, a cornerstone of life-philosophical lecturing is the lecturer's ability to lead the lecture situation as a communal process and in a way that allows the supportive, reassuring and encouraging energies to flow, grow and glow within and between the people that are present. The communal setting is thus not an accidental feature depicted by limited resources, but an essential characteristic of a life-philosophical lecture. Vital forms of rewarding life-philosophical reflection are facilitated by the presence of others who form a benevolent group in the midst of whose camaraderie anybody can feel accepted, spirited, elevated and safe.

Undoubtedly, there are forms of life-philosophical reflection that require solitude rather than solidarity, but my experience points to the importance of the disregarded forms of reflection that gain momentum when others are present.

Evidence that the social nature of us humans runs deeper than often thought, is mounting (Hobson 2002; Cacioppo and Patrick 2008; Gilbert 2009; Malloch and Thevarthen 2010; Gallese et al. 2007; Sennett 2012; Grant 2013). When seeking out the "better angels of our nature" (as Abraham Lincoln famously put it), the company of others is indispensable. It accelerates the emotional energy (Collins 2004) that yields to insights that flow into action. Positively tuned, it enhances the participants as "givers" as opposed to "takers" (Grant 2013). The emotional field of experience shared by the participants is the key to philosophical lecturing as a positive philosophical practice that helps people to flourish (Keys and Haidt 2003; Seligman 2011). The configuration of people in their orientation to others is paramount among all the aspects of a life-philosophical lecture as a systems-intelligent technology of the self.

A life-philosophical lecture is therefore a social creation which aids and succours a participant in realizing the noble ancient bid to engage in the investigation of one's life and thinking. It provides a structure for humans to engage in the making and modification of their personal lives, a repeatable set-up for crafting their aspirations in order to seek a way forward towards a life better lived. As such, the life-philosophical lecture is a technology that benefits the quest for "knowing oneself" and for living a life well examined.

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