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A New Method in Philosophical Counseling (IPAA)

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Abstract: Starting from the four principles of Pólya's problem-solving method, by analogy, in this paper we propose a new method of philosophical counseling. Thus, the objectives of this study are as follows: the review of several methods of philosophical counseling; justifying the need for a new method, which we called the IPAA method; developing the four principles – the principle of identification (I), the principle of planification (P), the principle of application (A) and the principle of assumption (A). In order to achieve these, we took into account the fact that the nature of the philosophical problems faced by the clients of the philosophical counselors, whether they are existential, moral or metaphysical, can be solved on their own. Therefore, we argued that if in the first instance, clients really need the input of the philosophical counselors, as long as the latter uses the IPAA method – a problem-solving method – they can offer clients the opportunity to self-counsel. The novelty of the IPAA method consists in the fact that it offers the client, assisted and guided at the beginning by the counselor, the possibility to carry out the act of counseling outside the office, being empowered to apply the four methodical principles mentioned above. The present study is relevant in that the new IPAA method, a method focused on solving everyday problems, is a useful method for both philosophical counselors, as its application in the office helps them to train the clients in researching, understanding and assuming their own lives, as well as for the clients, because if they are assisted in the first instance by the counselor's expertise, they can independently clarify and solve their daily difficulties.

Keywords: *philosophical counseling, counseling method, applied philosophy, practical philosophy, philosophy as a way of living.*

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1. Introduction

Philosophical counseling aroused the interest of philosophers in the late twentieth century, as it brought to mind, among other things, the idea that philosophy, through its practical dimension, can be a path to a better life. Moreover, some problems of daily life can be solved in a philosophical way. Therefore, philosophical counseling has been received as an alternative to other types of counseling (psychological, pastoral, spiritual, etc.). It is important to note that philosophical counseling has several approaches, methods, and techniques that can be helpful in the counseling process, depending on the problem the client is facing. And the multitude of approaches, methods and techniques are immediately due to the transdisciplinary nature of this field – either ideas from different subfields of philosophy are borrowed, or methods from psychological counseling are borrowed, or are general methods of problem solving, which are adapted to the specifics of philosophical counseling, as we will show in this paper.

Therefore, we aim to offer a new method of philosophical counseling, useful in solving the daily problems that clients of philosophical counselors face, starting from a general method of solving problems (of any kind). Thus, the hypotheses of the present approach are: 1) the idea of solving a problem immediately leads to the need of having a specific method of solving it and since this has been generalized by some thinkers, i.e. general methodological principles of problem solving have been offered, we can immediately adapt these principles in philosophical practice; and 2) although there are already some methods specific to philosophical counseling, those who have written about them have agreed that each philosophical counselor is able and can propose his or her own method.

Based on these hypotheses, we argue that the specifics of the method in philosophical counseling can be deduced from the generality of some problem-solving principles (of any kind), so starting from some principles, we can obtain a new method in philosophical counseling, which can be used by the practicing philosopher to address, understand and propose solutions to specific problems appeared in the daily life of the clients. The proposed thesis will materialize in the development of a new method of philosophical counseling, which means that our objectives are: 1) to justify the need for a specific method of philosophical counseling; 2) the review of certain existing methods in philosophical counseling, in order to illustrate the novelty of the method proposed by us; 3) to develop the steps related to the new method and 4) to provide a relevant example by which we will show how this method can be applied in some actual situations.

For a clear explanation of this approach, we will first list some methods used in philosophical counseling. Moreover, we will hermeneutically analyze these methods in order to delimit the place that the new method proposed by us will occupy. Also, in order to constitute the new method of philosophical counseling, we will proceed in an analogous way, starting from a method of solving problems, which was theorized by the mathematician George Pólya, a few decades ago. Finally, we will dedicate another section to a few examples of actual problems that can be thought of, approached and solved according to the method proposed in this paper.

