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PHILOSOPHICAL COUNSELING - A USEFUL TOOL FOR OUR DAILY LIFE

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Abstract: We have focused in this text on some general aspects of philosophical counseling and on the openness that the practicing philosopher has in relation to other types of counseling. We have made some clarifications that can help the reader to see a possible profile of the client requesting philosophical counseling services and we hope that he will find himself in this description. Philosophical counseling is a professional practice, based on dialogue in solving existential problems, ethical dilemmas, metaphysical crises, and lack of solutions regarding the meaning of existence. At the same time, philosophical counseling involves a search for truth and authenticity, solutions for personal development and the formulation of a philosophy of personal and professional success. In the counseling relationship you can find support in a wide variety of issues, from personal reflections on life, death, and happiness, to very intimate aspects of personal feelings. Against this background we have revealed some aspects of love, as they can be found in the counseling practices and in the daily life of those who resort to philosophical counseling.

Key words: philosophical counseling, spiritual counseling, philosophical counselor, counselee, counseling relationship, dialogue, ontology of love, personal development

1. Philosophical counseling - a response to the feeling of crisis experienced by contemporary man

Counseling has become the most widespread cultural trend of the beginning of the new millennium. Since the end of the last century, we have been able to see a general trend towards the call for counseling on all levels of individual, community, and social life. Today we are in a situation where it is almost difficult for us to think about our lives without the presence of counselors, in different registers of our life. However, in this context, we have the greatest visibility and a tendency to generalize medicalization of counseling relationships. The most common practices are those of care, counseling, and therapy in the field of mental health, those in which forms of psychological or psychiatric labeling intervene. Lou Marinoff describes this phenomenon in the American context, attributing it to the action of mental health experts: „This kind of psychiatry, as well as some of clinical psychology, does not passively await patients, as mechanics await vehicles. Rather, psychiatry and psychology have colonized not only the health care system, but also the education system, the legislative system, the justice system, the corrections system, the military, and other branches of state and federal government” (Marinoff 2002, 103).

I believe that the trend towards medicalization of contemporary human life is evident in all Western societies. And the threat of a pandemic triggered by Covid 19 has made this trend global. It reflects not only the result of the action of mental health professionals, but also a real need of contemporary man to solve the problems he faces. Philosophical counseling must also find its rightful place here. It should not develop into a war with other types of counseling or therapies, but should find its place as an alternative to them, or as a type of counseling complementary to others, as many theorists and practitioners of philosophical counseling have already stated (Lahav, da Venza Tillmans 1995; Schuster 1999; Amir 2017a; Hațegan 2021; Frunzã 2021). At the same time, philosophy is present in the life of contemporary man by the fact that it becomes part of therapeutic practices and psychotherapy (Cohen and Zinaich 2013; Raabe 2014; Deurzen 2010; Yalom 2012; Waterman 2013; Fatic 2019). At the same time, philosophy can be integrated into the practices of spiritual counseling or pastoral counseling, which often has a strong confessional and pastoral dimension (Lynch 2002; Pargament 2007; Gold 2010; Groza, Groza 2021; Schuhmann, van der Geugten 2017).

In order to claim its rightful place, it is not necessary for philosophy to have an attitude of rejection of any of these counseling practices. We are not surprised that for the time being, the trend of medicalizing interpersonal relationships is gaining ground. As long as we hear repeatedly that we live in a society that is generally perceived to be either

adrift or downright sick. However, even those who do not accept the pathological nature of contemporary existence may agree that we live in a society in crisis.

Regarding the crisis - often conceived as a crisis of religious morality or a crisis of values - it is clear that this catastrophic vision is only partially justified. Even if we accept the decadence of the world in which we live, it cannot undo the fact that never in its history has humanity experienced a higher level of economic prosperity, technological and scientific development, and the development of spiritual creation. However, both in the discourse of elites, in public discourse, but also in the expression of personal opinions, we can notice a negative light shed on the human condition of the digital society. Some of those who adhere to such assessments of the pathologies of today's world end up, for various reasons, in counseling offices.

