

# Proposal for an existential therapy based on the awareness of death and self-creation

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**Abstract:** This essay explores the foundations of an existential therapy grounded in the awareness of death and the process of self-creation. Also, this work explores how a person's encounter with mortality can act as a catalyst for creating a meaningful existence, drawing on the philosophical traditions of existentialism. The essay explores philosophical viewpoints from thinkers like Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Sartre and Camus, suggesting that accepting freedom, negotiating with the absurd, and deliberately forming one's narrative identity are the paths to self-creation and authenticity. In order to help people incorporate death awareness into their lives in a coherent way, like we will see in Heidegger, and without giving up on this personal project, it also looks at the therapeutic potential of irony and philosophical counseling. In spite of life's inherent uncertainties, the work seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how existential therapy can enable people to face death, create a coherent sense of self, and live ethically.

**Key-words:** existentialism; therapy; philosophy; death; awareness; self-creation; freedom; authenticity; irony; meaning; identity; ethics;

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We all die. This seems to be a certainty. And until the moment when a pill or a new ultra-advanced technology suspends our mortality, man will be looking, however blindly, towards his own death as something inevitable. The dilemma lies in how we look towards this certainty and what we do with our human relationship with mortality. Nowadays, not only are we thrown into an incomprehensible system that, by many means, truncates our possibility of understanding essential existential questions, but we are driven by external forces to hide the idea of death under endless layers of empty moments, grueling vacations, working hours, bureaucracy, media and many other things that go far beyond the quick benefits they provide. The first "path" for man in search of self-mastery, especially when he is facing death, is, of course, the one that most of the world thinks of when they hear of "Philosophy". On this path, the individual, supported by the advisor, can go, through much intellectual work and reflection, towards the bright center of a philosophy that speaks from the distant but still living past. It is what we could call the becoming of man in "The Sage". In philosophy, "The Sage" is an eminent and ancient figure that symbolizes an idealized combination of virtue, wisdom, and enlightenment. This figure can be found in a number of philosophical systems, each of which offers a different perspective on what it means to be truly wise. Through a comprehensive analysis of various philosophical traditions, including Confucianism, Taoism, Epicureanism, and Stoicism, a more profound understanding of this ageless figure and its importance in the quest for a purposeful life can be discovered. We can say that, in this case, a wise man, the true Sage, knows, first of all, who he is and what he wants, but also that life is complex, sometimes hostile, and death something more than a biological event, of which we must must feel great fear. So we can clearly see that in this essay we wish to create a form of existential therapy.

The philosophical traditions of existentialism serve as the foundation for existential therapy, which views the human condition through the prisms of authenticity, freedom, meaning, and mortality. With this therapeutic approach, accepting death and life's inevitable finiteness becomes a building block for creating a meaningful existence rather than a cause for hopelessness. The essay incorporates several of the main concepts from the original work (my dissertation on the idea of Death, 2024), including the significance of authenticity and the need for self-creation in navigating the complexities of human existence. As we will

examine, the goal of the existential therapy approach is to assist people in integrating their experiences into a cohesive self-narrative that facilitates a life of integrity and purpose rather than to eradicate worry or anxiety. Philosophical counseling, which draws from the rich traditions of existential and philosophical thought to provide clients with tools for self-discovery and meaning-making, is incorporated into existential therapy as well. Philosophical counseling encourages people to have a conversation with themselves, assisted by the counselor, in order to discover more profound truths about their lives and their place in the world. It does not offer predetermined solutions or moral guidelines. So this essay comes to support the field of philosophical counseling, not to break away from it.

This path sounds extremely promising, and one might even wonder why we bother building counseling prototypes when we have the answer right in front of our eyes! Well, our answer to this supposed answer is simple: to become such an individual, even a demigod, is an extremely difficult task, impossible for most of the world. If it were simple to become wise, in the style of Stoicism or Confucianism, then probably the majority of the population would want to practice such a life to escape fears and anxieties; supposing that, understanding what a wise and virtuous life affords, men will no longer set a high value on material things and other such delusions. Moreover, besides the fact that the mission of a philosophical adviser is not only to refer the counselee to some extremely important book titles and a few thinkers, thus escaping from the more complicated matters, we do not consider such a path to be easy to follow in today's socio-cultural climate. In late capitalism and its volatile cultural forms, Antiquity and all its wisdom is rather a museum exhibit, beautiful and important, but only if it is kept behind bulletproof glass. Only a handful of specialists are allowed to immerse themselves in the knowledge of times long gone, the rest of the world has to limit themselves to gladiator movies and documentaries on Netflix (at best). In such a climate, wanting to live on the path of becoming The Sage is madness, both from the perspective of those around us, and from the fact that we are not armed with the necessary weapons. Also, such a journey to wisdom, otherwise internal not external, requires some qualities that people have long lost: self-reflection (who wants to be alone with himself when there is a new detective series on TV ?it's scary to be alone, that's why we have therapists!), long meditation and deep thinking (we don't mean Yoga practiced in the living

room, between two Google Meet meetings), reading and immersing oneself in the wisdom of others (things that consume too much time!). This path remains open, it is a possibility, but it is reserved, at least for the moment, for the few. That is why the philosophical advisor cannot rely on such a strategy, it is too limiting and speaks to too few possible clients. As a doctor we would not recommend a vaccine that only works in 1% of the population. Not because the vaccine is dangerous, but because it is pointless in its elitism.

