

WHAT'S IN A GENUS? GENUS USURPATION AND THE PROBLEM OF NAMING IN PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

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Abstract: This article introduces ‘genus usurpation’ as a tool for clarifying concepts within philosophical counseling. It has been argued that Krishna’s counsel to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita* does not count as philosophical counseling because it is monological, not dialogical, their relationship is unequal, and Krishna speaks uniquely with authority. Similar objections apply to other forms of philosophical guidance across the world’s wisdom traditions. Contemporary ‘Philosophical Counseling’ (PC) represents a dialogical, theoretically equal, and unauthoritative approach. Technically, philosophical counseling includes both ancient and PC versions. ‘PC’ is thus a species of the broader genus, an instance of genus usurpation. The article maps these and related problematic relationships, self-reflexively aligning with the Confucian rectification of names.

Keywords: genus usurpation, philosophical counseling, philosophical practice, Socratic Counseling, rectification of names.

1. INTRODUCTION

The names we give things matter; cf. ‘circumcision’, ‘genital mutilation’, ‘gender-affirming care’. This insight is as old as Confucius, who insisted proper governance and ethical life depend on the rectification of names – ensuring that titles, roles, and terms correspond to what they denote.¹ Socrates spent his life interrogating what others presumed to know, often discovering that the words people relied on couldn’t withstand scrutiny. This is central to analytic philosophy’s imperative to define one’s terms, attributed mainly to Bertrand Russell.

Yet the contemporary Philosophical Counseling (‘PC’) community – a young field that emerged over the past half century as a return to philosophy as a way of

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¹ Confucius, *Analects* 13.3, in Edward Slingerland (trans.), *Confucius: Analects, with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, Indianapolis, Hackett, 2003.

life and a form of care for the soul – has not reckoned with a naming error that threatens to distort its conceptual landscape. This error occurs when a term that denotes a genus is appropriated as the proprietary name for a species, eclipsing the genus. I dub this genus usurpation ‘genusurpation’. It need not be an intentional bait-and-switch, but it risks functioning as one. Addressing that risk justifies analysis. Most people do not know what philosophical counseling is, many academic philosophers included. We should be clear about what it is.

The broadest genus of philosophical counseling (‘pc’) includes Krishna’s counsel to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Buddha’s teachings, and the Stoics’ therapeutic philosophy, among other forms of pc throughout the world’s wisdom traditions. PC arrived late, found the genus unclaimed in the professional register, and claimed it.

I surmise that ‘PC’ was claimed for two related reasons: to differentiate PC from psychotherapy and other talk therapies, and to capitalize on the recognition the term ‘counseling’ might afford from the mental health professions. The resemblance was both blessing and curse. It was a blessing because it gave the public a familiar model for partly understanding the work, and a permission structure within which prospective clients could grasp what they were buying. It was a curse, however, in deeper ways than the merely terminological. By naming itself ‘Counseling’ and adopting the talk-therapy session as its standard format – the one-hour dyadic conversation, the comparable hourly fee, the office-based intake – PC unwittingly wedded itself to the normativity and professional authority of the talk-therapies industry, whose evaluative apparatus was developed for an entirely different *telos*: clinical symptom reduction rather than sapiential transformation. The cost of legibility was the silent importation of the wrong measuring stick. PC has spent much of its short institutional life defending itself against efficacy framings, treatment-plan expectations, and outcomes-data demands developed for a practice it was never trying to be. The genusurpation analysis below gives one diagnosis of how this confusion was inscribed at the level of *naming*; the parallel problem at the level of *format* admits of the same diagnosis and the same remedy – the recovery of *therapeia* in its original Greek sense, and the willingness to let the format follow the *telos* rather than the reverse.² The converse claim is in any case more appropriate, since psychology, on my analysis, is a species of philosophy of mind, and philosophers of mind are far more qualified to engage in it than psychologists.³

² I develop this format-inheritance self-critique, and the corrective embrace of a purely philosophical *therapeia*, at length in R. Repetti, *How to Talk with Socrates: The Art of Socratic Counseling* (forthcoming, tentatively, Lexington Press). The argument extends the self-reflexive logic of the present article from naming to format, and applies it to the entire field of PC rather than to particular cases, while honestly acknowledging that my own approach, Socratic Counseling, itself has not yet fully escaped the format inheritance it diagnoses.

