The Metaphorical Load of Philosophical Consultations in Psychotherapy

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Abstract: The paper propose the idea that philosophical practice has a metaphoric dimension which reveals the human subject's cognitive biases and psychotherapeutic necessities. To support this claim, the focal point of author MA thesis in Philosophical Counseling and Consultancy was to consider metaphor from various perspectives: ontological, esthetic, epistemological, existential, social constructivist, ethical and practical. Throughout this theoretical task, was explored applications of metaphor in working towards people's health and wellbeing across the lifespan using an integrated metaphor-based approach in consultations, including philosophical practices and transactional analysis. This article shows various definitions of metaphor, descriptions of how we know through metaphor and what psychotherapy has implied along its history as a practice.

Key-words: metaphor, embodied realism, play, psychotherapy, conceptualization, discourse, philosophical practices,

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Introduction

One of the etymological roots of metaphor from Ancient Greek is bher which meant to be pregnant or to carry a child in the womb. The other is pherein, a concept which was a more general term meaning 'to carry'. Adding the prefix meta- which is the English equivalent of the movement preposition 'across', results in the formation of the word metaphor (Harper, 2019) by which we synthesize the mental activity of carrying the meaning of a word or image from one domain to another. Metaphor can thus be seen as a process of giving birth to new meanings or as a process of looking at something through new conceptual lenses. The rhetorician Quintilian wrote that metaphora brevior est similitodo – that is: metaphor is a shorter form of expressing a certain similarity (Quintiliano, 2007). Metaphor was subsequently used and studied mostly in literature and arts as a means for aesthetic expression. As a figure of speech, metaphor uses certain images to refer to something else, by resemblance: flood in its literal sense brings to mind an area of land that has been filled with water by a river overflow. But being flooded with tears or even flooded with information imports knowledge of a natural phenomenon to express a subjective experience. The common associations of the literal term flood helps us consider ways in which a person could improve her state or change her perception in the midst of her emotional overflow: holding on to a belief, being reshaped by a life event, accepting a life raft or a helping hand and many others.

Knowing through metaphor

In 1942, philosopher Susanne Langer proposed the idea that lived experience could be enhanced or extended through the use of analogy in speech. She shows that all thinking has a metaphorical status, which makes metaphor a building block of human expression but as well as the building block of human experience, since not only do we continuously construct metaphors - they as well influence and shape how we experience being in the world. In the second chapter of Philosophy In A New Key she wrote that „Man, unlike all other animals, uses signs not only to indicate things, but also to represent them" (Langer, 1979). If man uses signs to orient himself

(i.e. this cloud indicates rain) his intelligence is no different than that of animals who also make use of signs in order to satisfy their biological needs for safety and nurture. This type of learning is conditional - our brains associate stimuli and thus we become able to make predictions about how things are going to happen or can happen if there are adequate circumstances for them to happen. Some of these conditions can be created intentionally by us humans since homo habilis. The second part of the quote above is more important to the thesis that metaphor plays a crucial role in psychotherapy (Ariel, 2018). The fact that human beings use signs to represent things (that is to bring them back into their mind in their absentia) endows human beings with the power to symbolize, that is to construct reality. The signs announce things, whereas symbols remind us of things. For the human infant, a certain smell announces him that it is his mother who is holding him and not another person. That smell signals her presence. When his mother is not there, everything soft and warm can represent his mother. To him his blanket is not merely a tool destined to protect him from the cold, but primarily a symbol of safety, something that reminds him of his mother, a fantasy by which he is protected from the panic of being alone. For this reason psychoanalysts call the blanket „transitional object" (Winnicott, 1953) - it helps the child transition from a state of clinger to a state of increased autonomy, by means of an object that is able to bring the idea of mother in his mind and self-soothe with it while the mother is not physically there. Everything that is meaningful to the individual can be understood contextually from two perspectives: synchronically (what does it mean in his current life situation) and diachronically (what does it mean in the context of the individual's personal history). Any stimulus that is significant to a person is likely to reveal something about the individual's psychological structure. Individuals' various forms of expression are performative manifestations that show what sense an individual made of what is happening here and now. His words and his behavior reveal how his mental representations are structured, how he has linked concepts, to what extent his impressions have been articulated into speech in the course of meaning-making, with effects on his behavior and on his perceptive capacity.

According to Langer most metaphors are non-linguistic. We find them in behavior, not yet in speech and sometimes even contrary to speech (Allen & Mendieta, 2019). Within the discourse, we can find metaphorical

load in the words people use to express their ideas, especially if they chose their words rather automatically and unconsciously. For these reasons the metaphors we live by are easily disregarded or can go by unnoticed, unless they are examined intentionally and explicitly, be it in extensive linguistic studies or simply in the course of consultation. Human beings draw images from their bodily experiences to express their emotional states, their aspirations, their assumptions, their assessments, their difficulties and their worldviews (Lahav, 2003).

