

Shared Wisdom: Seminary Philosophers and Philosophical Practitioners in Dialogue

by Vaughn Jérôme Fayle, OFM

For some, there may be two contradictory terms, at least culturally or historically, two opposing worldviews—the seminary and the academic discipline of philosophy—hiding all too comfortably beneath the title of this article. Let me begin by ferreting them out:

The seminary: a place, principally, for the theological, philosophical, ethical, and moral training for future religious, academic, and denominational leaders.

The academic discipline of philosophy: the professional, systematic, historical practice of critical, non-denominational inquiry into valid concepts and their implications for ethical human behavior and values, achieved through the art of reasoned description and argumentation.

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How then, some may ask, could these two worlds plausibly coincide, especially if one puts philosophical practitioners, and in my opinion correctly so, on the side of number two; and the seminary, with seminary philosophy teachers and pastoral theologians, clearly in the camp of number one?

The response in this article to this question is based on a presentation that was largely an attempt to explore this very valid question before an audience of professional philosophical practitioners and participants at the 13th International Conference on Philosophical Practice, held in Serbia, with the theme *Philosophical Practice as a Profession and as a New Paradigm in Philosophy*.¹ But first, what is the philosophical practice movement? Since the publication of the enormously popular book *Plato, not Prozac!*,² togeth-

¹ The conference was hosted by the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade, Republic of Serbia, August 15–18, 2014, and brought together scholars, philosophers and practitioners from all continents. My interest in making philosophy and the humanities relevant within the walls of seminaries and schools of theology goes back several years. I am grateful to Maria Marek and Sally Kelly-Gomez, professors of pastoral theology and the practice of ministry, for convincing me in 1991 as a very young and inexperienced philosophy teacher at Oblate School of Theology, San Antonio, Texas, that good philosophical questioning is not too far from the sound approach to questions one needs to ask in theological field education and ministerial theology.

² Lou Marinoff, *Plato, Not Prozac!* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999). Marinoff is a professor of philosophy at the City University of New York and founder of the American Philosophical Practitioners Association (APPA) and the philosophical practice journal. This book has been translated into twenty-seven languages. More recent creative efforts in philosophical practice have come from the cofounder of the philosophical practice movement, Ran Lahav, who offers videoed interviews with philosophical practitioners and their immensely creative methods from all over the world. For further information see *The Philo-Practice Agora*, <http://www.philopractice.org>.

er with other such publications, and the founding of the movement for professional philosophy practitioners, sometimes also called philosophical counselors, credentialed philosophical practitioners in various settings and countries have used the skills of philosophy, much like Socrates in his day, to attend to the social, existential, and ethical needs and concerns of groups and individuals.

The methodologies used by philosophical practitioners are diverse and are adapted to the cultures and circumstances of individuals and groups. As a movement, *The American Philosophical Practitioners Association*, for instance, has become a professional organization, with its annual conference, its own journal, requirements for accreditation and extensive networks in several countries.

Despite the growth of the APPA movement, a connection, however, between pastoral theologians, Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) supervisors for seminarians, spiritual formators and seminary theologians, is long over due. I leave it to more competent voices within the philosophical practice movement to define what a philosophical practitioner is not supposed to do, but lean slightly more on what he or she might do, or might consider doing, in addition to or as complimentary to his or her practice, vis-à-vis philosophy in seminaries.

Furthermore, in the course of this article it should become clear, but even right from the outset, that I already assume that the arduous process of reconciling two diverse professional worlds, two diverse sets of competencies within the humanities and social sciences today, to be highly beneficial for both the professions of philosophy and philosophical practice. I do not feel compelled to say why this reconciling process is important. I share this position with several contemporary, interdisciplinary philosopher-theologians, and with numerous thinkers in the continental and post-analytic philosophical movements. What I do need to spell out at the outset, however, is how I would like to illustrate the mutual benefits between seminary philosophy and the philosophical practice movement within the needs and context of seminary philosophical training today.

