

REFLEXIVE PRACTICE IN PHILOSOPHICAL COUNSELLING: AN ONTOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract: This paper explores the reflexive exercise in philosophical counselling from an ontological perspective. Starting from the situation in which the subject remains absorbed by the event and overwhelmed by personal interpretations, the study argues that philosophical dialogue can introduce a pause between emotion and reaction, generating a repositioning of one's mode of being. Critical thinking is understood as a process of becoming aware of presuppositions and suspending automatic reactions, while Stoic distinctions concerning attitude and control provide a conceptual framework for this transformation. Acceptance of experience and the possibility of decision emerge as effects of stabilizing a reflexive disposition cultivated through discipline and practice. The analysis highlights the role of the philosophical counsellor in maintaining the dialogical space and supporting the autonomy of the person, without adopting directive interventions.

Keywords: philosophical counselling, reflexive exercise, critical thinking, ontological repositioning, acceptance.

INTRODUCTION

Within the praxis of philosophical counselling, a recurrent phenomenological dynamic frequently emerges: the subject articulates a specific difficulty yet remains ensnared in a self-reinforcing cycle of overwhelming interpretations. The locus of the problem thus transcends the empirical event itself, extending into the very modality through which the event is lived and construed. What results is an intense identification with the situation, an ontological absorption that is immediately reflected in the subject's language. This observation precipitates the central inquiry structuring the present study: what precise structural shift occurs when dialogue assumes a reflexive character, transforming into a deliberate exercise of judgment? This question inevitably directs us toward the specificity of philosophical counselling as a distinct modality of applied reflection. Over recent decades, philosophical counselling has acquired public prominence by explicitly applying

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the philosophical tradition to quotidian existential crises, thereby reaffirming philosophy's pragmatic relevance. However, this trajectory has provoked methodological debates concerning the discipline's boundaries, particularly its demarcation from clinical psychotherapy¹. Critical assessments of the field have cautioned against the unchecked expansion of therapeutic competencies without stringent criteria, underscoring the imperative for a rigorous articulation of the practice's philosophical foundations. Concurrently, recent literature explicitly defends the role of reflexive dialogue in cultivating personal resilience. For instance, an empirical study published in 2024 demonstrates that interventions rooted in Socratic and Stoic methodologies significantly enhance the comprehensibility of experience, the subject's sense of manageability, and the articulation of personal meaning². Such findings indicate that reflexive practice yields effects far exceeding mere conceptual clarification, thus validating the pragmatic efficacy of the philosophical endeavour. Reflections on applied philosophy suggest that the practitioner's intervention serves to elucidate unexamined presuppositions, thereby reconfiguring the subject's epistemic and existential grasp of their life-world. Philosophical dialogue constructs a discursive space for interrogating the concepts, values, and interpretive schemata that undergird the lived experience of a crisis. As Ora Gruengard emphasizes, the counsellor's orientation targets the conceptual architecture of the difficulty, thereby fostering the intellectual responsibility of the agent³. Within this horizon, reflection operates as an act of existential assumption and repositioning. Clarification, therefore, acquires a profound ontological depth: it necessitates severing the raw fact from its subjective interpretation, unearthing latent biases, and formulating the problem with conceptual rigor⁴. As these underlying schemata are brought to light, the subject is emancipated from their total absorption in the event, attaining a more stabilized, critical vantage point. The Stoic intuition that cognitive disturbance is tethered not to things themselves, but to our normative attitudes toward them, succinctly captures this perspectival mutation⁵. The classical demarcation between that which falls within our volition and that which eludes internal control generates a reflective interval capable of restoring equilibrium. Consequently, the restructuring of one's mode of being, as operationalized in

¹ Samuel Knapp, Alan Tjeltveit, "A Review and Critical Analysis of Philosophical Counseling", *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, vol. 36, no. 5, 2005, pp. 558–560.

² Rotem Waitzman, „Philosophical counselling as a tool for strengthening personal resilience: an exploratory study”, *International Research Journal of Ethics and Philosophy*, vol. 4, no. 12, 2024, pp. 8–12.

³ Ora Gruengard, *Philosophy in Philosophical Counseling: Unasked Questions, Open Answers*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2023, pp. 32–35.

⁴ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, edited by Arnold I. Davidson, translated by Michael Chase, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1995, p. 82.

⁵ Epictetus, *The Discourses as reported by Arrian, the Manual, and Fragments*, translated by W. A. Oldfather, vol. I, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1925, *Enchiridion*, 1.1, pp. 755–756.

philosophical counselling, enacts an *ontological repositioning* of the subject. The suspension of immediate interpretative reflexes and the scrutiny of implicit judgments open a temporal and conceptual gap, allowing the individual to renegotiate their relationship with their own experience. Methodologically, the present study advances a conceptual analysis of the reflexive exercise, augmented by a hermeneutic retrieval of the Stoic tradition and an ontological articulation of subjective transformation. Ultimately, this analysis seeks to elucidate how critical thinking, deployed within this dialogical horizon, functions as a rigorous practice of judgment that fundamentally alters the subject's mode of being-in-the-world.