The metaphorical mind

In 1980 George Lakoff and Steven Johnson developed an extensive Conceptual Metaphor Theory through the study of our cognitive unconscious as it is revealed in the use of our ordinary conceptual systems that convey not only our explicit but also our many implicit views. This theory views metaphors as being the very building blocks of human language, mind and behavior. In an illustrative example at the very beginning of Philosophy in the Flesh (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999). Lakoff and Johnson bring up the common expression struggling to control ourselves and they invite us to see that it implies a kind of split within the subject „into two distinct entities that can be at war locked in a struggle for control over our bodily behavior". Their research is filled with such examples from everyday expressions people use. They too observed that our spoken language was structured in accordance with our embodied experience of being in relation with the world. We categorize because as embodied beings we experience ourselves as limited bodies and consequently we look outside of ourselves from inside and we establish boundaries in our environment - we conceive the world as made up of bodies. The main contribution of these two authors to the understanding of the metaphorical nature of human thinking was named „embodied realism". When defining metaphor they too referred to it as "seeing something in terms of something else" -- but in particular they noticed a clear transfer of a set of structural characteristics from the concrete sensory-motor domain of the body to the abstract domain of ideas.

Considering that all language is basically metaphorical we can assume that human beings conceptualize their present experiences in terms of their past ones and ultimately in terms of their physical bodily

experience. An even more interesting implication for the practice of consultative services aiming at human health and development is that we may have to include the body (the nonverbal) into our work, on the premise that whatever is in the mind is previously experienced in the body. In this way we facilitate the conceptualization or abstract representation of what is generally experienced as mere impressions and emotional states: the not yet said (Bakhtin, 1984: Rober, 2005) and possibly „the not yet thought".

Unlike Jean Piaget who placed the ability for abstract thinking in the operational stages of the child's cognitive development thereby underestimating children's thinknig capacities (Babakr, Mohamedamin & Kakamad, 2019), Susanne Langer argues that we can make abstractions from a very early age, before we are even able to speak. By abstracting and constructing the "sameness" of his experiences, the human child will be inclined to then use that construction in order to „familiarize" increasingly more of his environment and his later experiences, as long as he can identify at least one or some similarities with his primary constructs. Everything that is new to him or unfamiliar will be connected to this initial core in order to understand the unknown. New experiences that do not seem to contain anything similar to what the child has already learned, will become useful raw data that the child will be able to combine in such ways as to recreate his familiarity or to express his familiarity. This capacity of the brain makes it not only a transmitter of information but also a creator and a transformer of information (Langer, 1979). Langer suggests that the fountain of all arts and culture, rituals, dreams and compulsions is in the capacities of the brain to abstract, transform, and combine experiences, symbolizing and giving meaning to everything it encounters.

We commonly expect that young children's worldviews contain less rigidity, less differentiation, and less clarity than adults' worldviews, which means that they are usually exposed to large chunks of information taken as a single "entity" which they cannot name, therefore they need metaphor to interact with that "entity". For example, the child is exposed to his parents' interaction during a fight. This complex moment which can be rather confusing and unclear to the child is like a single "entity". We may later see him draw a creature with crooked body parts, extra limbs, lots of black and lots of red, open mouth, etc. We cannot suppose that it represents something in particular but we can suppose it contains

undifferentiated material that the child is trying to make sense of, in an effort to cope with something terrible for which he does not have a name yet. Thanks to the immense potential of the child's imaginative play (Ariel, 2018) we can take his imaginative „battle with the monster" further as a metaphoric representation of family dynamics, considering that the child is researching existence in his in vivo family laboratory. We can use his „battle with the monster" in family psychotherapy to describe, discuss, and understand more about an abstract family issue, such as the concept of enmity in relationships, the concept of defense, that of being goal directed, and many other concepts relevant to that particular family system. The adults of the family can fruitfully enjoy a deep discussion that includes the children and their contributions, mending the communicative gap between generations while revealing the experiential differences between them. We will have the opportunity to question and transform any abstract concept during play. Metaphorical language is very rich in content and complexity.