In the first part of this article I will lay out the traditional tension between purely academic philosophy and philosophical training in a seminary context on the one hand, and, philosophy as a free, non denominational, secular, professional inquiry on the one other. I will also try to sketch out the history of the seminary as the locus for seminary philosophy and seminary philosophers while giving a brief phenomenological survey of where and how it finds itself today. In the second part of the article I will attempt to address what is not working for students, especially for those who decide against moving on from philosophy studies to theological studies, as is the custom. In the third and final part, I offer points for a possible mutual discussion between philosophical practitioners, seminary students of philosophy and seminary philosophy teachers. I finally suggest five mutual and foundational competencies, as a starting point, which could be used if and when philosophical practitioners engage seminary philosophy professors and students, thus equipping the latter with tools for using philosophical training in a world beyond the walls of the seminary.

As the tone of this article points to a future, possible, collaboration between two, as yet, un-introduced partners, namely seminary philosophers and philosophical practitioners, and, by implication, pastoral and practical theologians, I hope that everything presented here, especially the shared competencies in the final part of the article, will serve as grist for the mill for further refinement and mutual enrichment especially on the part of those already working daily in the field of philosophical practice. I also hope that pastoral theologians, schools of theology, pastoral theology journals and departments will also eventually weigh in on the connections between pastoral theology in seminaries and the philosophical practice movement in such a way so as to advance a mutually enriching conversation.

The Seminary Philosopher: Always Reconciling Two Worldviews

One of the great difficulties in addressing a topic from the bi-optic perspectives of philosophy and theology is the pre-existing mutual distrust each discipline tends to have of the other. This distrust is often felt most acutely at international professional conferences.

Consider these two contrasting scenarios. The “*Philosophy, Finally Sanitized From All Religion*” conference tacitly accepts speakers and poster sessions wherein wholesale, illogical, anachronistic, and ad hominem innuendoes, against any form of religion or spiritual practitioners, go unchecked. At these conferences any student of religion or theology, seminary professor, any practicing Hindu, Mormon, or Muslim is fair game. Strangely enough various shades of Buddhists tend to come off fairly unscathed from the fray. But overall, sadly, it is often not the sets of ideas that are critiqued but the actual individual, the practicing seminarian, the religious or spiritual practitioner in his or her person. Materialist and logical-positivists take aim, fire, and all forms of metaphysics and ontology fall to the ground on a pile of dead realisms. For most of these thinkers the western philosophical tradition is seen exclusively through the lens of the Enlightenment, post-Cartesian and post-Kantian. Through this lens the ancient period of the pre-Socratics, the early wisdom traditions of the Stoics, Epicureans, patristic and medieval mystics are often seen as unnecessarily delaying the progressive march of philosophy to logical positivism and analytic or Anglo-Saxon philosophy where it finally will be respected in the pantheon of “hard ideas” or the natural sciences.

But two doors down, at the “*Religion And Theology As Poor Victims Always Under Attack*” conference, the clear enemy is philosophy, and by that I mean most forms of non-Thomistic philosophies along with the post-modern variety of philosophies and almost all philosophers actually writing or teaching in non-denominational or non-sectarian graduate schools. Philosophy, for religious thinkers in this room, is seen as a veritable petri dish for all forms of relativism and responsible for the widespread secularism in the world. Bishops, imams, rabbis, prelates and theologians dogmatically inveigh against most twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century philosophies accusing them of playing the leading role in destroying religious values, replacing them with post-modern values which lead to deconstructed canonical authorities, texts and emasculated magisterial orthodoxies. Bishops, imams, chief rabbis, who have not read a recent book of philosophy nor used any form of philosophical argument to support their positions for decades since leaving the seminary, will often feel free, at these conferences, to paint all philosophers as anti-theistic enemies, and even if they find common ground with some on matters of bioethics they will still fault them for their lack of religious observance and practice. If philosophy here is the malady with its bottomless pit of questions, religion in this scenario, is seen as the only solid, perennial, apodictic remedy for the cure. Uncritical religious literacy and orthodoxy, that is, correct thinking according to a specific religious code, is seen as the only assurance of ontological immutability for providing handy dogmatic answers to all the problems of this world, and the promise of a secure place in the world to come, wherein, supposedly, all questioning ceases.