THE EXERCISE OF JUDGMENT

Whereas the previous section articulated the problem of the subject's absorption by the event, it now becomes imperative to analyse the mechanism through which this absorption can be suspended. Within the context of philosophical counselling, critical thinking is not a mere intellectual instrument applied to a situation; rather, it constitutes an exercise of judgment whereby the subject becomes conscious of the internal architecture of their own interpretations. This practice opens the possibility of suspending automatic reactivity and establishes a discursive setting for a consciously resumed evaluation. Absorption by the event presupposes a total identification with one's own interpretation. In this state, the individual fails to distinguish between the empirical fact and the subjective meaning attributed to it. The judgment presents itself as self-evident, and the resulting emotion is configured as an inevitable reaction. The critical exercise intervenes precisely at this juncture: it does not target the emotion directly, but rather examines the underlying judgment that sustains it. This orientation toward presuppositions reconnects philosophical counselling with its classical roots, functioning as an exercise wherein, as Pierre Hadot observes, 'it is thought which, as it were, takes itself as its own subject-matter, and seeks to modify itself.'⁶ In the praxis of dialogue, the process frequently commences with a seemingly simple question posed by the guest. However, this question often harbours evaluatively charged terms, sweeping generalizations, and definitive formulas. Words such as "always," "never," "everyone," or "no one" serve as linguistic markers indicating a rigid interpretive structure. Identifying these discursive nodes becomes a vital fulcrum. Interventions such as "what does this mean for you?" or "what does this assertion presuppose?" function to elucidate the conceptual horizon within which the person formulates their stance, thereby unearthing the implicit presuppositions that anchor it. Ran Lahav describes this movement as the examination of the individual's

⁶ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, edited by Arnold I. Davidson, translated by Michael Chase, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1995, pp. 81–82.

worldview, asserting that concrete difficulties are invariably inextricably linked to a broader horizon of values and latent assumptions⁷. From this perspective, critical thinking is not synonymous with formal logical analysis. Instead, it entails an internal act of lucidity through which the subject becomes acutely attentive to their own evaluative inferences. Halting the automatic reaction requires systematically suspending the seemingly inevitable character of the judgment. In the Stoic tradition, this epistemic shift is epitomized by the radical distinction between the event itself and the normative attitude adopted toward it. While the event may unfold beyond our volition, our attitude remains perpetually open to rational scrutiny⁸. The assimilation of this distinction profoundly alters the structure of lived experience. The subject realizes that their affective reaction is structured by their interpretation of the situation, rather than being a direct, unmediated determination of reality. Conceptual clarification plays an instrumental role in this process; however, the ultimate stake in philosophical counselling extends beyond mere terminological precision. The intended transformation is fundamentally existential. To the extent that unexamined presuppositions are rendered visible, the possibility of an ontological repositioning toward them emerges. This orientation is corroborated by recent empirical research indicating that the restructuring of evaluative inferences and the suspension of their perceived inevitability, directly contributes to enhanced cognitive flexibility and the mitigation of interpretive rigidity⁹. Ora Gruengard emphasizes that philosophical intervention specifically targets these pre-reflexive frameworks that structure the difficulty, and that dismantling their rigidity is essential for overcoming the existential impasse¹⁰. The blockage is thus generated not exclusively by the intensity of the emotion, but by the inflexibility of the conceptual architecture that validates it. The efficacy of examining evaluative inferences is directly corroborated by recent empirical research. Specifically, a controlled preliminary study on Logic-Based Therapy (LBT) demonstrates that the logical restructuring of irrational beliefs yields a statistically significant reduction in state anxiety compared to a control group¹¹. Simultaneously, critical analyses of the field reiterate the imperative of maintaining

⁷ Ran Lahav, *Essays on Philosophical Counseling*, edited by Ran Lahav and Maria da Venza Tillmanns, Lanham, University Press of America, 1995, pp. 7–12.

⁸ Epictetus, *The Discourses as reported by Arrian, the Manual, and Fragments*, translated by W. A. Oldfather, vol. I, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1925, *Enchiridion*, p. 768.

⁹ Rotem Waitzman, „Philosophical counselling as a tool for strengthening personal resilience: an exploratory study”, *International Research Journal of Ethics and Philosophy*, vol. 4, no. 12, 2024, pp. 14–16.

