

Philosophical Counselling in Today's Society as a Philosophy

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Abstract:

The practice of philosophical counselling brings us in touch with the ancient understanding of philosophy as something that the individual could use as a guide to living. Many philosophical counselling techniques make use of Socratic dialogue, Hellenistic philosophy and Indian philosophies to help individuals with the issues of anxiety, guilt, identity confusion and loss of meaning with reasoning and inquiry. The foundation for philosophical counselling, goals, methods and strategies will be discussed based upon material from an extensive 6-month course on counselling from a philosophical perspective. The case presented, will suggest that many human challenges can be framed as philosophical issues rather than as mental health/physical health issues. Therefore, philosophical counselling offers a humane, non-medical and dignified way of allaying human suffering in addition to/and separate from a psychological or clinical perspective of therapy.

Keywords: Philosophy counselling, philosophy as a praxis, Socratic method of finding out one's worldview, dealing with existential questions (i.e. what is the meaning of life).

Introduction:

Philosophical counselling provides a solution to the anxiety, confusion, guilt, identity crisis and loss of meaning experienced by so many individuals in the contemporary world. These original interpretations of our problems are not because of mental illness, but rather, they are often the result of beliefs that were not delivered well, conflicting values, and misconstrued meaning about life. Philosophical counselling helps people to solve their problems by looking at the meanings that these issues have, the validity of their reasoning and the worldview in which they base their understanding of the meaning of their lives; hence solving for the problem on the level of meaning, not just treating it as a mental illness and providing a diagnosis and/or medical treatment. For philosophical counselling philosophy is a practical guide to how to live one's life. As such it regards those who seek assistance through philosophical counselling as being capable of critical thought, self-understanding and the transformation of one-self. As a result of critical dialogue and self-reflection philosophical counselling will help an individual to become more aware of the meanings they place upon their thoughts and enable them to live more consistently and responsibly.

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The Philosophical Underpinning of Philosophy Counselling:

The Socratic Context Philosophical counselling can trace its historical roots to Socrates who through his method of dialectical questioning encouraged others to challenge their ideas and look for inconsistency of their own beliefs in an effort to arrive at self-knowledge. His statement that "the unexamined life is not worth living" sums up the basic presumption of philosophical counselling which is that the act of reflecting on one's life is a prerequisite to leading a fulfilled existence (Plato, 1924). Socratic dialogue has become a defining characteristic of philosophical counselling, and prioritises questioning above providing answers or giving advice and prioritises understanding above providing instruction.

Hellenistic Philosophy as Therapy Like the Stoics, the different Hellenistic schools believed that philosophy is a method of healing the soul. Epictetus theorised that we suffer not because of events but rather, because of our view of events (Epictetus, 1865). The writings of Seneca and Marcus Aurelius demonstrate the idea that if we rationally examine ourselves and discipline ourselves ethically we can overcome our sufferings. The similarities between these ideas and the modern day perspective that a person experiences emotional distress as a result of irrational beliefs and/or faulty judgements of value as opposed to the external circumstances is striking.

The Indian philosophical traditions:

Indian philosophies were modes of counseling within the context of not understanding things such as modern-day psychology. In the Upanishads, we learn of human suffering having its roots in ignorance of one's own true self and the path to liberation is the path of knowing one's true self. Buddhism analyzes suffering (dukkha) as being a product of craving and ignorance, and teaches mindfulness and correct understanding in the order to remedy these conditions (Rahula, 1974). In Yoga philosophy, they treat mental disturbances but they have disciplined awareness of detachment and in Bhakti traditions, they focus on emotional healing by showing devotion and surrendering to God. Through these systems we can see that there is no cultural limitation to philosophical counseling; it has its roots universally in people's attempts to figure out what suffering consists of and why we are here. The objective of philosophical counseling is to clarify, rather than cure or diagnose a client. The purpose of philosophical counseling is to help a counseling client bring unconscious beliefs, values, and assumptions into the light for the client to reflect upon. Philosophical counseling can address such issues as: - The meaning and purpose of life - Freedom and responsibility - Identity and self-respect - Anxiety, guilt, and fear - Suffering, dying, and impermanence - Ethical dilemmas and conflicts related to values Philosophical counseling acknowledges that not all forms of suffering require medical intervention, and that many forms of distress could benefit from a philosophical reflection rather than a medical intervention.

Core Aims of Philosophical Counselling:

- Philosophical counselling seeks clarification rather than cure. Its primary aims include:
- Bringing implicit beliefs into conscious awareness.
- Examining inconsistencies in reasoning.

