

ONLINE PHILOSOPHICAL COUNSELING AS A CONTEMPORARY AGORA

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Abstract: This paper examines the adaptation of philosophical practice to online formats in the context of the constraints imposed by the recent global pandemic. It analyzes the transformation of philosophical counseling, group facilitation, and organizational consultancy through digital technologies, with particular attention to both their practical implementation and their conceptual implications. The central claim is that the online environment may be interpreted, with appropriate qualifications, as a form of “contemporary agora,” namely a virtual space in which philosophical practitioners engage with individuals, groups, and organizations. Although the analogy is limited, it allows for the identification of new modalities of access and interaction within philosophical practice. The paper considers both the advantages of online communication – such as accessibility, flexibility, and extended reach – and its limitations, including reduced spontaneity, the mediation of presence, and constraints on dialogical interaction. It concludes that the online environment should not be regarded solely as a provisional substitute, but as a developing space that contributes to the reconfiguration of philosophical practice and its public dimension.

Keywords: philosophical practice, contemporary Agora, philosophical counseling, online environment, communication.

INTRODUCTION

The paper addresses the following question: how did philosophical counselors adapt their practice to online formats during the COVID-19 pandemic, and what are the implications of this transformation for the future of philosophical practice? More specifically, it examines whether the online environment can be understood as a “contemporary agora,” that is, a virtual space in which philosophical practitioners engage with individuals, organizations, and communities.

The transition to online practice emerged as a response to the global health crisis and the restrictions associated with physical distancing. Under these conditions, philosophical counseling developed forms of interaction adapted to digital environments.

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This development raises questions concerning both the nature of philosophical dialogue and the conditions under which such dialogue can take place. The notion of a “contemporary agora” is employed here in a metaphorical sense and requires careful qualification. The ancient Athenian agora constituted a physical public space for open and collective debate, whereas online philosophical counseling typically takes place in private settings, mediated by digital technologies.

However, the analogy points to several relevant similarities. Both the agora and the online environment create spaces dedicated to philosophical dialogue; both reduce certain institutional constraints (the agora extending discussion beyond formal academic settings, while online platforms overcome geographical limitations); and both facilitate encounters between philosophers and individuals seeking forms of practical reflection. At the same time, the limits of the comparison must be emphasized. Online sessions lack the spontaneous and public character of the agora, being structured, private, and technologically mediated. As Habermas has argued, the constitution of a public sphere presupposes conditions such as openness, equality, and the possibility of critical debate – conditions that are not fully realized in private digital interaction¹.

The reference to a “contemporary agora” should therefore not be understood as implying a direct equivalence with the ancient model, but rather as indicating the emergence of a new space for philosophical engagement. Communication at a distance is not, however, without precedent. Alongside face-to-face dialogue, philosophical reflection has often been mediated through written correspondence. A relevant example is provided by Seneca’s *Letters to Lucilius*, which contain sustained philosophical guidance and may be interpreted as an early form of distance-oriented philosophical practice². In contemporary conditions, such forms of mediation have undergone significant transformation. Handwritten correspondence has been replaced by email, messaging platforms, and other digital media. At the same time, philosophical practice has increasingly oriented itself toward public engagement since the late twentieth century, taking forms such as individual counseling, group facilitation, and organizational consulting. These practices can now be conducted within digital environments, which redefine the space of interaction between practitioner and client³. The transition to online formats was accelerated by the pandemic, which imposed restrictions on direct interpersonal contact. Under these conditions, the online environment became not only a practical solution but a necessary mode of continuation. Individuals increasingly turned to counseling practices in response to uncertainty, isolation, and existential concern. As a result, philosophical practice extended into the digital sphere,

¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1991.

² Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*, translated by Brad Inwood, New York, Oxford University Press, 2007.

³ Vasile Hațegan, *Forme ale comunicării în practica filosofică*, Bucharest, Eikon, 2020.

reinforcing the idea of a “contemporary agora” as a virtual space of dialogue and reflection.