The interaction of metaphorical minds

There are risks when we try to interpret what the drawing of the child represents: we are likely to be wrong – that is to project our own fantasies onto the expressions we see, as they are reminders in absentia of our own personal past experiences in the world. Thus human behavior – whether present in children's imaginative play or in adults interplay in power struggles and other 'dances' – requires deepening by questioning and by playing along, in hope to find repetitive patterns and name them as well as in order to distinguish what belongs to the psychotherapist and what belongs to each participant. Play then is a serious exploratory activity in a philosophical realm and not simply a „safe and orderly space where we can indulge in lifelike experiences without consequence" (Callois 1958). In the philosophical exploration facilitated by play we will see for example that to some, love is a path, to others love is a container; to others love is a collection of selected deeds, to others love is a type of fluid and so on (Kovecses, 2010). Similarly, we can look at conflict: to some, conflict is a pleasurable pool to swim in, to others it is a scary monster to run from. Metaphor can have a semantic, an expressive and a pragmatic function in human communication, which is why it will be very useful in the practice of transactional psychotherapies.

Then it makes sense that counselors and therapists try to be mindful of what their professional practice means to the clients. Our responses to each other are going to be contaminated by our subjective representations. Reasoning is difficult for both sides, because of the emotional charge of our beliefs, that makes some of them not easy to question and even more difficult to give up in the face of evidence. The responses of the counselor to the clients' difficulties add layers of meaning to our consultation experience. In psychotherapy professionals are expected to be aware of countertransference -- that is the contamination of the process by the therapist's own subjective issues and the consequent behavioral reactions. Awareness of countertransference starts with having an impression and distancing oneself from one's own impression in order to be able to understand it. Impressions are a kind of subjective experience that has not yet been articulated. Philosophical practice teaches us to conceptualize, that is to articulate impressions and then to check the validity of our conceptualization, as well as its implications, limits and consequences.

We receive signals all the time through our sense perception and we distinguish between the important and unimportant ones immediately according to two major criteria: intensity and relevance. If we cannot clearly and immediately associate a signal with a threat or with protection from threat, it is likely that we dismiss it before we even make a conscious idea about it. If the intensity is too small then it is likely that we dismiss the signal as unworthy of our attention and energy – our brain can handle it on a cognitively unconscious level that does not require our awareness. Psychotherapists as well as philosophers learn to take interest in contents that might not be interesting or important to them personally, but professionally, they explore the client's cognitive unconscious (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999) while at the same time strengthening and developing reasoning abilities through questioning (Brenifier, 2006). Philosophical practice provides us with such questioning tools that help construct reality in an organized manner: clarification questions make boundaries or links clearer, deepening questions connect ideas through causal and conceptual links, problematization questions reveal inconsistencies, discrepancies between evidence and what we think, overinterpretations, the impact of our affective states on the process of dealing with specific content, etc.

Although conventional metaphors that are passed to us through the acquisition of language and the processes of socialization and acculturation, the common sense is only apparently common to all of us. The order of incidental and repetitive events that we are exposed to since our early childhood accounts for our diversity of subjective constructs. In the subsequent encounters with other human beings who bring to the relationship their own subjectivity and diverse but coherent lived experience, the language of metaphor is going to be a very useful tool for describing, understanding and regulating interpersonal phenomena.

Exploring metaphor-based family dynamics

Families who come for systemic psychotherapy provide the therapist with insight into their culture as well as individual lived experiences, by both linguistic and non-linguistic metaphors. One client said that she is not interested in a mere band-aid for her problem. She wished to be healed once and for all. It is through this sentence that she reveals her worldview even before going any further anamnesis: she views her psychological suffering as a sign of a mental injury that is within her but not a part of her identity. Suggesting it is possibly caused by an intense stimulus, she establishes agency outside of herself. She also shows that she is aware of two approaches in the treatment of her injury, which she cannot name except metaphorically: one is about covering the wound, the other is about healing. Both actions are expected to be performed not by oneself but by a healer, someone outside of oneself. Apart from showing us the way she thinks about mental health, we can as well make presuppositions about her interpersonal relational expectations: that she be the passive recipient of wellness from a powerful other. Looking for presuppositions is a rather playful and creative endeavor, while also a way to produce a map of his absolutist ideas and his repetitive interacting patterns. Transactional therapy uses the term life-script (Widdowson, 2010) to refer to these patterns. It is an interesting metaphor drawing representations from cinema or theater to describe the tendency of people to play repetitive or familiarized scenarios with one another across their lifespan. Once the clients become aware of their life-scripts, they can start living a less automatic and a more conscious and responsible life.

When working with families, the presence of various members implies a number of parallel therapy processes happening at the same time. It is probably the main reason why family members so often do not understand each other even when they think they do. Cognitive scientists and dialogical psychotherapists agree that most of what is therapeutic in a family process is hidden from awareness. So it becomes crucial for mental health practitioners to view all ideas as hypotheses and to learn to make and to assess presuppositions, to question their own methodology and to constantly problematize their findings.

