

Why Critical Thinking is not enough in Philosophical Practice?

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Abstract: Prevailing mainstream of Philosophical Practitioners uses a kind of reason grounded on conceptual and logic-argumentative reason. Their main tools pretend to conceptualize, to make definitions, to create and to assess hypothesis, to analyze concepts and to study philosophical roots of everyday issues among others. This reduction is very anti-philosophical for several reasons: it closes ways of seeing reality, it impedes to see some entities, Philosophy has discovered other types of rationalities in 20th century (anagogic, analogic, poetic, symbolic, experiential, historical, narrative, etc), it can provoke that philosophical counseling becomes a profession that normalizes and integrates in the capitalist system instead to criticize it. This paper intends to deep in these limitations and to conclude with an alternative view of PP: Experience Philosophical Practice.

1. Philosophical Practice based on Critical Thinking (PP-CT).

Prevailing tradition defend a Philosophical Counseling based on Critical Thinking. Warren Shibles characterised Philosophical Practice as follow twenty years ago:

Despite philosophical practitioners can have different methods and orientations (...) they facilitate activities as: (1) to *examine arguments and justifications* of their counselees; (2) to *clarify*, to *analyse* and to *define* important *terms* and *concepts*; (3) to expose and to assess *underlying assumptions* and *logic implications*; (4) to show conflicts and *inconsistency*; (5) to *explore traditional* theories of *philosophy*

and its *meanings* related to counselees issues; and (6) all activities that has been identify as philosophical (italics added, Shibles, 2001: 51)

Oscar Brenifier has determined three peculiar activities for Philosophical practice: to identify, to problematize and to conceptualize. In addition, his intellectual skills embrace exercise such as to design hypothesis, to define, to put in contact ideas, to mind up questions and answers. Indeed, his psychological or social skills are based on dialogues build on Critical Thinking (Brenifier 2011, 2012).

Lebon set up their methods on the same kind of reason. *Progress* helps to make good decisions by assessing the arguments and emotions involved in them and RSVP is a procedure for producing and improving subjective values by using a logic-conceptual process (Lebon, 2001).

Roxana Kreimer's *Artes del buen vivir* (2001) encourages carry out Philosophical Counseling sessions in the same road: to examine counselees arguments, to clarify their concepts and assumptions, to expose contradictions of the arguments and to track how counselees arguments are linked to philosophical theories.

Second and third stages of Peter Raabe's method ('Inmediate Problem Resolution' and 'Teaching as an Intentional Act') report a process of problem resolution using CT and a teaching of the strategies of CT (Raabe, 2001).

Let's see an excerpt of a consultation of E.Cohen as an example of theses groundings:

B: My wife has a *New England mentality*.

C: Does your wife come from England? (conceptual analysis)

B: Yes.

C: What do you mean by a "New England mentality"? (conceptual analysis)

B: People from England are crude; they just say whatever is on their minds without first thinking about what they are saying.

C: Have you known many people from England? (logic analysis to discover inconsistencies)

B: No. But the ones I've known have like that.

C: How can you say, then, that *all* people from New England are like that on the basis of such a small sampling? (logic analysis to expose contradiction) (Cohen, 1989)

The situation in philocafés is the same. Most of them employ Critical Thinking as their practical skill. This is the case of Christopher Phillips in USA (Phillips, 2004), Tomas Magalhães in Portugal or Francisco Barrera in Spain.

2. Frontiers of a PP-CT.

2.1. First problem: normalization.

Ran Lahav discriminated two models in PP: ‘Grand’ and ‘Small’ Philosophical Practice. PP-CT is small because it ‘no longer attempts to elevate life (...). It does not seek to transform the foundations of life, but to address specific needs or difficulties and to fix problems’. According to Frankfurt School, “this kind of philosophy is therefore basically a normalizer, a problem-solver, and a satisfaction-provider’ (Lahav, 2006b). It deals with problems but it doesn’t problematize the counselee purpose and therefore is an instrument to maintain social injustices. However, as Socrates taught, Philosophy is a critical activity that light up new conceptions, it should be “about venturing into new dimensions” (Lahav, 2006a). Unfortunately, Lahav continues “Critical thinking seems to be more about smartness than wisdom, and smartness is not the sort of thing that in itself can transform us in a profound way” (Lahav 2006a). It raised a second problem: is it CT enough to produce that transformation?

2.2. Second problem: beliefs, not ideas.

One of the main concepts to be studied in order to understand how to overcome a crisis is (life) experience. The concept was gone over by Martin Heidegger (‘Ereignis’ in German), María Zambrano (‘experiencia’ in Spanish), Spranger, Julián Marías (1965), Claude Romano (‘evenement’ in French, Romano 2012), Kitaro Nishida (‘junsui keiken’ or ‘pure experience’ in japanesse) and even me (Barrientos 2010, 2015a, 2015b)

A life experience is an event that transforms people, for example, to give birth or to turn in the witness of a painful situation such as when one beloved relative pass away. Why is it so important in personal crisis? Because (deep) events/life experiences opens a new state of

affairs in personal life: the one needed by counselees. Previous existential state of affair doesn't works for the new situation. This circumstance brings about that counselee feel the necessity of discovering a new soil for life. This discovery cannot be achieved just by rational thinking. The quest is not linked just to a cognitive or ideational area but to an existential.

