Philosophical Appreciative Counselling

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Abstract

In this article we will focus on philosophical counselling technique as an area of excellence of social practice: a fundamental methodological dimension. Philosophical counselling proposes to transform life by rediscovering the interrogative and interpretive dimension of human consciousness and applying it to everyday experience. It is an experience of freedom transposed from the metaphysical into the social dimension. Philosophical thinking out of transcendent space reconfigures immediacy by connecting it to the world of ideas and engendering the individual’s authenticity. The Appreciative approach to philosophy is based on the works of David Cooperrider on “Appreciative Inquiry”: a discursive pragmatic form that replaces the focus on the problem with focusing on the successful elements of previous experience of individuals, groups, organizations or communities. Principles of appreciative philosophical counseling aim at partnership between all participants in philosophical counseling. This experience can be integrated with the philosophical methodical return to the maieutic model and the Platonic dialogue.

Keywords: Appreciative inquiry, appreciative philosophy, appreciative counselling, philosophical counselling

Introduction

Philosophy is becoming an integral part of a transdisciplinary field with sociology, semiotics and discourse theory called practical philosophy. In Marinoff’s vision, philosophical counselling is able to replace the theoretical surrogates. Philosophy becomes an active part of social action (2010). He proposes philosophical counselling as a way to bring philosophy from the ivory tower to the Agora (p. 343). Practical philosophy manifests in areas such as: psycho-social counselling, management strategies, and ethical guidance. Philosophical counselling proposes to transform life by rediscovering the interrogative and interpretive dimension of human consciousness and applying it to everyday experience. It is an experience of freedom transposed from the metaphysical into the social dimension. Philosophical thinking out of transcendent space reconfigures immediacy by connecting it to the world of ideas and engendering individual authenticity. Philosophy does not propose to be a psychological therapy of the soul, but of the spirit reflected in social action. Thirty years have passed since the first philosophical counselling office opened in 1981 in Köln by Achenbach to the current situation (Marinoff, 2010, p. 125). The process consists of a logical analysis of life situations starting from the exploration of the individual’s belief system and how it affects behaviour, authenticity, autonomy and the welfare of the individual. It is a methodical return to the maieutic model and the Platonic dialogue. Marinoff considers that academic philosophy departs from the philosopher as one who seeks truth, wisdom and justice (p. 421). Abandoning medical, theological, or psychotherapy models, philosophical counselling opens the way to create an area of philosophical dialogue that defines its own vision of applied philosophy.

Theoretical Models in Philosophical Counselling

Robert Walsh describes philosophical counselling as an interaction between a professional philosopher and a client who wants to understand his attitude towards life, towards himself and the consequences
of his actions (2005, pp. 497-508). Following the tradition of Socrates the counselling philosopher poses questions to himself and others about what gives meaning to life, how it becomes a means and a current action. Philosophical treatment process does not aim to transform the customer into a philosopher, but to put him in a situation of openness to reflective self-awareness and personal autonomy. Involved is a restructuring of subjective reality to a state of personal power and discovery of the elements that brings this power into the lives of individuals. Philosophical counselling derives from the phenomenological vision of Husserl and phenomenological successors.

William Ferraiolo (2004) suggests a counselling model from the Stoic tradition. The author brings into question the relationship between determinism and free will and the way to integrate freedom in daily life. Behavioural changes are caused by cognitive attitudes toward others and toward the binding elements of the outside world. Our own position makes us vulnerable to everyday events.

Leslie Spivak (2004) provides an application of Kierkegaard’s philosophy to the problem of freedom in philosophical counselling and psychotherapy. Self is considered to be the centre of Kierkegaard’s philosophy of freedom. Movement of the Self is a pendulum between freedom and its absence. In a Kierkegaardian manner, she presents a case study focusing on a sixteen-year old suffering from depression. She argues that freedom in Kierkegaard’s vision makes sense at the individual level. Humanity can only be helped by helping private individuals. The concept of freedom is seen as an understanding of one’s limitations in the context of ongoing responsibilities to the presence of others. Spivak’s paper explains Kierkegaard’s philosophy and how it is used as a theoretical foundation in therapeutic practice.

