

Postmodern Openings

ISSN: 2068-0236 | e-ISSN: 2069-9387

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2021, Volume 12, Issue 1, pages: 380-386 | <https://doi.org/10.18662/po/12.1/267>

Towards a Meaning-Centered Philosophy of Communication

Review of: Sandu Frunză. 2020. *Filosofie și comunicare cotidiană. Cărțile ar putea să-ți schimbe viața (Philosophy and Daily Communication: Books could change your life)*. Iași: Lumen Publishing House.

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Abstract: Philosophical counseling is a dialogical practice which aims to explore and elucidate issues that do not fall into the pathological sphere, focusing on: common situations you may experience in daily life, moral dilemmas, existential crises due to lack of meaning or purpose of life, ethical conflicts in the workplace, reconciling present experiences with previous thoughts and painstakingly careful inquiries. Sandu Frunză reminds us that philosophical practices should not be understood as a way to satisfy the counseled person or applying painstakingly careful inquiries by finding a viable solution to the problem that worries them, but rather offers them an opportunity to broaden their horizons of knowledge by confronting ideas and beliefs different from his own. In the light of these statements, it would not be to bold to reassure that one of the main purposes of philosophical counseling could only be the search for and acquisition of wisdom. Practicing counsellors as well as scholars and advanced students of philosophy, communication, counseling, and educational and ethical guidance will find the volume *Philosophy and everyday life: Books might change your life* of particular importance.

Keywords: *philosophical counselling; Lou Marinoff; communication; philosophical dialogue; Emmy van Deurzen; Sandu Frunză.*

How to cite: Medveschi, I. (2021). Towards a Meaning-Centered Philosophy of Communication. *Postmodern Openings*, 12(1), 380-386. doi: 10.18662/po/12.1/267

Philosophy and communication practices always complete the sphere of values by bringing to light new and prestigious works. Among the diverse editorial appearances under the aegis of Lumen Publishing House in 2020, our attention was drawn upon a particular volume entitled: ***Philosophy and Daily Communication – Books could change your life*** by Sandu Frunză. The book is structured in two sections: The first part: **I. Philosophical counseling and existential communication** covers different methodologies of philosophical counseling practice. In brief, existential counseling ought to be understood as a collaborative and conversational activity between a trained philosopher and a client in which the client's life-problems are worked through by identifying, examining, and revising as necessary the operating beliefs, values, and habits of action that inform those problems. In the second part: **II. The seduction of the joy of living**, the philosopher explores the distinctive ways in which contemporary philosophy has engaged with poetry and its contribution to philosophical meaning-making, challenging us to rethink how philosophy has been changed through its encounters with poetry. In the meantime, this section also raises discussions on important issues such as: religious fundamentalism, populist politics and crisis situations. Overall, the volume encompasses a collection of 70 articles which could be traced as well on the author's blog: <https://frunzasandu.wordpress.com>. Frunză's work shall mostly revolve around a nucleus concept: ***the book***. In various incarnations, the metaphor of the book has long been part of human culture (books are the symbols of knowledge and memories - allowing us to decode the meaning of the word, the birth of the Western culture was possible due to the ontological structure of the book, spiritual narratives can be attached to books - by writing in a book, therefore the faithful are said to be written in the book of life; for by Divine remembrance is signified salvation, and by non-remembrance, or forgetting, is signified damnation. Currently, in a postmodern context it can be noticed that books impose intellectual fashions. In such circumstances, the author does not question the fact that, "reading and studying books can provide a solution for restoring humans and increasing the quality of life" (Frunză 2020, 21).

The first section of the volume unearths the ongoing crisis of philosophy. Sandu Frunză accurately highlights that even though European philosophy was born in the Ancient Greek Agora (under the emblematic figure of Socrates) - throughout its history, it has been noticeable that philosophers happily cut themselves off the public space and withdraw towards an "ivory tower" (Frunză 2020, 73). Every step of the way,