2. Literature review: methods in philosophical counseling

We will start from the hypothesis that solving a problem (of any kind) requires a specific method, i.e. a way to formulate a solution. Therefore, from the first attempts in the field of philosophical counseling, several methods have emerged, helpful to practicing philosophers to solve clients' problems. Because the field of philosophical counseling is rather characterized by transdisciplinarity, in the sense that it borrows, to some extent, approaches, methods and techniques from other types of counseling, it is known that theorists in this field have given the philosophical counselor the freedom to solve the clients' problem or problems through the best methods (at their own discretion) that could provide an optimal solution to them. It is also important to mention that we can distinguish between approaches, methods and techniques for solving problems. Therefore, we first focus on a few methods discussed by Raabe (1999), and then complete his list with some methods that have been designed in the last two decades. Moreover, we will discuss these methods from a hermeneutical and critical perspective, in order to be able to introduce, at the end of this section, the new method that is the subject of the present research.

Achenbach's method (*beyond-method method*). Gerd Achenbach is considered to be the founder of philosophical counseling since 1981, when he opened the first cabinet dedicated to this type of counseling (Achenbach, 1984). Thus, in the practice offered to clients, the method of counseling used by him was called by Shlomit Schuster (1993) *beyond-method* method, as the German philosopher considers that the counseling process involves a variety of methods in order to improve the life of clients (Achenbach, 1996). In other words, for Achenbach, solving problems related to philosophical counseling is not limited to the thinking of a single philosopher, but the counselor must consider everything that philosophy means in order to help the client (Schuster, 1996a). As such, this is the method proposed by Achenbach that opens the field of expertise in philosophical counseling (Schuster, 1995).

Moreover, in this method, Raabe (1999) finds that it would be necessary to apply four rules: 1) the philosophical counselor must adapt to the client's problems; 2) the philosophical counselor helps the client, first of all, to understand the cause(s) of the discomfort felt; 3) the counselor should not abandon the client until the client's problems are resolved; and 4) the philosophical counselor must help the client to broaden the horizon of his / her (the client's) life.

Philosophy as a Way of Life. Inspired by the work of Pierre Hadot (1999), as Raabe (1999) points out, some philosophers rethought the possibility of philosophy as a way of life - as philosophy was considered for the ancients. For example, Hadot (1999) observes that ancient philosophers used philosophy as a tool for finding the authenticity of life and, especially, for a correct view of the world, with the help of which they became free. Among the practicing philosophers who rethought these things and thus designed specific methods, we mention Jon Borowicz with the *Therien* method. Borowicz considers that philosophy should not only be considered a type of discourse, but also an art of living; as such, it can be useful in solving everyday problems. Raabe (1999) finds that, by his method, Borowicz advocates for a rational life, in which meditation is essential and consists in the dialogue of the individual with himself.

Psycho-philosophical method. This method brings together ideas from psychology, psychotherapy and philosophy (Cohen, 2004) which are useful to a philosophical counselor in practice. For example, among the practicing philosophers who use this method are James Elliot, Kathy Elliot, and Pierre Grimes. James Elliot and Kathy Elliot called their method "clinical philosophy" or "non-academic" philosophy. In short, this method consists in applying the philosophy to the daily problems of the clients, whether we are discussing ethical dilemmas or existential problems, for the acquisition of a good life and personal freedom. On the other hand, Grimes (1998) associates ideas from the psychotherapeutic sphere with philosophical ideas and calls his method "philosophical midwifery", following the model of the Socratic estate, which Plato (2012) talks about.

Calling on philosophers. Contrary to Achenbach's view, some practicing philosophers speak of the individual use of philosophers' thinking in philosophical practice. Steven Segal (1995) considers this method useful in philosophical practice – for example, interpreting Tolstoy's "A Confession" (1983) from the perspective of Heidegger's philosophy is an example of how this method works. By doing the same, the method can be applied to the problems of clients who seek for philosophical advice.

Two-stage decision-making method. This is a method proposed by Marinoff (1995) and aims to solve the problems of ethical counseling, which has prevailed in the field of expertise of practicing philosophers since the 1990s (Cozma, 2021). This method is done in two steps and aims to remove *decision paralysis*. The first step is for the counselor to help the client clarify the possible options, while also discussing the results that would be obtained in each case. The second step is to propose other possibilities to solve the client's problem(s).