Lydia Amir (2004) critiques the validity of philosophical counselling ideas and questions its domain. Main assumptions identified are: autonomy of the counselled, the existence of significant differences between philosophical counselling and psychological practices and philosophical counselling effectiveness in solving practical situations. The principle of client autonomy in philosophical counselling represents its reflexivity in developing its own views on the world. The precise approach of a particular philosophical vision and a particular model of practical counselling and even understanding of autonomy outlines a framework where the client’s autonomy can develop. Autonomy can be understood in an existential manner as directly correlated with responsible actions. Other correlations of autonomy are different models of rationality, e.g., Socratic, Kantian, etc. Amir notes that truly autonomous individuals will rarely be attracted to counselling services. Regarding the clear distinction between philosophical and psychological counselling, the author points out that all psychotherapeutic techniques are based on a philosophical vision.

Existentialist philosophy has created an existential therapy; the stoic philosophical model underlies Rational Emotive Therapy, and the principles of humanistic philosophies have generated principles of person-centred therapies. Psychological therapy itself uses a philosophical, interpretive and interrogatory practice. It highlights the dispute between advocates of philosophical counselling practice and the integration of philosophical vision in philosophical therapy. Unifying trends of counselling practices are present starting from their rational or emotionally specific dimensions. Regarding philosophical counselling effectiveness, Amir shows that a rational understanding of life is not necessarily a condition for behavioural change. Amir raises the issue of the legitimacy of philosophical counselling and correlates to this her discussion of the legitimacy of philosophical practice. A postmodern vision of philosophical counselling starting from narrative realism is proposed by James Tuedio (1988). The question of legitimating narrative practices that affect individuals’ vision arises. Philosophical counselling is close to practice. Individuals are faced with existential issues such as terminal perspectives, their relationship with the transcendent, etc.
Philosophical Counselling: Appreciative Inquiry Model

Counselling as a strategy in social practice aims at both the potentials indicative in its assessment function and client resources, and the interventionist-systemic change in behaviour through cognitive-behavioural changes. In this article we will focus on counselling techniques that are an area of excellence of social practice, a fundamental methodological dimension. In either approach to counselling, the operational foundation of counselling process is the traditional problem-solving process. We can see this process as a congruency between problem-solving by the human self and facilitation of the functionality of the social systems to which the individual belongs. Precisely at the level of the functionality of social systems we can identify the reference area of affirmative-appreciative counselling.

Counselling is a process that aims at fundamental change. The change process applies to both the individual customer and his social environment with its complex networks that interact and influence each other (which together form the client’s system). In recent years, counselling, as a client-centred socio-educational intervention absorbs hypothetical theories of personality psychology and is adapted and oriented to education science.

The Appreciative approach to philosophy is based on the works of David Cooperrider on “Appreciative Inquiry,” a discursive pragmatic form that replaces the focus on the problem with focusing on the successful elements of previous experience of individuals, groups, organizations or communities (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2006). Principles of appreciative pedagogy aim at partnership between teacher and student. This experience can be integrated with philosophical discourse’s return to a referential maieutic and Platonic dialogue. Hermeneutic reality can be seen as a philosophical reflection on the positive experiences of everyday life and falls in the philosophical tradition of the search for ultimate meanings of human reality. It is a way to bring philosophy from the space of pure theoretical construction into the sphere of social practice as a form of applied philosophy. The appreciative discourse starts from a postmodern vision according to which reality itself is a social construction generated by successive negotiations on interpretaton.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (investigation) is in Gergen’s view a form of deconstruction applied to social research that shows the intrinsic correlation with narratological and semiotic practices, and on the other hand with social action. Appreciative inquiry deconstructs social research down to the level of interpretative choice focusing on stressful factors incongruent to social reality, or to the level of the generative, constructive, appreciative use of the same social reality. Deconstruction achieved through appreciative inquiry concerns how research focuses on a problem which can in turn become, through an interpretive convention, a positive transformative practice. The latter focuses on how researchers can design a constructive vision of developing the studied system (Gergen, 2005). Cooperrider proposes the following operational definition of appreciative inquiry: a co-transforming positive research of individuals and organizations (Cooperrider and Srivatsva, 1987). Appreciative inquiry is a transforming discovery generating sources of vitality in moments of maximum efficiency and creative ability in the economic and environmental human realm. It is a mobilization capacity based on the principle of unconditionally positive questions. The research dimension is correlative with intervention by unleashing the innovative potential of the creative imagination instead of by denial and criticism (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2006).

