

Article

Spiritual and Philosophical Practices: Together for Community Using the Counseling

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Abstract: The paper presents characteristics of practices in the humanities that can be manifested through specific forms of counseling, namely spiritual or pastoral counseling and philosophical counseling. Through the comparative analysis of the two practices, interdisciplinary links are identified, reflected at the conceptual and applied level, with both their similarities and differences being highlighted, in order to emphasize the originality and the capacity to adapt to the requirements of the field from which they come. The paper supports the new trend of involvement in communities of specific counseling practices by expanding their application potential from person to group and community, with the help of an adaptation process necessary to achieve the goal in order to bring the practice of counseling to as many persons and to community or society in general.

Keywords: religion; spirituality; philosophy; spiritual counseling; philosophical counseling; theology



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1. Introduction

The orientation towards various practices dedicated to counseling has a tendency to develop, manifested mainly in recent years, although the option of resorting to such practices was known to humanity long ago, being applied in various forms in a restricted format. Thus, for the spiritual field, the practice was developed in the form of pastoral or spiritual counseling, and within philosophy, the practices were timid in the form of spiritual or contemplative exercises (Hadot 2015). The paper brings arguments regarding the ways in which these counseling practices can be adapted through new forms and directions of action for the benefit of the community, through counseling programs dedicated to this segment of contemporary society. Some of the practices are already present in the communities, by the fact that the practitioners we are referring to are already in the community, by their domicile and belonging to a cult, in the case of the spiritual counselor, or by opening a practice office, in the case of the counselor philosophical.

Practitioners' approaches have often been different, viewing from the perspective of the recipients of these forms of counseling. We observe that a spiritual counselor has as beneficiaries of his services, the persons or groups of persons who attend the church or the cult in addition to which he works, this being usually supported by the religious entity. The perspectives available to a philosophical practitioner are diversified, in the sense that, although they act on their own through a philosophical practice office, they can offer counseling services to several categories of beneficiaries, all being parts of the community in which the counselor is located.

Thus, the specialist offers individual philosophical counseling service to interested persons, can be a philosophical facilitator in events for groups of people, or can address organizations and entities in the community, through philosophical consulting and ethics applied to them. Despite these openings for large groups of beneficiaries, the promotion of practices derived from philosophy is still in its infancy, with the first such cabinet being founded in 1981 by the German philosopher Gerd Achenbach, who left the chair of

philosophy and opened a philosophical practice office at Bergisch Gladbach in Germany (Hațegan 2018b).

If initially the counseling practices were addressed only to individuals, later the area of beneficiaries was extended to other recipients, so that philosophical practitioners had approaches within organizations, through philosophical consulting for leaders or teams of managers, and later, in both areas of practice, they have shown concerns for the ecological field, by developing concepts such as ecophilosophy or ecotheology, which can be taken over in the practice of counseling for communities (Hațegan 2021a). There is a concern of practitioners in both fields to expand the area of interest of counseling, to support more beneficiaries, present in the community, who manifest different needs, and who can be approached differently through counseling practices specific to each domain.

To achieve the purpose of the paper, we start with a conceptual approach on the areas to be analyzed, followed by a comparative analysis on the specific practices of the two areas of interest to identify the involvement of specific concepts and forms of action, which can achieve the interdisciplinary links between the two areas, and they can be capitalized in applied practices, in the form of the counseling process. The comparative analysis is based on direct observation and study of the characteristic elements of the two types of counseling practices (Hațegan 2021c), transposed in the paper in the form of our own tables that highlight both the similarities and differences necessary to identify their common interests within the community. The interpretation of the analysis results is concretized in conclusions and future study directions, with concrete proposals for the implementation of new practices adapted to the current requirements of the community, but also in order to diversify and develop forms of practice through counseling and specialized consulting practices which can be offered to the persons and the communities.