- Clarifying values and priorities.
- Encouraging ethical coherence.
- Promoting autonomy and responsibility.

Rather than pathologizing distress, philosophical counselling interprets suffering as part of human existence. Anxiety may signal value conflict; guilt may reveal ethical tension; confusion may reflect unexamined assumptions.

Philosophical Counselling methods

1. **Socratic Dialogue:** Socratic dialogue is characterised by the use of open-ended questions and help people to discover their own beliefs through self-exploration not offering advice or resolutions.
2. **Worldview Analysis/Critical Thinking:** A person's worldview, i.e their beliefs regarding how success, happiness, interpersonal relationships and worth are assessed is made up of many things. Through the lens of philosophical Counselling, we look at those beliefs and closely analyze them to find contradictions, inherited assumptions and unreasonable expectations.
3. **Deconstruction, Redirection and Stabilization:** This is a three-phase process which provides the foundation of the philosophical Counselling method. The first phase, Deconstruction, is an attempt to identify, question and unearth problematic beliefs. The second phase, Redirection, in which a person can consciously decide to embrace another point of view or values. The last phase, Stabilization, involves using reflection and ethical consistency to integrate the trans-formative insights into the everyday context.
4. **Mindfulness and Philosophical Exercises:** Mindfulness exercises based on Stoicism, Yoga and Buddhism develop nonjudgmental awareness of one's thoughts and feelings. These give one a sense of philosophical clarity and a reduced emotional reactivity.

Philosophical counselling is carried out in a fluid, two-way conversational way that goes through these three steps.

- a) **Worldview Exploration:** The philosopher listens to and helps the individual to reflect so as to develop an understanding of how the person views himself, the world in which he lives and his experience of suffering.
- b) **Philosophical Perspective Opening:** Opening to the philosophical perspectives is provided by the philosopher as a means of assistance and not as an imperative.
- c) **Integration and Transformation:** The individual will bring themselves to an understanding of their values through a gradual process of bringing their thoughts, feelings and actions into coherence with consciously chosen ones. These steps are carried out on an ongoing basis, which means that good participation in philosophical counselling presupposes the understanding that philosophy is a lifelong endeavor. Practical Application and Understanding of the Case In cases of marital conflict, of guilt associated with trauma and identity theft associated with retirement on the other hand, philosophical counselling does not offer a diagnosis. It will examine the individual's understanding of responsibility, how much the individual can control their actions, as

well as the individual's understanding of his or her inherent worth. The individual will be taught the difference between that which is under his and that which is not under his control, which is fundamental to the philosophical school of Stoicism (Epictetus, 1865). Through the use of philosophical counselling, the individual will experience a relief from their emotions, a clarity that was previously missing and a regaining of their autonomy, while at the same time having an understanding of the limitations of philosophical counselling and when to seek the assistance of clinical psychologist.

It is the role of the philosophical practitioner to listen carefully, respect the client autonomy, refrain from making medical claims, and facilitate independent thinking. Philosophy is therefore used not as doctrine but rather as a means of dialogue. The philosophical practitioner does not impose beliefs on the client, the practitioner facilitates the client's reflection process. In a world full of stress, competition and existential uncertainty, philosophical counselling offers an alternative to the more conventional methods. It complements psychology, while still allowing for the distinctive role of philosophy to be maintained - that of providing reflective wisdom regarding meaning and values rather than symptoms alone. In its role as restorative practice, philosophical counselling works for the purpose of maintaining philosophy's original role of caring for the self by means of reasoned dialogue and reflection. By addressing issues of existential and ethical concern without pathologizing human beings, philosophical counselling helps to maintain autonomy and clarity with respect to a meaningful way of living. As a contemporary philosophical praxis, philosophical counselling continues to provide relevance to modern day life.

Conclusion:

Philosophical counselling is one way that the ancient task of philosophy can be reasserted: care of the self by dialogue. It is based on Socratic questioning, enhanced by Hellenistic therapeutic wisdom, and inspired by Indian traditions of self-knowledge, and is non-medical in relation to dealing with existential distress. The work reveals that, most of the modern day struggles are philosophical and not pathological. Philosophical counselling restores autonomy and meaning by making beliefs as clear as possible, exploring values, and creating a sense of ethical consistency. It does not replace the psychological treatment but it maintains the unique role of philosophy. The next round of research can be focused on the empirical evaluation of the results, cross-cultural adaptation, and institutionalization of philosophical practitioners. Being a modern type of philosophical praxis, philosophical counselling is still extremely topical to solve the moral and existential issues of contemporary life.

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