³ For a comprehensive argument for the superiority of philosophical counseling over psychotherapy, see my monograph (forthcoming, *op. cit.*).

2. WHAT IS PC?

The neologism ‘genusurpation’ emerged from sustained philosophical self-examination about what I do as a philosophical counselor and what to call it.⁴ PC may be understood as a form of dialogue-based practice in which a philosopher engages with an individual who is functionally stable – not in obvious need of mental health counseling – in dialogue about their concerns, questions, values, beliefs, or interests. The primary value of PC is educational, minimally, and sapiential, ideally – oriented toward wisdom, understanding, meaning, and transformation – rather than therapeutic in the clinical sense, although therapeutic benefits often arise as collateral consequences.

PC’s mentally-well clients need intelligent assistance resolving their issues, thinking more clearly about an existential concern, improving their understanding of meaning, navigating ethical dilemmas, or addressing other questions that are not pathologies requiring treatment but perplexities deserving philosophical attention. Philosophical Counselors (‘PC’s’) bring at minimum two basic abilities: to engage in philosophical dialogue, often called “Socratic dialogue”, and to draw upon their philosophical knowledge as resources for clients’ concerns, often called “bibliotherapy”, prescribing, recommending, or exploring relevant philosophical texts, doctrines, or ideas.

I practice a form of PC I call ‘Socratic Counseling’ (‘SC’) – capitalized to mark it as a term with a stipulative definition, and thus as a species, rather than the genus of ‘Socratic counseling’ (‘Sc’), which would be any form of pc incorporating elements of Socratism: the philosophy of Socrates, his approach, style, ideas, or modes of activity.⁵ SC takes Socratism as central to Sc, and thus as its default posture: the maieutic practice of helping others give birth to their own ideas, knowledge, and wisdom through intuitively targeted, probing questions and *elenchus*, cross-examination of the answers.⁶

While most PC’s employ some elements of Sc – with dialectical dialogue as a generic minimum – many also employ bibliotherapy, unlike Socrates. Unless a PC form defines itself as *essentially* Socratism, calling it Sc would be misrepresentative, even if it employs Socratic elements, in my rectification-of-names initiative.

The midwife stance, as I teach it to junior PC’s I supervise, is the Socratic Counselor’s (‘SC’s’) central ‘ready’ posture – analogous to the martial artist’s fighting stance – from which contextually-appropriate Socratic moves emerge spontaneously. When a client presents as seeking answers, the general human instinct is to provide them, but the SC’s instinct, cultivated through practice, is to ask: Is this really a problem? How do you know? What if it’s not? What would it look like from the opposite perspective? Etc.

⁴ That initiative defines the bulk of my above-cited monograph.

⁵ On Socratism, see Agnes Callard, *Open Socrates: The Case for a Philosophical Life*, New York, Basic Books, 2025.

⁶ On Socratic midwifery (maieutics), see Plato, *Theaetetus* 148e–151d.

SC is not a ‘method’ in the conventional sense, despite a long tradition in philosophy and law of referring to something close to it as “the Socratic Method” (‘SM’) – a form of interrogation and cross-examination exemplified in *The Paper Chase*.⁷ But that form of SM is not conducive to therapy of the soul, and more often than not constitutes what John Vervaeke calls *philia nikia*, love of victory (rather than *philia sophia*, love of wisdom),⁸ a kind of philosophical bloodsport I experienced in graduate school.

I resist the idea that Socrates employed SM, however close his behavior seems to fit that pattern. Instead, with Callard (*op. cit.*), I believe Socrates simply expressed his life-long interest in finding out what others knew, believed, why, and whether their reasons were cogent – drawing on decades of dialogical exploration with people from all walks of life. He relied on his lifetime of background beliefs, experience, intuition, and shared cultural knowledge. In my case, similarly, decades of genuine interest in finding out what others believe, value, and aspire toward – across academic philosophy, contemplative disciplines, psychotherapeutic modalities, martial arts, yoga, and the world’s major wisdom traditions – have been internalized such that relevant elements emerge organically in authentic encounter with clients, rather than being systematically applied. I have called this, tentatively, a ‘methodless method’: not methodlessness born of ignorance, but method transcended through exposure to and mastery of many methods, analogous to what the Daoists call *wu wei* (effortless action), or the jazz musician’s spontaneous improvisation built on thorough mastery of theory and extensive practice.⁹