The metaphorical aspect of psychotherapy

In the third stage of my research, I wanted to take a few philosophical perspectives on the psychotherapy process in general, because the way it unfolds in the particular cases is to a large extent based on a complex set of theoretical models that informs us therapists how to make sense of what is going on in psychotherapy.

Since various schools of therapy have various sets of tenets and approaches, we need to investigate the grounds of most psychotherapies: main metaphors psychotherapists live by, as well as considering how these constructs probably impact the way we relate to our clients.

What constitutes optimal psychological functioning is culturally constructed and cultures have a way of regulating the lives of individuals through social rituals, so as to ensure that their most basic physical and relational needs are met at least to a minimum extent. Take for instance the habit of greeting or salutation. It is present in every culture and it satisfies a basic human hunger for the recognition and respect of one's existence. The way a culture defines functional individuals (Yeh, 2004) and functional societies shape the daily rituals of its people and its institutions as well as the ways in which dysfunction is viewed and corrected. Most spiritual practices in the history of various cultures led members to lose control on one side and gain mastery over their own impulses on the other side. These practices have a lot in common with contemporary psychotherapy practices.

For example, what was called empowerment and purification rituals two millennia ago could be the equivalent of what is nowadays called decontamination (Widdowson, 2010) in the process of

psychotherapy. Decontamination brings to mind a type of cleaning that refers to identifying and removing a person's biases, and unexamined beliefs from its reasoning activity. The main feature of an accepted religion in the Roman Empire was that it helped the individuals invoke and control spiritual entities for their own benefit and for the benefit of others as well. In analogy, Transactional Analysis would nowadays call these Integrated Parent Ego State or Integrated Child Ego State (Widdowson, 2010) and refers to being able to remember and use internalized representations of those we grew up with and to value our previous life experiences to our benefit instead of holding them to our detriment.

I explored such examples in a variety of cultures and concluded that contemporary psychotherapy has a much wider and older history than we are taught. It has not all started with Freud. The metaphorical reading of the history of psychotherapy allows the practitioner access to a wealth of symbolic forms to work with in the process of pursuing mental health. Etymologically, we find the concept of therapeuein in Ancient Greece to mean treating medically or healing, whereas psukhe – the ancestor of psyche – meant breath, life, and soul. "Healing one's breath" is a powerful metaphor about restoring one's problematic relationship with others, as well as one's capacity to balance between what one takes in and what one pushes out of one's identity, in order to maintain oneself as an individual in relation with the surrounding world.

I continued with exploring the etymological roots of words like health or healing, that used to mean undamaged or complete in the old Germanic vocabulary. They imply that in some situations, the wholeness of a person is threatened or lost, that we can somehow get wounded in the mind as in the body, that the limits of our self-constructed individual identities can somehow be trespassed, that we may lose some of the capacities of the self or experience a loss of integrity or a rupture in the membranes that represent our limits and areas of contact with the "outside of ourselves". Thus the restoration of health can be seen as a restoration of our wholeness. According to Hippocrates, in order to restore health, one must properly identify and alter the conditions that account for the damage and to improve the relationship between the patient and his environment (Majumdar, 1998). Concepts like wholeness and completeness in the context of this research raise the question of what are the essential characteristics that a human being needs to integrate in order

to be considered "whole" or "complete". When we explore the historical debates about what a complete human being is, we will find that human beings are mostly described in terms of their competences and abilities to separate, to sense, create, to move and to transact – all these are body-based notions. The Masterson approach to personality structures, for instance, is based on the conventional definition of a "complete" person as the one who has realized her potential twelve capacities of the self (Masterson, Lieberman, 2004). This view about what a complete human being is can be questioned, deconstructed, refuted and replaced, as it too is constructed.

In his 1946 article (Eliasberg, 1946) about the philosophy of psychotherapy, W. Eliasberg defined psychotherapy as simply "dealing with the sufferer". To suffer is to bear (Lat. ferre) the pain of being under (Lat. sub) the pressure of a more intense stimulus than one's sensory threshold admits as safe, considering the capacity of the living organism to maintain its integrity. "Dealing with the sufferer" is a loose enough description to encompass various types of goals: increasing one's capacity to tolerate pain, finding relief from the pain by tending to its causes or to the needs it points to or by decreasing the body's sensory capacity (that is the capacity to experience pain), finding and constructing meaning for pain, developing one's capacity to grow and develop through pain, abilities to express it and use it, finding consolation and so on. In any case, the stress that internal and external forces put on the human being's individual integrity has a certain intensity, while the individual has a certain resistance and liability to them, and there is always a cost of self-protection and self-repair efforts for the human being's existence. When the self-repair costs are too big, the role of the therapist becomes that of a helper or a catalyst of these natural self-repair processes, especially where culture and other societal systems fail to fulfill such a role.