philosophical discussions became progressively dominated by structural rigidity and encrypted language. In recent decades, however, an increasing number of contemporary philosophers attempt to restore philosophy as a public practice – that is, a form of philosophy that engages and collaborates with stakeholders beyond the academic space towards the end of improving our communities. Philosophy as a public practice should not be confused merely as a service that professional philosophers bring to their communities, instead, it is a reciprocal process of theory and praxis – giving voice to different activities such as: philosophy clubs for children, philosophical counseling, Socratic dialogue, philosophical companionship. More and more often, philosophers begin to question people of different backgrounds about the meaning of the most important ideas governing inside their minds. But is such a return feasible? Can we nowadays, after so many centuries of abstract philosophy, put the sophisticated terms of philosophy into simple words? Can we still discuss meaningfully about the philosophy of today's thinking beings, trapped almost entirely in a digital world and social networks? Apart from offering some answers, in some ways, Sandu Frunză, advances the manner and extent to which a Lévinasian scheme can serve as a guide to life, capable of supporting philosophical practice in the form of existential counseling. These efforts are valuable in their own right. The author highlights the concept of otherness in Lévinas ethics and raises questions about the degree of empathy and presence of moral commitment in philosophical practices. *In nuce*, Frunză embraces the existence of a prescriptive ethics that is imposed on context and applied across contexts based on the *I-Other* relation. Just as Lévinas, Frunză praises a philosophy of responsibility – rooted in the exchange between self (philosophical counselor) and other (client). The philosophical practices find genesis in the desire evoked by the other and in recognizing the alterity of the other (Frunză 2020, 173).

Unlike the modern age academic philosophy, the philosophical practice movement portrays the philosopher as a companion or organizational advisor who helps individuals to become conscious about their experiences and find optimum solutions within the context of their values and general preferences. The core 'existential' function of philosophy could be most clearly shown by a dialogic connection and the ethics of dialogue. Frunză suggests that the principle underlying the existential counselor-client framework is the production of a dialogic connection in between the two parts based on the idea of recognition. This exchange is ethically driven by a set of three obligations: the obligation to speak, the obligation to listen, and the obligation to respond. In each of these three

dialogic stances one is obligated to turn to the other as an Other, and call the other into presence within the dialogic connection. Across the dialogic distance selves are interpersonally (Frunzã 2020, 89). To the finish, the author fought necessary to underline the stringent challenge faced by engaged philosophers, due to the fact that for a prolonged period, psychology and psychologists have carved up a legally exclusive niche for themselves as the only 'experts' qualified to provide talking psychological therapies. Nowadays, counseling experiences, argue that psychology, a child of philosophy, solely extrapolates and dilutes philosophical methodologies, and in many cases falls short of achieving its full effect. Increasingly psychological intervention is geared to treat symptoms and try to effect external behavior change without looking closer to the causes of the discernible dysfunctional behavior or trying to elucidate the meanings of the individual's problem.

Philosophical consultancy, also known as philosophical practice or philosophical counseling is not something new, but rather it should be grasped as a revival of the old tradition of practicing philosophy. By contrast, the modern philosophical counseling movement is relatively young. In the beginning of the 1980s - philosophers raised the practice of philosophy to the professional status it has today. It is generally held that - since the 1950s philosophy was embraced as a practice (philosophical midwifery). The philosopher does not forget to mention that the movement has often been said to be rooted in the Socratic tradition, which viewed philosophy as a search for the good and the good life. A life without philosophy was not worth living for Socrates. Practitioners of philosophical counseling began to offer their philosophical or consultation services to clients who have been experiencing difficulties regarding the following topics: core beliefs and truths, identity, self-discovery, meaning, fulfillment, decision-making, purpose, moderating emotional life, freedom, responsibility, communication and relationships etc. Quite often, non-medical problems are narrow in scope, demanding organizational or philosophical counseling and sometimes the problems are more general, at their root having to do with questions like: How should I live? - Who am I? - What are my responsibilities? - How do I fit into the bigger world? Nowadays a wide variety of approaches and methods form an eclectic array under the all-encompassing banner of philosophical counseling. This diversity has led to some interesting developments in the field (Frunzã 2020, 67).

For instance, Gerd Achenbach promoted the type of thinking which has not yet disappeared, and there are many who follow him in promoting a version of liberal conventional wisdom as the all-purpose

solution for existential dilemmas. Others challenge contemporary philosophical norms both by calling for increased collaboration between the sciences and the humanities. Lou Marinoff, a thinker of insight and subtlety argues that philosophical consultancy is often applied to business consultancy as well as to individuals, as it frequently involves a reshaping of values and beliefs, functioning in the same time - as a method for rational conflict resolution. In the last case, philosophical counseling might be in lieu of, or in conjunction with, psychotherapy. The movement is tied to with and related to existential therapy which has thrived in the United Kingdom since the establishment of the Society for Existential Analysis (SEA) in London in 1988, an approach currently promoted by Emmy van Deurzen. Romanian contemporary philosophers - for example, Laurențiu Staicu proposes a return to ancient stoic theories of the soul, body, consciousness and self-recovery. Moving forward, Antonio Sandu argues that in passing over the human experience, some dilemmas are fully soluble only by applying an appreciative ethics framework. As Claudiu Mesaroș, sees things - he proposes a redefinition of philosophy as self-care and is insistent with the spiritual exercises which compose the daily practice in three types of learning: learn to live, learn to dialogue (Socratic dialogue), and, ultimately, learn to read (practice reading for familiarization with moral behaviour). In order to support creativity, use tools of critical examination, draw connections, we must do more than applaud the efforts of philosophers and organizations practicing public philosophy. We must also undertake significant changes to conceptions of legitimate philosophical practice and, in turn, systems of evaluation and support for publicly engaged philosophers in institutions (Frunză 2020, 46).