I draw this parallel deliberately, because the question of naming – what to call this approach, and whether any given name is accurate, misleading, or a category error – is not incidental to the philosophical work, but constitutive of it. Throughout the development of SC, I have wrestled with terminology: shifting from Callard’s “untimely questions” – by the time we ask philosophical questions, she argues, we are already long-committed to presupposed answers, rendering them untimely – to my preferred label, “sunk cost questions,” which better captures the logic and phenomenology of our resistance to reexamining foundational commitments.¹⁰ Since such questions are always asked at this point, this is the *normal* – hence ‘timely’ – point at which they are asked; the issue is not their timing but our potential bias from something like the sunk cost fallacy. I coined ‘postjudice’ as an antonym to ‘prejudice’ – judgment posterior to extensive experiential evidence, rather than prior to it – to emphasize that our lifeworld-navigating beliefs are not

⁷ *The Paper Chase*, dir. James Bridges (20th Century Fox, 1973).

⁸ John Vervaeke, “Awakening from the Meaning Crisis,” Episode 47 (“Heidegger”), online lecture series, 2019–20.

⁹ For a full treatment of the ‘methodless method’ concept, see R. Repetti (forthcoming, *op. cit.*), Chs. 1, 5–7, and 14.

¹⁰ A. Callard, *op. cit.* My critique and development of “sunk cost questions” is in R. Repetti (forthcoming, *op. cit.*), Ch. 2.

automatically suspect, but massively confirmed through decades of tacit predictive-processing-style hypothesis-testing.¹¹

This attention to the precision and transparency of philosophical terminology is central, not peripheral, to philosophical practice. The act of naming a philosophical practice is itself a philosophical act, subject to all the scrutiny that philosophical concepts deserve. It was in the course of this sustained self-examination, while writing my monograph on SC, that I encountered the particular naming error.

3. RELATED GENUSURPATIONS

3.1. PHILOSOPHICAL MIDWIFERY

Pierre Grimes, the late American philosophical practitioner, developed an approach to PC he called “Philosophical Midwifery” (‘PM’).¹² Grimes’s approach involved a specific method of dialogical inquiry aimed at uncovering what he called the *pathologos* – a false and limiting belief about the self, often formed in childhood, that constrains an individual’s adult life. I benefitted from witnessing and experiencing PM with him.

The problem is not with the practice but with the name. Philosophical midwifery (‘pm’) – maieutics – is one of the oldest and broadest categories in the Western philosophical tradition. Socrates described himself as a midwife of ideas nearly 2,400 years ago: his primary role in dialogue was to ask targeted questions designed to help his interlocutors give birth to their own latent knowledge and wisdom.¹³ Every PC employs some pm, every philosophy teacher who guides students toward their own insights, every facilitator of a Socratic dialogue who trusts the participants to discover what they do not yet know – all are practicing pm. PM also employs Grimes’ unique form of dream analysis in search of the *pathologos*. PM is thus a species of pm, and pm is a species of Sc, which genus also includes *elenchus*.

By naming his specific approach ‘PM’ Grimes appropriated the genus name from ‘pm’ for his single species. Thus, anyone searching for information about pm is likely to encounter PM first and perhaps exclusively. The genus is eclipsed by the species. This is not merely equivocation; it is an act of naming that colonizes a conceptual item in the commons, however unintentional.

¹¹ The idea that long-verified experience – postjudice – has positive epistemic value rather than specious value draws on Jonathan Adler’s analysis in *Belief’s Own Ethics*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2002, esp. Ch. 6; it’s developed in R. Repetti (forthcoming, *op. cit.*), Ch. 2.

¹² Pierre Grimes, *Philosophical Midwifery: A New Paradigm for Understanding Human Problems with Its Validation*, Costa Mesa, CA, Hyparxis Press, 1998.

¹³ A. Callard, *op. cit.*, persuasively refutes cynical views to the effect that Socrates employed questions that lawyers would call “leading the witness.”