2. Conceptual Approaches in the Analyzed Fields

The approach to the concept of *SOPHIA* has been made differently since antiquity, being included, on the one hand, in philosophy, defined by the “love of wisdom”, and for the religious theological field representing the principle of divine wisdom (Ivlampie 2015). The wisdom given by *Sophia* was called by the Russian philosopher Solovyov as “the guardian angel of the world” (Solovyov 1994). A significant reference is given by Vladimir Lossky, who associates theology with *Sophia*’s concept, stating that it is related to *gnosis* and *epistemes* (Lossky 2006) and from this approach can derive the salvation of philosophy, which will appeal to faith (Tat 2017) interfering with theology.

A different approach is given to the analysis of the two fields as academic disciplines, but also as ways of expressing spirituality between which the boundaries are not distinguished, interfering and influencing each other, and when theology is separated from philosophy, it loses its academic status (Tomuleț 2017), a fact which, once again, highlights the deep links that exist between domains. The quoted author refers to spirituality as a common property, different from the discipline itself, with it being attributed to the person, who can be a philosopher or theologian (Tomuleț 2017), and will manifest itself through spiritual or philosophical practices alike. For a long time, spirituality was considered a synonym of religion; however, in reality, the positioning of the two is different, with religion being defined as a way that facilitates access to spirituality (Stanford 2020).

Following this conclusion, we turn our attention to the study of the main charities of spiritual or pastoral counseling, in relation to philosophical practices, such as counseling. Philosophy is the one that has manifested since antiquity some practices meant to clarify existential problems of the person, concerns that have been identified in the field of spirituality, by identifying forms of meditative or contemplative introspection on nature, or by altered states of consciousness, which could be achieved through religious rituals, such as fasting or prayer. From Nae Ionescu’s analysis of the religious phenomenon, we find that “the religious act is a psychic process related to the absolute” (Ionescu 2018), while Georg Simmel highlighted the social character of the so-called religious phenomenon (Simmel 2018).

The role of philosophy in the perception of the human soul is explained by Bergson, who attributes to it the role of realizing the spiritual connections of the person, emphasizing that it has “the task of studying the soul in all its manifestations” (Bergson 2017). In the Middle Ages, the two mentioned fields were intertwined, with the philosophy being assimilated by theology, often through constraints exerted by the church on the thinkers of the time, who also became theologians. Revelations on this phenomenon are made by Pierre Hadot, who mentions that the return to current fields was made later, when philosophers returned to university chairs, managing to present their theses or to publish works specific to philosophy (Hadot 2019).

Another analysis of the medieval period shows that philosophy was a Christian-oriented way of thinking, with any other current being considered erroneous and in contradiction with Christian truths, which is why medieval philosophers could be considered theologians (Mesaros 2005). Although the philosophy of those times had a deeply Christian orientation, it cannot be assimilated as the official philosophy of the Church, but must be understood as “*ancilla theologiae*”, with the role of verifying some concepts of theology, one being the universal truth (Cordoneanu 2015). In the current context in which the two domains manifest a real crisis of authority that lead to a spiritual blockage of contemporary society, the same author proposes the resumption of their dialogue, through which philosophy will bring tools in its collaboration with theology, which can be used like a medicine administered to a society in crisis (Cordoneanu 2015).

The conclusion is contrary to the previous thesis, the author showing that the Christian philosopher will not become a theologian, because he uses principles and methods specific to philosophy, which clearly distinguishes him from theology. In the early Christian centuries, church leaders avoided calling themselves theologians, appreciating philosophy as a way of life, and theology was seen as a function of it (Spidlik 1971).

These primary forms of collaboration between the two fields can be considered prerequisites for the development of interdisciplinary links that later developed between the fields, as we find them today, in the form of cooperation as specific counseling practices, starting from a common goal, that of a better service to humanity, and implicitly giving up the contradictions that have marked them for centuries. Spiritual counseling becomes a form of counseling intended primarily for the person who uses theses and ideas in the field of theology, being put into practice by theologians, pastors or clergy, their name being used depending on the religion they come from.

