

Psychotherapy Re-examined : Philosophical Contexts.

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The idea of my dissertation is closely connected with my professional work. Over the past 20 years, I have been practicing psychotherapy, working with individual patients and couples. I had a lot of time and opportunity to observe my own work and the work of other therapists as a supervisor. I also conduct workshops for aspiring therapists. Through my observations, I've noticed that psychotherapy education often is focusing on developing practical skills. However practical approach to therapy cannot discover the true nature of psychotherapy and answer to the question what psychotherapy truly is?.

To address these issues, I am focusing on a philosophical and systematic approach in my dissertation. In the course of this reflection, methodological issues also arise, aiming to clarify the relationship between philosophical reflection and psychotherapy. It appears that an active dialogue between philosophy and psychotherapy can yield tangible benefits, manifesting in a better understanding of the essence of psychotherapy. This, in turn, will translate into greater awareness among psychotherapists about the domain they practice. Consequently, this should impact the quality of their therapeutic processes.

I divided the content of the work into two parts.

In the first part, I try to analyze the ways in which philosophical contents appear in psychotherapy and what are possible relationships between psychotherapy and philosophy. Based on historical reflection on the development of psychotherapy, in this part will be posed three important research questions: How significant is the influence of the philosophical paradigm of various psychotherapeutic approaches on their understanding of basic concepts such as mental health and dysfunction, therapeutic change, and the therapeutic process?; how can the philosophical worldview of psychotherapists shape the therapeutic process? And under what conditions can philosophy be considered a form of psychotherapy?

The search for answers to these questions are organized into the following content structure:

1. Philosophical Paradigms of Approaches

o Psychological Paradigm: Naturalism – Antinaturalism

The philosophical paradigm of each psychotherapeutic approach, understood as a system of philosophical assumptions and beliefs posited as an axiomatic system by the approach and shared by psychotherapists, is present both in the formation of theories applied in psychotherapy and in practice. This necessitates a precise delineation of the origin of the fundamental assumptions used in the theory and practice of different psychotherapeutic approaches. Such practice can help avoid many misunderstandings and dogmatic disputes observed in debates between approaches.

o The Legacy of Paradigmatic Dispute in Psychotherapy Psychotherapeutic approaches share the paradigmatic dispute in psychology, ongoing since its inception as a specific science, essentially between the choice of naturalistic or antinaturalistic methodologies for understanding psychological phenomena and

practicing psychology itself. Therefore, precise definition of the philosophical paradigm of each approach can be most fully achieved by analyzing the role of naturalism and antinaturalism theses appearing over time in the creation and sometimes transformation of the fundamental philosophical assumptions of various approaches. Knowledge of this significantly broadens the understanding of the differences between approaches and allows for more precise answers regarding the possibilities or impossibilities of integrating approaches.

2. Philosophical Worldview of Psychotherapists

Philosophical aspects appear in the structure of psychotherapy not only through the general assumptions present in philosophical paradigms but also through the philosophical worldview that psychotherapists bring into the therapeutic process with their most fundamental metaphysical, anthropological, epistemological, and ethical beliefs. The theses of the philosophical worldview indirectly influence the shape of the therapeutic process, hence the postulate of expanding the therapeutic work standard to include philosophical education, with particular emphasis on verifying one's own beliefs contained in the personal philosophical worldview

- **Moral Views and Attitudes Conclusions:** Due to the nature of psychotherapeutic work, where building a relationship with the patient—a person—is a significant element, ethical considerations within the philosophical worldview of psychotherapists are of particular importance. They shape specific moral attitudes that therapists adopt during therapeutic processes. Analyzing these contents brings to the forefront the conditions that enable the adoption and maintenance of a neutral worldview stance during therapy. Ethical codes, which each approach possesses, should assist in this area. However, several doubts arise regarding the nature of their substantive justifications. Thus, a crucial question emerges: Does the object ethics represented in deontology indeed meet the needs of psychotherapists? It seems that an unexplored subject ethics in psychotherapy, based on building moral dispositions, could complement, or perhaps even replace, the deontological ethics currently commonly used in psychotherapy.
- **Cultural Trends and Worldview**

The philosophical discourse conducted in every culture influences the prevailing understanding of truth, determines what is acceptable, sets the boundaries of norm and pathology, and significantly impacts people's thinking about themselves and the world. Cultural trends affect the worldviews of psychotherapists and can also change the shape of philosophical paradigms in psychotherapeutic approaches. Therefore, it is essential to analyze the influence of cultural trends on these phenomena. Today, psychotherapy and psychological thinking are becoming part of the cultural climate. We currently observe the formation of a "psychological man" culture, which on one hand elevates psychotherapy as a field, and on the other, imposes increased responsibility on it, not just for mental health but also for the preferred model of life and development. In contemporary cultural trends, the dominant position of emotionality as a constitutive feature of humanity understood as an individualized form of existence is evident. The quintessence of this process is the consistently strengthening position of emotivism as a cultural trend, also

present in the thinking of psychotherapists and the therapeutic processes they construct.