And this general crisis, if it is assumed and felt with intensity on a personal level, can best be overcome by going through the counselor's or therapist's office. And sometimes the vulnerable person waits for this counselor to diagnose them, offer them a prescription (medical or existential) and accompany them on a longer or shorter journey, as appropriate, toward healing. The contemporary individual today seems to be in search of healing, in search of a way out of the existential, social, and even cosmic pathology that unfolds around him. For this he needs therapy. Experts are plentiful and ready to intervene. The therapist's office and his intervention are the sanctuary of a personal salvation from which the return to the good life springs. The use of scientifically relevant techniques is appropriate to the tendency to rationalize and streamline the therapeutic relationship.

In this context, the importance of the presence of philosophical counselors must be understood. A rather discreet presence, although in recent years it has begun to gain visibility not only among philosophy enthusiasts, but also among the public with cultural and spiritual concerns. Although philosophy is part of the science we call the humanities, philosophical counseling is not intended to be scientific. It does not aim to be scientific for the simple fact that its purpose is to be philosophical. We must keep in mind that philosophical counseling is not scientific, in the sense that it is philosophical. However, the interdisciplinary vocation of philosophy opens it to science and scientific practices, as it opens it to other fields of human creation. As a philosophical practice, philosophical counseling, as we find it today in the counseling market offer, has emerged as an alternative to psychological and psychiatric practices. It should be emphasized that this is an alternative, not an opposition relationship to these types of interventions. It is no coincidence that we find concerns for psychology and psychiatry in practicing philosophers, as philosophical thinking is often integrated by therapists in their work with clients, in their practices.

Despite the similarities we can establish between various mental health practices and philosophical counseling practices, we must note that the professional training of philosophical counselors is different. They are philosophers and counselors rather than therapists. This does not mean that we deny therapeutic function of philosophical counseling. It can be present among many of the functions that philosophy and philosophical dialogue can have in the life of the individual in general, and in the counseling relationship in particular. When we talk about philosophical therapy, we have in mind a philosophical and spiritual meaning rather than a psychological and medical meaning of the term therapy. If we were to briefly mention a specific of the therapeutic relationship in philosophical counseling, it would be good to remember that the emphasis in this case falls on the reflective dimension, to a greater extent than on the careful pursuit of a therapeutic relationship technology. Moreover, this reflective dimension is claimed by philosophers as a contribution that philosophy can bring in the field of therapeutic techniques on which the activity of counselors concerned with solving personal or group problems is based.

2. The client as a dialogue partner in philosophical counseling

The person who uses philosophical counseling is characterized by a high level of desire to solve the problems they face, to develop personally and to participate in the creation of a better world. It is very natural to filter this need to transform the world in terms of solving personal problems and to have as a starting point the need for a search for personal transfiguration. He starts this construction together with his counselor in a relationship of dialogue partners. He does not come to philosophical counseling as a patient, even when he is supposed to enjoy philosophical therapy. It is not wrong to have therapeutic expectations, because the dialogue itself has a strong therapeutic force. Dialogue is felt as such in a culture of individualism and loneliness in which everyone speaks, everyone communicates excessively, but neither listens to the other. Dialogue involves placing each other in a relational role in which each communicates with the other and is listened to. It's a relationship between partners. That is why I believe that in order to appoint the beneficiary of philosophical counseling, it is right to call him a client instead of a patient. However, I prefer to call those who choose to dialogue with me in my philosophical counseling office "dialogue partners".

In my experience, I find that clients often turn to the philosophical counselor not to solve acute crises, but rather out of the need to reach an existential comfort. People who seek such counseling feel a certain ambiguity about the answers they give about how they can quickly and efficiently reach a general state of comfort in their own lives. Then they begin to explore how it can be achieved at the level of their physical

dimension, at the level of social experiences, in relation to living personal experiences, spiritually and religiously, but also in terms of a harmonious experience in which to communicate and build identity and personal presence in the virtual space (Frunză 2021a, 39-54; Sandu, 2019).