These two sketches are obviously caricatures, and, even though we can easily identify Wittgensteinian “family resemblances” within each, I present them as caricatures precisely because I believe that that is not, intellectually, where the majority of those working and teaching philosophy and theology, especially those teaching in seminary schools, actually live. I also believe that the more mature philosophical practitioner or career counselor/coach, working with today’s university or seminary students, cannot, and should not, operate with such partisan views as expressed in either of the two above scenarios if he or she is to be considered a well informed professional. From a personal point of view, I have found the second view more problematic, especially with the power of hiring and firing it carries for staff and institutions.

The history of the seminary, *seminare*, in Latin meaning to plant or to nurture, dates back to Ancient Greece, Egypt, Persia, and Israel with the formation of the *lyceum*, the *academia*, the *schola*, the *scholasticate*, the *madarassah*, and Talmudic *schulen*. It is only in the late patristic age, however, with St. Basil of Ancyra (d. 364), that the term begins to be applied specifically and increasingly in a consistent manner. It generally was meant to be an institution for the formation of students who will eventually lead their flocks as priests, rabbis or mullahs, both morally and intellectually; and thus, there was the need for training in rhetoric, philosophy, logic, epistemology, but also the moral sciences, jurisprudence, psychology and even medical studies. This meant that religious training would slowly no longer be conducted privately in the monasteries, universities and cathedral schools, but in seminaries. The term, although not the institution seems to fall somewhat into disuse for centuries, until, after the reformation, with a decree from the Council of Trent (1545-1563), seminaries were established in every Catholic diocese and, by church law, is still the requirement for the suitable intellectual formation of the students for the priesthood. With the Council of Trent also came growing suggestions surrounding the precise kind of philosophy to be taught, the writing of philosophical textbooks, and the role of the philosopher in the seminary as someone well equipped to combat theological errors within the denomination. Seminary philosophy professors were also called upon to assist political leaders, accompany scientists and medical professionals on their expeditions to the new world and present logical arguments for new theological and missiological concerns to an ever increasingly diverse audience. Most existing seminaries in the world today have their origins in the 1800s, with the growth of religious education during that period, and many peaked in terms of enrolment in the 1950s, although this is truer of the West than for other parts of the religious map. What is most interesting however, though not surprising when measured against a broader context and history, is that many seminaries have maintained a trace of philosophical training by way of individual courses, if not fully fledged undergraduate programs.

But returning to the Enlightenment and Modern period for a moment, we discover that even though several modern-period thinkers, from Descartes, Spinoza, Lenin to Brentano and Heidegger, received their initial philosophical training in a seminary context, with the advent of the modern period's hegemony of scientific and quantitative inquiry, experimentation, not speculation, became far more valuable.

Philosophy, in the form of dry speculative manuals, could not compete with the exciting new world of experimentation and thus the formal distinction was born between the faculties of the *Naturwissenschaften*,³ on the one hand, and what philosophy and religion departments described as *Geisteswissenschaften*, *Seelenwissenschaften*, or *Gemeinschaft-Wissenschaften*,⁴ on the other. It is a more-or-less porous distinction we still encounter to this day. In fact, many Ivy League universities pride themselves on the happy coexistence of both the hard and human sciences within their faculties.