3.2. ASHTANGA YOGA

A parallel case occurs in the domain of yogic practice, which from an Asian philosophical perspective is part of philosophy proper,¹⁴ but the example is instructive because its structure is identical. K. Pattabhi Jois, the influential twentieth-century Indian yoga teacher, named his specific system of physically-demanding choreographed postural sequences ‘Ashtanga Yoga’ (‘AY’). Yet ‘*ashtanga yoga*’ (‘*ay*’), literally, the eight-limbed yoga, is the term used by the ancient sage Patanjali, in the *Yoga Sūtras*, for the foundational framework of classical Yoga philosophy.¹⁵ Patanjali’s eight limbs comprise moral restraints, observances, postures, breath control, withdrawal of the mind from the senses, concentration, meditative trance, and transcendence. Physical postures are but one of the eight limbs of *ay*, and they are traditionally conceived primarily as preparation for meditation, not as an end in themselves.

AY is almost entirely focused on years of disciplined practice in graceful, ballet-like choreographed sequences of physical postures. It is, at most, an elaboration of one of the eight limbs of *ay*. Yet by calling it ‘AY’ Jois claimed the genus name for his species. This criticism holds even if a handful of his advanced followers learned the other seven limbs of *ay*. The consequence is predictable: anyone who searches for ‘AY online is likely to encounter Jois’s postural system in the first results. The ancient *ay* framework is occluded by its modern single-limb derivative. Whether this naming was deliberate marketing, homage, or simple ignorance is irrelevant to the structural analysis. In either case, the genus has been usurped.

Similarly, the Self-Realization Fellowship (‘SRF’) *might* genusurp in calling its specific method ‘Kriya Yoga’ (‘KY’), since the genus ‘*kriya yoga*’ (‘*ky*’) is the term Patanjali uses for an alternative to *ay*,¹⁶ although it is not as clear that there is a substantive difference between what SRF teaches and *ky*.

4. GENUSURPATION

Why call this naming error ‘genusurpation’? In coming gradually to formulate my answer, I applied the same discipline I bring to philosophical terminology generally – reasoning through several candidate names before settling on one that, to borrow a phrase, “wears its analysis on its sleeve.”¹⁷

¹⁴ For an argument that yogic and related meditative practices fall correctly under the genus ‘philosophy’, see Rick Repetti (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook on the Philosophy of Meditation*, London, 2022, esp. ch. 2.

¹⁵ Edwin F. Bryant, *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, New York, North Point Press, 2009.

¹⁶ On *ky*, see E.F. Bryant, *op. cit.*; on KY, see Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Los Angeles, Self-Realization Fellowship, 1946, ch. 26.

¹⁷ I favor neologisms that are “analytically transparent” – terms that wear their analysis on their sleeve. “Postjudice,” “ontonaut,” and “genusurpation” are all examples. See R. Repetti (forthcoming, *op. cit.*), *passim*.

A first candidate was ‘genus grab,’ by analogy with ‘land grab’ or ‘power grab.’ It captures the acquisitive character of the move but lacks analytical precision and connotes bad intent, which I prefer to avoid. A second was ‘genus capture,’ by analogy with ‘regulatory capture’ in political science, where an entity meant to be regulated ends up controlling its regulator. Here, the species meant to be classified by the genus ends up controlling access to the genus term. Analytically promising, but too technical for general use.

A third option was ‘reverse genericide.’ In trademark law, genericide occurs when a proprietary brand name becomes the generic term for an entire category – Kleenex for tissues, Xerox for photocopying. What Grimes and Jois have done is the precise reversal: taking the generic category term and converting it into their proprietary brand. Technically exact and symmetrically elegant, but it leans heavily on specialized knowledge of trademark law. A fourth was ‘nominal enclosure,’ evoking the historical enclosure movement in which common land was fenced off for private use – evocative but too literary for analytic purposes.

I also considered ‘specious branding,’ which I might retain as a secondary designation. ‘Specious’ derives from the Latin ‘*species*’ – appearance, form, kind – the very word that gives us our genus/species distinction. So ‘specious branding’ literally means ‘species-level branding’ while simultaneously meaning ‘misleadingly-attractive branding.’ It names both the structure of the error and its epistemic character in a single phrase. But ‘specious’ suggests ‘fallacious’ and seems needlessly harsh.