The Appreciative Inquiry perspective is socio-rationalist, summarized by Cooperrider in several key elements:
· The social order is fundamentally unstable at any time, being the product of a negotiation or agreement between persons, agreement tacitly or explicitly assumed by them;

· Social-organizational action patterns are not required by biological or physical constraints; they are capable of infinite variety;

· Social action is likely to be interpreted differently depending on the historical context in which it takes place and none of the interpretations can be objectively considered;

· Human actions are prescribed by ideas, beliefs, intentions or theories and transforming human conventional behaviour is achieved by changing ideas, theories, conventional ideologies;

· Socio-rationalism believes that the theories that we embrace, our beliefs and representations of social systems have a strong effect on the nature of social reality;

· The most powerful vehicle that communities have to transform their conventions or agreements on norms, values, goals, ideologies is the act of dialogue made possible by language, thus the changes taking place in linguistic practices can cause profound changes in social practices;

· Social theory can be seen as an elevated language which has its own grammar and it can be used as a linguistic tool capable of creating new models of social action;

· Any theory is normative, whether intended or not, and this has the potential to influence social order whether or not people have reactions such as acceptance, rejection or indifference;

· Each social theory has moral significance: the potential to affect and regulate inter-personal relations in everyday life. Social knowledge lies in the collective interaction: created, maintained and used by human groups.

Steps of the Appreciative Counselling Process

The appreciative counselling process based on appreciative inquiry can be defined in four steps. First: Deep exploration of client’s success strategies. This step methodologically overlaps in-depth exploration of the problem in a problem-centered approach. For example, in vocational counselling we talk about student evaluation skills and performance prior to immediate and future interests. At this step of discovery by appreciative counselling, the client in partnership with the counsellor explores his own affirmative strategies, his success strategies, resources for change, etc. Second: Explore alternatives in partnership between client and counsellor. Alternative solutions in classical counselling are replaced by the appreciative counselling approach with an appreciative visioning process. This step overlaps the dream step of Appreciative Inquiry. In our example above, vocational counselling will explore existing educational options correlated with the possibility of subsequent absorption into the labour market and with the customer’s design career. Third: Identify innovative ways to create the customer’s desired future for himself. Contract steps from problem-centred counselling corresponds to the Design steps within appreciative counselling. Design steps can be defined as a stage of identification of innovative ways to create the client’s desired future for himself. This step has specific concreteness and outcomes intended to change the client’s system in congruence with his own projections for the future. Fourth: Implement strategies for client’s self-achievement. The implementation step of the contract in problem-centred approaches can be revalued in terms of
appreciative counselling as the delivery phase (Destiny) of Appreciative Inquiry. This stage involves the actual implementation of strategies for self-achievement, identified in the visioning step. Once the individual has identified and built a picture of a preferred future, he is going to use language and communication (intentional non-directive interview) to apply and follow concrete achievements of the designed future.

There are other useful elements in approaching philosophical counselling from the Appreciative strategy perspective such as:

- identifying success stories;
- creating a relationship wherein the client can review his successful strategy in the past, to focus more deeply on what he wants or needs to change and reach a new perspective in making his own decisions;
- granting attention and unconditional respect and appreciation to the client while communicating with him; concern about the client’s interests must be shown explicitly;
- observing client’s attitudes during the interview, verbal and nonverbal behaviour;
- manifesting empathy, subjects have to feel the counselor’s respect toward them is demonstrated by attitude and behaviour;
- conveying to clients the idea that they are able to exercise control over their own destiny; replace critical judgment with positive appreciation, active listening and understanding, manifestation of spiritual warmth, support and change; identify client’s goals and build a client-counsellor partnership.