Six-stage relationship method. It is a method proposed by Annette Prins-Bakker (1995) and obviously aims to solve philosophical problems that may arise in a couple. Thus, the six useful steps in addressing such issues are as follows: 1) Tell me…; 2) Who are you?; 3) What about your life?; 4) In which phase of your life are you now?; 5) Questioning your relationship; and 6) Should the marriage be continued?; and, as such, using this method, the philosophical counselor should try to open the possibility of a dialogue between the two partners about the important things.

Group method. This method is intended for group counseling; for example, when a philosophical counselor is asked to discuss with members of a corporation, organization, etc.. It consists of helping these members to conceptualize problems and, moreover, to improve their lives by listening to their colleagues. In other words, it is about broadening the worldview, as Ruschmann (1998) observes. Raabe (1999) states that through this, the clients come to examine the adequacy of their conception of the world, which can change their daily behavior (within the organization / corporation etc.).

Socratic dialogue. In addition to the clear reference to Plato's dialogues, this method is discussed and attributed to Leonard Nelson (1949), who also proposed some useful rules for philosophical practice, even though these rules came into this field of counseling much later. For example, the philosophical counselor who uses the Socratic dialogue proposed by Nelson asks a question to the participants and requires from them relevant answers with examples of situations in their lives when they have experienced such a thing. After listening to their answers, the counselor chooses a case of an exemplary event to discuss together (Raabe, 1999; Farnsworth, 2021). In other words, in such a case, the role of the philosophical counselor is to moderate a discussion on a topic established by him.

Logic-based methods. There are also methods based on logical or critical thinking, sometimes there is no clear distinction between these two types of thinking. The idea behind these methods is that the client's statements can be analyzed logically (Cohen, 1995). The role of the philosophical counselor who uses this method is to investigate together with the client the

possible logical errors inserted in the reasoning of the latter. Again, the idea is very simple, as long as the client makes logical mistakes when expressing his / her ideas, his / her system of assumptions, prejudices, beliefs suffers, as they are based on some invalid syllogisms. As such, the philosophical counselor must detect these syllogisms and reformulate them so that the client's philosophical system is logically correct (Cohen, 1995).

PEACE method. This method is one of the best known methods in the field of philosophical counseling. It was proposed by Lou Marinoff (2014) and is a progressive five-step method. Thus, its stages are: problem, emotion, analysis, contemplation and equilibrium. In short, if a counselor applies this method to solve the client's problem (s), then the objective is to achieve "equilibrium" with the meaning of well-being in life. Therefore, the problem that the client is facing must first be identified, then the emotions related to the problem are detected, followed by the stage in which these emotions are analyzed and reflected – the client is asked to philosophize with the counselor. Frunză (2018), a Romanian philosophical counselor, finds that this method is effective for many forms of philosophical practice, but also for personal counseling or philosophical therapy.

MEANS method. The MEANS method is another method proposed by Marinoff (2003). MEANS is an acronym and represents, in fact, the stages of the method. These are: Moments of truth, Expectations, Attachments, Negative emotions, and Sagacious choices (Marinoff, 2003, p. 320). The practicing philosopher believes that this method will help the client to inspect himself philosophically and, moreover, to clarify what we might call his or her own philosophy of life.

Amir method. Assuming that philosophical counseling aims to remove the client's confusion about some aspects of life (Iftode, 2010), Amir (2003) proposes a multi-steps method. The starting point or the first step is asking a question about the client's problem; thus, the counseling process begins. Alternative answers to this question are provided, and after highlighting them, the third step of the method starts, i.e. the critical evaluation of the answers. Based on this assessment, another question is asked and the process is resumed. It is important that this sequence of questions is correct in relation to the level of abstraction of the client (Amir, 2003).

Beyond these classic methods in philosophical counseling, we must mention that in the Romanian philosophical space, philosophical counseling has grown in the last two decades (Hagiu & Bortoş, 2022), which is why some practicing philosophers proposed, in turn, useful methods in the process of philosophical practice. Some of these – the best known are the ones we will present below.

Appreciative approach. Sandu (2012) offered a method of ethical counseling, but which can also be applied to some issues that are not necessarily related to ethics. The appreciative method proposed by the Romanian philosopher is based on the fact that the counseling process starts from some strengths and positive issues related to the client's problem and, further, through their analysis, the philosophical counselor proposes solutions (in the same appreciative key) with the client.