¹⁰ Ora Gruengard, *Philosophy in Philosophical Counseling: Unasked Questions, Open Answers*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2023, pp. 45–48.

¹¹ Elliot D.Cohen, Barbara Piozzinni, Chinmay Bapat *et al.*, „A Randomized, Controlled, Preliminary Study to Assess the Efficacy of Logic-Based Therapy in Reducing Anxiety and/or Depression in Family Caregivers”, *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*, vol. 42, 2024, pp. 595–598.

a clear demarcation between philosophical counselling and psychotherapeutic interventions, warning that ‘philosophical counsellors with no formalized training in clinical diagnostics may not be capable of discerning the difference’ between an existential crisis and a psychological disorder¹². The absence of stringent methodological criteria or the overextension of competencies without clinical training risks engendering disciplinary confusion. This caveat does not undermine the philosophical endeavour; on the contrary, it compels it toward absolute conceptual clarity. In the context of the present study, the exercise of judgment is strictly defined as a reflexive practice oriented toward the examination of presuppositions and the reorganization of meaning, unequivocally devoid of any clinical therapeutic claims. Dialogue remains the privileged medium for this practice. Solitary reflection perpetually risks remaining captive within its own echo chamber of cognitive biases. The presence of the Other introduces an indispensable critical distance. Through dialogue, the person hears their own assertions externalized, allowing them to observe inconsistencies or sweeping generalizations that they previously deemed self-evident. The philosopher safeguards the integrity of this examination without imposing exogenous conclusions. The practitioner does not dispense ready-made solutions, but rather facilitates the maieutic process through which the person clarifies their own existential positions¹³. The exercise of judgment demands sustained repetition and rigorous discipline. The reflexive pause between emotion and reaction is not attained through a singular, isolated act of will. Reactivity is inherently rapid and pre-reflective. Consequently, instating the reflexive interval necessitates constant, deliberate practice. In the Stoic tradition, the methodical reflection upon daily actions is prescribed as a foundational technique for cultivating rational discernment¹⁴. This discipline operates as an exercise in maintaining vigilant attention over one's inner life, ultimately aiming for clarity and equilibrium of judgment. Over time, the cultivation of this internal distance has the capacity to fundamentally remodel entrenched habits of thought. As interpretive rigidity diminishes, genuine cognitive flexibility becomes accessible. The paradigm shift from reactivity to reflection is empirically observable in both the subject's language and attitude. The individual overwhelmed by emotion typically describes their situation as a closed totality, devoid of alternatives. Conversely, the individual engaged in the exercise of judgment introduces nuance, formulates conditional statements, and proactively explores alternative scenarios. The cadence of their discourse shifts, the tonality becomes increasingly balanced, and the space for authentic decision-making begins to materialize. Thus, the

¹² Samuel Knapp, Alan Tjeltveit, “A Review and Critical Analysis of Philosophical Counseling”, *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, vol. 36, no. 5, 2005, pp. 561.

¹³ Gerd B. Achenbach, *Philosophical Praxis: Origin, Relations, and Legacy*, translated by Michael Picard, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2024, p. 39.

¹⁴ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations, Books 1-6*, translated by Christopher Gill, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, 3.11. p. 18.

practice of judgment constitutes a profound reorganization of the relationship between interpretation and empirical experience. Emotion is neither cancelled nor suppressed; rather, the modality through which it is apprehended is entirely transformed. The suspension of automatic reactivity successfully opens the horizon for a more stable, reflexive mode of presence.

REFLEXIVE NEUTRALITY AND THE ONTOLOGICAL REPOSITIONING OF THE SUBJECT

Following the analysis of the mechanism of critical thinking and the modality through which judgment is brought into the field of consciousness, it is now necessary to examine the transformation this activation produces upon the existential structure of the subject. Within philosophical counselling, the effect of reflection is not reducible to mere conceptual clarity or the reformulation of an opinion. Rather, it configures a fundamental alteration of the vantage point from which experience is lived and evaluated. In the context of the present study, the *ontological* level designates the stable structure of relating to reality, the modality through which experience is constituted as meaningful for the subject. The transformation under analysis concerns this very structure, as it intervenes upon the conceptual architecture from which experience is interpreted and assumed. This shift can be accurately described as an *ontological repositioning*, inasmuch as it affects the person's mode of being in relation to themselves and the world. This transformation targets both the content of the interpretation and the structural relationship between affect and judgment, reconfiguring how these elements articulate within the subject's lived experience. To the extent that an interpretation is rigorously examined, it loses its character of immediate self-evidence and becomes an object of reflection. Consequently, an active distance is constituted between lived experience and its evaluation. This reflective distance entails maintaining the experience within the field of consciousness, accompanied by a reorganization of the modality of relating to it. The subject continues to live the event, yet can integrate it without identifying entirely with the initial, automatic evaluation. This understanding aligns with the classical tradition that conceives philosophy as a formative praxis. Pierre Hadot demonstrates that, in Antiquity, philosophy was inherently understood as a spiritual exercise oriented toward transforming one's vision of the world and one's way of inhabiting reality¹⁵. Reflection possessed an intrinsically practical character, being integrated into a process of internal formation and directed toward configuring a consciously lived life. In this context, the transformation of perspective necessitated a profound modification of the subject's affective and evaluative structure. On an