While these institutions now market themselves as places of nondenominational, scientific and artistic higher learning, many, thankfully, maintain solid departments or schools of divinity or religion and also departments of philosophy. Some, such as the University of Chicago, have also maintained an informal affiliation with their founding denominational seminaries. The same is true of some of the legendary European medieval universities such as Louvain and Paris among others. Most of my experience, as a philosophy teacher, has been at far, far more modest yet highly diverse places over the past two decades in the United States where I have been fortunate to have

3 German term for the exact or natural sciences or any science with a positivistic methodology.

4 German for the humanities, the spiritual sciences (literally, sciences of the soul), or the communitarian sciences. Much of the division within these terms comes from a German psychologist and sociologist, Wilhelm Dilthey 1833–1911. These three terms also connote differing methodologies and are the precursors to the array of courses in the humanities, arts and letters, and social sciences that one finds in many liberal arts programs today, mainly in the Anglo-Saxon world. It is interesting to note that music and psychology were often treated as spiritual sciences, but that psychology was originally seen as an empirical science and often offered only in departments of medical practice or departments of psychiatry, which were formed only in the twentieth century.

helped in the building of direct and accredited philosophy programs in schools of theology and ministry. Most of my research on ecumenical seminary institutions is based on the work of national and international associations that evaluate the academic formation of philosophy and theological studies in Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim, and Protestant seminaries.

Contemporary Seminary Philosophy: Challenges and New Opportunities for Philosophical Practitioners

Today the term “seminary” is used very diversely. Evangelical and Pentecostal groups especially in South East Asia, India, Africa, former Communist countries and Latin America will often set up online or private seminaries for the education of their future ministers. Sadly, at times, these institutions and websites are flagrantly hostile to any form of secular inquiry or philosophical speculation, relying instead on purely ritualistic or strictly uncritical interpretation of sacred texts for the shaping of their world-views that often end up being fairly hermetically sealed. Exactly which governing body, similar to Pontifical and Diocesan Commissions for Seminary Education with their Programs for Priestly Formation (PPF) requirements, or which academic accreditation council, such as the outstanding Association of Theological Schools of America and Canada with its 250 member institutions, will supervise the credit-hours and general tone of theological and philosophical education in many of these institutions, is unclear. Educational societies, both denominational and non-denominational, journal publishers within the academy and even certain governments remain rightfully wary of any form of higher education today which is less than transparent with regards to its role in producing future citizens or religious thinkers within democracies, especially in post-conflict, post-genocide societies.

Other well-know religious schools of higher learning such as Calvin Theological Seminary, founded 1876, now speak of a preseminary program wherein studies in rhetoric, Greek, philosophical studies, and communication studies are emphasized, almost as a propaedeutic to formal theological studies.⁵ The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, founded in 1886, has maintained annual course offerings in Jewish Philosophy.⁶ Founded in 1967, in francophone Belgium, the Séminaire Cardinal Cardijn saw itself as a new kind of seminary for the weekend training of seminarians who also held regular jobs such as construction and factory workers. Today, ongoing spiritual, ministerial and pastoral formation and religious education is their aim, although many courses in the history of theology will also contain a strongly philosophical component. The famous Inanda Seminary School for girls in South Africa, founded in 1853, sees itself as a college preparatory seminary wherein girls receive a solid moral and academic education that will equip them for their future roles as women in the new democratic South Africa.⁷ On the other hand, the Serbian Orthodox Seminary just outside Chicago,⁸ while offering a selection of philosophy courses in the first two years of study, sees itself as a place wherein the distinct theological history of the Serbian Orthodox Church is studied and pastorally ritualized. The aim of this seminary is primarily to produce Orthodox priests who will minister in the Orthodox Church and not primarily to produce philosophers who will comment on or further the philosophical knowledge in the Orthodox world.

5 <http://calvinseminary.edu/academics/>.

6 <http://www.jtsa.edu/Academics.xml>.

7 I am well aware that most of this article has dealt with major or grand seminaries, not minor high school seminaries. I have, however, included the reference to the Inanda Seminary, started by American Missionaries in Natal, South Africa, since most North Americans and Europeans would be amazed to hear of a seminary for girls that ended up, despite the legacy of apartheid, educating important leaders in southern Africa in the humanities. Education in the humanities was often seen as a luxury in South Africa, especially in black seminaries and high schools, and some who graduated were explicitly encouraged to opt for manual employment after graduation. Inanda Seminary remains one of the historic South African colleges and high schools for girls, predating seminarylike institutions in Europe and America.