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

This paper employs a narrative-analytical approach, based on the examination and synthesis of published materials produced by philosophical practitioners during the pandemic period, alongside theoretical contributions from Romanian and European philosophical literature. The analysis draws on three principal sources: (1) reports by members of the American Philosophical Practitioners Association (APPA) concerning their professional adaptations during the pandemic, (2) philosophical reflections on communication and technology developed within Romanian philosophical discourse, and (3) critical literature addressing the implications of digital communication.

The methodological approach adopted is primarily reflexive rather than empirical. Rather than generating fresh empirical material through interviews or questionnaires, this method proceeds by examining already published testimonies, case descriptions, and reflective accounts. The aim is to identify recurring ways in which philosophical counselors adjust their practice to online environments. Once these patterns are traced, they can be interpreted through concepts drawn from recent philosophy of technology and theories of communication. This makes it possible to understand, with greater nuance, how philosophical practice changed under the pressure of digital transformation. The analysis focuses predominantly on practices documented within a North American context, particularly those published in the APPA journal, while also incorporating selected examples from Romanian philosophical practice. It does not claim to provide systematic data concerning client outcomes, comparative effectiveness, or global representativeness, but rather aims to offer a conceptually grounded interpretation of a specific historical and professional development.

THEORETICAL APPROACH TO THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN SOCIAL LIFE

Starting from the classical understanding of the human being as a fundamentally dialogical entity, for whom dialogue constitutes the primary form of interpersonal interaction, one can observe the central role that communication plays within philosophical practice. Dialogue, specifically, assumes a decisive function in the development of applied philosophical activities, especially in philosophical counseling, where it becomes the principal medium through which reflection is articulated and shared⁴. From antiquity to the present, human beings have manifested not only a

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

social nature but also a communicative one, oriented toward dialogue as the defining form of interhuman exchange, hence the characterization of the human as *Homo communicans*. Alongside this fundamental orientation toward communication, there has been a continuous effort to enhance communicative capacities through technological means, often interpreted as markers of progress.

A critical perspective on technology, however, was already articulated in twentieth-century philosophy. In a 1969 interview with *L'Express*, Martin Heidegger expressed a distinctly cautious view of technology, warning against the illusion of its neutrality. His point was that once technology is treated as something obvious or simply given, its deeper effects on human life tend to disappear from view⁵. Jean-Claude Larchet extends this line of criticism by examining the way digital technologies reshape the texture of everyday existence. It is in this context that he introduces the figure of *Homo connecticus*: the contemporary individual who remains constantly linked to digital networks, able to communicate across distance and at speed, but often at the cost of sustained and meaningful exchange⁶. Larchet reads this as part of a broader historical shift in communicative habits – from the slower, more reflective rhythm of handwritten correspondence, through the relative immediacy of email, to the compressed and fleeting character of instant messaging⁷. He also emphasizes the growing tendency of individuals to entrust significant aspects of their lives, both material and symbolic, to large digital infrastructures, commonly referred to as Big Data. Drawing on Plato's allegory of the cave, Larchet interprets the virtual environment as a form of "double alienation," describing it metaphorically as "the shadow of a shadow"⁸.

From this perspective, contemporary communication technologies may function not only as facilitators of interaction, but also as obstacles to meaningful engagement, contributing to forms of individualism, fragmentation, and even dependency. These developments raise significant philosophical questions regarding the impact of digital communication on both the psychological and the spiritual dimensions of human life⁹.

SHORT HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF ONLINE PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

To identify the premises for the development of online philosophical practice, it is necessary to outline several historiographical landmarks. Previous studies have examined forms of distance philosophical counseling, initially conducted via telephone and later through online communication. One notable example is Shlomit Schuster,

⁵ Horacio Potel, "Heidegger en castellano", in *Trei dialoguri cu Heidegger*, Bistrița, Mesagerul, 2007, p. 12.

⁶ Jean-Claude Larchet, *Malades des nouveaux medias*, Paris, L'Édition de Cerf, 2016.