In mentioning these possibilities, I expose different elements of the phenomenon that can be problematic. But the name I adopt as my primary term is my neologism ‘genusurpation’ – a fusion of ‘genus’ and ‘usurpation’. It identifies the move in a single word: the usurpation of the genus by a species. It is self-explanatory once unpacked, memorable, and analytically transparent. Jois’s appropriation of “Ashtanga Yoga” and Grimes’s appropriation of “Philosophical Midwifery” are instances of genusurpation – the colonization of a conceptual commons by a single proprietor’s species-level brand.

5. THE CONFUCIAN CONNECTION: RECTIFICATION OF NAMES

The concern that animates genusurpation has a distinguished pedigree in Chinese philosophy. Confucius, in the *Analects*, and later Confucians such as Xunzi, treated the rectification of names (*zhèngmíng*) as a central condition for proper governance and ethical life.¹⁸ When names do not correspond to reality, Confucius argued, disorder follows: if a ruler does not behave as a ruler should, calling him ‘ruler’ perpetuates a falsehood that corrupts the political order. Conversely, when names are rectified, clarity and order become possible.

¹⁸ E. Slingerland, *op. cit.*, 13.3 and commentary.

Genusurpation is, among other things, a failure of the rectification of names. When ‘PM’ names a single practitioner’s technique rather than the genus of Socratic maieutics stretching back millennia, the name has not been rectified but risks misleading. When ‘AY’ names a modern postural sequence rather than the ancient eight-limbed philosophical/soteriological path, the name has been enclosed rather than shared. The Confucian insight deepens the analysis: genusurpation is not merely a semantic inconvenience but a potential source of conceptual disorder. It distorts the intellectual landscape by making a species appear to be the whole of a genus, thereby obscuring the other species, the history, and the breadth of the category.

6. THE SELF-REFLEXIVE TURN: PC AS GENUSURPATION

A philosophical principle is ad hoc if applied only when it suits one’s case. Parity of reasoning requires that I apply the concept against my own side as well. I practice SC, a species of PC, itself a species of pc in its broadest sense: the practice of offering philosophical counsel or guidance to individuals confronting existential, ethical, or spiritual difficulties. That genus encompasses far more than what PC has claimed under its genusurped name.

Krishna’s counsel to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita* is intensely philosophical, addressing the deepest questions of duty, action, selfhood, mortality, and the nature of reality.¹⁹ The entirety of the *Gita* consists of Krishna responding to Arjuna’s existential paralysis on the battlefield with sustained pc. If that is not pc, nothing is. The same holds for the countless analogous forms of Indian pc, e.g., Vedanta, Bhakti, Shaiva, Tantra, Trika, Siddha, Jain, Sikh, Buddhist, etc.

We could extend the list: Laozi’s *Daodejing* offering counsel to whoever would read it,²⁰ the Daoist sage responding to a student’s confusion about action and non-action, the Confucian master redirecting a disciple’s character through ritual propriety and virtue. The same holds for much of Pythagoreanism, the Orphic mystery cults, Stoicism, Cynicism, Epicureanism, Pyrrhonian skepticism, Platonism, Neoplatonism, the Sufi sheikh guiding a seeker through spiritual perplexity, the desert fathers and mothers of early Christianity offering wisdom in existential distress. All of these are species of the genus of pc, understood in its broadest and most historically accurate sense: sapiential.

The late-twentieth-century Western coinage of ‘PC’, as if it names the genus, is genusurpation. This observation does not diminish PC – it is a legitimate and valuable species. But naming the species as though it’s the genus has consequences.

¹⁹ Winthrop Sargeant (trans.), *The Bhagavad Gita*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1994, esp. chs. 2–3.

²⁰ Laozi, *Daodejing*, trans. Philip J. Ivanhoe, Indianapolis, Hackett, 2002, esp. chs. 37, 47–48, and 63 on *wu wei*.