The contradictions that manifested were generated by some religious dogmas that refused to recognize the role of philosophy in the development of humanity, ignoring the consecrated role of *Sophia* as “love of wisdom”, being considered to distance the person from divine love, as the concept is seen in the religious prism. At a theoretical level, too, the markings were often violated, in both senses, a fact highlighted by the phrase used by a researcher of the fields, which referred to the existence of philosophical theologians but also religious philosophers, who were attracted to an exploration of outer space and the interior of our lives’ (Caputo 2006). However, philosophy is assigned an important status in society, being considered a natural gift, but of a divine nature, a fact that, in the acceptance of St. Gregory Palamas, gives philosophy the due honor (Crîșmăreanu 2017). Husserl, considered to be the father of phenomenology, also has some non-confessional approaches to the religious phenomenon (Husserl 2013), following by studying Christian monotheism (Turcan 2017).

Another philosopher who studied the correlations between philosophy and theology was Heidegger, who described philosophy as madness, in relation to the original Christian faith (Heidegger 2002), and in this context, the believer becomes a person engaged in his own pilgrimage (Maci 2017). Trying to draw a parallel between practitioners of the two fields, the philosopher Cavadi remarks that a spiritual counselor is based on confessional beliefs and practices, appealing to the sacred texts of religion, which have an indisputable character when compared to the philosophical advisor who appeals to the treasure of

wisdom generated by philosophy and its practices, which manifests an already established authority, through philosophical practices applied since antiquity (Cavadi 2010).

The link between philosophy and theology is indicated by another philosophical practitioner, who asserts that philosophy gives religion a justification for its meaning (Koestenbaum 2003) for the benefit of humanity (Koestenbaum 2003). We emphasize that a philosophical counselor can always face requests for counseling on spiritual issues, the practitioner thus becoming a guide or spiritual counselor for the counselor, he is unable to avoid problems of this nature, being seen as a specialist in the field of personal counseling. Looking in the opposite direction, we do not exclude the fact that in practice there are cases in which a spiritual/pastoral counselor faces requests to define the person's worldview or outline a philosophy of life, requirements from the counselee, and which are usually avoided in spiritual or pastoral counseling.

The practice of counseling, regardless of the approach and field from which it derives, can be considered a spiritual discipline, being necessary for practitioners in those areas analyzed, and which contributes to the spiritual development of the person (Faiver et al. 2001). The connection to the spiritual area is initiated by the existential problems of the counseled person, who can call for clarification and counselors with specific skills, specialized in philosophical practice or spiritual counseling (Gilligan Coudy 2018).

The importance of using the philosophical dialogue promoted by Marinoff in his practice (Marinoff 2019) is studied by other authors in terms of implications in existential or ethical counseling, and this type of dialogue can be included in the needs of the human communication (Frunză 2018). The influences of spirituality and religion on those involved in therapeutic processes were studied in a research that highlighted their important role in the practice of counseling, with the authors recommending taking over elements that can become complementary to any therapeutic intervention (Frunză et al. 2019), a fact which we use to develop the topic, using a new point of view, by the interference of the spiritual counseling with philosophical practices.

3. Comparative Analysis of Practices Specific to Each Field

In order to study in detail the two types of counseling, we further analyze the features and elements specific to philosophical counseling related to spiritual counseling, to indicate similarities and emphasize the common purpose of providing specialized services to the person, while highlighting the differences that individualize each of them, in order to identify a common path or in the sense of developing a collaboration within the community in which each one operates.

In carrying out the analysis, we also studied previous research on the topic, especially the volume of papers with the suggestive title *Sofia e Agape* (Zanella 2012) or the initial work of the author (Hațegan 2021c), that we develop in this new approach.

Table 1 highlights the main similarities of the two types of counselors, which leads us to outline a common profile of them that can be expressed synthetically, as follows.

Table 1. Similar characteristics of the philosophical and spiritual counseling *.

Philosophical Counseling vs. Spiritual Counseling	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a philosophical practitioner/philosophical counselor as a specialist; Specialist uses a specific tools for philosophical practice; Works with a client/counselor; The specialist is trained in philosophical practice/counseling; Process has origins in philosophy, as a practice; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a specialized spiritual counselor/the own staff of a religious cult; The counselor uses methods and specific procedures to the person's counseling process; Works with a person/group of persons; The counselor may have special training in spiritual/pastoral counseling; The origins are in theology, religions and spirituality;

Table 1. Cont.