I would say that the man of philosophical counseling is not a man of crisis, but one of the need for inner peace and outer harmony. A state of general peace is the ideal of such a human being. This explains the fact that some of those who turn to philosophical counseling accompany this approach with a concern for meditation techniques, spiritual self-recovery techniques or prayer practices, in order to restore interpersonal and community relationships. Such activities are not part of philosophical counseling, but they can very well complement it. Although it starts from a specific problem, with which the client comes to the philosophical counseling office, the counseling relationship is oriented towards covering the entire existential horizon. Each of the issues under discussion involves a series of reflections from the perspective of each of the six dimensions through which human existence can be captured in a coherent image: the physical, social, personal, spiritual, religious, and virtual dimensions.

Solving the problems that the individual may have most often has not only a philosophical component, but also one related to the culture in which he lives. Perhaps it would even be useful to introduce the idea of cultural intelligence, which makes a good career in the discourse of the globalization of the philosophy of culture. This concept refers to the ability to adapt to cultural pluralism and assume it as a personal way of situating oneself in one's own existence (Ang, Van Dyne 2008). Far be it from me to have an anti-psychiatric, anti-psychoanalytic, anti-psychotherapeutic or anti-psychological attitude. But it is clear that these cultural nuances are more within the reach of the philosophical counseling and the philosopher, who does not have to implement a therapeutic plan, evaluation schemes, or rules of thought and behavior. He comes to promote a philosophy of life based on the data with which the client can build such a world as the horizon of his own life. Lou Marinoff's attitude is beneficial, considering that in order to solve the problems that people face, "they need dialogue, not diagnosis" (Marinoff 2009, 39).

In fact, counselors, in general, can now enjoy Carl R. Rogers' analysis to adopt a therapeutic position in which the person who chooses to enter the counseling office is no longer a patient. He is a client who benefits from a favorable framework for solving the problems with which he comes in the therapeutic relationship (Rogers 2015). The general condition assumed by the counseling relationship is non-pathological. It is important to notice this aspect when we have in mind the phrase philosophical therapy. In philosophical counseling, which in philosophical situations some philosophers prefer to call philosophical therapy, the client becomes a dialogue partner who reveals himself and fulfills himself in the dialogue with his counselor. He is a person who, by seeking

counseling, focuses on his personal development needs, on improving the condition of his own life, on restoring harmony between all dimensions of his existence, on raising to a higher level of action in cultivating personal values, on shaping a philosophy of life consistent with the level of development it reached at that time etc.

However, philosophical counseling can find this model in the history of philosophy. We can find over time philosophers who have been around strong leaders whom they have advised. And today philosophical counseling is called to act in relation to the managerial and leadership function, at least in the form of ethical counseling. But it is especially significant in its ability to respond to existential problems that affect personal life as a whole. For example, one of the ways in which Pierre Hadot finds that in the past philosophy was practiced as a way of life is through which philosophy becomes a form of orientation in one's own existence, a practice of wisdom, but also a spiritual exercise. Such an exercise involves a personal assumption of philosophy. It must be seen “as a voluntary, personal practice, meant to effect a transformation of the individual, a transformation of the self” (Hadot 2019, 137-138).

At the same time, we must remember Michel Foucault's analyzes of the significance of Socratic dialogues. Socrates is portrayed as a master of dialogue that relates to young aristocrats. Their philosophical training came as something complementary to the legitimacy they had from birth in terms of involvement in the acts of governing the city. The philosophical dialogues carried out in the agora have this formative role. They trained young people in at least three dimensions: 1) in cultivating the ability to govern, and governing requires first of all the ability to govern yourself; caring for yourself becomes caring for others 2) in the gift of being governed until the moment when you can assume the exercise of government; which also involves the pedagogical exercise of choosing a suitable trainer and cultivating a supportive relationship in self-government and others 3) in getting out of “ignorance that ignores itself”. It seems important to me to note in Foucault's analysis that he shows us a Socrates who in dialogue with young people tells them not to despair that they have not come to learn all the secrets of wisdom, because they are young and have time to do so. For what they have time: not so much for knowledge, but especially for self-care (Foucault 2004, 53-55).