Philosophical meditation as a counseling method. Haţegan (2019) proposes (philosophical) meditation as a method in philosophical counseling. If this method is applied, the philosophical counselor must guide his client and actively participate in the counseling process, by answering the questions of the former. What is important to note about this method is its openness to other methods or techniques of counseling. In addition, it can be considered a hermeneutic method, because the counselor can reflect with the client on philosophical texts.

We note, therefore, at the end of this section that there are several methods of philosophical counseling, which have in common the fact that they can be easily adapted to particular cases of problems, according to the needs of the client. Moreover, different working techniques can be subordinated to these methods, such as problem orientation (Lahav, 1995), client orientation (Boele, 1995; Norman, 1995), result orientation (Schuster, 1996b), *Weltanschauung* holism (Lahav, 1995), dialogue (Tuedio, 1996), Achenbach technique (which is the same as the method he proposed).

3. A new method in philosophical counseling

We note, therefore, that the theorists of philosophical counseling do not limit their research to a single method (of philosophical counseling). Also, since philosophical counseling is still a field in searching for general principles, especially when it comes to counseling methods, we propose in this section of the paper a new (philosophical) counseling method, which is based on some ideas for solving problems (of any kind). In other words, we will take over and adapt the four problem-solving principles that George Pólya (1992) formulated. Moreover, as we will show below, the method proposed in this paper aims to re-formulate and apply Pólya's principles in the field of philosophical counseling, in order to solve the daily problems of clients who turn to a practicing philosopher. In order to justify the thesis of this paper, i.e. to design a new method of philosophical counseling, which differs from those listed in the previous section, we will discuss the principles mentioned by analogy with the specifics and needs of philosophical problems. We also noticed in the previous section that there are several approaches when it

comes to applying methods. It is clear that the method we will detail in this paper is a problem-oriented method and then, a client-oriented method.

Studying the methods in the previous section, we can notice that they do not offer the client the opportunity to be able to counsel himself or herself, i.e. he or she is constantly dependent on the philosophical counselor; the latter having rather the role of a guide. Can we identify a method that allows the client to self-advise? In other words, if we could find some methodical principles that would be within the reach of less trained clients in philosophy, we would give more people the chance to solve their existential problems in a fast and elegant way. Therefore, we do not rule out the role of the philosophical counselor in the clients' life, but try to suggest that unlike other types of counseling, philosophical counseling can offer the clients the opportunity (and also the freedom) of "learning" to solve problems on their own. Thus delimiting the workspace for the present study, we consider it necessary to introduce such a method of philosophical counseling. Therefore, through the proposed method, we try to extend the act of counseling beyond the office, the client to be empowered, independent and to be able to self-counsel, under the guidance of the philosophical counselor.

The principles we will develop in this paper are general and can be easily adapted to solve every day or existential problems. In this method, the role of the counselor will be to initiate and assist the clients in applying these principles to certain problems they (the clients) are facing. Therefore, the benefits of this method of counseling are for philosophical counselors as well as for clients; for philosophical counselors, by limiting the number of meetings they can initiate and therefore help as many clients as possible; for clients – they will be able to reflect on their own lives whenever these lives are in difficulty. The method also has the advantage of giving the counselor the opportunity to counsel individually as well as at the group level.

Thus, the four principles (Pólya, 1992), adapted to the present study, are:

1) The principle of identification: understanding the problem;

2) The principle of planning: designing a solution plan;

3) The principle of application: achieving what is proposed in the problem solving plan;

4) The principle of assumption: reflection on the advantages and disadvantages of assuming a possible solution (the overview of the problem and the solution or solutions and choosing the appropriate solution).

To these, in philosophical counseling, we may add the following additions to the first principle and to the fourth principle:

1a) Identifying or detecting the problem.
4a) Assuming a moral / existential position.

Therefore, starting from the names of the four principles, we note that in the continuation of this study, when we refer to the method proposed here, we will use the IPAA method or simply IPAA. In the following, we will briefly discuss these methodological principles.