Philosophical Counseling vs. Spiritual Counseling	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal process, does not require the conclusion of a contract; • A counseling requirement is established; • It does not follow a specific method—it is usually adapted to the counselor; • The specialist is a facilitator between the client and his problem; • Using the questions to clarify and understand a problem/situation/dilemma; • The process clarifies the past, analyzes/accepts the present and manifests orientation to the future; • Client can stop philosophical practice at any time; • Process generates an agreement/reconciliation with oneself by clarifying the dilemma/solving the problem or the organizational situation subject to philosophical practice; • Does not provide solutions to the situation, but supports the person for clarification and learning skills to think or to philosophize; • Outlines the person's own vision of the world and his life; • Transfer the skills of philosophizing to the counselee person; • Privacy and confidentiality conditions are ensured on the meeting; • Respecting the identity and dignity of the persons is ensured in process; • Manifest some limitations, in pathological cases, which require other specialists; • Personal limitations may arise, due to the specialist specialization in certain areas of work; • The requirement of a continuous specialization; • A professional code of ethics applied in the counseling process/moral and ethical norms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal process, does not require the contract or other forms; • It is not follow a counseling plan; • Using a method of counseling adapted to the person, through individualization; • The counselor can be a facilitator between the counselor and his spiritual problem; • Using the questions to identify mistakes in a person's past (sin); • Process analyzes the past/the present, outlining development directions towards the future; • Person can stop the counseling at any time; • Counseling produces a reconciliation of the person with himself, and the development of his own process of communication with the divinity (through prayer or specific practices); • It is a non-directive process, and it appeals to advice or guidance/offers only exhortations, which can be useful for spiritual evolution of the person; • Support the realization of a spiritual relationship in the person's life; • Develops the necessary skills for the spiritual development of the person; • The confidentiality of the topics discussed in the counseling process is ensured; • Mutual respect for the parties is paramount in the counseling process; • Limitations generated by the person's pathology, which attracting other specialists; • Individual limitations generated by the belonging to a cult/religion of the participants; • Need for permanent knowledge; • A specific moral norms are applicable/code of ethics to specific counseling can be taken over.

* Source: author's own processing.

The counseling practice process is an informal one, with origins in the field from which it developed, being made by specialists in counseling practice who use tools and methods specific to each practice, used for the benefit of counseling the person or groups of people. Counseling takes place without a specific plan, with working methods and approaches being available to each practitioner, with a focus on clarifying life situations and defining a vision of the world, or developing personal skills, avoiding issuing solutions to the counseled problem.

The process is a voluntary one, based on confidentiality and mutual respect, without containing interferences on the person's life, which can be withdrawn from the process at any time. The counseling specialist is constantly concerned with improving their training and respecting the moral norms and professional ethics specific to the exercise of a counseling practice. In the next table, we analyze comparatively what the differences are found in the two types of counseling, as follows:

In outlining a profile, the differences presented in Table 2 lead us to other elements that show the originality of each practice analyzed, diversities that distinguish them, and which can be summarized as follows: occupations are being recognized, with different approaches, depending of the specific tools and methods resulting from the field of reference, and the focus on the person's problems is different, as well as the goals pursued. Spiritual counseling aims at the spiritual development of the person, sinning the philosophical practitioner to support the person in identifying a vision of the world and life. The organization of the counseling service is also different, where the spiritual counselor benefits from the support of the church in which he works, being considered a complementary service, until the philosophical practitioner is organized individually, in practice and counseling offices, and is rewarded by the client through working fees. If participation in philosophical counseling is voluntary, spiritual/pastoral practitioners can use various communication channels specific to the church or worship, to benefit from recommendations that convey the option of resorting to the practice of specialized counseling.

Table 2. Different features of the philosophical and spiritual counseling *.