It obscures the deep roots of the practice in ancient Western and non-Western traditions, creating the false impression that pc is a twentieth-century Western invention rather than one contemporary expression of a practice as old as philosophy itself – arguably older, since one need not be a philosopher in any institutional sense to offer wise counsel. It also risks intellectual provincialism: practitioners operating under the assumption that they practice the genus rather than a species of it may fail to draw upon the immense resources of traditions they do not recognize as belonging to their lineage. As I have argued elsewhere (*op. cit.*), Asian wisdom traditions, religious contemplative traditions, and various practices hitherto unrecognized as philosophy in the academic Western branch of the subject all count as forms of philosophy, and contain rich resources for philosophical counselors.²¹

7. STRUCTURAL DISTINCTIONS WITHIN THE GENUS

The self-reflexive application of genusurpation enables us to sharpen structural distinctions. The ancient forms I have identified – Krishna's counsel, the Buddha's teachings, the Stoics' disciplines, Laozi, Confucius, etc. – operate primarily in the grammatical modes of declarative and imperative sentences. Krishna tells Arjuna what reality is and commands him to act accordingly. The Buddha declares the nature of suffering and prescribes the Eightfold Path. Almost all of these truths are expressed monologically, even when they occur in conversations; when they do, the conversations are uneven, and an authoritative sage is delivering 'Truth'.

Contemporary PC, by contrast, operates in a dialogical mode in which the practitioner guides exploration of a topic with the client as interlocutor, in a primarily educational context. Some forms of contemporary practice, more specifically, such as SC, operate primarily in the grammatical mode of interrogatory sentences – they ask rather than tell, midwife rather than prescribe, interrogate when cross-examining rather than flat-out refuting. This yields three modalities of PC proper: one monological and two dialogical. One of the dialogical modes often shares the didactic modality with the monological mode (the practitioner engaging in dialogue, but mostly didactically and educationally, e.g., using bibliotherapy); the other is the Socratic mode, engaging mostly in dialogical inquiry, midwifery, and *elenchus*. All three are genuine species of PC, but they are structurally distinct: one ancient, didactic, assertoric, typically unilateral, monological, often revelatory; two contemporary and dialogical – one mostly educational, the other mostly inquisitive and exploratory.

PC, insofar as it includes both Socratic and not-necessarily-Socratic approaches, is itself a genus containing multiple species – but it is not *the* genus of pc. The pc genus is older and wider than any of these PC species, and historically likely evolved out of the elder-sibling category of pastoral counseling, both of which may

²¹ For such resources, see Rick Repetti, "A Sampling of Philosophical Counseling Tools," *IRCEP* 3:8, 2023, pp. 136–95.

be considered species of a still larger genus, sapiential counseling, which in its earliest form likely included the wisdom of tribal elders.

The genusurpation analysis, once activated, reveals not isolated cases but an entire nested set of genus/species relationships obscured by genusurping practices throughout the overlapping histories of the field. It is worth pausing to map the full taxonomy.

At the broadest level, sapiential counseling in the oldest and widest sense – the genus of all forms of counsel offered by a sage, teacher, or wise elder to a person in existential, ethical, or spiritual difficulty – is the root. Once such counsel becomes explicitly philosophical, we may consider it pc. The pc genus includes Krishna's counsel, the Buddha's, the Stoics', the Pythagoreans', Parmenides', Heraclitus', Plato's, and countless others across the world's philosophical wisdom traditions that are primarily monologically authoritative. We may tentatively name this ancient form 'monological pc' ('mpc'). PC (including Sc and SC) is dialogical, so we may call them all 'dialogical pc' ('dpc').

Within contemporary PC practice, there is a further division. Philosophical *consultation* involves applying pc to practical problems in group or organizational settings: ethics officers in hospitals, chief philosophy officers in corporations, philosophical consultants on organizational teams. Philosophical *therapy* – what I call *philotherapy*, from *philia* (love) and *therapeia* (tending, caring for) – involves using pc for transformative tending of the soul: not treating pathology, but caring for the soul's natural capacity for wisdom, truth, and virtue through sustained philosophical practice. The term *therapeia* recovers its original Greek meaning – the *therapeutes* was a caretaker, an attendant, not a clinician. When Socrates described his mission as the care of the soul – *epimeleia tes psyches* – he was using the notion of *therapeia* in this original sense.

