

Iulia MEDVESCHI *

From Wonder to Wisdom: an Approach to Philosophical Counseling

(Sandu Frunză, *Comunicare și consiliere filosofică*, București: Eikon, 2019)

The world has undergone sundry alterations once with the development of the Internet, smartphones, and a plethora of social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.) As a result, technology created a fertile soil for the establishment of a global network society, restoring ubiquitous capacity of multimodal, interactive communication in chosen time, transcending space. Nevertheless, the expansion of online communication has contributed decisively to distort face-to-face interaction, while guaranteeing the loss of individual's ability to sense and accurately decipher verbal and nonverbal social cues such as (tone of voice, facial expressions, body language and direct wording). In a postmodern context, a constant risk of escalating social tensions and moral dilemmas jeopardizes the attempts of individuals to pursue and maintain a balanced existence. In such hazardous times, the volume *Communication and Philosophical Counseling* written by Sandu Frunză and published in 2019 at Eikon Publishing House from Bucharest must be received loud and clear as "an endeavor to return towards philosophy, at a moment of crossroads – the one of the emergence of the digital generation" (Frunză 2019, 9). At this juncture, the author insists that the reinstatement of philosophy in public debates cannot be interpreted as a denunciation of the technological landscape. Thus, alongside the coagulation of new digital patterns, Frunză embraces a conciliatory vision, praising the "importance of philosophical reflection, which requires the re-introduction of individual's issues into the core of philosophy, at the same time, provoking us to adopt a reflexive and an active attitude in assuming one's own life" (Frunză 2019, 8).

Through his work, Frunză is devoted with articulating the ground, scope and methodological practices of philosophical counseling. A close inspection reveals predominantly the efforts of providing a dialogical person-centered approach, the author managing to rightly point the implications of the development of self and other in a counseling context. Undeniable, the eight chapters of the book encompass a fruitful path to understand both the specific purposes of philosophical counseling and the dialogical configurations which stand at the heart of interpersonal processes.

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In interacting with works of Codoban Aurel, Lou Marinoff and Emmy van Deurzen, on philosophical inquiry – Sandu Frunză's explicit ambition is to restore them fairly and accurately – the complex and multidimensional methodological nature of philosophical counseling. When treated in a wider manner and taking into account its metaphysical dimension, the above-mentioned concept should be perceived here as an all-encompassing philosophical network, generously covering a variety of branches including: philosophical reflection in education, cognitive-behavioral counseling, humanistic and client-centered counseling, existential and phenomenological counseling etc. For instance, in the willingness to clear the vagueness categorization and static nature which prevails over philosophy, Sandu Frunză's work is very useful due to its ability to reveal the practical relevance of philosophy. In this regard, the author gives currency to principles and rules from which we can build a pleasant existence and, as far as possible, without any inconveniences.

Synchronously, in the first part of the book, the philosopher succeeds to endorse the useful heuristically suggestive nature of philosophical dialogue. Thus, he confidently uncovers the active role of philosophical reflection – criticizing with an engrossing vehemence the pejorative expression of philosophy as a discipline largely based on theoretical presuppositions, rather than dealing with reality. As such, abandoning the disturbing assumption of a chronic vegetative state of philosophy – (idea cemented, mostly, in the academic environment by some specialists), ultimately, stimulates and facilitates a paradigm shift in which philosophical practices and procedural inquiry leave behind the “ivory tower and return to ordinary men” (Frunză 2019, 25). In the search for realness, philosophical practitioners reassemble philosophical activities as services in accordance to the needs of postmodern humans, in the long run, sending them to the Agora in the shape of philosophy clubs and groups, philosophical cafés, workshops etc. In Frunză's understanding, philosophical counseling should be exposed and analyzed as a constructive power stretching through heterogeneous areas in both public and private sphere. First and foremost, philosophical counseling, repeatedly resurfaces as a generic scheme designed to exhibit individuals to complementary perspectives and alternative ways in establishing a cross-examination of self, at the same time nurturing “harmonious relations built on respect and responsibility in reference to the physical dimension, the social dimension, the spiritual dimension, the religious dimension and the virtual dimension developed by the new technologies” (Frunză 2019, 21). At a personal level, the philosophical approaches target multifarious issues such as: “particular ways in which love can be understood and practiced, a proper understanding of the intrinsic mechanisms to enhance relational authenticity

and place it in the human sensibility register; the clarification of personal moral dilemmas to solving moral crises affecting large categories of the public” (Frunză 2019, 20). Indeed, depending upon the needs and the capacities of individuals regimented and carefully organized in entrepreneurial communities, philosophical practitioners may incline towards problem-focused approaches as a prerequisite to anticipate the client’s interpersonal and social universe, helping them to get engaged and foster “the negotiations to adopt codes of ethics in harmony with the mission and the objectives which their professional organization has to fulfill” (Frunză 2019, 20-21).

