



The Modal World of Integrative Philosophical Counselling (I)

Introductory

It is about 9 a.m. in a COVID-19 ward, in a sickroom with three patients. It is quiet, with a light glaring from the ceiling. Masked, fully protected nurses rush as they connect drips, take temperature, and measure the oxygen level in patients' blood. There is a constant low whistle of the oxygen streaming through the pipes. Huge cylinders occupy the room, helping the three sufferers breathe. I was in this room for eight days, between 15 and 23 December 2020. I was struggling on edge for a while, my lungs unable to take the oxygen.

In that room, everyone was a philosopher.

The philosophical practice is suited to precisely such situations. It is a way of making philosophy relevant to painful and otherwise significant life events and a methodically rigorous way of rendering philosophy the foundation for integrating various psychotherapeutic interpretations of experience. Philosophical practice comprehensively integrates psychotherapy. In this sense, philosophical practice is the ultimate integration of the previously dissipated schools, methods, concepts, and psychotherapeutic ideas. By applying both the experience gathered through the development of various psychotherapeutic schools based on psychological theories and the wealth of philosophical concepts and traditions, philosophical practice offers a unique and new way of looking at psychic reality. It looks at psychodynamics and applies the ancient wisdom of philosophy to understanding our present-day issues, problems and dilemmas. In this sense, philosophical practice is probably the science of today: today's practical humanity is based on a fundamental shift in thinking logic.

One of the key tenets of philosophical practice and integrative philosophical counselling is the insistence on modal logic instead of the binary logic based on truth-tables. It is the insistence on modal logic, on the understanding of our thought as capable of bringing about the modal worlds which are not currently real and making them part of our living reality that holds the main promise of integrative psychotherapy. It inextricably links social, interpersonal, and in that sense objective change in one's circumstances and inner experience of the world. Only such change, combining the methodically rigorously founded reaching out for the realisation of a different, not-yet-real, but possible, modal world, with a yearning, anticipation and guided preparation for a new subjective experience and a new emotion, once the new modal

world is, in a sense, called into reality by our methodical efforts, promises a lasting change in the quality of life.¹

Modal logic is the very essence of our overall spiritual life and philosophical understanding of our life. In this sense, integrative philosophical counselling is very close to religious practice: it is very open to Christian counselling and Christian ethics, and it endorses several important concepts from the philosophy of Christianity.

On this basis, we develop an outline of the current perspectives in philosophical practice in this special volume, which contains fourteen papers. These papers are introductory in the sense that they only, as Arthur Schopenhauer once said, briefly open the “veil of Maya” – the veil of deceit hiding important truths from our everyday understanding. By looking briefly behind the veil of Maya through these fourteen papers, one may be able to apprehend the essential characteristics of philosophical integrative counselling:

“... (t)he ancient wisdom of the Indian philosophers declares, ‘It is Maya, the veil of deception, which blinds the eyes of mortals, and makes them behold a world of which they cannot say either that it is or that it is not: for it is like a dream; it is like the sunshine on the sand which the traveler takes from afar for water, or the stray piece of rope he mistakes for a snake.’”²

Schopenhauer’s description of the veil of Maya has surprisingly much to do with modal logic, just as it does with traditional epistemology. In the very sentence preceding the above quote, Schopenhauer directly connects the Indian concept of the veil of Maya with Kant’s reservations about our ability to know the ‘thing-in-itself’. In integrative philosophical counselling and in the appropriate integrative philosophical interpretation, the veil of Maya is exactly the blockage of our view to the not-real (to use Galtung’s terminology) and yet entirely possible modal worlds. It is a metaphor that orients our attention towards one of the most practical principles in integrative psychotherapy – ‘being realistic’ in the sense of focusing only on what is ‘real’ is the least philosophical and practically the least useful way of conceiving and practising psychotherapy. Being ‘unrealistic’ means operating on modal territory and glimpsing behind the veil of Maya as and when it permits us to penetrate what it hides. What is hidden beneath the veil may eventually come under the sun of our ‘reality’ that currently causes us suffering. This is the philosophical journey of integrative counselling that is not entirely rationalistic but relies strongly on traditions of spirituality and practical wisdom to which Schopenhauer himself – and so many influential psychotherapists and theoretical psychiatrists throughout the modern history of psychotherapy – have been so pliable with.

In this issue of *Synthesis philosophica*, we present the first part of the special theme. In the next issue, we will present the second part of this volume, bringing about a different perspective. That collection will merit a separate introduction that will be more detailed and focused on the specificities of philosophical practice exemplified by the upcoming seven contributions.

At this point, it suffices to say that integrative philosophical counselling is a new, synthetic perspective in the practical humanities, one from which all kinds of consultancy can be drawn, on an individual, group, corporate and social level. It is proposed as a fountain from which we can all drink, take fresh concepts and ideas: the fresh, practically useful philosophical water which we need in this current crisis of social sciences and humanities, which are becoming increasingly similar to a mathematical or empirical science.

This includes psychology which tends to wrinkle up methodically and creatively because it has persistently tried to become an empirical science, thus sapping its body of all the juices of creative philosophical interpretation, disfiguring its original and beautiful character of the art of interpreting psychic life. In this context, integrative philosophical counselling is a return to normalcy. It is a return to the ancient wisdom of applying philosophical concepts as healing tools. Epicurus once said that philosophy which heals no pain does not deserve to exist (“a philosophy that does not heal the soul is no better than medicine that cannot cure the body”).³

Such a healing perspective for philosophy is promising and ambitious at the same time. It is rigorously grounded in modal logic and the findings of applied psychology and other helping professions which have thus far informed the philosophical discourse. Until this date, the knowledge and dissipated insights accumulated throughout the psychotherapeutic work have not been lost, but ingrained and preserved in a greater body of integrative philosophical counselling.