¹⁵ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, edited by Arnold I. Davidson, translated by Michael Chase, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1995, pp. 20–21.

ontological level, this repositioning occurs the moment the subject ceases to be completely absorbed by their own evaluation. While previous sections described the condition wherein interpretation becomes totalizing and dominates the field of consciousness, the focus now shifts to the exit from this closed structure. The Stoic distinction between that which depends on us and that which eludes our control provides an internal criterion for orientation¹⁶. Introducing this criterion does not alter the empirical event, but it radically modifies the position from which the event is evaluated. This perspective entirely preserves the reality of the experience while directing the intervention toward the structure of the judgment, the precise locus where a modification of the internal relationship becomes possible. Once the judgment becomes the object of examination, the possibility of a more stable disposition opens up. The subject discovers the mediated character of their reaction and can purposefully introduce a moment of evaluation prior to the impulse. At this exact moment, a structural mutation occurs, transforming the individual into the responsible agency of their own evaluation. The reaction ceases to be lived as a simple, deterministic imposition, and this interpretive act becomes a consciously assumed stance. Here, freedom acquires an operative form, since the meaning of the situation is no longer passively absorbed but is deliberately examined and configured. The transformation thus concerns the very structure of relating to reality. Ontological repositioning is not the result of a simple, singular voluntary decision. Reactivity is frequently rapid and deeply sedimented. For this reason, the ancient tradition conceived reflection as a matter of rigorous discipline and repetition. Hadot emphasizes that spiritual exercises possessed a formative character precisely through their repetition and progressive internalization, ultimately constituting ‘a concrete attitude and determinate lifestyle, which engages the whole of existence’¹⁷. This existential repositioning is never instantaneous; rather, it demands the gradual stabilization of a reflexive disposition. Contemporary philosophical praxis conceptualizes this process as a decisive shift: from a rigid identification with a personal narrative toward a critical examination of the worldview sustaining the difficulty. Ran Lahav discusses the necessity of analysing the overarching worldview and the fundamental presuppositions implicated in the subject’s experience¹⁸. Modifying this horizon produces a reorganization of meaning and yields direct consequences for affective experience. Ora Gruengard accentuates that philosophical intervention targets the conceptual architecture of the difficulty and cultivates the intellectual responsibility

¹⁶ Epictetus, *The Discourses as reported by Arrian, the Manual, and Fragments*, translated by W. A. Oldfather, vol. I, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1925, *Enchiridion*, 1.1. p. 755.

¹⁷ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, edited by Arnold I. Davidson, translated by Michael Chase, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1995, p. 83.

¹⁸ Ran Lahav, *Essays on Philosophical Counseling*, edited by Ran Lahav and Maria da Venza Tillmanns, Lanham, University Press of America, 1995, pp. 10–12.

of the subject¹⁹. By bringing presuppositions into consciousness, a maturation of the existential position is achieved. The subject redefines their identity through the capacity to reflexively integrate external events into their own coherent understanding of experience. Gerd Achenbach, the founder of contemporary philosophical praxis, insists that philosophical dialogue creates a space wherein the person can reconfigure the meaning of their own life without being subjected to a normative therapeutic schema. Resisting the modern tendency to pathologize existential struggles, Achenbach argues that the guest in philosophical praxis wants neither to be treated nor cured, ‘he seeks to enlighten himself’²⁰. Thus, instead of reducing a life crisis to a psychological dysfunction, the dialogue cultivates a conscious mastery of life, proceeding from the premise that life is to be led, surmounted, mastered, if it is to come out well. This reconfiguration possesses an undeniably ontological dimension, as it alters how the subject understands their own being. Reflexive neutrality can be understood, in this context, as the stabilization of attention and the reorganization of the inner centre from which experience is lived. It presupposes the capacity to recognize emotion and to integrate it consciously, without allowing it to entirely determine the subject’s reaction and orientation. A disposition is thus established wherein evaluation is scrutinized, and reaction acquires proportion. The ontological character of this transformation consists in the modification of one’s *mode of presence*. The subject ceases to function as a mere passive receptor of events, assuming instead the position of a reflexive agency capable of integration. This modification deeply affects the structural relationship between interiority and exteriority, between affect and discernment. Interestingly, recent empirical research concerning interventions based on the restructuring of evaluative inferences indicates measurable effects on state anxiety. The study conducted by Elliot D. Cohen and colleagues regarding Logic-Based Therapy²¹, alongside exploratory research by Rotem Waitzman regarding personal resilience, demonstrates that intervening upon implicit inferences leads to a decrease in cognitive rigidity and fosters emotional stabilization²². Although these studies operate within psychological or empirical paradigms, they corroborate the premise that intervening upon judgment produces real affective consequences. This convergence indirectly supports the hypothesis of the present study: the modification of the evaluative horizon is inherently

