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THE MEDICALIZATION OF THE SOCIAL LIFE

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Abstract: The medicalization of society practically represents the effect of the society of risk, of the fact that the society is more easily aware of the various risks that individuals feel threatened about. A pandemic causes the whole society to be restricted, social activity to be shrunk. This is possible in the context of a medicalized society, which brings with it a lifestyle based on a sometimes exaggerated care for the health condition, healthy lifestyles, bio lifestyles and so on, which are imposing precisely on our fear of losing our comfort and health, in the context in which we are more aware of the risk to which we are exposed by various elements of daily life. Many of these efforts prove to be superficial, and to be aware of the ways in which these daily risks to health actually impact our life, can be achieved through ethical counseling and philosophical counseling. This changes the approach to philosophy and creates a relative incompatibility of fundamental themes of contemporary philosophy with the everyday intellectual concerns of the potential readers of philosophy.

Keywords: ethical counseling, philosophical counseling, medicalization of social life, pandemic, social distancing, healthy lifestyle, society of risk, contemporary philosophy, traditional philosophy.

MEDICALIZAREA VIEȚII SOCIALE

Rezumat: Medicalizarea vieții sociale reprezintă, practic, efectul societății de risc, a faptului că societatea este mai conștientă de diferitele riscuri de care indivizii se simt amenințați. O pandemie face ca întreaga viață socială să fie restricționată, iar activitatea socială să fie minimizată. Acest lucru este posibil în contextul unei societăți medicalizate, care aduce cu sine un stil de viață bazat pe o grijă uneori exagerată pentru starea de sănătate, stiluri de viață sănătoase, stiluri de viață bio etc., care ne

induc tocmai teama noastră de a ne pierde confortul și sănătatea, în contextul în care suntem mai conștienți de riscurile la care suntem expuși în viața de zi cu zi. Multe dintre aceste eforturi se dovedesc a fi superficiale, iar o conștientizare a modului în care aceste riscuri constante pentru sănătate impactează asupra vieții noastre poate fi realizată prin consiliere etică și consiliere filosofică. Acest lucru schimbă abordarea filozofiei și creează o relativă incompatibilitate a temelor fundamentale ale filozofiei contemporane cu preocupările intelectuale cotidiene ale potențialilor cititori ai filozofiei.

Cuvinte-cheie: consiliere etică, consiliere filosofică, medicalizarea vieții sociale, pandemie, distanțare socială, stil de viață sănătos, societate de risc, filosofie contemporană, filosofie tradițională.

1. Introduction

The medicalization of the society practically represents the effect of the "society of risk"¹, of the fact that the society is more easily aware of the various risks that individuals feel threatened about. Sometimes the idea of "medicalizing the human condition" is reached, which is nothing more than a treatable disorder². Here, in these days, a pandemic causes the whole society to be restricted, social activity to be shrunk, and to talk about social distancing³. O.M.S. proposes the replacement of the term "social distancing" by "physical distancing", understanding the need for accentuated social communication. However, the accelerated virtualization of social communication has the effect of real social distancing that is simultaneous with the physical one necessary to maintain quarantine and fight Covid-19 infection. This is possible in the context in which we are talking about a medicalized society, in which the effort for public health prevails over that for economic development, social development and so on. Without criticizing this effort, we believe that in the end the medicalization of social life brings with it a lifestyle based on a sometimes exaggerated care for the health condition, an increased consumption of pharmacological products or, on the contrary, natural products that are supposed to have an almost miraculous effect in maintaining health. We are talking about healthy lifestyles, bio lifestyles and so on, which are imposing precisely on our fear of losing our comfort and health, in the context in which we are more aware of the risk to which we are exposed by various elements of daily life. Many of these efforts prove to be superficial, generating the illusion of a healthy life⁴ and then, such an additional effort, to be aware of the risks, to be aware of the ways in which these daily risks to health actually impact our life, can be achieved through ethical counseling⁵ and philosophical counseling.

Answering to concerns about the crisis of philosophy, manifested as poor public adherence to traditional fields of philosophy, some philosophers such as Lou Marinoff (2019) explain it by ossifying

traditional academic discourse, the elitist approach to philosophy and the relative incompatibility of fundamental themes of contemporary philosophy with the everyday intellectual concerns of the potential readers of philosophy.