8 <http://www.serborth.org/education.html>.

A colleague returning recently from teaching philosophy in Asia recently informed me that one of the fastest growing online seminaries is in Tokyo.⁹ With an ever-increasing online student seminary population in Asia, monitoring and evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of such institutions from afar, let alone their philosophy programs, if any, may prove difficult.

What the future of nontraditional, autocephalous seminary institutions will be, and how they will adapt or reshape the concept of a traditional seminary education, remains to be seen. However, with a certain degree of confidence we can say that philosophical studies have always and will continue to be crucial for critical theological reflection in mainline Protestant, Jewish, Catholic, and Orthodox seminaries, despite radically aging and declining mainline church membership in the Western world.

Today the concept of sequestering groups of men or women for seven or eight years of study, with a view to serving either in the denomination's academy or in the denomination's ministry, seems largely out of date in the West. University departments of philosophy and religious studies in liberal arts colleges or other nonresidential institutions of higher learning seem to supersede the seminary.

On the other hand a careful look at the Third and emerging worlds proves otherwise. For large parts of the world, especially Latin America, Asia, and Africa, seminary education remains the beneficial and privileged first step to the study of and an appreciation of the humanities, social sciences, or liberal arts and their methodologies. A seminary education may also act as a feeder program for those who will later in public life learn to value the skills (competencies) of careful questioning and a solid appreciation for unhurried, complex, historical arguments. Despite these benefits, it is my opinion that the world of seminary philosophy is one that remains unexplored for many professional philosophical practitioners.

A healthy and philosophically creative seminary is capable of being the place where potentially the tension between the professions of philosophy and theological studies can coexist in mutual respect. (Often, sadly, this is not the case.) Healthy, creative seminaries are administered well and creativity in teaching is welcomed. Such seminaries are also potentially places where philosophical training can help students gain skills that are not merely religious or theological, skills ever increasingly in demand by a world wherein religions often compete violently; wherein cultures clash, political movements seduce vulnerable minds, and science and technology tend to dominate all forms of humanitarian and public discourse.¹⁰

In fact, over the past two decades of teaching philosophy in schools of theology and seminaries in the United States, most of the discussions and career counseling or academic advising I have done outside the classroom has been to assist former lay students of mine who, after leaving the seminary, chose nondenominational, nonreligious paths to their careers. Often these were my brightest, most philosophically able students, unafraid of a broad world of critical ideas and of evaluative action. I often felt sorry for them in that, despite their obvious philosophical talent, they would not enjoy the comfort and security of a career in a religious institution as would their priesthood and ministerial-tracked classmates. Then again, I also secretly rejoiced that they would not have to experience the pain of the suffocating lack of philosophical creativity that religious denominations often serve up as a daily meal in an attempt to remove all forms of critical thinking from their religious leaders, institutions, and followers.

⁹ Although my colleague mentioned this anecdotally, I have not been able to find confirmation from an exact website, nor the name of the exact seminary in Tokyo. I am, however, not entirely surprised, given the enormous growing interest in professional evangelical and Protestant education in Asia.

¹⁰ For an excellent evaluation of the kind of environment in the seminary that best serves critical philosophical discourse, see S. Theron, "Reflections on the Teaching of Philosophy in Clerical Seminaries," *New Blackfriars* 93, no. 1043 (2012): 47–57.