⁷ Jean-Claude Larchet, *Captivi în internet*, Bucharest, Sophia, 2018.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 220.

⁹ *Loc. cit.*

who, in 1999, established a telephone line for individuals interested in philosophical counseling and subsequently emphasized the importance of incorporating visual interaction to enhance communication¹⁰.

In his 2002 discussion of philosophical counseling by email, Peter Raabe reflects on the practical possibilities and the evident limitations of this medium. He notes that email counseling enabled him to address a surprisingly broad range of issues, including vocational uncertainty, spiritual concerns, existential doubt, determinism, suicidal thoughts, anger, and social anxiety. One difficulty, however, lies in the time gap between messages. That delay may frustrate both counselor and client and can weaken the sense of active, shared presence that live conversation normally provides.¹¹ Yet the same format can also offer certain advantages. For some clients, especially those struggling with highly sensitive or painful matters, the mediated distance of email may create a greater sense of safety and make disclosure easier. Raabe also points to the risks associated with the online environment, above all the ease with which unqualified individuals may present themselves anonymously as counselors. Even so, the growth of professional associations, along with clearer ethical standards and certification structures, has helped reduce some of these concerns. Another obvious advantage is accessibility: online communication can make counseling less expensive and more available, particularly for those who might otherwise have no realistic access to this kind of support.

A similar trajectory can be observed in North America, where early practitioners such as Lou Marinoff recount how philosophical counseling emerged in response to public demand, including telephone-based advisory services offered through professional ethics centers. These initiatives represent early forms of distance philosophical practice and contribute to the subsequent development of online formats¹².

In his turn, Ran Lahav introduces an innovative framework through the *Agora Project*, developed in several international languages, conceived not merely as an online discussion forum, but as a structured space for philosophical companionship. This project differs from conventional forums by organizing regular online group meetings, coordinated by a facilitator, in which participants engage in a contemplative exploration of philosophical texts. The emphasis is not on debate in the adversarial sense, but on resonance with philosophical ideas, generating what Lahav describes as a form of philosophical camaraderie¹³.

¹⁰ Vasile Hațegan, *Consilierea filosofică: de la practică la profesie*, Bucharest, Ars Docendi, 2018.

¹¹ Peter Raabe, *Issues in Philosophical Counseling*, Westport, Praeger, 2002.

¹² Lou Marinoff, *Philosophical Practice*, San Diego, Academic Press, 2002; Vasile Hațegan, "Premise ale practicii filosofice pe continentul nord-american", *Revista de Filosofie*, LXV (2), 2019, p. 245; <https://philopractice.org/web/>

¹³ Ran Lahav, *Handbook of Philosophical Companionship*, Vermont, Loyev, 2016.

The initial implementation of these meetings through platforms such as Skype, and later through dedicated digital environments, marks an important transition in philosophical practice: from dialogical exchange understood primarily as argumentation toward dialogical presence understood as shared reflection. This development suggests that online philosophical practice is not merely a technical adaptation, but also a transformation in the mode of philosophical engagement itself. Similarly, Peter Raabe's development of email-based counseling services led him to recognize the limitations of purely textual communication and to advocate for the integration of audio-video interaction, to recover aspects of immediacy and dialogical responsiveness¹⁴. This evolution reflects a broader tendency among practitioners, including Shlomit Schuster, to move from mediated textual exchange toward forms of communication that approximately embodied presence, even within technologically mediated environments¹⁵.

Another relevant development can be observed in Italy, where practical philosophy laboratories have experimented with "listening groups" organized through social networks such as Facebook. These hybrid formats combine asynchronous communication (email, messaging) with synchronous interaction (online meetings), thereby generating layered forms of engagement that reflect the complexity of contemporary communicative practices¹⁶. The philosophical laboratory emerges, in this context, as a flexible pedagogical and dialogical instrument, applicable both in educational settings and in counseling contexts. It enables the transformation of philosophical inquiry into a shared activity, facilitated through digital platforms. This approach resonates with the idea that philosophy is not merely a body of knowledge to be transmitted, but an activity of thinking that exceeds institutional constraints. As one author suggests, "the philosopher does not teach, he thinks, and thinking does not respect pre-established schedules," thus highlighting the tension between institutionalized philosophy and lived philosophical practice¹⁷.