I emphasize here the aspect of self-care (which Foucault finds as the essence of Socrates' exhortation “Know thyself”) not because the dimension of knowledge would not be important from the perspective of Socrates and the hermeneutic framework in which his exegete places him. But because it is significant from the point of view of philosophical counseling that self-concern and self-care can be cultivated by sharing personal experiences in dialogue. It is a good starting point for governance and self-government (Sivil 2010; Yu 2010). Although gnoseological problems are important in philosophy, it is a discipline that from the

beginning also had a very important existential component. Therefore, philosophical counseling should start from the fact that “philosophical discourse has its origin in a choice of way of life and in an existential choice” (Hadot 2020, 15).

This exercise of freedom involves not only choice and responsibility, but also reflection and interpretation. Nietzsche's invocation may be useful here (Nietzsche 1991). The man of the digital society, under the pressure of relativism and due to the global development of communication technologies, can accept the Nietzschean solution of reporting to reality, which leads us to the idea that everything is just interpretation. In this way, the individual can have genuine access to the reality of his own life as it is constructed in interpretation. The issue of interpretation as such is a useful tool in counseling practices. Sometimes it can be a turning point in the fact that the client has the revelation that the problems he is facing are marked by the way he deciphers the reality and that an alternative interpretation is possible. Interpretation can be instrumentalized in supporting the client in order to leave his dogmatic attitudes and structure a pluralistic attitude; in its effort to re-signify the various aspects that the problem it is facing may take; in nuance of the solutions they could opt for; in better highlighting personal values, principles and responsibilities, but especially in outlining an existential map and a philosophy of life that responds to the immediate needs of the client.

From Ran Lahav's analysis we can understand that the interpretation presupposes the situation in an adequate framework of its practice. Practicing an attitude of existential hermeneutics requires having a philosophy of life. Philosophical counseling brings this effort of the philosophical counselor and his dialogue partner to consolidate his own philosophy of life. And for those who are not aware of a philosophy of life, philosophical counseling should give them support to build one, depending on their current level. To be comfortable in our own lives, we need a worldview and a coherent way of living according to it. Ran Lahav is entitled to say that „In a sense, worldview interpretation is a magnifying glass of everyday life. Life consists of a continuous interpretation of ourselves and the world. Philosophical counseling offers a controlled and directed environment in which life – herein understood as a process of interpretation – is intensified” (Lahav 1995, 24).

3. Philosophical counseling in a culture of love

In philosophical counseling, the importance of interpretation is highlighted, among other things, by the fact that in the counseling relationship, the practitioner must always take into account cultural factors. The communication between the counselor and his client must take into account the personal culture of the client, but also the cultural

tradition of the community in which he operates, as well as the culture of which he is a part. In Western thinking, culture is about values and the practice of values.

Among the core values of Western culture is love. It is one of the reasons why we will talk further about how love becomes present in the dialogues of philosophical counseling. The importance of love in personal development, in understanding existential problems and in solving the various metaphysical crises that the client faces is evident in all dimensions of the human condition: the physical, social, personal, spiritual, religious, virtual dimension. We will focus here only on two dimensions: the physical dimension and the spiritual dimension.

When we make distinctions between the dimensions of existence, we do not avoid the fact that the human being is a whole, that each of the dimensions that can be invoked is closely related to the others. Man is an autonomous unit and at the same time an opening to infinity. This aspect is present on each of the dimensions and in their synthesis at the level of the human being. Therefore, the distinction between physical and spiritual is a good opportunity to talk about their intertwining, the concern for both, even when we say that we are interested in only one of them. One of the explanations we can find in the practices of logotherapy is suggestive here: „In logotherapy, love is not interpreted as a mere epiphenomenon of sexual drives and instincts in the sense of a so-called sublimation. Love is as primary a phenomenon as sex. Normally, sex is a mode of expression for love. Sex is justified, even sanctified, as soon as, but only as long as, it is a vehicle of love. Thus, love is not understood as a mere side-effect of sex; rather, sex is a way of expressing the experience of that ultimate togetherness which is called love”, tells us Viktor E. Frankl (Frankl 1985, 134).