There is still much research to be done on the vast numbers of international seminary students who, over the past three decades, have successfully completed philosophy studies in seminaries, yet for one reason or the other have chosen not to continue with priestly or theological studies. I have often wondered what becomes of their seminary philosophy training. Does it, for instance, function like the intense training of medical and nursing students who, while not completing their schooling, frequently report that something of their training “always somehow stays with them, especially in emergency situations”? If so, how, exactly? I also wonder whether or not seminaries should have a responsibility to point departing students in the direction of career paths that would value and capitalize on their previous seminary philosophical training. Often, sadly, students who complete only their philosophy studies in seminaries without going on for theological or priestly studies view themselves, and are frequently viewed by religious communities, as “failed priests, failed rabbis, or former seminarians.” My conviction has always been that, to the degree in which they applied themselves in their philosophy studies while in the seminary, their philosophical acumen is still much needed in today’s world, especially when lived beyond the safe and often unreal walls of the religious denomination and denominational concerns.

The philosophical practitioner could, once again, be of crucial benefit to these students. Repeatedly, these lay, former seminary students of mine have asked me for letters of recommendation and suggestions as to how their more than twenty-four credit hours of undergraduate philosophical training in critical thinking, ethics, the history of philosophical argumentation, aesthetics, political philosophy, and philosophical anthropology in the seminary might be marketed so as to be useful in a world that overtly despises philosophy majors as being fools for undertaking such useless degrees in the first place. In order to help them in an informed way, for years, I researched and spoke with colleagues and various business, social, and civic agencies and organizations. I was amazed to find that with a little coaching and translating of course titles, the competencies that my students, especially nonordained students, learned in my classroom suited them in fact extremely well for a variety of useful and meaningful careers. Today, some of my former philosophy students work in the fields of pre-engineering education in Africa; some are communication experts; others are social workers and NGO specialists in justice and peace issues; others are university campus ministers and counselors, journalists, philanthropists, high-school teachers for persons with intellectual disabilities, nurses, psychiatrists, and politicians.

One thing seems profoundly clear: that, in today’s competitive world of both employment and education, one is no longer hired exclusively because of the name of one’s seminary, the particular brand name of one’s philosophical training, or the name of one’s seminary philosophy professor; rather, one is hired because one is able to demonstrate transferrable philosophical skills (or competencies) in a variety of very unorthodox situations and fluid contexts.

Philosophical practitioners could play a crucial role in counseling and coaching former philosophy seminary students in this regard. Prescinding from the lack of skills-based education even in the fields of ethics and social philosophy, someone with an appreciation for a philosophical tradition, such as a philosophical practitioner, can help former seminary philosophy students make vital connections between philosophical problems in the world and the necessary philosophical skills needed to understand and resolve them.

Three Proposals and Five Competencies for a Mutual Exchange between Seminary Philosophers and Philosophical Practitioners

Three proposals

For the aforementioned to occur, three preliminary triadic conversations between among seminary philosophy professors, students studying philosophy in seminaries, and philosophical practitioners will be necessary.

1. First, philosophical practitioners may need to re-evaluate their own philosophical perspectives and re-examine any residual prejudices they may have inherited from their Anglo-Saxon, analytical university training in philosophy in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, which, in those days, often tended to present every conceivable religious idea as inherently antithetical to free and rigorous philosophical inquiry. A careful study of the issues and political problems confronting today's world shows that such a prejudice is anachronistic as best. Furthermore, teaching in international seminaries—with students from all over the globe, including places traumatized by tribal genocide and political and religious instability—certainly brings home the fact that the glories of both strictly Continental and so-called analytic Anglo-Saxon approaches to philosophy often tend to diminish beyond the walls of European and North American academies. This is especially true when both philosophy professor and student are forced to take on broader and more creative and technical philosophical skills and logical solutions—some gained within the crucible of trying to honor philosophy studies in seminaries in postconflict countries; others gained from the wise repository of Buddhism, Hinduism, medieval Islam, and other religious traditions less immediately associated with the birth of modern philosophy in Europe. Reciprocally enriching conversations between these seminarians—especially those coming to study philosophy from postconflict zones such as Rwanda, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Mali, the Balkans, Northern Ireland, and the Ivory Coast—and philosophical practitioners, may help to broaden the valid, albeit overly introspective and exclusively therapeutic, world of the philosophical practitioner and his or her European or North American clients.