2. Philosophical practice – a solution to the crisis of academic philosophy

In response to these potential shortcomings of academic philosophy, a new method of philosophizing has been developed, being called "philosophical practice"⁶, which aims to return to the love of wisdom and return philosophy to the agora of the ivory tower where its academic approach seems to have exiled it. The anti-academic and anti-epistemic character of philosophical practice⁷ is crowned by accusations brought to traditional academic philosophy by thinkers such as Achenbach (1984) and Hadot (1995), by a diversion of the meaning of philosophy to a discourse confined to classical themes of philosophy, often sterile and inappropriate for the current concerns of the society. These philosophers are in favor of returning philosophy to its mission of guiding individual efforts, of seeking a good and thoroughly examined life.

Philosophical practice (philosophical counseling) has in turn a kaleidoscopic character, we can speak of a relative lack of unity, philosophical counseling being a *therapeutic of the spirit* that uses the resources of practical wisdom for an alternative approach to the human condition to the specific one offered by the medicalization of social life. We agree with the opinion of Lou Marinoff (2019), who considers that the practical philosophy and the practice of philosophical counseling represent an exit from the medicalization of the society.

In the book "Plato Not Prozac: Applying Philosophy to Everyday Problems" (2019) - Prozac being a current medicine in the treatment of many mental illnesses - Lou Marinoff considers medicalization as a departure from the nature of society. He states that most depressions and anxieties - except for the deep ones, which are based on a strong

chemical imbalance - could be treated rather by philosophical practice, by reflection, by conscious life, than by psychotropic drugs or medicines that accentuate the alleviation of the individual to others and emphasize social distancing. The idea is to give up on a society dependent on the doctor's advice, not to give up on him, not to give up treating us when a disease affects us. The idea is also to give up those pseudo-scientific, pseudo-medical advices that abound in today's society and that are, in fact, products of the marketing of the pharma industry, of a marketing that is based on fear, fear of uncertainty, fear of a decrease in health, but without considering a concrete medical problem. We emphasize here that the refusal to accept any pharmaceutical product and the results of aggressive marketing of the pharma industry should not be confused with the refusal of any medication and with the acceptance of the conspiracy theories that place the pharma industry at the origin of any significant epidemic, including the current pandemic.

Such efforts are necessary because sooner or later we must face our own person, our own existential anguish, otherwise we will always be dissatisfied with our own existence, dissatisfied with our own achievements, as long as paradoxical happiness⁸ is an external one and rather supported by medical effort than by the return to one's own discursive effort, to one's own argumentative effort, to one's own conscience, and to bring into play a permanent dialogue with oneself and a dialogue with the other. The medicalization of social life, as I understand it, is an overuse of tools originally from the medical sphere, but little or unscientifically adapted to everyday life, which marks our daily lives.

3. Healthy lifestyles – an eco-ethical perspective

One example of the tendencies described above may be yoga practices. The practice of yoga has been, historically speaking, an ascetic practice, as is European asceticism, in fact the asceticism specific to any religion, a practice dedicated exclusively to self-knowledge. For the purpose of self-knowledge, most ascetics

belonging to most spiritual traditions have added as the main purpose of spiritual search and meditative practices, prayer or contemplation, the creation of a close relationship with the Divinity and knowing it. The practice of yoga, diverted from the purpose of self-knowledge and union with the Divinity - the term yoga comes from the Sanskrit root of *jug*, which can also be translated as union, connection⁹ - becomes a gymnastics that rather aims to provide a mental comfort that you have made efforts - limited to a few hours a week - to ensure your health.

During the communist period I had access to a book called "Yoga as a source of health", written by Nicolae Constantin Tufoi (2010), and which at that time presented yoga from the perspective of asanas - practicing physical postures - *pranayama* - breathing techniques - all aimed at achieving much better health. Nicolae Constantin Tufoi (2010) is a character who used the practice of yoga to heal from very serious diseases that put not only his health, but also his life in danger, and which at one point made him immobilized, having a paralysis. Through the effort of performing asanas and *pranayama*, along with techniques of concentration and meditation, he achieved complete healing of the body and full recovery of mobility. The practice carried out by Tufoi (2010) and as it was described by him, represented a real asceticism, which included an ample personal effort, directed in order to recover his health. Yoga nowadays becomes a gymnastics spiced with the inevitable naturisms, which very often do not include really natural products. Yoga is becoming a fashion and it is fashionable to see people in various yoga positions.