¹⁹ Ora Gruengard, *Philosophy in Philosophical Counseling: Unasked Questions, Open Answers*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2023, p. 33.

²⁰ Gerd B. Achenbach, *Philosophical Praxis: Origin, Relations, and Legacy*, translated by Michael Picard, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2024, p. 24.

²¹ Elliot D. Cohen, Barbara Piozzinni, Chinmay Bapat *et al.*, „A Randomized, Controlled, Preliminary Study to Assess the Efficacy of Logic-Based Therapy in Reducing Anxiety and/or Depression in Family Caregivers”, *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*, vol. 42, 2024, pp. 595–598.

²² Rotem Waitzman, „Philosophical counselling as a tool for strengthening personal resilience: an exploratory study”, *International Research Journal of Ethics and Philosophy*, vol. 4, no. 12, 2024, pp. 12–14.

accompanied by an affective transformation. A methodological clarification is, however, necessary. The aforementioned psychological research operates at the level of affective and behavioural effects, measuring variations in anxiety or cognitive flexibility. The present analysis situates itself on an entirely different plane. The focus here is concentrated on the transformation of the horizon within which experience acquires significance for the subject, transcending the level of interventions oriented exclusively toward symptom reduction. Whereas psychology investigates the consequences of an intervention upon affective states, the ontological approach describes the transformation of the structure of relating to reality, namely, the modification of the vantage point from which the event is evaluated and integrated. This ontological transformation supersedes a mere theoretical description, becoming recognizable in the concrete manner in which the person integrates their experience and assumes their lived reality. Philosophical counselling provides the space of reflection wherein this modality of relating to experience can be learned, practiced, and ultimately integrated into the structure of one's inner life. Dialogue becomes the locus where thought reflects upon itself, placed in the position of examining its own limits and rigidities in a constructive manner. Without the intervention of an Other, a consciousness capable of reflecting and interrogating from the outside, the person may remain held captive within their own interpretive schemata. Gerd Achenbach underscores that philosophical praxis creates this space of inner freedom precisely by shifting the centre of gravity from technical speech to authentic reception. In his view, the foundation of this dialogue is not a routine professional intervention, but rather the practitioner's cultivated capacity to listen. As Achenbach asserts, 'being adept at listening is the very essence of conversational mastery' because 'the conversation begins with the readiness and wherewithal to listen' not merely with the act of speaking²³. It is precisely within this profound, receptive space, sustained by the philosopher's listening, that the subject is enabled to hear their own thoughts objectively. Once initiated by the dialogue, this internal distance gains consistency and is sustained over time through constant exercise and a vigilant return to one's own reactions. The subject learns to interpose evaluation prior to reaction and to integrate experience in a proportionate manner. Events are recognized as transient, and their meaning is subjected to rigorous examination. Within this stabilization, a profound form of inner freedom is configured. Ontological repositioning thus expresses a distinct mode of participating in the world. Experience is lived consciously, and decisions are formulated from a stable inner centre. Philosophy, from this perspective, emerges not as an abstract discourse, but as a practice of self-formation and a sustained exercise of attention, wherein reflection truly becomes a way of life.

²³ Gerd B. Achenbach, *Philosophical Praxis: Origin, Relations, and Legacy*, translated by Michael Picard, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2024, p. 36.