2. Along with this it seems to me there needs to be a return to the fact that Socrates used his maieutic skill with the aim (end)¹¹ of producing an educated citizen who would play a beneficial role in society and that that role would be based as much on personal transparency and internal coherence as on acquired or “bought” skills. Pragmatic, “skills-only” philosophical training, devoid of value inquiry and history, the kind advocated by the Sophists in Plato's later dialogues, are like today's used-car salesmen and saleswomen—brilliant at displays of technique, but also concealing a debilitating inner fear that these skills would prove inadequate if one wanted to transform oneself into a better, more balanced, less provincially minded, more compassionate, holistic, “spiritual” human being. The seminary-trained philosophy student and teacher would know that the quests for inner self-improvement and for rigorous philosophical training are not ipso facto incommensurable.

3. Earlier in this article I used the word *competency/competencies*. By a competency I mean an applicable common, practical, and wise skill,¹² one that can be observed, copied, repeated, and corrected by others. Furthermore, almost at the conclusion of this article, I also want a competency to stand for a shared mode of evaluation, or a foundation upon which dialogue between the world of seminary philosophers and the world of the philosophical practitioner could build. The emerging model of philosophy, when evaluated outside the rather safe environment of the seminary, divinity school, or school of theology, could look quite different. New or complementary competencies are needed to relate seminary philosophy to the actual philosophical problems in the world. It is obvious that those coaching former seminarians to use their philosophical skills will themselves have to be aware of the following competencies, operative in their own practice of philosophical counseling, before transmitting them to others.

Five competencies

The following five competencies are merely heuristic, but I believe as a whole, they function in tandem so as to produce a holistic philosophy and a holistic pastoral practice. In compiling the list of five competencies, enumerated below, I have been partially inspired by the works of philosophers cited in the bibliography at the end of this

11 By aim here I mean a final purpose, what the Greeks called *telos*. It is more than the natural outcome of a procedure.

12 By skill I mean the use of the word in Latin, *habitus*, or Greek, *phronesis*.

article, but on the whole, they have been drawn from my own experience counseling and advising former philosophy students and listening, over the years, to their helpful feedback as they struggled to find employment years after the seminary.

1. First, we could begin by asserting a common truism as grounding: “Machines do not philosophize; humans do!” This truism underscores the central anthropological endeavor in our work. All good philosophy and philosophical counseling begins with a central confidence in the human person’s philosophizing. Philosophy is not just about a set of true and false conclusions to propositions; it is above all an inquiry into the strengths and weaknesses of the human person doing philosophy. Since the ancient Greek period, the human person, not the gods, was seen as the measure of all things. Questions such as

how confident am I, or how happy am I with who I am?

what do I culturally and physically bring to the way I see others and myself?

am I content to be considered as a part of my culture, or do I define myself as being apart from dominant or inherited cultures?

what unites me with my community and with the international community?

are vital for grounding any philosophical activity, especially when using it as a basis for a future long-term profession or career.

2. Reflections on distinctiveness are the tools that often aid us in distinguishing nuanced positions, even when doing so may be prickly or uncomfortable at times. Questions such as

how comfortable am I with conflicting or contradictory positions in an argument?

do I think that all conflicting positions need to be immediately reconciled, or am I prepared to take a clear and at times lonely stand on things I care about, even though my opinion may not be the popular one?

might be helpful as we grow and invite others to realize that a careless common unity, hastily thrown over distinctions like a fire-blanket so as to avoid conflict, may not always be helpful in the maturation process of either the philosopher or the religious and pastoral leader.

3. Unity and communality, or, to use a phrase from the methodology of phenomenology, “the seeking of common essences,”¹³ is a way of understanding what is crucially valuable, not just in philosophical training but also for many forms of communal and political life today. The follow questions, and others like them, might be helpful in preparing minds to move from stubbornly held adverse positions to finding common ground:

How do I frame a discourse in such a way that can comfortably contain conflicting positions?