Pascal and, somewhat later, Kierkegaard, were right. Most likely, man, a paradoxical being, is in the middle between two great possibilities, which reside in him simultaneously. The finite and the infinite. Matter and "soul". But here we are betting on a different kind of spiritual propensities, which go towards an "infinity", not necessarily those that would translate into faith. We can mention here, for example, the symbolic needs of man that often hide behind many other human needs: recognition and respect, belonging and social connection, and perhaps of most interest to us, personal identity and meaning. Obviously, material possessions, quick and easy entertainments, time occupied with irrelevant matters and obsession with the present (empty present, by the way) are not enough to satisfy the human mind. The number of psychotherapists with a long list of clients clearly proves this point. And in order to be able to build meanings related to this life and about the inevitable death, to accept them at their true value, but also to do, as much as possible, what we want from them, man needs a stable foundation, although, paradoxically, ever changing: himself. Hence the weight of the problem we are struggling with in this essay. In addition to the fact that the definition of a Self has been contested for years and discussions never seem to reach a compromise, it is equally difficult to choose to build yourself, believing that this is actually possible. Personal identity, a personal Self capable, at the same time, of allowing us to build meanings on it, playing the role of the foundation of a possible building, but also of being mobile enough to undergo changes without breaking, is shown in our theory as the vital point. Moreover, not every self is desirable, for man needs his personal and unique self.

Thus, another central element takes shape: authenticity. Of course, in this context, authenticity is described as limited by numerous issues, from social and cultural parameters to childhood or age trauma; that is if authenticity, therefore freedom, is really possible.

Although whether it is possible or not, whether it is an illusion or a truth, does not matter much for our theory. We are betting more on the existential struggle of self-building than on the answer to the question raised earlier. The answer is not, for us, the most important thing. It may not even exist or be negative. This does not matter because the journey is more valuable than the destination. Then, how can we, once we have managed to pencil in at least a sketch of a possible Self, to keep ourselves in this state, considering that we are, after all, immersed in the same all-encompassing system described above. A system that does not necessarily want to keep us in the authenticity of our own being, but always pulls us towards conformity and thoughtlessness.

Existential philosophy has made death a central theme, from the contemplations of Epicurus and Socrates to the works of contemporary philosophers like Heidegger, Kierkegaard, and Camus. Human consciousness is shaped by the universal recognition of mortality, as stated in the text provided. This realization is used in existential therapy to promote a deeper engagement with life rather than to arouse crippling fear. It forces people to be genuine and introspective, making them confront the question of what it means to have a meaningful life in the face of finite resources. Thus, death becomes more than just the end of life; rather, it serves as a catalyst for transformation and self-creation. Existential therapy assists clients in regaining their freedom by facing the constraints placed on them by death. This allows them to actively participate in self-creation, make meaningful decisions, and find meaning even in the most absurd of circumstances. The battle with the Absurd will be quite important for us. A major theme in existential philosophy is the absurdity of life, which reflects the notion that people live in a world that is unreasonable by nature. Philosophers who have tackled the absurd, including Friedrich Nietzsche, Søren Kierkegaard, and Albert Camus, examine the tension that exists between the universe's meaninglessness and our need for order, meaning, and purpose. In the light of this absurdity, we easily realize how difficult it is to become someone!

Adorno (*The Jargon of Authenticity*, 1964) will say that in order to be authentic, as people caught in the capitalist or idealistic vice, we must have critical awareness, a resistance to commodification and social engagement. We add to these things, which we respect and take as such, the concept of irony. The ironist is the one, as we shall see, against common

views on irony, often misunderstood, who can look at himself from the perspective of the 3rd person and reshape himself, also criticizing the outside, knowing what and how to choose for himself. The mission of the philosophical counselor is difficult. Most people cannot or do not want to think too deeply and too much about matters of this kind, and even find it a serious waste of time. Then people, often also those who consider themselves very independent, look for an authority to tell them how to think and, implicitly, how and what to be. This is where the danger lies. We, as philosophical counselors, must not shape clients, even with the desire to help them, in the image that seems to us to be the most correct. We must be the help, the launching pad, through which the client can start on their own path of self-possession and the creation of his own authenticity. If customers then decide to take the path to becoming a Sage as well, so much the better. Even better if they are not discouraged by our warning against such an attempt. However, we must realize that most clients, not even ourselves, will never be the Ancient Sage, and that's okay. There are other tools that, used coherently, will build us up and help us in our search for meaning. But to have meanings, at least ones that turn out to be satisfying, we need a Self to assume them. Hence the first stage of our plan.