3. Philosophy as Psychotherapy

- **Advantages and Limitations Conclusions:** The presence of philosophy in psychotherapy can also take the form of a methodology for working with psychological problems based on philosophical reflection. This mode of philosophy's presence in psychotherapy is a concept of directly incorporating philosophy into the helping process. Philosophical psychotherapy can have numerous applications in reducing problems such as loss of life's meaning, confusion in contemporary world realities, or difficulties in defining one's identity. Its undeniable strength lies in drawing on the philosophical heritage and using the discoveries of the greatest minds of humanity. Philosophical psychotherapy does this much more frequently than clinical psychotherapy. Its clear limitation, however, is working only with individuals without psychological or psychiatric contraindications.
- **Necessary Conditions for Viewing Philosophy as a Form of Psychotherapy Conclusions:** Philosophy understood as a psychotherapeutic process should not be practiced as a theoretical reflection on reality but as an art of living. This view of philosophy, where its psychagogic function is utilized, has been known since antiquity and develops alongside speculative philosophical reflection. Moreover, to regard philosophy as a form of psychotherapy, it is essential to precisely define its purpose, method, and the nature of the relationship between the qualified philosopher and the client.

In the second part, I analyze ,step by step, the important components of psychotherapy, like a method , a subject or goals and look for an answer to the questions: How can philosophical reflection help us clarify the main aspects of the phenomenon of psychotherapy? And finally : what the psychotherapy truly is? In seeking answers to the above questions, the research material is organized according to the following issues:

1. **Methodological Reflection on the Definition of Psychotherapy** Despite the generally recognized importance of psychotherapy, its exhaustive description and coherent understanding leave much to be desired. Existing and continually emerging new definitions of psychotherapy come from different defining traditions, and their accuracy and usefulness vary. Considering the complexity of the definiendum involved in psychotherapy, a satisfactory model for a definition in this field seems to be the real descriptive definition. Analyzing existing definitions of psychotherapy highlights several distinctive features, such as non-pharmacological intervention and the systematic and purposeful nature of actions within its scope. The unsatisfactory portrayal of the phenomenon of psychotherapy in existing definitions encourages further searches for a deeper understanding
2. **The Goal of Psychotherapy in Philosophical Terms: Personal and Axiological Perspective .**

The teleological nature of psychotherapeutic actions seems widely acknowledged. However, precisely formulating what the actual goal of psychotherapy is poses numerous challenges and divides researchers depending on their theoretical

perspectives. Applying a philosophical understanding of the term 'goal' can contribute to a better grasp of the ultimate purpose of therapeutic actions. This understanding allows defining change in psychotherapy as a recognized and desired good, which is further specified in the form of therapy goals. A personal and axiological perspective enriches the understanding of therapeutic goals, emphasizing that therapeutic actions address the natural human need for recognizing and realizing value, impacting not only the theoretical but also the practical aspects of psychotherapy

3. The Method of Psychotherapy in Philosophical Terms: Multi-Aspectual Therapeutic Assistance

The existing division of psychotherapy methods into supportive and therapeutic methodologies reflects the complexity and depth of psychotherapeutic interventions. This division should not imply that these methodologies constitute separate disciplines. Instead, they represent complementary aspects of the multifaceted work carried out by psychotherapists, each addressing different stages or elements of the therapeutic process.

4. The Object of Psychotherapy in Philosophical Terms: The Human Subject.

The object of psychotherapy has been the subject of numerous analyses, usually identifying either mental health or pathology as the focal point. From a philosophical perspective, the formal object of psychotherapy is the intrapsychic aspects of the person, while the material object is the whole person. This distinction facilitates integrating various viewpoints on the object of psychotherapy present across different approaches.

5. What is Psychotherapy as a Discipline: Theory, Science, or Art? Psychotherapy, after analyzing its definitions, appears to be more of a specialized helping skill that uses the achievements of a science, rather than being a science itself. Psychotherapy should be viewed not merely as a scientific discipline but as a specialized form of human activity combining theoretical knowledge with practical skills aimed at achieving therapeutic goals. It is a practice that transcends mere scientific categorization and aligns more closely with a form of art or craft, relying on the psychotherapist's skill, creativity, and intuition.

6. Proposal for Understanding Psychotherapy as Techne Based on Therapeutic Process Analysis

Viewing psychotherapy through the lens of techne (a term from ancient Greek philosophy describing a skillful and purposeful activity, as defined by Plato and Aristotle) underscores its dual nature of theoretical knowledge and practical application. Psychotherapy, as a techne, involves systematic and deliberate actions aimed at benefiting the person undergoing therapy.

7. Proposal for a Definition of Psychotherapy Based on Therapeutic Process Analysis

A comprehensive definition of psychotherapy could be: "Psychotherapy is a specialized form of human activity involving systematic and methodical psychosocial interventions aimed at reducing the dysfunctional aspects of subjective suffering caused by psychological crises, thereby facilitating personal development and well-being."

8. Necessary Conditions for the Therapeutic Process

For a therapeutic process to occur, certain conditions must be met. For the patient: subjective suffering, lack of adequate personal resources to cope, willingness to accept help, active participation, and hope for achieving therapy goals. For the therapist: theoretical knowledge, practical skills, sensitivity to human suffering, and readiness to provide help. Recognizing these conditions enhances the understanding of the therapeutic relationship and its dynamics.

Future Research Perspectives The dissertation concludes with a presentation of potential directions for future research on the desired cooperation between philosophy and psychotherapy. Emphasis is placed on further exploring the philosophical foundations of psychotherapy, developing comprehensive educational programs for psychotherapists that include philosophical training, and investigating the impact of cultural and philosophical trends on psychotherapeutic practices. The ultimate goal is to foster a deeper and more holistic understanding of psychotherapy, benefiting both practitioners and those they serve.

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