Philosophical Counseling vs. Spiritual Counseling	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupation is in the process of recognition; • It is a paid service and can be negotiated with the counseling participant; • Specialist support the client to find a personal vision of the world and life; • The counseling does not pursue a specific goal, it is not an action of result; • The approach starts from the problem/the life situation/the existential problems; • The relationship between the specialist and the counselor is for facilitate counseling; • Action is to find meaning in life or respond to a dilemma, using philosophy by specific thinking tools; • Process has a short time for solving/clarifying, without a dependence on the specialist; • The process can be done without procedures, choosing the working methods and strategy; • The client's participation is voluntary in the counseling process; • Philosophical counseling has different forms: individual, group, organizational, institutional and community; • The counselor does not solve problems, but can clarify situations or dilemmas of the person; • The counseling process does not have well-defined objectives, develop a vision of life; • The specialist shows professionalism by not being involved in the solution; • Helps the client to find a personal vision of the world; • The specialist has a neutral position towards the problem/dilemma—he is only a facilitator of the counseling process; • Other specialists/family members of the counseled person may also participate; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupation is not officially recognized; • It is not a paid service, but it can be rewarded with donations; • The goal is the spiritual development of the person; • The action results in a change in the attitude and behavior of the counselee person; • Approach to help the client make personal changes in the spiritual, even religious; • The relationship between the specialist and the counselor is one of support and help; • Process of awareness of the role of spirituality, change of attitude or behavior of the person, with effects in his spiritual evolution; • Counseling can become repetitive/can sometimes create a certain dependence on the counselor; • A work procedure follows, offering support, encouragement and support to the person; • The client come based on a recommendation/can decide for himself on his participation; • It has various forms: individual/group spiritual, pastoral and monastic; • The counselor is concerned with the spiritual development of the counselee person; • Follows the transformation of the person and his spiritual evolution; • The counselor can generate some spiritual benefits to the counselee person; • Concern for the person to clarify his spiritual problems; • The specialist is involved in the spiritual counseling of the person, with the option to influence his personal development; • No other specialists are involved, and family members can participate in group counseling;

Table 2. Cont.

Philosophical Counseling vs. Spiritual Counseling	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual evaluations are avoided, having a concern for stimulating the person's life; • It has no therapeutic skills, but can generate therapeutic effects; • Does not solve problems, but focuses on the person's life and existential problems; • To avoid the use if any medication/therapy; • Use elements of the critical thinking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyzes spiritual aspects of the person and can be overcome through forgiveness and conversion; • Generate therapeutic effects on the person by solving existential dilemmas; • Focusing on the spiritual or theological/religious issues; • Apply the specific elements to psychotherapy; • Uses domain-specific tools.

* Source: author's own processing.

The forms of practice have been developed differently, from their application to people and groups of people, specific to both practices, to specializations such as philosophical consulting applied to entities and organizations within a community. The benefits of counseling practices are different and derive from the specifics of each application, but also in accordance with the needs of the counseled person. The application of practices over time is different, in the sense that the spiritual counselor can have a repetitive character, which can even generate dependencies on the counselor, while philosophical practices are points on a problem, dilemma or life situation in which the specialist intervenes for clarification, developing new skills for the subject, supporting him in building his own vision of life, but without generating an addiction to counseling.

Philosophical practice completely avoids any therapeutic approach, declining competence if necessary, while spiritual counseling may have some therapeutic effects on the person. The detailing of the main characteristics presented in the tables reflects only the similarities and differences identified by the comparative analysis of the two counseling practices, also highlighting their evolution and originality, which will lead them to a process of adaptation to the specific field from they come from.

4. Discussions and Future Directions

We thus analyzed two counseling practices which can be successfully learned and applied for the benefit of a community, starting from their characteristic elements that were analyzed comparatively, resulting in the identification of common points that justify their adaptation within communities.

The analysis presented highlighted some differences of approach derived from different origins, we refer to the spiritual/pastoral counseling that are derived from theology/religion and the philosophical counseling, as a practice specific to philosophy. Spiritual practices were initiated in the form of pastoral or spiritual practices, applied by the staff of the cults, after which there were qualified specialists in spiritual/pastoral counseling who currently work around a church or a cult.

Philosophical practices were applied at the beginning only by philosophers interested in putting philosophy into practice, and the distinct debut took place with the appearance of the first cabinets of philosophical practice, which generated the contemporary current called philosophical counseling, being a specialization of the occupation of philosopher which shows tendencies towards definition and discontinuous recognition, as a service intended for the person, organizations or community.