The first principle, the *principle of identification* (or the principle of understanding), requires a special attention and also raises a "classical" problem of philosophy, that of understanding and clarity (Bondor, 2012). As mentioned, in philosophical counseling this principle seeks to identify the problem. It is important the understanding, in the first instance, of the clients' world and life, and, at the limit, of their interpretation of their own life. Therefore, the first task of the philosophical counselor, who applies this method, is to understand his clients' lives and offer a new interpretation – which may differ from the clients' interpretation. Of course, in order to identify the problem that the clients are facing, the philosophical counselor can follow different paths, which he considers appropriate for the clients' problem (s) and lives.

The second principle, *the principle of planning*, consists in making a plan to solve the existing problem. However, we can immediately notice that this principle is closely linked to the principle of understanding. In other words, by this second principle we are considering the development of the first principle to the point where the philosophical counselor can really work out a plan to solve the clients' problem(s). Again, the counselor enjoys the freedom to propose the most appropriate plan to the clients, but we would like to make some mentions / suggestions. In developing this stage of our method, ideas related to identifying or solving problems may be useful to philosophical counselors. We can think, for example, of John Dewey's (1938) theory of inquiry, which can be easily applied in philosophical counseling; even if the context in which it occurs is a logical one (Munteanu, 2019). In addition, for Dewey, the inquiry is defined as follows: "Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole" (Dewey, 1938, pp. 104-105). Therefore, following this principle, the philosophical counselor not

only understands the clients' lives, but can certainly detect problematic situations and, in this way, can devise a plan for overcoming them.

Following the configuration of a problem (s)-solving plan that the clients are facing, the task of the philosophical counselor is to help the first ones to follow this plan. Therefore, the third principle of our method, the *principle of application,* considers the application of the solution plan. Before that, the questions about the plan should not be avoided, for example: *is this plan optimal for the problem in question?*; *how could it be improved?; is the client able to assume the proposed ones?* etc. Therefore, for the method proposed in this study to work, the philosophical counselor should also present to the clients some risks, such as non-fulfillment of those proposed in the problem-solving plan; which obviously involves not solving the problem.

Finally, let's suppose that the client fulfills the tasks of the plan to solve the problem. Is this the end of the counseling act? Of course not. Unlike science (from which we borrowed and adapted the method), in everyday human life, problems appear and disappear, are partially solved and can (re)appear in different forms. For these reasons, the fourth principle of the method mentioned in this study, the principle of *assumption*, is to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of adopting a possible solution – and this, as we added, has to do with the assumption of a morale or existential position towards the problem and solution; as the good life of the client does not exclude the possibility of moral progress (Iftode, 2021, p. 39). So, as we can see, the four principles (the principle of identification, the principle of planning, the principle of application, and the principle of assumption) of the method proposed in this paper are simple and can be applied by both philosophical counselors and clients after several counseling sessions, without the need for the counselor's input.

Things will become clearer in the next section.

4. How can this method be applied?

Let's give an example to show how this new method of philosophical counseling can be applied. Let's say that the door to a philosophical counselor's office is opened by a client who faces the following problem: the client still considers the geocentric theory to be "true". This scientific problem, as we know, has long been overcome, but the client in question considers that the meaning of his or her existence depends largely on the geocentric theory, and the visit to the philosophical counselor aims to clarify that he / she considers this theory as being true. How can the philosopher's counselor apply the method indicated in the previous section?

It is clear that the problem faced by the client is one that involves, in fact, other issues, such as the meaning of life, trust in the science of the last centuries, etc.. Let's dwell only on the initial problem and its addition, the problem of the meaning of life. For example, the first principle of our method, the principle of understanding, can be applied in this case as follows. The philosophical counselor knows very well that the client's initial problem is a metaphysical one. It is a matter of principles or, as the British philosopher Robin George Collingwood (1948) put it, a matter of presuppositions. According to the same author, the assumptions are of two kinds: relative and absolute. And metaphysics represents knowledge, that is, identification of absolute presuppositions. And the biggest problem that Collingwood pointed out is the transition from one system of absolute presuppositions to another. It is exactly the problem the client is facing. Therefore, in this way the problem faced by the client can be understood. Then, because this problem involves the question of the meaning of life, the philosophical counselor discusses with the client some perspectives on this problem, trying, for example, to show the client that it is not wrong to question his / her life from the perspective of questioning the meaning of life. On the contrary, we know that such a question is constantly on our minds, as long as it has been formulated (Afloroaei, 2021); which means that this "training" to look for answers to this question can finally lead the client to a closeness of a meaning of his / her own life. It is necessary to point it out the following: we have given here an example of how the ideas of philosophers may be used in the act of counseling, and we have mentioned Collingwood's name, but it is clear that the competence of the philosophical counselor and the good training in philosophical readings allow him to choose from the field of philosophy those authors who have discussed matters that would be useful to the client.