Socratic *therapeia* is a specifically Socratic form or species of philotherapy, distinguished by its interrogatory mode, its reliance on midwifery and *elenchus*, and its embrace of *aporia* (productive uncertainty) as intrinsically valuable rather than as a failure to reach conclusions. It sits alongside other species of philotherapy – Stoic, Buddhist, existential therapy (in the tradition of Jaspers and Marcel) and others – each a distinct approach to the same genus of transformative philosophical care. SC is distinctively Socratic philotherapy, but calling it 'Philotherapy' would also commit genusurpation, given these other species, although perhaps 'Socratic Philotherapy' might not bag an existing genus or species name, but it's a bit of a mouthful.

The same nested structure appears within the specifically Socratic domain. Socrates's practice of philosophical midwifery is a genus; Pierre Grimes' 'PM' is a species of that genus that has claimed the genus name, despite its focus on Platonic dreamwork as an inroad to the *pathologos*. Similarly, Socratic counseling (lowercase) – any form of counseling recognizably Socratic in character, employing interrogatory dialogue, midwifery, and/or *elenchus* – is a genus. Socratic Counseling

(capitalized) is a species of that genus: one emphasizing the methodless method, competence-based training, and the integration of contemplative capacities as a philosophical 'superpower'.²² But in the same way Grimes's adding a focus on dreamwork doesn't quite justify his genusurpation of pm, neither, by parity of reasoning, should my adding distinctive emphases justify my genusurpation of Sc.

What this mapping reveals is that genusurpation is not a defect found in one or two aberrant cases but a structural tendency recurring wherever established categories are available for capture. At every level of the taxonomy – from the broadest genus down to the specific species of Socratic midwifery – the temptation exists to name one's species with the genus term, whether through ignorance, marketing, or simple failure to attend to the distinctions. The concept of genusurpation, applied systematically, makes these nested relationships visible and thereby available for the rectification that philosophical precision demands.

8. AVOIDING GENUSURPATION: THE CASE OF SC

Having identified genusurpation and applied it to my own field, I should explain why I believe SC, while prima facie guilty, nonetheless mitigates the error for which I have criticized others.

First, there is no pre-existing named genus called Sc, apart from my identification of Sc here. Unlike PM or AY, where pm and ay existed in the philosophical literature for thousands of years, the term 'Sc' has never been employed in the Western philosophical canon, and thus my adoption of it in capitalized form does not colonize an established term. Socrates did not call what he did "counseling"; the compound term is new. He also did not sit face-to-face in psychotherapy-type sessions with clients, charge clients for conversing with them, or condone such transactional practices. Second, the term is explicitly presented as a stipulative definition that admits to the appearance of genusurpation but identifies itself as a particular species of Sc – in both the forthcoming monograph and the present article. There is no bait-and-switch. Third, the book-length analysis devotes itself to the sort of careful terminological exploration that would prevent genusurpation from occurring unnoticed, making it almost impossible to name this approach without risking some version of the error: e.g., Philotherapy, Socratic Therapy, etc.

I do not want SC to be guilty of genusurpation, even with my stipulative clarity, but I cannot think of a better name to capture what I consider the core of my approach. 'Methodless method' doesn't do justice – not merely because it

²² I expound on the reasons for this 'superpower' claim in my forthcoming monograph (*op. cit.*), but some main reasons are that the practice cultivates presence, clarity, focus, intuition, cognitive empathy, insight, cognitive flexibility, consciousness expansion, mental clarity, and, *inter alia*, what Socrates called his *daemon* (what I consider one's inner philosopher-genie).

is an oxymoron, but because it fails to indicate that this is a Socratic form of Philosophical Counseling. Again, ‘Socratic Philotherapy’ might not bag an existing genus or species name, but it’s a bit of a mouthful, it’s difficult enough to explain what PC is, and I want a name that wears its meaning on its sleeve. If I could conceive a better term, I’d use it. Those who understand SM as entailing specific formulae and sequential processes might constitute a sibling species under the genus, but I am unaware of any forms of PC for which this is centrally the approach. Anyone who reads my forthcoming monograph (*op. cit.*) will not likely be misled by the title, but if they are at all, when they read the book they will have their understanding adequately and emphatically corrected.