Starting from the areas of application in which the two forms of practice can manifest, but also from the tools and working methods characteristic of each, we consider necessary the option of extending them to other recipients, as one of the practices has already done through consulting offered to organizations. We observe that both practices are interested in promoting other forms of practice within entities or communities, by organizing group events, such as themed excursions, starting from the pilgrimage model, and in which the group facilitator can use specific applications, such as retreat in nature combined with contemplative, meditative or spiritual exercises, which can be included in the program of

the event. The presented analysis shows that there is a common interest of both practices, to support the counseled persons but also the group of which they can be part, which encourages us to support their expansion and for the benefit of the community by appealing to the influences of each practice, already manifested for penetration to other areas within a community. In this common approach, they can complement each other, where one of them has not yet arrived, such as the organizational field or the field of social assistance, approached either by philosophical practice in the form of philosophical consultancy for leaders, or by both within the institutions of the second domain.

The benefits of these practices are diversified, depending on the recipient of the counseling process, with effect on the person, group, organization or community in which it is applied. In the case of the person, both practices are concerned with clarifying life situations, including those of an existential nature or relating to the person's relationship with himself or the divinity, and which have different approaches depending on the tools and concepts with which the practitioner operates. The practitioners' approaches can follow the theory of 4 C, (Hațegan 2018a) to clarify life situations, applying the consolation for a past experience, by reconciling a conflict or by counseling applied to a life situation or dilemma, aiming to create the own vision about the life, in accordance with the aspirations and searches of the counselee person. Within groups or organizations, goals can become common to the people participating in the counseling process, and the practitioner uses specific methods and tools to find an answer to the dilemma or counseled situation, or through identification of common goals, which will benefit the entire group or the organization. Within the applications that are intended for the community, the benefits have a more general character, according to the approached topic, which becomes the object of specialized counseling, with beneficial effects on the whole community.

For the spiritual practitioner with a permanent presence in the community, and who benefits from the support of the church or cult of which he is a part, all of these are advantages in his favor to be assimilated to the community, along with other significant figures concerned with the well-being of the community. Although for the philosophical counselor the mentioned support is missing, he adapted by diversifying his offer, from individuals to organizations and other community structures, which opened new opportunities for practice, by involving philosophy and counseling as special forms of support for communities.

A recent study (Hațegan 2021a) was conducted on the adaptations between the two fields, namely philosophy and theology, which interfered with the field of ecology and environmental protection, generating hybrid concepts, such as ecophilosophy and ecotheology. The eco trend can also be transposed into their practice, manifesting itself in the form of counseling practices developed by each field, which can be transposed within communities, being suggestively called *Ecophilosophy for community* (EP4com) or *Eco-counseling for community* (EC4com) (Hațegan 2021a, 2021b). The manifestation of these new forms of counseling practice can be done through philosophical consulting services offered to organizations and communities alike, concerned with solving current issues, where organizations show a major interest in adapting for effective decisions, to respond to the current trend of social responsibility within a community.

We believe that the counseling practices that we propose to be implemented within a community can be implemented at the beginning, through specialized offices or counters set up within the communities that bring the specialists closer to each member or entity in a community. Another direction of action that we support is the establishment and implementation of training programs for staff involved in achieving these objectives, which can be attended by practitioners interested in specialization in the field of counseling for communities, but also people with decision or action, being interested in the implementation of this type of services within the community. The need to enter in community with counseling practices is highlighted once again, and the implementation of the programs we referred, also will ensure the continuous training of practitioners already active in the field.

5. Conclusions

Through this comparative research approach, we highlighted once again the important role of practices in humanistic fields, considered of origin, referring explicitly to specific practices, respectively to philosophical counseling and spiritual or pastoral counseling. We propose and support any idea that can bring philosophy and religion closer, through their specific practices, to human communities, which include both individuals (those for whom current counseling practices are intended) and groups, organizations or other community entities, interested in benefit from new counseling specialists, who use their practice methods and working tools specific to each field presented.

The counseling proposed as a community practice is the way in which the analyzed practices can come together in achieving a common goal, that of serving the whole of humanity, each through specific means and forms of manifestation derived from the humanistic fields.

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