The pandemic context accelerated this transformation, particularly in educational environments, where philosophy teachers were compelled to adopt applied and interactive forms of philosophical engagement. This development may also be interpreted considering the broader aspiration that philosophy should function as a practice of free thinking, rather than as a purely academic discipline¹⁸.

BENEFITS AND CRITICISM OF ONLINE COMMUNICATION

When considering the counseled person, one of the most evident advantages of online philosophical counseling is increased accessibility. Individuals who are geographically distant from practitioners can participate in sessions that would

¹⁴ Peter Raabe, *Issues in Philosophical Counseling*.

¹⁵ See Vasile Hațegan, *Consilierea filosofică: de la practică la profesie*.

¹⁶ Edoardo Giusti (ed), *Il counseling filosofico. La saggezza in pratica*, Roma, Sovera, 2012.

¹⁷ Dan Tomuleț, *Considerații (in)utile despre destinul filosofiei*, Bucharest, Eikon, 2017.

¹⁸ Valentin Mureșan, *Ce este filosofia?*, Bucharest, Punct, 2000.

otherwise be unavailable to them, thereby extending the reach of philosophical practice beyond traditional spatial limitations.

This development points to a broader change in the accessibility of philosophical dialogue and invites a more difficult question: does increased access actually democratize philosophical practice, or does it merely redistribute it in altered form? When the technical conditions are adequate, online sessions can preserve a high level of confidentiality, creating a controlled environment in which distraction is reduced, and participants may feel more secure. The possibility of joining from one's own home, without the burden of travel, can also lower emotional barriers and encourage greater openness.

The online environment thus becomes a virtual meeting space in which practitioner and client can interact in real time, approximating, though not fully reproducing, the conditions of direct dialogue. At the same time, this form of practice requires specific conditions, including technological competence, stable connectivity, and the capacity to maintain an environment conducive to reflection. The effectiveness of online philosophical counseling depends not only on access to technology, but also on the participants' ability to inhabit the digital space as a space of dialogue rather than mere communication. The reduction of operational costs and the increased flexibility of working conditions represent additional advantages for practitioners. At the same time, this convenience is not without cost. What makes online participation easier may also subtly alter the tone and force of the encounter. The comfort of distance can reduce inhibition, but it may also soften the intensity and immediacy that often characterize face-to-face philosophical exchange. Hence the underlying question remains: might the very conditions that facilitate self-expression also weaken the depth of inquiry? For practitioners, of course, the online format substantially expands the range of people they can reach, allowing them to work with clients who are socially, culturally, and geographically far more diverse than would otherwise be possible.

Scrima identifies two fundamental difficulties embedded in digital culture. The first is simply ignorance in the ordinary sense. The second is more unsettling: a deeper incapacity to recognize one's own ignorance when it is there. These conditions are intensified by the dynamics of social media, which encourage rapid opinion formation without sustained reflection. His response takes the form of a philosophical "Decalogue," drawing on classical philosophical resources to articulate practical strategies for disengagement from compulsive digital participation. The imperative "Stop Facebook, I want to get off!" expresses a call for regained autonomy within an environment that tends toward dependency¹⁹.

This critique may be situated within a broader philosophical tradition. Inspired by Étienne de La Boétie's reflections on voluntary servitude, one may reasonably ask whether contemporary digital life has produced new forms of

¹⁹ Stefano Scrima, *Socrate su Facebook*, Roma, Castelvecchi, 2018.

willing self-subjection. Our constant need to remain connected may well be one of them. Seen from this angle, digital technologies do not merely extend human possibility; they also alter, in quiet but significant ways, the meaning of freedom.