Let's explain this theory with an example. After giving birth, our life (and we) changes. I *become (am)* another entity: I move from 'woman-without-kids' to be entitled as 'mother'. As far as I *am* a different entity, my feelings, ideas and decisions are reshaped. Since I *am another* entity, previous ideas and believes are not useful to face same situations. New problems stand up despite external world didn't change. 'Mother' is an entity with *worries* that a 'woman-without-kids' doesn't know and feel. 'Mothers' feel worries as an *ontological* need and not as an informational one: people knows that children can have the flu but the *knowing* of a 'mother' is special: her knowledge is linked to all her personal dimensions, her thoughts, her feeling and her will live together. When she knows that her child is ill, her will is coherent and she can't stop to be worry. A Doctor can separate his ideas and his feelings: he can know that a child is ill despite he is not worry about it. This transformation in what a woman can be after giving birth could be the starting point of a consultation. Since the child was born, her husband, our counselee, starts to complain of loneliness. He feels that the mother is not anymore to support him. On the other hand, the 'mother' complains that her husband is unfair: she is angry because she feels that he doesn't love his son enough.

The consultation could be useful for analyzing (in a logic-conceptual way) main concepts of the issue (love, motherhood, loneliness). Counselees can mind up hypothesis and proposals to sort out urgent problems. And finally, they can decide what the most effective solution is: maybe, the mother devotes a whole day to his husband each week. Well done! Case is over.

Oh, no, no, no! Six months after the sessions, counselor and counselee meet in the street: 'How are you and your wife?' 'We are better now', he answers. 'Good!' said the counselor. 'No, I think you didn't understand. I am better now because I divorced'. 'What?' ask the shocked counselor. 'Well, we discovered the best (rational) solution in your sessions. We try to carry out but I and my ex-wife *felt* it wasn't satisfactory. Therefore, we decided to divorce'. Ideas and feelings walked in opposed directions. Consultations were useful for

deploying an analytical process, it wasn't enough to manage the problem of life. Probably, ideas changed but lives of husband and wife were the same. Therefore, the rational solution was lived as an imposition that doesn't fit their fixed existences.

To sum up: the point is to discover solutions but to change lives in order to change points of views. If counselees are similar in the first and last consultation, maybe counselor did a good rational work, a useless end for counselees.

The situation is similar in Holy Bible: Saint Pauls groan when he tries to become a good Christian. He knows the main Christian rule, the rule of Love, but in a lot of occasions his ideas and decisions weren't coherent: he knew (rationally) what to do but he *can't* do it (Rm 7,19).

Irvin Yalom exposes the same idea by means of a character in his novel. We can use ideas and words but they don't penetrate in the person. In front of the death, we can use the Epicuro phrase 'where death is I am not, where I am death is not'. According to the character, this is the failure of philosophy, the difference between thinking and doing (Yalom 2007, 220).

Why CT are not so effective as experiences? Because (1) experiences proceed on beliefs and CT on ideas and (2) what a crisis need is a new ground of beliefs.

3. *Experience as a way to cope with crisis.*

Ortega y Gasset distinguishes between ideas and beliefs. Ideas can be changed easily, believe are not because we 'live on our beliefs'. What we *are* is based on our beliefs. Beliefs are the container that structures our lives (feeling, ideas, will). For example, the attitude (feelings, ideas and decisions) to animals is different in a vegan and an omnivore because their beliefs are different. A young marriage without kids *believe* that the purpose of their lifes is just to promote the happiness of the beloved partner; however, when kids come the belief of one or both companions can change. Goal of marriage is based (mainly) on children raising and (secondly, if possible) on providing love to the other. Opposite beliefs are the starting point of problems. The solution comes from discovery a new common project where beliefs of both of them can be included. Beliefs are change by means of experiences not by cold reasons.

Since (1) a crisis is the reason to go to a Philosophical Counselor and (2) crisis are based on the need to find new beliefs (not just ideas) (3) that create new certainties (4) on what to build a new self, is it enough Critical Thinking for Philosophical Practice? Obviously, not. *Experience Philosophical Practice* proposes to complement CT-PP by working on experiences. In order to know how to do it, it is needed to know what are its main characteristics and what dispositions are vital to make a transforming one. We have explained it in other works (Barrientos, 2010, 2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b; Barrientos et al, 2014) and we can explain it by email (barrientos@us.es) or in the questions I hope we can share from this point.

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