From Western philosophical discourse we can deduce that love is an ontological fact that we perceive as a burning desire to become a whole with the loved one but keeping our individuality. Further, it is only a matter of a choice that we make in the already given horizon of our own becoming. This understanding of love - which takes it out of the affective perimeter and places it on an ontological level, theorized by various thinkers (Buber 1937; Tillich 1952; Grad 2013) - does not exclude the fact that it becomes visible in the individual's life through manifestations perceived in the register of feelings.

3.1. The physical dimension: the dialogue about love and sexuality in philosophical counseling

On the physical and spiritual dimensions, the cultural conditioning of the way in which love is understood appears to us with the greatest importance. A suggestive example may be that of relating love to sexuality. Sexuality and love are both linked to desire, regardless of

whether we consider them different facets of the manifestation of the same desire or consider them as different types of fundamental needs of the human being. In such a context, desire becomes a good topic of philosophical debate. It is a problem to be investigated from a metaphysical point of view rather than a problem that can be solved physically and biologically.

This does not mean that erotic games, and specifically sexuality, are not significant in terms of philosophical analysis. To see what place the theme may have in the philosophers' concerns in this regard, it is enough to remember that for Arthur Schopenhauer the orientation towards desire is central because is "the desire that constitutes even the very nature of man". He draws our attention to the fact that „The sexual impuls is therefore the most complete manifestation of the will-to-live, its most distinctly expressed type" (Schopenhauer 1958, 514). At the same time, a philosophical analysis of love, such as that proposed by Roger Scruton, shows us that „erotic love is a form of desire and also a form of love. And I shall give reasons for thinking that the attempt to separate the two 'components' is ultimately destructive, not just of this love, but perhaps also of every love" (Scruton 2006, 240).

Placing eroticism in a structure that includes both desire in its physical sense and desire in the metaphysical sense of love reveals that in Western culture we can speak of erotic play both physically and spiritually. This aspect is more obvious in the case of love than in that of sexuality, but sexual desire can be transfigured. It does not necessarily have to be sublimated in order to become meaningful in terms of personal fulfillment. Things become clearer when we talk about projecting love onto a person. Or when we consider the experience of love for a person we embrace in the world of our desires. Such love presupposes an act of bringing it into existence and strengthening it in its own existence and in our existence of beings living on the horizon of love. Viktor E. Frankl pointed this out very well when he wrote: „Love goes very far beyond the physical person of the beloved. It finds its deepest meaning in his spiritual being, his inner self" (Frankl 1985, 58).

In counseling we refer in a cultural way to love, erotic desire or sexuality. This happens not only in philosophical reflections and conceptual constructions, but also in psychological counseling or in the psychiatric approach to mental health. The relationship between what can be labeled as pathological and normalcy is strongly influenced from a cultural point of view. An example given by James T. Hansen is suggestive of the way in which this influence is carried out from the cultural representations of the physical world, the social or political representations: „It follows, then, that psychiatric disorders, by definition, must represent deviations from some standard of normality; otherwise, they could not logically be defined as disorders. However, what is this standard of psychiatric normality? In this regard, it is useful to remember

that psychiatrists were responsible for the greatest mass medical cure in history. This cure, which was instantaneous, impacted millions of people throughout the world at once. Specifically, in 1974, psychiatrists, by a narrow vote, decided that homosexuality should no longer be considered a mental illness ... Millions who had been afflicted with homosexuality were instantly cured. When the societal definition of normal sexuality changed, so did psychiatric definitions of disordered sexuality” (Hansen 2014, 23). Of course, such a decision could be made through an analysis of the history of ideas and the history of culture, which can highlight behavioral constants that can be settled as evidence-based decisions and practices. It is obvious that when we establish a counseling relationship, we cannot ignore the scientific culture, the professional culture, but also the broader frameworks of the culture circumscribed to the traditions of a community.