I note, with some ironic satisfaction, that turning the logic of genusurpation against my own approach, and acknowledging my technical commission of a form of it with respect to Sc, at least partly immunizes SC against the charge that the deployment of its genusurpation analysis is self-serving. If I were willing to apply it to Grimes, Jois, and PC in general but not to my own work, it would be a weapon, not an analytical tool. Applied even-handedly, it does what good philosophical concepts should do: it clarifies.

9. GENUSURPATION AS A PHILOSOPHICAL TOOL

The concept has applications beyond the examples considered here. Any domain in which established categories risk being captured by particular instances – in intellectual property, branding, institutional naming, the politics of knowledge – is susceptible to this form of conceptual distortion. One might examine whether the modern category of ‘mindfulness’ has been genusurped by specific secular mindfulness programs, eclipsing the broader Buddhist genus from which the concept derives. Even that broader domain is itself guilty of genusurpation, since the quality or state of being mindful – mindfulness – is a universally available mental attribute or state and a universally prescribed antidote to mindlessness, carelessness, and foolishness.²³ One might ask whether CBT has hidden something like the inverse of genusurpation with respect to the cognitive-behavioral therapeutic practices stretching back through the Stoic and Buddhist *Abhidharma* traditions, but more like ‘genus laundering’.

In each case, the analytical move is the same: identify the genus, identify the species that has claimed the genus name, trace the consequences, and ask whether the rectification of names would clarify the conceptual landscape. However, since there was no ‘cbt’ named as such in those traditions, just as there was no ‘Sc’ named as such in Socratism, either both genusurp or neither do. This raises a

²³ See Rick Repetti, “Meditation Matters: Replies to the Anti-McMindfulness Bandwagon!” in Ronald E. Purser, David Forbes, and Adam Burke (eds.), *Handbook of Mindfulness: Culture, Context, and Social Engagement*, New York, Springer, 2016, pp. 473–94.

question – pivotal for our purposes – in the metaphysics of meaning: If a compound concept can be formed in a language for a practice that does not yet exist in that language-using community, but it has not yet been formed and named, does it exist in some Platonic realm of possible meanings? We need not settle this metaphysics-of-meaning question here, but assuming *arguendo* an affirmative answer, that is not the same as an already-named genus in genusurpation or genus laundering, and thus SC is arguably not guilty of either.

Any principle applied only when convenient is *ad hoc*, and therefore not a genuine principle. Genusurpation earns its status as a philosophical concept precisely because it can be – and, as I have shown, must be – applied against its own user's domain. The willingness to do so is the price of analytical integrity.

10. CONCLUSION

The naming of philosophical practices is a philosophical practice. When we call something by a name, we make a claim – about what it is, where it belongs in the conceptual landscape, how it relates to adjacent practices, and what history it inherits or obscures. Genusurpation names a specific failure of this practice: the usurpation of a genus term by a species, resulting in the conceptual colonization of a commons. That is at least the opposite of genus laundering, a form of conceptual-linguistic plagiarism that hides the origin of intellectual real estate.

Genusurpation error occurs in identifiable cases – Grimes's PM and Jois's AY – and, more consequentially, in the very naming of PC itself, and perhaps to some extent in my own form of it in SC. The late-twentieth-century Western practice that goes by 'PC' is a legitimate and valuable species of a far older and broader genus, *pc*, encompassing the philosophical counsel of Krishna, the Buddha, the Stoics, and countless other sages across the world's wisdom traditions, all of them descendants from a prehistoric form of sapiential counseling.

Acknowledging our own genusurpation does not diminish the modern practice. It theoretically deepens it – by restoring its connection to the ancient roots that give it meaning, by honestly acknowledging the structural diversity within the genus (e.g., the grammatical divide between declarative-imperative *mpc* and educational-interrogatory *dpc* modes), and by situating contemporary PCs within a lineage that stretches back not decades in the West but millennia across the globe. The Confucian aspiration toward the rectification of names is not merely an ancient ideal. It is a standing obligation for any field that takes language and concepts seriously – which is to say, for philosophy itself. If identifying the phenomenon of genusurpation and naming it appropriately helps us see more clearly what we name and why, it will have done what good philosophical concepts should do: it will have clarified.