THE ACCEPTANCE OF EXPERIENCE AND THE POSSIBILITY OF DECISION

If the reflexive exercise produces an ontological repositioning of the subject, then this repositioning must become visible in the concrete manner in which the person lives their experiences and formulates their actions. The transformation transcends the structural level and becomes manifest in the concrete mode of relating to situations, in the inner tonality from which decisions are formulated, and in the way, events are integrated into one's own existential narrative. One of the most salient manifestations of this transformation is *acceptance*. Acceptance is neither an external gesture nor a moral performance displayed for others. It represents a fundamental modification of the internal relationship with reality. Acceptance entails relinquishing the continuous struggle against what has already transpired. It implies the cessation of internal opposition to an empirical fact that can no longer be altered. In this sense, acceptance is a factual acknowledgment liberated from excessive dramatization. In the Stoic tradition, this attitude is inextricably linked to the recognition of the limits of our control. As Epictetus explicitly prescribes, the reflexive exercise demands stripping the event of its totalizing affective weight, actively declaring to every harsh impression: 'you are an external impression and not at all what you appear to be'²⁴. The demarcation between what is up to us and what is not provides a clear criterion for orienting internal energy. Acceptance thus configures itself as a realistic calibration of the relationship between desire and reality. The subject assumes what they cannot modify and directs their attention toward what can be influenced through judgment and action. Authentic acceptance possesses a dimension of internal relaxation. When a person truly accepts a situation, tension decreases, interpretative rigidity diminishes, and their attitude becomes significantly more malleable. The subject detaches from the strain of continuous resistance and assumes a more grounded internal openness. From this state, experience can be integrated into the structure of one's life in a coherent manner, without generating fragmentation or the accumulation of resentment. Pierre Hadot describes philosophical exercises as transformations of the way of seeing and being, oriented toward a conversion of vision. Specifically, this conversion demands a complete reversal of our subjective perspective, moving toward a 'natural' vision of reality that 'replaces each event within the perspective of universal nature'²⁵. Acceptance can be understood, in this sense, as the stabilization of a relational mode that no longer absolutizes the event and ceases to transform it into the exclusive centre of experience. Reality is

²⁴ Epictetus, *The Discourses as reported by Arrian, the Manual, and Fragments*, translated by W. A. Oldfather, vol. I, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1925, *Enchiridion*, 1.1–1.2., p. 756.

²⁵ Hadot, Pierre, *Philosophical Praxis: Origin, Relations, and Legacy*, translated by Michael Picard, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2024, p. 83.

recognized within its inherent limits, and the subject no longer identifies entirely with their initial reaction. However, there are also apparent forms of acceptance. The subject may declare that they accept a situation merely to demonstrate maturity or to avoid confronting their own underlying fears. In such instances, acceptance functions strictly as a defensive mechanism. The internal tension remains active, even if the outward discourse suggests calm. Such an attitude does not produce an ontological transformation, because the internal opposition is merely repressed, rather than examined. Authentic acceptance requires transparency toward oneself, the recognition of fear, uncertainty, or limitations without dramatization and without the need for moral justification. It is at this juncture that the reflexive exercise reveals its formative dimension. Acceptance does not derive from fatigue or resignation; it expresses an inner groundedness matured through constant examination and lucid assumption. The state of internal equilibrium described previously manifests here as a capacity to integrate experience without being dominated by it. Authentic decision-making becomes possible only after this internal stabilization. In a state of emotional turmoil, reactions are dominated by impulse, and the evaluation of alternatives is distorted by affective intensity. The practice of self-examination introduces the necessary pause for the clarification of judgment. This pause does not eradicate the emotion, but rather situates it within a broader evaluative horizon. From this vantage point, the person can analyze their options and formulate an action in accordance with their core values. A well-founded resolution becomes possible only when the evaluation is no longer driven by catastrophic interpretations or rigid generalizations. It is imperative to emphasize that not all reflection immediately leads to acceptance. There are situations wherein the person is not yet prepared to integrate certain dimensions of their experience. The process possesses its own rhythm, and forcing acceptance can generate profound resistance and fear. Philosophical counselling creates a safe, dialogical space wherein reflection can evolve gradually, unburdened by the modern pressure to produce immediate, fixed outcomes. In this context, the practitioner's approach aligns with precept that it is not the business of philosophy 'to make the solutions simpler, but to make the problems harder'²⁶. By patiently sounding out the actual depths and intricacies of the difficulty, the dialogue honours the complexity of lived experience, allowing genuine acceptance to emerge organically rather than being imposed as a superficial result. A climate of unconditional trust is a prerequisite for transformation. The subject must feel free to express doubts, resistances, or ambivalences without the fear of being normatively evaluated. Within this setting, acceptance emerges as the effect of a progressive internal maturation, sustained by conceptual clarification and personal assumption. The ontological transformation described in the previous chapter manifests here through the

²⁶ Gerd B. Achenbach, *Philosophical Praxis: Origin, Relations, and Legacy*, translated by Michael Picard, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2024, p. 44.

capacity to integrate experience without total identification. Events are properly recognized as transient. The subject learns to distinguish between empirical fact and interpretation, between raw emotion and cognitive judgment. Emotional amplification through mental rumination loses its intensity when the underlying interpretation is systematically examined and calibrated. Acceptance and decision thus emerge as dual expressions of the exact same ontological repositioning. The former stabilizes the relationship with the past and the present, while the latter orientates the relationship with the future. A strict internal continuity exists between them: without acceptance, decision remains inherently reactive; without decision, acceptance remains existentially incomplete. Reflection and analysis, practiced consistently, transform the very modality in which a person lives their life. Acceptance becomes a stable attitude, and decisions are formulated from a balanced inner centre. The resulting coherence between affect and judgment expresses the true maturation of the subject. Within this maturation lies genuine internal freedom. Thus, the acceptance of experience and the possibility of decision constitute the concrete, lived manifestations of the ontological transformation produced by the reflexive exercise. The reconfiguration of the subject's position is ultimately manifested in the way they integrate reality without rigidity, orienting their actions from a stable, lucid, and self-aware internal centre.