On the other hand, separating the practice of yoga from the meaning it has always had, that of self-knowledge (of course, self-knowledge in the religious, spiritual sense) makes us talk about a pseudoyoga, a pseudonaturism and a bio-industry based only on so-called oriental influences, which sounds Indian and certainly sounds exotic.

Also due to the medicalization of social life we are talking about the so-called organic food. I am not against the consumption of naturally produced food, produced by Romanian or foreign farmers. I believe that processed food or industrial food production, especially in the case of meat (pork, beef, poultry) can mean a deterioration in the

quality of food when processed artificially. I agree that genetically modified organisms can be a threat to health and that the body is subjected to additional stress due to lack of food or air quality, and that we suffer from a deterioration in quality of life in general due to daily stress. The excess of *organic* as a result of the medicalization of social life translates into paying 5 times more for organic products, which were far from produced without chemicals, under natural conditions.

One question that can be asked from an eco-ethical perspective is: what real change in lifestyle have we achieved by spontaneously purchasing organic products at a high price, without replacing the stressful and polluted living environment in most ways? A real action in this direction would first require awareness of the ecological situation and, at the level of society, taking measures to reduce pollution in general, which are to be applied at several levels - from that of the community, to that of the nation and of humanity. Instead of such public measures and policies, which reflect an ethic of relations with nature, so-called individual measures are taken to adopt a "naturist" or "bio" lifestyle, which ultimately lead to the creation of an industry that produces so-called natural, organic food, which came to replace industrially produced food, which in turn replaced, when agriculture and food production was industrialized, the natural products grown on individual farms.

Basically, we are currently talking about a *fitness* industry, renamed by some yoga, an organic industry that produces pseudo-natural artifacts in most cases, all these industries doing nothing but speculate on the fear of illness. This fear is a social construct that we internalize when we accept that our lives depend on environmental conditions, but that these conditions are entirely within our reach to be changed, in any direction, including by returning to a nature that is partially depreciated by human activity.

4. The medicalized society and the adaptation of philosophy

We have become accustomed to a certain lifestyle and a certain level of quality of life, which includes an increased degree of comfort and a minimization of any discomfort. This lifestyle increases the fear of illness, disease, because we are less accustomed to suffering than previous generations for example. If we refer to the Middle Ages - and I am not a follower of the return to the Middle Ages, on the contrary, I am a follower of the modernization of society - we find that, for example, men of that time were accustomed to the idea that there would be battles and participate to them, and that they will most likely be wounded and even die. Basically, they were hard on the idea that they live near death and that death is inevitable, that it can happen at any time, either in a battle you went to tomorrow, or because of an epidemic whose origin or treatment is unknown to you, that you could always risk your life or be hurt, and these conditions were present in their lives all the time.

At present, even if we suffer from a shutdown¹⁰ of the whole society, due to the risks of coronavirus infection, in the past, pandemics were much more frequent, but there was no possibility of self-isolation or shutting down societies, because these — epidemics — usually accompanied wars, and battles had to be fought. Also, public health knowledge was almost non-existent, even though quarantine was invented in the Middle Ages to reduce the risk of infection.

Unlike people of that time, we - and I am among the first - run to medicine for every pain, which obviously shows us that we live in a medicalized society and that we have adopted this lifestyle by accepting the dependence on a doctor, but also on the pharma industry. Of course, we are very grateful to the doctors and all the medical staff who are in first line during this period, in the fight against the pandemic. The measures that society takes, health policies aimed at self-isolation and limiting non-essential social activities are an obvious effect of medicalizing social life, as decisions are aimed at reducing medical risks, even with the risk of disastrous social effects in the post-pandemic times.

