

Philosophical practice at the crossroads: the road to professionalism

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It is 40 years since the first philosophical practice was opened in Europe by the German philosopher Achenbach, which marked the opening of a new path, dedicated to those who today can practice philosophy for the benefit of people, other than philosophers, who were dedicated to the academic environment, through their writings or through the activity at the philosophical department.

If initially this initiative manifested itself mainly only among philosophers, interested in becoming practitioners, this trend diversified with the emergence of the specialization of philosophical advisor, which was possible with the advent of training programs in this new applied field of philosophy.

Thus, in various countries of the world, practitioners have formed associations to represent their interests, in their attempt to be recognized in a diverse and competitive labor market, dominated by established forms of counseling or therapies for person. They reacted to the philosophers' initiative to make their practices known, through various positions, or even by claiming the right to offer exclusively some services, by virtue of some regulatory norms they benefit from, depending on the legislation of the country in which they operate. . In some countries, after these first initiatives, practitioners have formed national associations, some with open characters at the international level, in the sense that they have also accepted practitioners working in other countries, an example being American Philosophical Practitioners Association – noted APPA.

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These associations were the ones that initiated training programs for the members, being the ones that concern the training of practitioners in philosophy, and that usually militate for attracting practitioners among philosophers or those who have previously studied a philosophy program. Opposition to this trend was also among philosophers, who criticized the approach of practitioners, by arguing that philosophy has a special destination, and its descent into the agora, in the form of philosophical practice services can be detrimental to its reputation. The fact that some practitioners have applied the model of organizing a counseling service, which also involves charging a fee for the provision of philosophical counseling, has attracted other criticism, with reference to the role of philosophy, attributed exclusively to academically oriented philosophers. With all these positions, coming from different directions, in all these years, in many countries of the world, more and more philosophers began to work, who became practitioners, but also specialists trained in philosophical counseling.

In Romania, the process was reversed, in the sense that the initiative came from the university, by setting up a master's degree training program, which was launched in Timisoara in 2015, and which has already completed a series of graduates, in specialization as a philosophical advisor. These graduates in order to practice are required to declare themselves in other forms of counseling, as the occupation of philosophical counselor is not yet defined and recognized as being distinct from the occupation of philosopher, which can be used only by those with a degree in philosophy, prior to follow the master program.

Preliminary data analysis on this program showed that about 80% of applicants come from different fields of license, other than philosophy, and that during two years of training they managed to develop new skills and assimilate knowledge to become specialists in philosophical counseling. Of course, each party encountered some difficulties in the training program, in the sense that of the 80% had difficulty in assimilating in a short time some essential philosophical concepts necessary for future practices, and among those who had these theoretical bases, through undergraduate studies in philosophy, they showed some difficulties in the counseling practice procedures, included in the master's program

Thus, the students participating in the master program managed to have an exchange of practices, in the sense that philosophical practitioners

had a baggage of basic elements and concepts, which were put together with other tools taken from philosophy, and successfully introduced in philosophical practice, by creating new working models, as presented by other practitioners, such as: Marinoff, Brenifier, Raabe.

Looking from the point of view of those interested in the specialization of philosophical counseling, they were concerned with the development of specific skills of counseling, as a service for the person or organization, chosen according to the recipient of the service. We consider that the association of practitioners within an association is the first step towards the recognition of the new occupation, which will militate for the recognition of a new profession, which can be regulated on the format of a liberal profession. In the previous study we outlined the path to follow for those interested in recognizing the new profession (Hătegan, 2018) starting from a model identified in research, that of the mediator profession, which was analyzed compared to the specialization of philosophical counseling, both having many similarities (Hătegan, 2019) which is why we concluded that mediation can be a useful model in the process of regulation for a new profession, the philosophical counseling. If we look in a special context, where the mediator facilitates the negotiation of a conflict between two people who appear in his office, then we can say that the philosophy practitioner can facilitate a mediation between the counselor and his problem, and that can be clarified, accepted or resolved, using the philosophical counseling.

Another research done in 2013 was published in the form of an interview book, in which several practitioners from various countries of the world were asked about how philosophical practice can be approached, with reference to the studies needed by those who will practice, and the result indicated a majority option for the practicing philosopher, compared to a minority of opinion (about 25%) who supported the emergence of a specialization distinct from that of philosopher, and which the philosophical counselor can enter (Knox, e.a. 2013).

But regardless of the currents of opinion expressed so far, the recognition of a specialization needs support in the form of a professionally recognized association at national or international level, to which is added a training program in the new occupation or specialization, which can train

the specialists well prepared for the practice of philosophical counseling, seen as a distinct occupation on the labor market.

We believe that it is necessary for each association to be able to issue a mission statement, in the sense of promoting the new occupation, the philosophical counseling, in order to recognize and implement specialization in the services market, as a different occupation from the practicing philosopher, and that can be regulated like any liberal profession. The associations we refer to are the organizations to which all practitioners can join, including practicing philosophers, and which will generate codes of ethics of the profession, which are acquired and recognized by all members, which will lead to increased confidence and prestige in the new occupation, as part of a professional organization, which oversees the practice of its members.

Recently, a sociological study was conducted in Romania based on the effects of the pandemic condition on the person, and which contained relevant questions regarding the perception of philosophical practices and the interest to call a specialist in philosophical counseling, and the results are encouraging, in the sense that there is already a perception of the new specialization that is trying to make its presence felt in the field of services in Romania. This approach is another important step in recognizing the new occupation, which will encourage the existing professional association to continue the procedures in this way.

Now, Romania has university who owns the master training program for new specialists, it is the West University of Timisoara, as well as the professional association that can take these steps (APCFE), which has already adopted a code of ethics of the profession, being opposable to all its members, presented online on the association's website (www.consiliereafilosofica.ro), in order to consolidate the image and trust in the new specialization promoted.

We believe that this type of social research can be applied in other national associations, in the sense of outlining the need for a joint mission statement, in order to have a global recognition of the current trend of promoting philosophical practices and philosophical counseling in as many countries.

Periodic meetings organized by philosophical practitioners and philosophical counseling specialists, under the auspices of ICPP or any other national organization, can also generate the establishment of joint

working groups, based on volunteering, to centralize results and draw conclusions or directions of the research, and that should be discussed at future practitioners' meetings. The study may also include the option of defining a code of ethics and good practices, which can be promoted uniformly by all national associations, and which facts can be an important factor in building the professional prestige of the counselor or philosophical practitioner in the world.

Through these actions it will be possible to identify several aspects that may be involved in the recognition and regulation process, in order to define a path to a desired profession, which will position it distinctly, and will avoid any interpretations that may arise from other areas with which it can be assimilated, and here we refer mainly to therapies dedicated to the person or to other personal development programs.

Another direction is the opportunity to outline a unitary code of ethics of the profession, and if this approach can be useful to practitioners, but also the need to identify specific ethical features specific to each field of application of philosophical counseling, with reference to individuals, groups, organizations or communities.

In Romania, we also studied the opportunity of recognizing the profession of philosophical advisor, following on the one hand what are the procedures to follow for regulating a liberal profession, meaning that we took as a model the profession of mediator (recognized since 2006) to outlines the path to follow in the process of recognizing and regulating the profession of philosophical advisor.

The mission statement can be an essential element in separating the new specialization, to position it distinctly in the current plan of services dedicated to the person or organizations, differentiating it from other therapies or applications specific to organizations and communities, which are already present in the labor market well-defined services.

It is necessary to analyze the cultural differences that can influence the practice of philosophy, given its conditions and evolutions in various countries of the world, which brings substantial improvements in future decisions facing future specialists and practitioners.

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