A complicated and multifaceted idea, the self or personal identity has been thoroughly studied in a number of disciplines, including psychology, philosophy, sociology, and neuroscience. In general, personal identity refers to our sense of self as unique individuals, which includes our memories, experiences, beliefs, traits that set us apart from others, and thoughts. There are different perspectives that try to solve the problem of personal identity, what exactly it is, or at least where it comes from, believing that if we master the understanding of its origin, we will be able to learn what it is. If it is really something like this, because there are also theories that oppose this idea (Hume, Metzinger, etc.). One of the most popular perspectives, which we will also rely on, is the psychological one. Although the name seems to betray the simplicity of the perspective, it is much more complicated than it seems. However, an important element of this perspective is the psychological continuity of the individual (in fact, it creates the idea of the individual), which does not leave me from 3 years old and me now (as well as all the other "me" located between the 2 moments) to be considered 2 different persons; to this is added the presence of elementary psychic behaviors, such as the power of reasoning,

however primitive, or memory. Going even further, skipping numerical identity (or mathematical/logical, which reduces identity to a theorem like:  $A=A$ ), relying on psychological theories of identity, because this is where it draws its vital juices, we will declare narrative identity as being, in the process of creating a Self, an element of importance that is hard to underestimate. A person's internalized, dynamic story that unifies their past, present, and future and gives them a sense of purpose and coherence is known as their narrative identity. It is impacted by memory, culture, and social interactions and is essential to self-awareness, emotional control, and personal development. It can be helpful to comprehend and create narrative identity in a variety of contexts, such as education, therapy, or simply for personal growth. In our case, it is a constitutive tool of human consciousness, because the structure of narratives creates the Self (or the illusion of a self which, although an illusion as some voices may call it, it is extremely precious, both for survival and for living well ). Narrative identity is therefore the Self's story about itself.

Of course, we do not mean to say that the ability to create narratives is, in itself, the Self. But the ability (or the tool, which works through the thought-language relationship) to build a certain narrative is a vital structure of the self, of the identity, without which, we believe, the said identity cannot exist, in fact. The self is constructed in the midst of possible narratives, always in flux, for they are not perpetual for man, and it would be dangerous to be so, being in an unceasing relationship: for even a narrative needs a subject. The self is the "oasis of subjectivity" (Husserl), but for this oasis to be illuminated, seen by an inner eye, it needs to be surrounded by narratives that include it; we can even assume that Husserl's *epoch* is also, in fact, a narrative in the form of a pure inward journey. Moreover, we note that narratives may be, as they are generally understood, plans for the future or ideals, but they are not limited to these things, for if they did, they would not be so integrated into the very the essence of human identity. Even the film that is created when I drink the water from the glass lifted from the table is a narrative. Of course, this is not an impressed narrative, such as, for example, that I imagine myself in the future as a great surgeon who saves people, but this kind of narrative, in which I do the Act (raising the glass, seeing the glass and the table, drinking water), is vital for the proper functioning of man. The narratives merge into an immanent universe in which our selves arise and, though

ever-changing, remain in essence and, together with the immanent context in which they stand, give direction to human life; in such a context, even death can be successfully integrated. Although we do not have something absolute and immovable, we are left with a plane of total immanence in which some direction is possible without being totally lost in a meaningless desert. At this point, it can be pointed out, and quite rightly so, that in such a context, finding the truth, for the truth is what ordinary human reason leads to, is impossible. We answer, as we have done before, that in this plan truth does not matter so much as finding meaning. As Hannah Arendt puts it: "The need for reason is not inspired by the search for truth, but by the search for meaning. And truth and meaning are not the same thing." (Arendt, 2023) Socrates also, through his aporetic dialogues, shows us, with the help of Plato's writing skill, that, in fact, man has nothing to know, therefore he has no way to reach the truth, he can only ask and search. That is why Socrates claimed that he is not a teacher, because he has nothing to teach. But, his quest was unceasing, for that gives meaning to the human being. Also in Arendt we find a fascinating idea, which comes to help our arguments. Every living being wants to "show itself", that is, to show itself in the ways it thinks it is on the inside, but also in the ways it wants to be for its appearance in the world (which is not so far from the way -to-be-as-you-are). People appear on the stage of the world, like actors, but for the appearance to be successful, the inner stage is needed, of all the narratives of a person about himself and of himself in the world and with Others. Arendt tells us: "In other words, every thing that appears acquires, by virtue of the fact that it appears, a disguise that can - but does not necessarily - hide and disfigure it" (Arendt, 2023). The apparition is perceived by a multitude of other spectators, so other Selves, but first of all the Self must perceive itself.

The self-creation and Self philosophy of Kierkegaard provides a strong framework for comprehending the existential challenge of becoming one's true self. According to Kierkegaard, selfhood must be actively created via deliberate decisions, introspection, and, at the end of the day, faith. A number of obstacles must be overcome on the path of self-creation, such as hopelessness, anxiety, and the need to give in to societal pressure. But according to Kierkegaard, these challenges can be met head-on by people who are authentic and willing to take a leap of faith, which enables them to accept their freedom and accept responsibility for their



existence. Maybe for Kierkegaard this "Leap of faith" refers to a belief in Divinity and its plans, but we will use this term when we refer to the "madness" of a second that any person suffers when he chooses to be someone and to decide for himself or herself this and that. Being a person is, in fact, a leap into the unknown, unjustified, but what justifies everything.