Lou Marinoff (2003) considers that dependence on public health and the medical society should not be treated with resignation. The philosopher believes that in terms of mental and social life, we should limit ourselves, although not completely, from the medical approach that views the individual as a patient, and not as a person who is in the midst of many social interactions. At least in the case of anxieties, of depressions that come from the existential positioning of our being, we should talk about self-understanding, about self-knowledge, rather than about suppressing anxiety through medication. When we talk about limiting the medicalization of social life, we are not talking in any case about contempt for medical practice, for scientific practice in the medical field and about *evidence based medicine*, including in psychiatry, but to reduce excess therapy, excess consultation based on the medical model and the understanding of any social and communicational phenomenon as a pathology. A medical model of social life starts from Freud (2010), being a psychiatric model, which came to consider that each person eventually suffers from a certain mental illness (a neurosis). In this context, there is a joke that says that a distinguished psychiatrist, when asked by a reporter: "How many lunatics do you have in the hospital?", answered: "None. We have mentally ill people in the hospital, the lunatics are outside."

A distinction must be made between real mental illness and existential anxiety. Freud's (2010) insane idea of everyday life includes various disorders, from psychosis to neurosis, including everyday neurotic manifestations, concluding that in fact we are all neurotic. If Freud (2010) preferred a therapeutic line based on psychoanalysis as a form of psychotherapy, which includes the analysis of dreams, various oneiric creations, creative acts of that person, interactions between pseudotherapists and patients, life story, under the influence of medicalization and pharmacology, it ended up that any aspect related to a so-called mental imbalance or even to a state of maladaptation or social vulnerability to be treated with medication. Drug suppression of distressing states, with neurotic potential, leads to the loss of fundamental properties of human consciousness related to self-reflection, the capacity for self-knowledge, including the inherent loss of an essential component of quality of life, related to a

„philosophical” lifestyle, based on self-examination, on reflection on ourselves. Whether such a lifestyle based on self-knowledge and self-examination is important or not - each person is called to answer for himself.

5. Philosophical counseling – an alternative to medicalization

Practitioners of philosophical counseling, without diminishing the real importance of medication, where appropriate, including in some mental illness, emphasize psychotherapeutic treatment where possible, and in addition, formulate a solution specific to philosophy, a practice derived from philosophy, called philosophical counseling. When the anxieties experienced by the individual do not have a biological support based on chemical imbalances in the body, but a psychic or emotional support, or rather mental, when we talk about existential dilemmas and the inability of the human being to deal with them, a solution can be philosophical counseling.

Of course, there are also a number of forms of psychotherapy, especially humanistic, such as: rational-emotional therapy, behavioral therapy, non-directive therapy¹¹, which can participate in the therapy of healthy person who is in a development crisis. Non-directive psychotherapy¹² follows the idea of self-development of the person through counseling. Along with the non-directive method, in current humanistic-inspired psychological counseling, techniques from transactional analysis¹³ and neurolinguistic programming are used¹⁴.

All these practices can lead to a therapy of a healthy person who has a series of anxieties, generated by problems, stress, emotional conflicts. Unlike the psychotherapeutic approach, philosophical counseling comes and adds to these therapeutic tools, abandoning the paradigm of deficiency¹⁵, specific to the medical model, which it replaces with that of existential dilemmas, in which the individual is the subject of choices between competing ethical values. This philosophical practice aims at positioning the client in the situation of reflecting on himself, of examining his own life¹⁶. The transformation

of the client from a presumed patient into a seeker of practical wisdom is achieved by relating to beliefs, to the way of life, to his own understanding of the world and life, to his own assumed sense of existence, to experiencing the anxieties and dilemmas that these states cause them.

Philosophical counseling emphasizes the idea of Socratic dialogue¹⁷, of maieutics, of reflection on the state of the person starting from one's own philosophical consciousness, and a personal question about the assumed meaning of one's own existence. This philosophical approach is especially useful in certain situations, in which we face a crisis of growth, as is the case when the individual needs to relate to transcendence, but also to himself, to something higher that makes him aware that he is part of nature, but also of a universe larger than we understand at present, under the influence of materialism. This approach refers to a resigned universe, to which is added a spiritualist or religious content, which is sometimes seen as oppressive, limiting, sometimes limited by the anguish of death - said Heidegger, limited by time, limited by space¹⁸.