THE ROLE OF THE PHILOSOPHER IN SUSTAINING REFLEXIVE TRANSFORMATION

The reflexive endeavour analysed previously takes shape within the context of a relationship and acquires its consistency through dialogue. It unfolds within a discursive space where the presence of the philosopher sustains and orients the process of clarification. Philosophical counselling is neither a mere conversation nor a technical intervention applied to an isolated difficulty. It presupposes a relationship built on trust, equilibrium, and mutual respect. The person seeking counselling frequently finds themselves in a state of vulnerability. Blockages, confusion, or suffering inherently reduce the capacity to view one's situation with critical distance. In such a context, the adoption of a position of superiority on the part of the counsellor would fatally compromise the process. The philosopher does not occupy the position of an expert on the Other's life, nor do they dictate the meaning of experience on the subject's behalf. Rather, they serve as a witness to the person's internal process and a partner in existential inquiry. This positioning presupposes relational equality. Academic training, extensive knowledge of philosophical traditions, or involvement in applied philosophical research provide rigorous conceptual instruments, yet they do not confer epistemic authority over how another individual ought to live their life. The subject is neither an object of clinical analysis nor a disciple to be moulded. They are an individual encountering

an existential blockage, and the counsellor can assist in overcoming it strictly through clarification and dialogical investigation. At certain junctures, the philosopher acts as a mirror. *Mirroring* entails the faithful reflection of the words and presuppositions expressed by the person, so that they may be objectively heard and examined. This does not involve authoritative reformulation or normative correction; it is, instead, a bringing back into consciousness of the subject's own thought processes. Through this reflection, the subject acquires the possibility of observing the rigidity of certain interpretations and identifying the sweeping generalizations that sustain their blockage. The counsellor acts as a guide, yet this guidance strictly precludes covert direction. It manifests through precisely oriented questions that touch upon the sensitive nodes of the discourse, thereby opening intervals for examination. The appropriate question opens a space of reflection wherein the answer is not coerced; within this space, the previously analysed reflexive pause between emotion and reaction becomes genuinely possible. Relational equality constitutes a fundamental ethical condition, safeguarding against the inherent risk of exerting unjustified influence over a vulnerable individual. In contemporary philosophical praxis, this responsibility is deeply anchored in epistemic humility. As Gerd Achenbach clarifies, philosophy does not assert dominance by claiming absolute epistemic authority over all fields of knowledge. Rather than imposing a rigid framework, philosophical praxis is driven by a profound, boundless curiosity about the guest's personal convictions, aspirations, and evaluative judgments. The practitioner's ethical responsibility is demonstrated through their willingness to adapt the conversation to the guest's lived reality, enabling philosophy to 'succeed in discovering itself in its other'²⁷ without asserting an authoritative stance. Clarifying the status of the intervention and safeguarding the autonomy of the subject thus become structural conditions for the legitimacy of the praxis. The person's vulnerability cannot be exploited through the cultivation of dependency or the exercise of subtle psychological influence. Philosophical counselling demands firm demarcations: the professional boundaries must be protected, and the client's autonomy must be unconditionally respected. Any personal involvement or financial conflict of interest that might alter the foundational trust contravenes the very spirit of this practice. Manipulation occurs the moment the counsellor deliberately steers the person toward a decision they secretly deem more appropriate. Such an intervention would degrade the dialogue into a mere instrument of influence. The philosopher cannot decide in the subject's stead and cannot possess absolute knowledge of what is ultimately beneficial for them. The transformation holds value only to the extent that it is personally assumed. The role of the counsellor is exclusively to cultivate the conditions under which this assumption becomes possible. The temptation to forcefully orient the process may arise, particularly in situations where a seemingly obvious solution presents itself. In these critical