Self-creation can be considered contingent, for how can we really know that they are making free decisions in the process? Nietzsche would say that this does not matter, what matters is the will to build yourself. For the same philosopher, who was the prophet of the cultural landscape of the 20th century, to be human, to be someone, i.e. a Self, one must constantly define oneself, so one must have this courage to do this (similar to that Sartrean courage), but also to always look for new ways to define themselves. For this reason, Nietzsche almost deifies the poet, for only the poet is that creative, crazy and strong enough to always define himself in new and spectacular ways, to go against the world that wants to define him with its limited and boring arsenal of words and labels. However, paraphrasing Wittgenstein, there is no poetry without cultural and social contexts, i.e. a certain stage-setting, no matter how great the poet is. So, we could say that there is no such thing as a purely Nietzschean life (Rorty, 1989). But even this is not important to the point we are pursuing here, for we and our future clients do not seek purity, the absolute, when they want meaning. Often the absolute inhibits meaning and destroys the person as such. We, using Nietzsche's poetic argument, only emphasize the important fact of finding the courage to build ourselves, to build stories about the Self. In this context, something that has never been hidden, we see that human life is always incomplete. But this is not tragic, on the contrary: it is heroic and creative. If the thread of the individual's destiny were already complete, unchanging, and exact like a mathematical formula, people would kill themselves out of sheer desperation or boredom. It is all the more difficult in this case to start on the road of self-building, but once we are convinced that this is the most coherent thing to do, throwing ourselves into the maelstrom of creation, we will see the hills of freedom, as far as freedom is possible for human beings. Even Foucault, although, for a large period of his career was completely consumed in his efforts of all-destructive philosophical archaeology, bringing to the surface the small details of philosophical perspectives to demonstrate their lack of

stability on their own account, obsessed with contexts and backgrounds, came to seek, towards the end of his days, the possibility of building a Self, even the formation of a Self which, although defined in many of its elements by external powers, could also bear a face of authenticity (the central element of his search takes shape in the concept of "epimeleia heautou" or "the care of the self").

The study of "epimeleia heautou" by Foucault has its roots in the self-examination and self-care rituals of the classical Greek and Roman societies. Foucault explores how these archaic customs attempted to cultivate the self in his lectures at the Collège de France and in his later volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, especially *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*. "Epimeleia heautou" refers to a variety of practices, including self-discipline, writing, meditation, and conversation, that are part of an ongoing and deliberate effort to take better care of oneself. These behaviors were thought to be necessary for leading an honorable and satisfying life, not just for personal gain. Numerous "techniques of the self" are employed by individuals to modify their own identities, according to Foucault. Through self-examination and ethical self-fashioning, these techniques help people mold their behavior and character. These practices, according to the ancient Greeks, were essential to the development of an authentic self since they helped people become self-aware and in harmony with their moral and ethical standards. So taking care of yourself, this self-hygiene, while it may not seem like a very creative process at first glance, is a vital process of creating identity and authenticity. According to Foucault, these methods are a way of defying social norms and outside forces. People can critically evaluate their own behaviors and beliefs by practicing self-discipline and self-reflection. This helps people develop a sense of authenticity that is based on personal conviction rather than social conformity. According to Foucault, the ethical endeavor of self-creation is inextricably linked to authenticity. In contrast to the static idea of the self as something given or fixed, Foucault views the self as an evolving, fluid being (also as we understand the Self here). Being authentic means consciously and actively forming one's identity in line with ethical standards and one's own values. This is very different from just taking on the identities and roles that society has prescribed. Adorno too, will agree here with Foucault and with us. According to Rorty also, being authentic is about creating our own selves rather than discovering a fundamental self

that is buried deep within us. This implies that it is up to us to define and redefine who we are by making our own decisions and narratives. Rorty places a strong emphasis on pragmatism, contending that authenticity must be beneficial and advance both society and our individual lives. Being authentic is a means to a more meaningful life and a constructive way to give back to our community, not an end in and of itself. The idea that the Self is a process of becoming rather than something static or predetermined is also central to Nietzsche's philosophy. Nietzsche disapproved of metaphysical ideas about the self as a constant being or a soul existing apart from experience. Rather, he thought that the Self was something that had to be made, molded by one's deeds, morals, and perspectives on life. According to Nietzsche, the journey towards becoming the real self is a never-ending process of self-overcoming—the never-ending effort to rise above one's confines and liberate oneself from the psychological, cultural, and societal forces that seek to limit personal identity. This, of course, does not justify ruining others in order to build our own identity. Of course, a question may be raised, once we have presented why it is vital to construct ourselves based on the human capacity for narrative identity which, rather than inhibiting numerical or logical identity, better sets it in a context; context in turn extremely important, because only within it, as in the middle of a fog, can meaning float. The question being: how? We respond with: imagination (creativity) and courage (almost insanity, saying "YES" to something that appears exactly after and with this affirmation), two defining human qualities; It is of course not understood that we skip over other vital elements in this process, such as fundamental psychological processes or the bio-chemistry of the brain, but always must be taken in consideration. Imagination, an element that became even mystical in historical periods of great scope, such as German idealism or romanticism, in which, rather than a characteristic of the human mind, imagination was seen as something divine, which sent beyond the human, towards the transcendent, an abyss where all things are born, is here of central importance and continues to impress any sincere researcher. But, going a little beyond its divine characteristics, which would occupy many other pages, we maintain that the imagination helps man more than we would think at first glance, and even differentiates us from any other known creature. Not only do we have intellect and reason, but we have creativity, which allows us to access the