The idea of philosophical counseling proposes a way to be different from ourselves, to relate interrogatively to the meanings we give to life, to discover our own assumptions, our own presumed things that underlie decisions, practical philosophy using, along with Socratic and Mayan dialogue, the practice of critical thinking.

I argued in this paper that one of the specifics of (post) modernity is that we are dependent on medicalization, the medical world, and that although we have passed the Middle Ages in terms of the ability to prolong our lives, we have lost a way to relate to the finiteness of existence, the heroic one. If chivalrous heroism once represented, for some, a value - glorified in songs, ballads, in the heroic novels of the round table - this value seems to have returned to the present day. This need for heroism could be reinterrogated and reinterpreted in the form of contemporary heroes, which allows us to justify our claim to be one with the archetypes. The archetype of the spiritual hero (Jung, 2004) re-enters our lives in the form of the Hollywood hero, a fearless freedom fighter, often endowed with fantastic powers. Our need to participate in the archetype is satisfied by constant viewings of high-

budget productions and tailor-made advertising. Sports competitions, economic competition - are just as many forms of living the archetype of the hero sublimated within the limits of political correctness.

The current exceptional situation, with the spread of the epidemic globally, brings back to the present the model of the rescue hero, which we admire in the case of doctors and medical staff in the first line in the fight against this Covid-19 virus. Being in the first line in the fight against the virus, where the possibility of infection is much higher, is an example of heroism that we, those who are in self-isolation, admire and greet. We can also give as an example of heroism the case of a 72-year-old Italian priest who asked to be disconnected from the artificial respirator, knowing that he would die as a result of this action, in order to save the life of a young man who had later arrived in the intensive care unit, and for whom no ventilation devices were available¹⁹. These examples of heroism are comparable to those described in the chivalrous novels of the round table, but also of other legendary knights with the image of whom I grew up.

The current generations in Romania, including my generation and those after me, have not had until now the experience of a war or religious or political persecution of considerable size, which effectively threatens life, as was the case of the generations of our parents or grandparents who experienced communist persecution or the events of the Revolution. Suddenly we live in a society where the values of everyday heroism become important and then we have to reposition ourselves and rethink our myths, the stories that motivate us, that justify us and argue our existence.

The practice of philosophical counseling in such situations must be of a narrative nature, to see what stories we tell ourselves to justify our existence, and how in these stories we incorporate fundamental myths, myths that generate behaviors, that generate our way of thinking. We aggregate the individual narratives into constitutive meta-narratives of the society that is based on values of an ethical nature.²⁰ We are talking about a series of constitutive values, those that make necessary the emergence of institutions, social practices and even a model of society. Here, all of a sudden, we have heroism again as a constitutive value at the level of society, because we need heroism, we

need to reawaken in ourselves the capacity to give, to communicate, the capacity to empathize with others.

6. Conclusions

Suddenly, humanity is confronted with the remembrance of courage as the constitutive ethical value of modern society, which became known to us in otherness through chivalric myths, through Hollywood myths. This value suddenly becomes constitutive for the pandemic and / or post-pandemic society. Such stories about heroes next to us operationalize constitutive values, and beyond these we have operational values - for example, how to put this courage into practice? In the first medical line there should be courage doubled by wisdom, prudence, public decision makers should not send doctors in the first line without protective masks, without gowns, without special equipment, to almost certain infection.

Having courage as a constitutive value of an emergency medical practice, and prudence as its operational value, philosophical counseling and ethical counseling should emphasize these values and identify moments of success in the subject's previous experience, in which it experienced courage and prudence as constitutive values of social or professional practices. These values are specific to medical practice - we call it because it is in the minds of most of us during this period - but we also talk about these values in other daily practices, social work, public administration, etc.

The interference between bioethics and philosophical counseling is found in the idea of ethical counseling, which includes, in addition to the actual ethical values, a number of other spiritual values. These values can be pursued from the perspective of the philosopher who understands the relationship with the Divinity as a possible relationship with otherness, within the limits of our possibility of awareness of our own finitude, but also of our own position in the world.

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Notes

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⁷ Vasile Hategan, "Involving Philosophical Practice in Solving Life Situations. The Action of 4C Theory" in *Postmodern Openings*, 9, 3(2019): 20-35. DOI: 10.18662/po/34.

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