It is in the darkness and loneliness of our life experience that we call upon the different modal worlds. If we call them into reality, it is through what Scott Peck calls *prayer time* or *prayer proper*.⁴ By *prayer time*, Scott Peck means a focused concentration on our thinking, needs, and sensibilities. By such philosophical and, at the same time, spiritual concentration and mental discipline, we may bring one modal world, from the status of possible but not actual, to the status of real and actual for us, in the present. This is how we change our lives, and this is the fundamental principle of the practical implementation of modal logic, as opposed to two-dimensional binary logic. That is the foundation on which integrative philosophical counselling functions.

It takes considerable reservations to rationalism to be an integrative philosophical counsellor. Being chained to rational thinking, to deductive logic, to only the seeming guarantors of truth, the truth tables and binary values is a way of drifting away from wisdom, from the ability to creatively, artistically and usefully interpret our existential experience. Being chained to a binary value-based understanding of the world is like seeing the world in two dimensions, missing the third dimension completely. This third dimension that integrative philosophical counseling brings to the increasingly lifeless world is considered a traditional psychotherapeutic theory.

All psychological and psychotherapeutic theories are valid in their way. They are based on hypotheses that help us interpret the experiences we would oth-

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Cf. Aleksandar Fatić, *Integrativna psihoterapija [Integrative Psychotherapy]*, Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, Sveučilište u Beogradu 2020, pp. 227–241.

2

Arthur Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, translated by E. F. J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York 1969, p. 8.

3

Hermann Usener, *Epicurea*, Teubner, Leipzig 1887 (Italian translation by Ilaria Ramelli, *Epicurea: Testi di Epicuro e testimonianze epicuree nell'edizione di Hermann Usener*,

Bompiani, Milan 2002), frag. 221; Aleksandar Fatić, Dimitrios Dentsoras, “Pleasure in Epicurean and Christian Orthodox conceptions of happiness”, *South African Journal of Philosophy* 33 (2014) 4, pp. 523–536, p. 524, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2014.967594>.

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M. Scott Peck, *The road less travelled and beyond: Spiritual growth in an age of anxiety*, Simon and Schuster, New York 1997, pp. 130–131.

erwise not make sense of. At the same time, each of these theories, based on binary logic, is mistaken. It is only a metaphor: a way of portraying certain experiences which allows us to symbolically metabolise them more effectively, to make a better sense of them. However, integrative philosophical counselling integrates all of these binary, black-and-white, two-dimensional theories into a richer, deeper conceptual vision of existence and provides us with a lasting philosophy, with a lasting understanding of our experiences. It opens up the room for awareness: for fresh awareness to form and to guide the realisation of new modal worlds in our reality – the achievement of new circumstances, visions, sensibilities, preferences, and values. This changes our lives. Integrative philosophical counselling, just like any counselling, traditional or modern, can enhance our health, but it also strives to enhance our social well-being, and those two aspects of well-being are very closely connected.

One way to illustrate the change in action and active thought that integrative counselling brings to the table is to use the key psychoanalytic metaphor of ‘displacement’. Drawing on Saussure, Freud believed that the way our stream of thought functions is something like Democritus believed that ‘atoms’ moved: sequentially and in some group order, but without inner logic – provisionally. Thus Freud’s initial ‘psychoanalytic method’ is of free associations: let the therapist see how and in what order the client’s thoughts display themselves sequentially. The therapist can then see whether useful interpretations can be drawn from such sequences of random thoughts. However, the dynamising moment comes when both the therapist and the client understand that a displacement, a deliberate intervention in the order of thoughts, can make a difference in the overall perception of one’s situation, and ultimately in one’s ability to seek a change of life actively. This moment of deliberate effort to disturb the spontaneous sequencing of thoughts, to affect a ‘displacement’, is the moment of therapy – often neglected. It requires a discipline of thought, a focus. It triggers the modal logic of thinking about psychotherapy: if one spontaneous sequence of thoughts is an experiential modal world, its ignition to change and induction of displacement means jumping into a qualitatively different way of thinking and the resulting emotional experience, and thus a ‘jumping into’, or ‘calling into reality’, of a different modal world: different decisions, values, choices, sensibility even – a different subjective life. That is how people make significant changes in their lives, leave behind what they had hitherto considered important and embrace new freedoms and new roads. The development of this dynamic aspect of psychoanalysis is the job of modern Lacanian psychoanalysis, but it illustrates the action-based model of intervention characteristic for integrative counselling.⁵

One could develop all kinds of parallels between this ignition of ‘jumps’ between modal worlds that integrative counselling develops and almost all traditional psychotherapeutic theories. They all contain kernels of truth in this sense. So why have they not brought those kernels to full fruition? Because they persistently stuck to the binary divide between ‘real’ and ‘not real’, to what is ‘true’ and ‘not true’ without realising the fundamental modal distinction made by Johan Galtung that ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ are interchangeable modal worlds belonging to ‘the possible’, and logically separated from those modal worlds that are ‘impossible’.⁶

Integrative counselling opens up a methodology which introduces modal logic as the very foundation of psychotherapy. I will say more about this in my

second introduction to the second volume on philosophical practice in the next issue of *Synthesis philosophica*. May these introductory lines and the initial seven papers serve both as a ‘teaser’ (if we may be allowed to proclaim so) and an initial insight into integrative philosophical counselling, before the topic assumes a more articulate and complete form with the follow-up.

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Cf. Paul Verhaeghe, *On being normal and other disorders. A manual for clinical psychodiagnosics*, Carnac Press, London 2008.

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Cf. Johan Galtung, *Theories of conflict*, Transcend Peace University, Oslo 2009.