Symbolic which, embraced with the human ability to think in the abstract, gives us access to a completely different dimension of stories (narratives), i.e. fascinating ways of building the Self. We are no longer a Self of the kind that an amoeba or even a chimpanzee might have „although we can only guess at the existence of a self in these creatures, for we have no access to what it actually means to be anything other than human” (Nagel, 1974), that is, only a group of cells limited by a membrane that allows itself to be carried only by the needs of matter and reacts automatically to the external environment (in the case of the amoeba) or an animal that, although extremely intelligent, has not passed the level of symbols and the abstract. The chimpanzee may, for example, use a utensil to make his life easier, but he will never question what this means metaphysically, ontologically, or axiologically. Man does it. Is every man capable of imagination? The naysayers would say no, but their perspective comes from prejudice, not reality. We can assume that it is possible to be born a human being totally devoid of imagination, but this is certainly not the norm. If there are hierarchical levels of imagination, we will not discuss here. Freud comes to our aid here, because he "democratized" the imagination. Perhaps it is true that the conscious man is dull because his conscious inner life lacks creativity. But the unconscious is creativity by definition, and every person has an unconscious dimension. So, through the connection of the human mind with its unconscious, we can declare, in a psychoanalytical perspective, that every man is imaginative, indeed, through the short forays into the abysses of the unconscious, he is so in an absolute way.

We were just talking about the fact that all narratives in which our Self is the main hero create a context, this context can bear different names and faces, such as "our life", "my destiny" (although a little inappropriately said) or the plan of the immanence that gives meaning to the person concerned. Of course, this context is not only internal, because it is in relation to the external context of reality, reality as such or social reality. Philosophy plays an extremely important role in enabling us to see this context, to be able to calculate where we are, where we want to go, what to choose for ourselves, etc. As a great physicist said, and here we paraphrase: philosophy helps us see the whole forest, otherwise hidden by the trees. Narratives create a context that can potentially be filled with meaning, in which even the death of the person can find a place, and the practice of philosophy helps us see this context and not fall into limiting and one-sided

ways. Epictetus, for example, inspired by Socrates, but forgetting that the latter did not teach anything because he had nothing to teach, considered that philosophy is the science or art of "knowing how to live". Although it is impossible nowadays for the philosophical counselor to become the example for his counselees, as an ancient master would for his disciples, he can still give advice so that his clients understand philosophy as something practical, not just something hidden behind the closed doors of universities. The anxiety-creating aura, often armed with impossible terminology and an obsession with encyclopedic thinking, that hovers around philosophy must be purified if the counselor is to truly reach, through philosophical methods, the inner ear of his client. When it comes to philosophy as a method to live well and peacefully, to teach man who and what he is, aware of his human dignity and the possibility of freedom, ancient philosophy is full of examples.

Also, returning here to one of the points mentioned by Adorno when he talked about the possibility of authenticity, more precisely critical thinking, we mention that philosophy deals with exactly this. Using his methods refined over the millennia, such as logic, philosophical thinking, having access to a much wider context, - and this is vitally important, because it widens the range of possibilities for the client - he guides us, in building our self and the relationship we have with the world, with life and death, to make the most rational decisions, carefully calculating what is coherent for us and our own good. Knowing what to include in the construction of one's self is perhaps as important as the first act of courage to want to build oneself. Again, malicious voices will be able to say, attacking our lack of sacred respect for Truth, that it is impossible to build something if we do not have solid, that is, "true" foundations. If we don't know what the self actually is (perhaps it doesn't even exist!), how can we build anything? The search, the struggle, the will! These matter. Also, drawing inspiration here from (Karl) Jaspers' perspective, we mention that human freedom, which offers the chance to find a personal meaning in a cultural universe that has destroyed the idea of objective meaning, is guaranteed precisely by the fact that we do not possess the Truth; we can say that truth constrains, and man can be free and build himself authentically and creatively only because he does not know the ultimate truths. We want to be somebody because we have access to the ultimate not-knowing. However, we must note—since we would not want to

overlook something so significant—that authenticity is linked to the knowledge that our identities and beliefs are historical and contingent, as both Foucault and Rorty have pointed out. They do not represent a universal or everlasting aspect of human nature, but rather the outcome of particular historical and cultural contexts. This is not to argue that we are just products of external causes, robots or soup cans that only have the illusion of authenticity. Our cognitive systems are far too different for external causes to produce identical individuals, and predicting the kind of product thus becomes impossible and useless. We only want to say that the creation of the self is closely related to external elements. To be authentic, one must first acknowledge the outside forces that have shaped who we are. Cultural norms, social expectations, education, the home environment, and individual experiences are a few examples of these influences. To comprehend how these elements influence our beliefs and actions, we must be aware of them. However, acknowledgment is insufficient. We need to integrate these influences selectively if we are to be authentic. We must select outside influences carefully, making sure they align with our core values and beliefs. Not all outside influences should be welcomed without consideration. For instance, we might accept some cultural customs that enhance our lives while rejecting others that are incompatible with our moral principles. Philosophy, whose spokesperson in our context is the philosophical counselor, whose mission is to inspire critical thinking in the client, is exactly the perfect method for this process of instantiating authenticity.