Time is granted for the identification of the client’s success steps and clarification of the client’s situation system. At this stage the aim of the counselling is to help the client find more solutions to his problems in accordance with his view of his future and with his previous success strategy. It is important to highlight situations where the client has successfully managed to cope with challenges coming from the social environment, to identify in partnership with the client the skills and competences of the latter which enabled him to meet those challenges. The counsellor can help the client find ways to creatively transfer those social skills to other problem situations as understood in classical counselling perspectives. Appreciative counselling practice replaces the process of making an inventory of all the problems the customer faces with the redesign of a problem situation into a challenge that generates social feedback.

Encouraging Positive Action

In the design step of appreciative counselling, the client should be assisted in developing and evaluating strategies for self-determination in order to create his own view of the world (Sandu and Ponea, 2010). Once Appreciative vision is established, it becomes necessary to adapt a decision on major routes by which the identified goals are met. At each stage of the counselling process a dominant strategy of communication and approach to the client occurs.

To improve communication, here are some aspects of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (N.L.P.) that streamline each stage of the appreciative counselling process. The “Axiomatic Fund” of N.L.P. consists of eight fundamental assertions that coordinate communication functionality, giving logic to the system. They
are a set of prior assertions and not assumptions as N.L.P. rejects any generating assumption that generalizes the dysfunction of communication. We present below these assertions and how, from each of these, result specific ways of operating in the intentional nondirective Appreciative interview. These arrangements are fully in line both with the principles of Rogers’ counselling and with the principles of Appreciative inquiry and social constructionism coming to add more effectiveness to the method.

**Assertion 1:** The personal reality map is not the same as others’ maps. There is a significant and fundamental difference between reality and our perception of reality. This principle is a key to understanding appreciative counselling from a constructionist perspective. The individual does not respond in accordance with reality, but with his picture of reality. Our personal map may fundamentally differ sometimes either from reality or from the maps of others. Identification of the client’s “map” is done through the appreciative interview. Appreciative interview technique must be accompanied by active listening. We define active listening as a structured way to listen and respond to the interlocutor. Active listening involves suspending critical judgment and full manifestation of empathy towards the interlocutor.

**Assertion 2:** Each person is unique and reacts in a unique way within the act of communication. The second fundamental assertion of N.L.P. reflects the uniqueness of each individual in terms of his approach to communication and reporting to the other. It is therefore necessary to decode the expression of each partner, and act with tremendous respect for any person engaged in an act of communication, without putting labels regarding the person’s manner of expression. Non-directivity as defined by Rogers starts with unconditional respect for the client. In addition to client-centred counselling, appreciative counselling focuses on identifying positive experiences of the individual.

**Assertion 3:** Every behaviour has a role in adaptation. Identification of so-called undesirable behaviours that should be refined in the process of change must take into account the situation that generated such adaptive behaviour. A parent may physically abuse his child (beating), as he also was abused by his parents and considers this a normal behaviour (his inner map of reality highlights the need for beating as a corrective action). By beating the child he finds a way to adapt to frustration (for example: problems at work, the parent physically abuses the child and beats him thus manifesting his repressed aggression). Resulting intervention focuses on discovering that need that led to the behaviour, then it is replaced by another, more beneficial, and constructive behaviour.

**Assertion 4:** We cannot live without communicating. Whether we use non-verbal or verbal ways, in one form or another we will outwardly manifest the inner attitude in response to an external stimulus. Listening is required before responding with either action, a discussion with a client or something that is learned. Listening is the basis of all strategies of action and evaluation. Reactions to listening are skills used by the counsellor to achieve a proper listening (Kerkhoff, 1997). Depending on the purpose, these reactions are classified as:

- Clarification (Zastrow, 2010) consists of a formula used after an ambiguous message sent by the client. The formula can be like: “You want to say that …” and then continue with the reformulation of the message. The aim is to encourage the customer to a more careful formulation, but also in terms of social constructionism a reformulation of their maps and for the interview operator to verify the accuracy of what he heard and especially what he understood from the other (his own maps);

- Paraphrasing represents a reformulation of the content of the message perceived by the student in order to induce him to focus on the meaning of the message. Learning involves recalling the message, identifying the content and then reacting to content (Zastrow, 2010, 45);
Reflection is a reformulation of the emotional part of the message so as to help the counselled one express more of his experiences with more intensity and become more aware of the feelings that dominate it. Reflecting and paraphrasing can react to the same message and each message will express directly or indirectly some information about the client’s situation and concerns about his feelings and emotions.