Do I see common positions between arguments within the hard sciences, the humanities, the arts, and other areas of inquiry?

13 Cf. Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1982), 677–719, in which the phenomenological method is described as a search for common essences among divergent or conflicting phenomena or states of understanding.

Do I look for the common essence in all positions, even those that appear contradictory or incommensurate?

4. Stability and change are two obvious dialectical forces in life. The following questions may help us not become too wedded to only one way of evaluating all propositions: Do I allow myself to change my opinion in the face of a compelling argument?

Do I seek to change the minds of others?

Am I too easily swayed by the arguments of others?

What is the purpose of changing my mind or that of others, especially when so many individuals often seem quite confined by their comfortably mundane, ingrown, and repeated philosophical positions?

5. Local thought and action is always self-evident: it is always empirically before our eyes, ears, tongues, stomachs, and hands; and yet, very often, as philosophers, we need to evaluate horizons from distant, intergeographical, bicultural, or international perspectives so as to avoid narcissistic provincialisms. The following questions and others, stylistically similar, may be helpful to get philosophers beyond the horizons of their own secure worlds:

How universal or international are the set of concerns I am presently grappling with?

How do I stretch the parameters of my horizon so as to understand the concerns of the majority of people in the non-Western world, especially in emerging economies and emerging democracies?

Am I affected by the sorrows and joys of other nations, and if so, how do these impinge on my way of thinking?

The question may be asked as to how exactly a conversation would work between a philosophical practitioner and a philosophy student in a seminary, or a former philosophy-seminarian.¹⁴ The philosophical practitioner might begin by welcoming the former seminary philosophy student and by asking him or her about his or her experience studying philosophy in the seminary context over the past few years. The philosophical practitioner may do well to seek out and emphasize the more positive expressions in the student's experience. The philosophical practitioner might then offer the list of the five competencies, mentioned above, and ask the former student if he or she could identify with any of the areas or questions. The practitioner, using much flexibility and sensitivity, could gently guide the student into probing the philosophical area more and more deeply, making sure that the former seminarian's level of confidence in handling philosophical issues and concepts increases. Finally, the philosophical practitioner might suggest a few occupations and institutions—such as journalism, education, social work, NGO leadership, or medicine, among others—that would benefit from having someone who is trained in philosophy and theology among their ranks. The philosophical practitioner, using some skills from the world of job coaching, would help the student to be increasingly proactive in searching for creative ways to use his or her philosophical competencies in aiding other individuals or groups. This conversation might last over several sessions, depending on the former philosophy-seminarian's needs.

Furthermore, the philosophical practitioner might come to a seminary staff meeting to explain his or her methods to the seminary philosophy teaching staff (and possibly also to the pastoral theologians, since their work often

¹⁴ This section would need to be developed further as the level of confidence and experience on both the part of the seminary student and the philosophical practitioner deepen.

overlaps that of the philosophical practitioner), thus offering the possibility of a mutual contact in shared experiences and methods.

Rather than a Conclusion: Prospects for Future Dialogue?

The journey toward seeing the world of the seminary philosophy student and philosophy teacher as intersecting comfortably with the world of the philosophy practitioner is just in its embryonic stage. Often they are like strangers waiting to be introduced to one another. Once mutual suspicions are reduced and common interests identified, shared competencies then serve to strengthen any philosophical and professional collaboration. But what would the outcome be?

Perhaps the dream of a more rational, mutually comprehensible world based on common religious beliefs is illusive, especially if we follow the news of religious wars these days; but a world based on the shared values of philosophy, as a common and reasoned enterprise for humans who respect valid intellectual arguments and therefore wish to diminish the level of miscomprehension in world, is a real possibility. Perhaps in some small way, the thoughts and historical context of seminary philosophers, teachers, and students, and their potential collaboration with the philosophical practitioner's movement, may just be pointing us toward realizing that more rational, mutually comprehensible world.