In the philosophical self-examination procedures conducted by the guidance of a professionally trained philosopher, Frunză seeks to remain faithful to a Socratic method. The author only rarely and cautiously uses the term therapeutic philosophy, whilst mostly preferring to employ philosophical-linguistic tools associated with dialogic reasoning. This particular process manifests itself as through an incessant struggle to fortify the dialogical substratum, proclaiming a commitment to a uniting renovative vision towards philosophical counseling, translated “as a form of self-reconstruction in communication, as a privileged instrument of personal development, as a philosophical way of recovering authenticity” (Frunză 2019, 56). In various incarnations, the author acknowledges the idea of dialogue has been long part of human culture. Furthermore, Frunză couples the dynamics of the counselor-client dyad with the widespread notions of philosophical anthropology and dialogical connotations encountered in the works of Martin Buber and Aurel Codoban. In this respect, it is not surprisingly that Frunză does not manifest resistance towards the affirmations: “all real living is meeting” (Buber 1958, 11) and “communication constructs reality” (Codoban 2009, 79). *Per se*, this enables us to recognize the rise of a socio-constructivist sense and, subsequently to internalize the meeting notion as an interactive process which occurs when two people meet in dialogue. The analysis of Buber can ultimately be considered far more useful in its potential, since within dialogical relations we cannot distinguish a full mutuality, but rather a so entitled act of inclusion (beyond empathy). This perspective essentially broadens the genuine dialogue (consisting of philosophical judgement, axiology and noetic elements) – as a way to explore the intrinsic nature of human beings, moderate anguishes and acquire meaning.

In the second part of the book, Sandu Frunză has revisited and thoroughly examined procedural inquiry approaches from and beyond the European continent. Firstly, he managed to adumbrate the nature of interpersonal and professional relations as embodied in the research of the American philosophical counselor, Lou Marinoff. Without fail, the author is a seminal figure in approaching philosophical counseling in the American space – mostly

through his arduous commitment to qualify philosophical practices among other helping professions and, at once restore its well-deserved legitimacy within the realm of social and behavioral sciences. Frunză sees himself compelled to emphasize that one may recognize in the statements of the American philosopher a clear fondness to key-words confined within the Aristotelian vocabulary, especially when associating philosophical counseling to “practical wisdom – phronesis” (Frunză 2019, 60). Overall, Marinoff’s increased interest is to case-harden philosophical counseling as an activity underlying on “efficient reasoning” (Frunză 2019, 60). In his counseling activities, the philosopher required to design a solution-oriented map in order to diminish existential dilemmas. Both Marinoff and van Deurzen – agree that a divorce between philosophy and psychology cannot be requested, the disciplines being tied to an umbilical cord. However, psychology and psychiatry are somewhat inordinately intolerant in respect to philosophy – transforming it into a scientific servant. As a way to cease the endless dispute within the triad philosophy-psychology-psychiatry, Marinoff applies a stark division between the disciplines. Therefore, psychiatry is charged to explore “issues arising from cerebral chemistry, while psychology aims to decode the “emotional world” (Frunză 2019, 60).

Moving back towards the European continent, Sandu Frunză concentrates upon the works of Emmy van Deurzen, an existential therapist, particularly being single out as a representative whom sought to develop a philosophical theory with emerging roots in existential-phenomenology. Van Deurzen can be considered among the very few voices to draw attention upon the necessity of innovative strategic thinking within the context of therapeutic issues. Being akin to emphasize on interpersonal relationships and care or benevolence as a virtue, suggests, in an explicit manner, that her philosophical creed and professional activity revolves around the ethics of care. Nowadays, we are witnessing major technological changes that are certainly responsible for the gap between social change and its understandings. Consequently, an increased risk to alienation, isolation and withdrawal from society shimmers on the horizon. In this worst-case scenario, the philosophical counselor reiterates that “religious imagery” (Frunză 2019, 89) mythological symbols, ideologies prove their inefficiency. Assuming the voice of van Duerzen, Sandu Frunză points that in postmodern societies, philosophical discourse is exported at the periphery of societal forces. Desiring to gradually remove the negative connotations surrounding the discipline – van Duerzen advances the necessity to address current-life issues on an ethical basis. In this respect, she urges the cooperation between cognitive forces and psychological drivers (concentration, perception, attention), understood as indispensable elements in the constant re-questioning of life.

Life is a process which solicits to be contemplated in order to generate meaning in the wake of “disclosedness of Being-in-the-world” (Heidegger 1958, 14).

Is there a meaning to life? If so, what it is? Where do you find meaning in life? Is humanity headed in the right or wrong direction? – seem to be the few questions arising in the worldview interpretation practice proposed by Sandu Frunză. Overall, the volume *Communication and Philosophical Counseling*, should be regarded as an insightful philosophical compendium for counselors, communication advisers and individuals, seeking a fruitful and authentic existence within a social system with a life of its own.

References

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