Another point raised earlier, the social engagement, but which can be greatly expanded by means of other thinkers who wrote very deeply on the idea of creation of the self through relationship with the Other, must be discussed here. Philosophy offers crucial insights into the function of interpersonal relationships and community in the search for authenticity and the development of personal identity. We can create a strong identity and an authentic self by interacting with the Other and assimilating into a community. Theoretical frameworks from philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre, Emmanuel Levinas, and Martin Buber help us comprehend these processes. First of all, encountering an Other, whoever it may be, plays an existential role in the structure of every human being; this is, in fact, the encounter with Otherness, which takes us out of the other suffocating paradises of solipsism. Through contact with an Other who, although at

first we don't realize this, but we will after a deeper experience of his/her presence, is another human, another self-narrator, we can delineate more concretely what we actually are: Identity without alterity is a all-encompassing tyrant, who sets no limits for itself because it does not know how. The limitation of identity appears through the contact with "something else", i.e. with alterity and multiplicity. To know who I am, I must intuit, at least in broad terms, how far I can stretch the boundaries of my self. This does not mean a total limitation on the previously discussed narratives, but a putting them on a coherent waterline. We need limits, i.e. some parameters, to be able to build some kind of narrative. A story that is, in fact, all possible stories, is nothing. It is also good to know for ourselves, but also for possible clients, that our self, being an entity (If it is an entity and not something much more difficult to define) that is volatile, ever-changing, allows us and even requires us to we constantly transform, to become, with time, other people or "A different person than we were before". However, as with narrative identity, a self that has grasped everything in its terrible jaws, unaware of the limits imposed by other conscious individuals, will become an All, but when you are everything, you are actually nothing. And on the nothingness masked in terrible totality, instead of becoming gods, we realize that we can build nothing. The foundation is infinite but unstable. According to Levinas, the "face" of the Other is an expression of radical alterity and an obligation. We are forced to acknowledge human fragility and dignity when we see the Other for who they are, and this forces us to react with compassion and accountability. Through this existential exercise, to which we are always subjected, without escape, slightly moving away from Sartre's harsher perspective on the "Looking" of the Other, we actually return to ourselves and, more so, to our own vulnerability: we look death through eyes that understood that the Other also dies, and this is inevitable and irreversible. But at the same time, it can be a balm for a troubled mind. We no longer die alone, because the Other, who is also a Self, a man who thinks and loves like me, dies too. We are not alone in the great drama (or comedy) of universal death, and that can strengthen us. In order to achieve authenticity and develop a personal identity, community is essential. Being a part of a community gives us access to a framework of norms, values, and interpersonal interactions that impact and mold who we are (either by accepting and assimilating external values, or by refusing to accept them).

For the development of a sound and genuine identity, community offers emotional support and validation. Our sense of self is strengthened through our interactions with other community members, who help us feel accepted and valued. Although community can sometimes become harmful, in that it takes the form of an Impersonal They and transforms individuals into predetermined images, suffocating emergent authenticity, it can be, especially when this diversity is in its midst, a place of dialogue, of sharing opinions and values, and even critical thinking. Of course, many people, especially in this ultra-individualistic society where interpersonal relationships are commodified to the point of refusal, have no real access to a community. For many potential clients, neither the family nor the group of friends will represent a real community, a place where self-building is truly possible. That is why it is so important that we as a counselor are the image of a real community. I was saying that, for the beginning, a dose of courage is imperatively necessary, the courage needed to say that "Yes!" in the face of existence, even accepting the absurdity and possible sufferings. First, we say yes to life, as we saw best in Camus, in his beautiful descriptions of the acceptance of life and its beauty, despite the absurdity that dwells in it (or in the human mind, searching for meaning in a meaningless world ). Then, or at the same time, to do what the existentialists urge us to do, we must say "yes!" to ourselves. Our authentic self will emerge the moment we come to honestly declare it as present. The difficulties have been presented above, but if with the help of a philosophical counselor and of course the help of the past masters, the client comes to sincerely want to build himself up in order to later give meaning to life and death, what we presented here becomes possible. But, let's say that we overcome this stage. How can we keep ourselves in the light of authenticity, keeping an un-fragmented idea of our own identity? Although individual work in this regard, a constant battle that, although it can sometimes become exhausting, is vital and its costs do not outweigh the gains, is extremely important, we offer one more tool: *irony*. The Cambridge dictionary tells us that irony is "a situation in which something which was intended to have a particular result has the opposite or a very different result". But for anyone who has pondered the idea of irony, they know that it is something much more complex, and transcends linguistic boundaries. In this case, what is the ironist, the person sitting comfortably in an "ironic state"? As Rorty puts it when talking about ironists: "never