**Assertion 5:** The meaning of a message is given by the reaction which it raises. This assertion highlights the importance of knowing the other’s system of internal representations, and that is necessary to shape a message depending on to whom we are talking.

**Assertion 6:** To communicate it is essential to enter into the other’s representation system on the surrounding world. Each individual perceives information from the environment through his senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. This information usually abounds around us, and the brain selects information considered important, to be processed and answered in the form of a reaction. Communication with the environment is largely made at an unconscious level, given our brain functions like a parallel processor. Many observations have led to the conclusion that the human being predominantly uses one of its senses to create one representation of reality at a time (Robbins, 2001). In NLP there are three main systems defined as sensory representation: Visual system; Auditory system; Kinaesthetic system (which refers to tactile sensations, but also the emotions. Differences between these predominant sensory representations occur as inhibitory factors of communication, sometimes leading to obstacles in understanding the true message delivered by the other. A person may use at a certain time other sensory channels than the predominant one, depending on environmental needs. Therefore, the observation and identification of SRS involves capturing behavioural schemes that are operating as true clichés of the individual concerned. It is also possible for a person to develop one or all sensory channels and thus easily express himself in different sensory registers. This however does not exclude the existence of his SRS. Sometimes it is necessary to follow the development of a sensory register so we can improve communication with others.

**Assertion 7:** Each person has within himself all the resources necessary to optimize his own behaviour. This assertion highlights the possibility of intervention. The person is a change agent. The counsellor’s role is to guide the person to the resources that he cannot identify in the social environment.

**Assertion 8:** Neuro-linguistic programming is concerned with how certain behaviours occur and how to solve the problems indirectly, through learning about how a person can optimize his behaviour.

**Conclusions**

Appreciative methodology in philosophical counselling proposes to capitalize success and positive experiences of the one receiving counselling in the construction of the co-constructive communication relation. Appreciative philosophical counselling extends the principles of the appreciative interview starting from the model of appreciative intelligence proposed by Metzker and Thatchenkery (2009) which refers to positive potentials existing in individuals and situations and to ways to transform these potentials into reality.

The constructionist vision of philosophical discourse allows passage from the academic dimension of pure speculation, to applied philosophy close to the original meanings of the phrase “love of wisdom.” Awakening interrogative capacity and passion to the significance of every day will not make a philosopher from the counselled one but will allow him to build his own philosophy as an interpretative, axiological and normative system. Reality or any part thereof may be a pretext for a philosophical debate or with philo-
sophical meanings. Without turning this course into a “Philosophy for Dummies” type, we prefer an approach that starts from daily life towards its significance, taking into account the phenomenological requirements.

Philosophical counselling provides not only a different perspective than the psychological one, but rather a way of understanding significant and generating narratives of meaning for individuals. Narrative perspectives and implicit constructivist psychotherapy, or social constructionist counselling models have been thematized. They are seen as potential semiotic and hermeneutic practices in philosophical counselling. The client’s problem is constructed by analysing the life story and significant narratives of the client. Reconstruction of interpretations of life stories automatically generates changes to the subjective reality of individuals and congruent social action (the functionality of the agent’s values and behaviour).

References

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Aims and Scope

Philosophical Practice is a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to the growing field of applied philosophy. The journal covers substantive issues in the areas of client counseling, group facilitation, and organizational consulting. It provides a forum for discussing professional, ethical, legal, sociological, and political aspects of philosophical practice, as well as juxtapositions of philosophical practice with other professions. Articles may address theories or methodologies of philosophical practice; present or critique case-studies; assess developmental frameworks or research programs; and offer commentary on previous publications. The journal also has an active book review and correspondence section.

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