James T. Hansen gave us an example of liberating sexuality from its moral, ideological, and medical dimensions. At the same time, we notice that the perspective adopted by counselors is not completely free from cultural conditions, including those of legal culture in a certain area of personal life regulation. Michel Foucault finds that we can identify, in 1870, a time when „the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted ... less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself” (Foucault 1978, 43).

What is the philosophical significance of such a discussion, given that the philosopher is not a therapist to solve this kind of problems? The topic is relevant from a bioethical and biopolitical perspective, from the perspective of what Foucault might call biopower relations in societies where control over the body of individuals and over intimacy is accentuated. And Western society, in its history, has not been spared decisions to over-regulate privacy. Cultural relativism in postmodern sexuality policies balances this kind of control over a sphere that should fall into the realm of personal freedoms, choices, preferences, and decisions rather than regulation by legal and political power.

In dialogue with a person who feels the pressure of such forms of control over his own intimacy, the philosophical advisor must notice the nuances of the types of interpretations that could support his client. They should, on the one hand, help him to avoid and detach himself from the possible transformation of control into a starting point for the crisis, and, on the other hand, to create a horizon of self-acceptance and acceptance by others.

At the same time, I think it is worth remembering that Lydia Amir stated, from the perspective of a theorist and practitioner of philosophical counseling, that “sexuality is an ethical field; and philosophical practitioners should not ignore ethical concerns” (Amir 2017, 87). This is where competing interpretations of morality come into play, and we should keep in mind the need for an ethical pluralism claimed by the

philosophical approach, even if philosophy tends to offer abstract, generalizing and thus integrating concepts. Because we are talking about philosophy and spirituality, the ethical requirement of theologians to have a meaningful say about sexuality and love can also be discussed here. And from the perspective of pastoral or ecclesial culture, they are entitled to place themselves in the territory of a morality related to intimate life and sexuality.

Responding to a group of young people with questions about marriage, love, sexuality and more, Father Constantin Necula stated that “also in these situations the confessor accompanies the person in crisis.” To which can be added the answer given to a person who blames himself in connection with some aspects of his intimate life: “Let this censorship come out of your mind as normal and abnormal ... Be strong. See your life, and God is sure to find a way to return to a gulf of peace. And don't be afraid. Go to a good, wise priest, tell him, confess, and move on! If not, see a psychologist. They also have a very good reason to be” (Necula 2018, 87). It is obvious that the philosophical counselor has his place here, along with other counseling practitioners, including in terms of ethical reflection. As Lydia Amir said, „society at large will benefit from the philosophic discussion this field affords, especially since political and ideological overtones have monopolized this subject. Instead of saying that the private is the politics, we could now say that the private is the philosophical” (Amir 2017, 124).

Whether it is about ideological, theological, or philosophical aspects, the philosophical counselor can support his dialogue partner in overcoming the crises he is experiencing regarding his desires, his sexuality, or his loves. There is always an answer waiting to be formulated, together, in the counseling relationship, to the questions that the client asks in his existential plan. And when the counselor feels the need for additional intervention from a pastoral counselor, psychotherapist, psychiatrist, or other expert, he or she may express an opinion. The decision to use an alternative form of counseling must always be at the discretion of the customer. The philosophical advisor does not put labels, does not make decisions on behalf of the client, does not guide and evaluate him in the therapeutic sense of the term.

Returning to the theme of love, I would note that although Aristotle takes his discussion to another level, it is useful in philosophical counseling to remember that he considered that “being loved is in itself a reason for joy” (Aristotle 1998, 175). It is true that he associates love with friendship, which involves more the idea of love than the idea of being loved, so he moves away from the reciprocal relationship that erotic play involves. However, we can use as a very productive starting point in counseling the idea that “love is like a creative act”, it urges action and requires effort in cultivating it (Aristotle 1998, 197).