quite able to take themselves seriously because (they) are always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus *of their selves*" (Rorty, 1989). We see that Rorty also emphasizes, quite refinedly, the existential turn, from language and linguistics (the vocabulary, the words used) to the persons themselves. Sartre also fascinatingly calls these people "*meta-stable*", a notion that captures the complex interplay between adaptation and stability in the face of an intrinsically unstable world. Interesting. But why? According to Sartre, an ironist views the world with a particular skepticism and detachment. They are able to see and evaluate the inconsistencies, pretenses, and ridiculousness that are present in both social norms and human behavior because of this position. The term "*meta-stability*" refers to a state that is stable under certain conditions but may alter when those conditions shifts. When used in reference to ironists, the term "*meta-stability*" denotes a stability that is not based on strict adherence to any particular identities or truths. Rather, it is a dynamic balance that is preserved by constant inquiry, skepticism, and flexibility. Ironists maintain a firm grasp on their viewpoint, but what distinguishes their stability is their constant willingness to modify and adjust it in light of fresh information and encounters. Some may consider the opposite of irony to be "*common-sense*", but we argue here that this dichotomy is a false one, for a true ironist will consider common-sense to be something vital in his daily life and even in the construction of his own identity; the difference is that the ironist, unlike other people, interrogates even the data of common sense, which often become accustomed to the apodictic demands of society and thus can be tyrannical. In a paradoxical way, the ironist, as we noted above (*meta-stability*), has access to a "*stable*" foundation to build on, even if this foundation is rather like the waves of the sea: flexible but not prone to ruin.

This existential authenticity is embodied by the *meta-stable* ironist, who rejects all absolutes in terms of identities and truths. Rather, they employ a flexible yet steady approach to deal with life's complications, based on their understanding that all human endeavors are temporary and artificial. This way of seeing the world, although we would be tempted to say that it would build a person lacking coherence and meaning, actually allows the emergence of the idea of building one's own meaning, by understanding the absurdity of any claim to absolute truth. Ironists can

interact profoundly with the world without becoming entangled into its paradoxes and inconsistencies thanks to this meta-stability. Through self-awareness and existential freedom, they are able to maintain a personal equilibrium that allows them to critique both personal behaviors and societal norms. This indicates a commitment to living a life that is sensitive to the changing and frequently contradictory aspects of human existence, not a lack of commitment or purpose. Most people suffer when their self-image, built largely on external bits of meaning, by definition limiting, an extremely narrow horizon, is destroyed by the fact that this image does not accept change. And life often forces us to change. The ironist can break away from the nets of his own narrative and see the wider context, his life in the ocean of life as such, but he can also see himself from the third person, which allows him to notice that there is still room for actions, development or just change. Therefore, the ironist can respond with a sincere smile to the fact that what he thought he was seems to be only an illusion or something incoherent, and so, continuing to smile, he makes a decision to improve himself. Of course, the change we bring to ourselves must be researched, so philosophy is our most valuable tool. Above we mentioned the fact that philosophical thinking exists only on the basis of critical thinking. Thus, accepting the need for change, understanding the importance of critical thinking, the ironist can use philosophy to decide what is appropriate to bring into the complex construction of his identity. Moreover, irony does not fall into the trap of absolute vocabulary. We will explain here what we mean. Carried by the Socratic obsession to find out the essence of concepts (words), such as, for example, the concepts of Good or Beautiful, man falls into the deadly trap of the "Objective" vocabulary. Man cannot live in a purely objective vocabulary, if this is possible, because, firstly, it does not belong to him, not including the pure subjectivity of each of us, and secondly, language is a very changeable and unstable entity, which might say that the very idea of an objective vocabulary is impossible. The impersonal they often tricks us into thinking its vocabulary is objective: everyone talks like that, why don't you? And this is fatal: to speak like everyone else is to describe yourself like everyone else, that is, to suffocate your chances of authenticity. Contrary to this perspective, which carries in itself a dangerous trap, the ironist rather sees the emergence of a personal vocabulary, through which he constructs narratives, as a poetic achievement, not a scientific, empirical trial. Perhaps truth exists

somewhere, independent of the human being and his mind „although Searle would say this is impossible: truth needs language to make its appearance through value propositions, and language does not exist without the human mind” (Searle, 1997) . But as I mentioned before, for our client from philosophical counseling, but also for us as counselors, the stake is not the absolute truth. Absolute truth can be a tyrant that destroys any possibility of real counsel. The stake is the particular meaning, that is, that imperative element necessary to be able to lead a coherent life, at least when viewed in retrospect, which allows the integration of one's own death and the avoidance of despair. This particular meaning can only be constructed if we break away from the obsession with objective vocabulary. According to Rorty, a person's final vocabulary (or objective vocabulary) is the collection of terms, ideas, and expressions they use to defend their views, deeds, and way of life. The majority of people take their final vocabulary for granted and use it as the unquestionable basis for their worldview. The ironist, however, is aware of the vocabulary's contingency and understands that it is a result of historical and cultural context rather than being rooted in any ultimate, objective reality. Thus, the ironist, our client who has learned that perhaps it is valuable to take irony seriously as a way of life, does not fall into the despair caused by the search for absolute truth or necessary changes that occur at the level of the self. Irony is the definition of the idea that the Self is something volatile and ever-changing. Through the force of his nonchalant smile, through the fact that he does not take himself too seriously, which allows for honest work on personal development and an objective view of the world and its rules, the ironist is the individual or rather the existential state best suited to include coherently all the elements mentioned by us in this essay.