Therefore, as long as the problem is understood by the philosophical counselor and then explained to the client, one can move on to designing the solution plan. Our suggestions for designing this solution plan are very simple: it should aim to solving the problem, i.e. to let the counselor free to make the best decisions with his client, as long as finding the meaning of the client's life is in a two-way relationship with self-understanding, which means that the client must design his / her own way of responding or not to life (Afloroaei, 2018, p. 203). The third stage of the client's problem-solving plan, in our example, can consist, for example, of some reading suggestions from the philosophical counselor; in addition to the philosophical readings – as we have already mentioned – scientific books can also be recommended, which discuss geocentric theory, heliocentric theory, whether they are books that present the

history of these theories, or whether they are books that bring (scientific) arguments for the heliocentric theory.

The fourth principle of this method, the assumption of a moral or existential position regarding the new understanding of the life or the new self-understanding of the client, has the role of clarifying to him or her the fact that the problems faced may reappear and, therefore, it is good to be able to offer solutions on your own. We have already mentioned that the question of the meaning of life does not receive a definitive answer, and the answers received are depending on the stages of our lives. So, as long as the clients understand this, we can say that they have already taken an existential "position" on the problem.

That is why our method considers the possibility of self-counseling and the fact that in the counseling process, the practicing philosopher has the role of initiating the clients and giving them the possibility of autonomy of self-understanding.

5. Conclusions, implications and utility of the study

Starting from a short literature review dedicated to the existing methods in philosophical counseling, we demonstrated the need for a new method in philosophical counseling. Then, the thesis proposed in the *Introduction* section of this paper, through the four objectives that we set out to achieve, was justified.

On the other hand, a new method specific to philosophical counseling, i.e. the IPAA method proposed in this paper, is based on a general method of problem solving, proposed by George Pólya (1992). In short, we have adapted the principles of Pólya's method to solve problems that arise in people's daily lives. Whether they are ethical, existential or metaphysical by nature, these problems manifest themselves as a discomfort in the lives of those who need philosophical counseling.

The most important thing that the IPAA method considers is that it is a method focused on (solving) the problem(s) that the client of a philosophical counselor is facing. Moreover, the novelty of the IPAA method is that it assigns to the counselor the role of guiding his clients to obtain the possibility of self-counseling – and this is an advantage of philosophical counseling: the possibility that after establishing a specific method, the client is able to self-counsel, obviously, without the need for the input of a practicing philosopher. Therefore, through the four principles of the method proposed in this paper – hence the name IPAA – the principle of identification, the principle of planning, the principle of application and the principle of assumption, we offer to the philosophical counselor a good working

instrument. Also, the IPAA method can be used by clients of philosophical counselors, as we argued throughout the study, following the clarification of the four principles. Let us note once again that the specificity of everyday problems is not to admit of a definitive / eternal solution, so, if we solve such a problem – for example, the problem of the meaning of life – it doesn't mean that the problem cannot reappear in our lives.

We specify that, in case the clients fail to solve their own problems, through self-counseling, they can always return to the expertise of the philosophical counselor and he can guide them to find efficient ways suitable for the problems. Therefore, the novelties of the IPAA method can be found at this point. Finally, we emphasize that, from our point of view, the act of counseling is not limited to the counselor-client interaction only in the office and during counseling sessions, but also in the fact that through the IPAA method we try to train the clients, assisted by the philosophical counselor, to succeed in applying the principles in order to overcome alone the problems of their life.

We conclude, therefore, that the new method of philosophical counseling theorized in this study, the IPAA method, is a challenge to philosophical counselors, both theoretically and practically, through the novelty of providing clients with the tool by which they can philosophically research, understand and assume their own life, constantly aiming for a better life.

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