From a philosophical perspective, love evades the positive-negative duality, with the moral imprint that this duality implies, because love is an ontological fact. It is one of the reasons why the captive of a love based mainly on erotic desire understood as sexual desire feels that such love takes him away from his inner world, that the ideal of his love cannot be completely exhausted by sexual fulfillment. However, he cannot give it up. Fear of a possible existential anxiety related to the emptiness he might feel due to not following his own erotic desires. Usually, the one who has such an option does not come to understand alone that this very captivity is one of anguish and inauthenticity. He can free himself from these constraints only by calling on an existential counselor with whom to decipher the ways in which his love is enciphered.

For those who do not have a motivation to enter the office of the philosophical counselor to talk about desire, sexuality, love and their relationship in everyday life, we can offer a meditation text about the meaning of love, which we find in Viktor E. Frankl: „Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality. No one can become fully aware of the very essence of another human being unless he loves him. By his love he is enabled to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person; and even more, he sees that which is potential in him, which is not yet actualized but yet ought to be actualized. Furthermore, by his love, the loving person enables the beloved person to actualize these potentialities. By making him aware of what he can be and of what he should become, he makes these potentialities come true” (Frankl 1985, 134).

3.2. The spiritual dimension: the dialogue about love and spirituality in philosophical counseling

When we talk about the six dimensions of human existence that we have in mind in philosophical counseling, we use the term spirituality in a cultural sense, leaving spirituality in its particular religious sense as a separate dimension. In the present text, we consider the spiritual dimension both in terms of cultural creativity and in terms of religious experience, which involves particular ways of relating to transcendence.

If we consider spirituality in its existential and cultural sense, we notice that, among other things, it can address the issue of the meaning of life, a topic that many of those who enter the office of the philosophical counselor are concerned with. I would mention here a way of valuing the meaning of existence that brings the other to the center of concern. And for this, as an exception to my habits of dialogue, I will not appeal to the philosophy of otherness formulated by Emmanuel Levinas (1999) or Søren Kierkegaard (1997), but to a statement by Viktor E. Frankl: „The more one forgets himself - by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to

love - the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself” (Frankl 1985, 133).

Sometimes the counseling relationship includes people who are tormented, torn inwardly by a failure of their desire to seek meaning in their own lives. There are even people who want a solution to get rid of this strong desire in the dialogue with the philosophical counselor. One of the people I counseled compared this desire to an intense erotic drive, which he could control, while her desire for meaning could not be mastered. Philosophical reflection teaches us that just as in desire we must not see a simple compulsion that man is driven by in its fulfillment, neither can the orientation toward finding meaning be seen as a pulsion that we might call the desire for meaning. To clarify this, we can turn to the analysis of Viktor E. Frankl who showed that it is wrong to see the will of meaning as one of the human impulses. When this search takes place, it is about something more than a preoccupation of man to reach his inner balance, which would involve an approach made for the sake of himself and not for the sake of discovering meaning. Or, in this type of search, “the meaning itself is the one that needs to be elucidated” (Frankl 2018, 57).

I think that in the case of my dialogue partner, the comparison she proposed between the erotic drive and the desire for meaning was not accidental at all. The two types of desire were experienced in her case with a high intensity, at a single level, the bodily one, they were somatizations of existing tensions at the mental level. Being a discussion about the meaning of life, in this case it is necessary to take a step out of the game of corporality and enter the area of a transfiguration that associates desire not with sexuality, but with love. In this way, we can assume one of Viktor E. Frankl's conclusions: „The truth - that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire... The salvation of man is through love and in love. I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved” (Frankl 1985, 134).

From the perspective of spirituality in its religious sense, love acquires meaning as a fact of human life. Starting from Spinoza's analysis, Paul Tillich remarked that “God loves and knows himself through the love and knowledge of finite beings” (Tillich 1952, 180). In this way, love is descended from the theological and metaphysical register and brought into the plane of an ontology of love in which the human being is invested as a carrier of love in his daily life.