We can be asked what is the meaning of this rather long, but hopefully not boring, discussion in the context of the theme of the present paper: death and philosophical perspectives on it. The connection is, we think, obvious. Man's relationship with death is a central element in how the individual's life will look. We can focus the discussion, using what was said previously, in a counseling session, precisely on the anxiety born from the awareness of mortality, a problem that is more common than one would think at first glance. One's own mortality is a source of great existential dilemmas, and, in the absence of real help, contemporary man finds himself thrown into absolute nothingness, with no possibility of

escape. That we have focused almost obsessively on the idea of self-construction and meaning-making is no accident, for, in the context of our perspective, we see these matters as something fundamental to how we can view and accept death. Of course, it is important to note, before going beyond this subchapter and laying down the conclusions of the present paper, that we do not wish to offer here a perfect and unique recipe for philosophical counselling; attempting such a process would be useless or dangerous. It is just one way of helping certain customers in certain situations, part of a wider range of other ways. Also, the counselor, like a psychologist, must refrain from forcing the counselee to follow a specific path, codifying him beyond recognition. He must learn the subtle art of presenting what he thinks can help the man in need, making him choose for himself and include in his life what he considers important for his own development and also what seems vital in his escape from the corner of despair or anxiety in which he finds himself. According to Kierkegaard, the process of creating oneself requires a great deal of despair. According to him, despair is the result of a person's inability to realize their true selves. When someone actively rejects the possibility of becoming their true Self or is unaware of their potential to become so, despair results. Three types of despair are described by Kierkegaard, each of which represents a distinct way in which the Self may fall short of realizing itself: *Despair of not being conscious of having a self*, *Despair of not willing to be oneself* and *Despair of willing to be oneself, but without God* (but we are more interested in the first two).

Anxiety, which stems from realizations of freedom, death, and the universe's inherent meaninglessness, is a defining feature of the existential condition. Instead of trying to eradicate this anxiety, existential therapy encourages clients to use it as a driving force in their lives. In this way, anxiety turns into a tool for self-creation, a constant reminder that we are in charge of our own lives and are not constrained by roles or labels from outside the world. The absurdity of life, as Camus famously contended, does not diminish its worth; rather, it calls us to rebel against meaninglessness by defining our own purpose. But in this process, there are few who can walk on their own. And if they succeed, the victory is painful. This is where the philosophical counselor can intervene, through an existential therapy that questions all these issues, to help the possible

client. Not to push him from behind, one way or another, but to walk alongside him, living in a true dialogue.

A significant framework for overcoming life's obstacles is provided by existential therapy. Death, self-creation, and authenticity are the main themes, which enable people to take charge of their life and embrace the freedom and responsibility that come with being alive. The recognition of mortality—that life is finite and death is inevitable—becomes a source of strength rather than despair. Existential therapy encourages people to face death head-on rather than avoid it, and then use that realization as a springboard for leading more purposeful and meaningful lives. Another tenet of existential therapy is the struggle for self-creation, a process highlighted by philosophers such as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. No one is born with a set identity or purpose; instead, one must constantly reshape themselves through decisions, deeds, and introspection. Since the Self is understood as becoming rather than as existing, it implies that the Self is constantly changing and is capable of expansion, adaptation, and metamorphosis. Existential therapy acknowledges that being authentic—becoming true to oneself—requires people to actively participate in life and make deliberate choices about their lifestyle and identity. But, unlike the so-called "life-coaches" and personal development books, the philosophical counselor takes the time to analyze these assumptions in depth. Unlike those already named, who may have one role or another in society, philosophical study often shows us that saying "Be you! Discover who you are! Be the best version of you!" it can actually be quite disingenuous, even dangerous. For there is no one hidden in us, deeply buried, that must be brought to the surface? There is not, in our opinion, an eternally fixed, and unchanging Self that needs to be "discovered". Our self, the best or not, must be built, and this day by day. The business is more complicated than it seemed at first.

Returning to our earlier conclusions, nonetheless, the freedom to create oneself is inextricably linked to accountability. People undergoing existential therapy are required to accept responsibility for their lives and acknowledge that they are the creators of their own experiences. The burden of freedom can be overwhelming because it forces people to make decisions in what sometimes seems like an uncaring or meaningless world. However, people discover their power in this very freedom: the ability to establish their own moral standards, forge sincere bonds with others, and

live by their own convictions. That is why the counselor must present the idea of community and participation in the World with others. A person who has self-disciplined, who has the strength and will to create himself, can tend, by various methods, to dumb down others, to force their existence to take a form desired by them, for personal purposes. Responsibility must be an important lesson taught to the client. Responsibility towards others, but also towards oneself.

Furthermore, the quest for purpose in a universe devoid of predetermined meaning turns into a pivotal aspect of the healing process. Existential philosophers like Sartre and Camus contend that meaning has to be produced rather than found. This calls for people to face the absurdity of life and rise to the creative challenge of giving their lives meaning via their deeds, interpersonal relationships, and personal endeavors rather than giving into nihilism or eternal despair. Therefore, the existential struggle should not be avoided or feared but rather accepted as a necessary aspect of human life. People find meaning, purpose, and a sense of fulfillment through this struggle—through accepting freedom, facing death, and taking ownership of their own creation. Existential therapy encourages people to fully engage with life's complexities, to make peace with uncertainty, and to live authentically in a world that offers no guarantees. It does not, however, promise simple solutions or an escape from suffering. This does not mean that there are no solutions. They exist. But to get there, a long, perhaps disturbing or painful process is necessary, and the process itself is without finality. This quest, while it can provide many positive attributes, can never be finished. Once this exact perpetuity is accepted, the adventure can truly begin.

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