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

moments, the internal discipline of the philosopher becomes essential. Reflexive practice is not reserved exclusively for the subject; it must be rigorously cultivated by the one facilitating the dialogue. Outlining the ethical and existential disposition of the philosophical practitioner, Gerd Achenbach emphasizes this exact symmetry of effort, noting that ‘what must be demanded, he demands first from himself, not from others’²⁸. The continuous examination of one’s own reactions, latent presuppositions, and the impulse to intervene represents an integral component of professional responsibility. The Stoic tradition provides a highly relevant benchmark for the counsellor as well. Reflection upon one’s own actions and judgments constitutes a fundamental exercise in self-regulation. The practitioner who sustains the clarification of another’s thought is duty-bound to have cultivated their own capacity for rigorous self-examination. Devoid of this internal discipline, the dialogue risks degenerating into unilateral instruction or doctrinaire imposition. Academic formation and active participation within the community of philosophical counsellors actively contribute to the consolidation of this ethical stance. Continuous study and research permit a more profound understanding of the theoretical foundations and ethical implications of the praxis. Nevertheless, theoretical preparation cannot substitute for personal spiritual exercise. Without internal commitment, knowledge remains entirely exterior to the transformative process. This gap is precisely what Ora Gruengard identifies when noting that even a sophisticated philosophical education often fails to provide the individual with ‘the tools to decide between incompatible philosophical approaches or to decide between any of them and prevalent popular beliefs’²⁹. Consequently, philosophical counselling differentiates itself from hierarchical structures through its uncompromising emphasis on the intellectual responsibility of the person, as the transformation of abstract theory into a lived tool requires a deliberate, reflexive appropriation. The dialogue orients reflection toward the conceptual architecture of the difficulty and the underlying presuppositions that dictate how it is interpreted. The philosopher sustains the reflexive process and facilitates the clarification of these presuppositions, strictly without imposing a conclusion. The ultimate evaluation of the intervention remains open-ended. The true effects of the dialogue become visible over time, manifesting in the transformation of how the person processes their thoughts and manages their affective reactions. Immediate expressions of gratitude may merely indicate temporary cathartic relief, whereas profound transformation necessitates stabilization and sustained practice. Epistemic humility represents the only appropriate attitude in relation to these complex processes. The counsellor does not lay claim to the success of the transformation, for the change belongs entirely to the subject. In this context, the role of the philosopher can be accurately described as the discreet facilitation of the emergence and consolidation of the reflexive pause. They

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 99.

²⁹ Ora Gruengard, *Philosophy in Philosophical Counseling: Unmasked Questions, Open Answers*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2023, p. 34.

safeguard the dialogical space wherein the subject can become acutely aware of their own interpretations and can formulate genuinely assumed decisions. The ontological transformation analysed previously is initiated within this relationship, yet the ultimate responsibility resides solely with the person living it. Philosophical counselling thus configures itself as a praxis of self-formation, sustained by an egalitarian and profoundly ethical relationship. The philosopher does not operate upon the life of the Other from an external position of reorganization. They sustain the maieutic process of clarification through which the person examines their own presuppositions and assumes their existential orientation. It is within this dynamic that a conscious and balanced presence takes shape, rendering the transformation of one's mode of being possible under the strict conditions of respecting the autonomy and dignity of the subject.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present analysis sought to elucidate the status of reflection within philosophical counselling and to highlight its implications for the subject's mode of being. The point of departure was the phenomenon of absorption in interpretation, where the empirical event and its subjective evaluation are conflated, causing the subsequent reaction to acquire a character of unexamined self-evidence. The rigorous examination of judgment was described as the mechanism through which this total identification is suspended, allowing the interpretation itself to become an object of consciousness. On an ontological level, this transformation consists in modifying the vantage point from which experience is constituted as meaningful. The pause between emotion and reaction designates the precise moment the subject assumes evaluative responsibility, deliberately substituting automaticity with conscious deliberation. A stable relational structure is established in which affect is integrated into the field of judgment and meaning emerges from a conscious assumption. Acceptance and decision emerge as the concrete, lived expressions of this transformation. The former stabilizes the relationship with lived experience, while the latter orients action in accordance with assumed values. The role of the philosopher consists in safeguarding the dialogical horizon that facilitates this maturation of relating to reality, strictly without substituting the subject's autonomy. In this light, philosophical counselling is a praxis of clarification and existential assumption, where the investigation of judgment profoundly restructures the interplay between interpretation, affect, and action. The described transformation thus acquires theoretical consistency and pragmatic relevance within contemporary philosophical reflection. Beyond these theoretical clarifications, the present study opens critical pathways for future research. It is recommended to further deepen the interdisciplinary dialogue between philosophical counselling and empirical sciences (such as cognitive psychology), in order to investigate more systematically the

correlations between conceptual flexibility and emotional resilience. Furthermore, in a contemporary era heavily marked by existential uncertainty and informational saturation, extending philosophical praxis into broader educational or organizational environments could provide essential instruments for cultivating rational discernment. Ultimately, philosophical counselling emerges not merely as a private refuge for individual distress, but as a rigorous practice of mental clarity and ethical responsibility with profound social implications.