Ever since Plato's Socrates exiled the poets from the ideal city in *The Republic*, Western world has distinguished itself by imposing a strict differentiation between philosophy and poetry. In many circumstances, poetry did not found a comfortable fit within philosophical frameworks, because it was constantly glanced as an underrated field, concerned only to exploit wily emotions, unconscious desires and imaginative impulses. In other words, poetry was divorced from deeper, richer nuances of meaning (intellectualized reality). Yet might their long-standing quarrel hide deeper affinities? In the second part of the book, Sandu Frunză wishes to put an end to the philosophy-poetry schism which haunts contemporary philosophy. That having been said, it is not hard to observe a tendency to favor the reunification process between poetry and philosophy. In so doing, Frunză emerges as a philosopher gravitating towards a Continental tradition in which - philosophy and literature complete each other. Without

philosophy, postmodern humans would be wildered of practical wisdom, philosophical value, logic, but in the absence of poetry, individuals would be deprived of an overflow of powerful feelings, emotions and life itself. By rejecting poetry, we would deny the complexity of our social world and live a desolated existence. Broadly, Frunză argues that philosophy and poetry unchain people from Plato's cave (guiding them from the darkness and into the light – as a metaphor for truth). Both fields throw man farther into himself and deepen his consciousness of his own destiny. A wide-ranging analysis on poets is proposed - to mention here: Lucian Blaga, Iulian Boldea, Vasile Dâncu, Ioan Chirilă and Oana Boc. Instead of a clash between competing worldviews, the philosopher figured out the relationship between philosophy and poetry as one of productive mutuality, leading toward new ways of thinking and understanding. Spanning a range of issues with nuance and rigor, this compelling, comprehensive and innovative section opens new possibilities for philosophical poetry and the poetics of philosophy. From a metaphorical point of view, the Mother – is regarded as the symbol of longing and the essence of love. To put it straight, the bond between mother-children and homeland is associated to eternity and wholeness. In other illustrative cases, the lyrical discourse is placed under the sign of femininity. The enduring metaphors of the heart also fall into discussion due to the image of the body as being entirely driven by the heart, whereas the heart lies at the center of our psychological well-being and character as well as our relationship with God (Frunză 2020, 294).

Each article signed by Sandu Frunză, depicts the image of an **astute philosophical poet** who employs poetic devices, styles and forms to explore subjects akin to the field of philosophy. His writings, on numerous occasions dispatch questions regarding the meaning of life, the nature of being (ontology), theories of knowledge and knowing (epistemology), and, last but not least, principles of beauty (aesthetics). Overall, the volume provides fruitful conditions to explore philosophical themes and to behold poetry as an alternative entry into philosophical thinking. Sandu Frunză's work brings to light Lucian Blaga's philosophy – claiming a poetic sensitivity, both stylistically and terminologically. The author reminds us that within Blaga's philosophical universe, the Paradisian knowledge does not entirely correspond to the common philosophical concepts of intuitive knowledge and conceptual knowledge. For instance, Blaga advanced, in his poems (Poems of Light) and in his aphorisms (Stones for My Temple), some philosophical ideas that were to become building blocks of his philosophical creed. The following aphorism – “There are hidden places in our souls that are as light as shadows: they disappear as soon as we try to spotlight them”

(Blaga 1968, 11) – is also observable in the verses: “Others’ light/ strangles the spell of the impenetrable/ hidden in the depths of darkness” (I Do Not Crush the World’s Corolla of Marvels – Blaga 1981, 7). In times of crisis, philosophy is embodied as an awakening from the mythological or dogmatic sleep of sense. Blaga’s work follows an approach which demands metaphysical thought to bring its own light into the vast night. Philosophy is meant to get to the bottom of existential mysteries and try to transmute them into knowledge. Sandu Frunză insists that Blaga’s magical and mythical thinking is intimately associated to the philosophical systems of the most important philosophers of the world. Human beings seek philosophy for their spiritual evolution, being driven by a mystery quest. Both Lucian Blaga and Sandu Frunză manifest an intellectual-spirited capacity of intuiting the world as a whole. This capacity should not be understood as an isolated factor, but an individual component. The poetic frame comprises a universe of meaning, of interpretations; it is not a simple set, but a permanent element, inseparable from the poet’s soul.

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