For Western man, one of the closest spiritual forms of practicing love is that of biblical inspiration. Love as a divine trinity and the image of human love after the model of this eternal love is a representation of an ontology of love based on the close relationship, in fact on communication and communion, between the divine Archetype and the Image of God in man (Stăniloae 1987). Love as participation in the archetype is a cultural

motif that we often find in Western culture. It is one of the reasons why we believe it is legitimate to say that by virtue of love we can project God's eternal love upon the loved one, who can thus be loved beyond death, beyond the intersection of time with eternity, beyond the conditioning of physical and imagined space. This opens the way for the assimilation of personal love with that of love as such. Thus, love for the loved one is associated with a theandric principle that makes it possible for the loved one to be recognizable as the lover for eternity. And personal love is perceived only as a part of eternal love, of love as an existential gift.

There is also a variant of understanding love, accessible only to the initiates. It is about the love that accompanies ascetic practices. Paul Evdokimov points out that: „The ascetic technique “renders the earthly qualities of the body pure”. An athlete exercises his body; an ascetic, his flesh. The icons show us men whose flesh has neither weight nor earthly heaviness, beings living in a new dimension. They have lost their material qualities that made them like things, but not their reality; more real than anyone else, they have gone beyond themselves” (Evdokimov 1966, 101). At this level, philosophical counseling can already be only partially effective and complementary support solutions can be used. If necessary, calling on a clergyman, a pastor, a pastoral counselor, or another type of spiritual counselor may be helpful.

4. Instead of conclusions: Philosophical counseling and love as a philosophy of life

Philosophical counseling is a relationship of support in search of truth and authenticity as they are or may be present in the personal life of the client requesting to enter into a counseling relationship. It starts from the human condition, in all its complexity, in solving concrete existential problems that the person faces. From my experience as a philosopher practitioner, I find that people who turn to philosophical counseling come in the counseling relationship mainly with two types of motivations. Most of them are driven by a desire for personal development; to clarify aspects of personal life that are significant for personal and professional success; they are looking for authenticity and are confident that they can achieve it through greater involvement in their own lives, including with the help of a philosophical advisor; in general, a positive attitude towards life leads them to turn to philosophy to become the best version of it. On the other hand, we have situations in which the person comes to the counseling dialogue with his problems, feelings, values, and perspective on life, often presenting them as a sign of crisis and anxiety and has the belief that through listening and dialogue he can lead to an improvement in the quality of his life. Of course, there is a third category, the fewest, who come to the philosophical counselor with a state of increased negativity,

with a low energy potential that they are willing to put into solving their problems.

For each of these categories of people, philosophy can offer different forms of support, nuanced and to varying degrees. A common solution that the counselor and his client build in the relationship of philosophical counseling aims to cultivate an active reflective attitude and build a philosophy of life according to the level of development of each of those who seek counseling.

A recurring topic in philosophical dialogues is the theme of love. It is one of the reasons why I have chosen to discuss some aspects of the presence of love. From the point of view of philosophical counseling, we must come to calm love, which gives us existential comfort. It is closer to respect than to blind worship, it is closer to the existential force of love, to its ontological dimension, than to the passionate impulse that could accompany love in the register of feelings. It is a way out of the pathology that could accompany love. At the same time, love must strike a balance, beyond any excess of desire-related practices. From the perspective of a philosophy of desire „the interest in passion is part of a dangerous tendency to assume that the central example of a phenomenon is the one in which its effects are most vivid or extreme. This search for the pathological is also an unphilosophical distaste for the normal. It is important neither to share, nor greatly to respect, its intellectual motivation. The romantic movement did not invent erotic love; but it did invent the corrupt perception of love, which seeks for love's essence in love's disease, and mistakes the flush of fever for the glow of health” (Scruton 2006, 243). No matter which form of love he encounters in the dialogue with his client, the philosophical counselor can find useful tools in the construction in dialogue of a perspective that will support him.

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