None of these two most common views on psychotherapy presupposes that the patient is fine as he is. Pathology in its etymological sense is the logic of pathos -- there is no negative or positive connotation to such a concept, but merely a suggestive implication that subjective feelings tend to interfere with reasoning in specific ways and that we can formulate comprehensible reasons why the human subject operates in the ways he or she does. We may find problems with the subject's reasons, but that is the case for any philosophical idea as well. Philosophical practice

involves exploring implications and problems of ideas without ever letting itself be subdued by an ultimate truth. Whatever we might call "health" remains a questionable temporary truth that a scientific community abides until another more useful construct or model arises from scientific research. I proposed the idea that psychotherapy is a playful form of collaborative philosophical practice, through which the human subject is invited to deconstruct the myths he lives by (Barthes, 1957) and to freely construct and deconstruct new ones. This aspect of it makes psychotherapy an essentially a philosophical endeavor with a creative literary aspect, that accounts for its cathartic impact. The chiseling of his reasoning capacities is a useful effect and also a subsequent basis for his improved adaptive strategies.

Conclusions

Throughout my research, the most important highlight was the human being's tendency to symbolize its lived experience. Unexpressed and unnamed feelings are like a primordial hot soup in which we dwell and which tends to dictate our moves as well as to bias our thinking. Along with the capacity to self-differentiate from others, the capacity to experience ourselves as individuals and to distinguish ourselves from objects and from other people, we begin by naming the seen and then progressively the unseen, gaining increasingly more cognitive control and freedom to act. Metaphors can give our subjective feelings and inner conflicts various forms of expression and so they allow us to engage others in our personal dramas, enact and reenact them, using clusters of signs in our circumstances that we connect into a symbolic landscape which awakes our intense feelings that are tied to our most significant preoccupations. The phenomenon has been named by Augustus Napier "role induction" and described as "maneuvering others into conforming our negative expectations". This process of casting others into our familiar roles represents every time an opportunity for a change of experience of our familiar life scripts or cognitive schemas, seeing that others bear the capacity to enact the attributed role in a slightly or completely different way than they were expected to. But for the opportunity to be effectively used, we need to: (1) identify it, for instance by noticing when conflicts become unproductive, repetitive, confirmatory and with a negative payoff

at the end for all parts involved; and (2) make conscious choices instead of acting out as usually — which can at first interfere with our sense of safety as well as with our sense of identity. For this reason, playing with metaphor is an excellent preparatory ground for change, as metaphoric play tends to increase one's sense of competence and one's habituation with being various characters (that is to not be too attached to a single, narrow and too explicit identity).

In the interaction of parents and children, as well as in adult couples, a mix of worldviews and their corresponding proximity and control goals interfere with each other leading to a patterned family system of meaning making. To explore this complex issue and its phenomena, we need to wonder: what is happening between people, what information do they transact, how are those transactions meaningful to them in different and various ways, how alone is each of them and how much of their reality can be shared with others, how aware can they be of hurting, of healing and of nurturing one another, what does hurting and healing mean? The thesis was redirected to raise these questions, which put the psychologist in the self-reflective position of thinking ethically about what he or she is doing professionally. I defend the idea that ultimately all consultative services are play, whose content is metaphoric and bears an important philosophical load. As groundbase, I mentioned and used the work of American Teacher and Art Philosopher Susanne Langer on the influences of art on the human mind and the work of American cognitive linguist and philosopher George Lakkoff who is renown for his thesis that the lives of all human beings are significantly influenced by the conceptual metaphors they use to explain experienced and abstract phenomena.

By understanding metaphors and gaining the freedom to work with them in playful and meaningful ways, we will increase our capacity to draw value from our encounters. Our consultations will be co-creative reciprocal guidance, as well as an enjoyable process, a transformative process and a necessary preparation to face our own finitude. Methodologically, throughout the paper I brought examples from my practice as a systemic and transactional psychoanalyst with individuals, couples and families, in order to exemplify the concepts and principles I described.

Metaphor was shown to be the essential ingredient in the therapeutic consultation and it was shown to facilitate meaningful

collaborative philosophical inquiry within families and in self-consultation. I conclude it is suitable to provide psychotherapists with opportunities to exercise critical thinking and philosophers with opportunities to experiment with bodywork and various non-discursive ways to foster reasoning practices. I view philosophical practice as a type of psychotherapy and I view psychotherapy as a playful type of learning to lead a philosophical way of life.

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