The question becomes not only how we communicate, but under what conditions communication remains compatible with autonomy. Returning to the Socratic model, it is important to recall that Socrates often adopted a position of declared ignorance in order to stimulate dialogue and self-examination. This line of thought presupposes that the acknowledgment of one's own limits is not a weakness but the real beginning of philosophical questioning. In philosophical counseling today, especially where one is dealing with forms of dependence encouraged by digital habits, the admission that one does not know is not something to hide. It is, rather, the condition of self-examination and possibly the first movement toward change. This dynamic may lead to a form of social conformity in which critical resistance is replaced by reactive participation. At the same time, Cristian Iftode acknowledges the undeniable advantages of digital communication, particularly its speed and reach, which surpass earlier forms such as correspondence or philosophical diaries²⁰. Such tendencies may also encourage a muted but powerful form of conformity. Instead of questioning dominant habits or resisting them, people may simply fall into reactive patterns, carried along by the general drift of digital life.

Taken together, these observations reveal a basic ambiguity at the heart of digital communication. On the one hand, it multiplies opportunities for connection. On the other hand, it transforms the character of connection itself. This matters greatly in philosophical counseling, where the quality of dialogue – its seriousness, honesty, and depth – is at least as important as the mere fact that communication occurs. This line of thought presupposes that the acknowledgment of one's own limits is not a weakness but the real beginning of philosophical questioning. From a phenomenological perspective, the mediation of interaction through screens introduces structural limitations. The so-called “screen effect” may reduce inhibitions, but it also filters nonverbal communication, including gesture, posture, and subtle forms of presence that are integral to dialogical engagement²¹. Moreover, the digital divide remains a significant concern.

Access to online counseling presupposes technological resources and digital literacy, thereby excluding individuals who may be most in need of philosophical support. This situation generates a paradox: the expansion of access at one level may coincide with new forms of exclusion at another. Although Hubert Dreyfus and Sherry Turkle²² approach the issue from different angles, they converge on a

²⁰ Cristian Iftode, “Experiența Facebook: expresivismul digital și cyber-bioputerea”, *Revista de filosofie*, LXIII (5), 2016, p. 555–570.

²¹ Haim Weinberg, Arnon Rolnick, *Psihoterapia online. Teorie și practică*, Bucharest, Trei, 2020.

²² Hubert L. Dreyfus, *On the Internet*, London, Routledge, 2001; Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together*, New York, Basic Books/ Hachette Book Group, 2011.

similar concern. Online interaction often lacks the embodied vulnerability that gives human encounters their force, even while it produces a convincing feeling of connectedness. This leads to a pressing question: can philosophical counseling, which depends so deeply on genuine dialogue, still have transformative power when conducted through a screen? There is no final answer to that question. What can be said with some confidence is that the digital medium does not simply host philosophical work; it shapes its possibilities from within.

ADAPTATIONS OF PHILOSOPHICAL COUNSELING TO THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

During the most restrictive periods of the pandemic, communication – whether by telephone or through online platforms – became indispensable. For many, it functioned quite literally as a lifeline, the only reliable means of maintaining contact with relatives, friends, and colleagues. At the individual level, prolonged isolation contributed to increased levels of anxiety and depression, particularly among individuals less familiar with digital technologies, such as the elderly or those living alone. In this context, philosophical counseling practitioners were required to adapt their methods to new forms of psychological and existential distress. The focus shifted toward addressing fear, uncertainty, and the disruption of everyday life generated by the pandemic. As Rick Repetti noted during the meetings of the American Philosophical Practitioners Association, the pandemic “has raised our individual and collective awareness of our mortality, as well as the contingency, fragility, and uncertainty of life”²³. Other practitioners approached the crisis from a more applied perspective. Peter Vernezze, for example, examined the increase in suicidal tendencies during the pandemic and identified both risk factors and warning signs relevant to philosophical counseling²⁴. In a similar vein, Todd Eklof emphasized the capacity of philosophy to respond to global crises, suggesting that contemporary challenges are not fundamentally different from those historically addressed by philosophers, particularly in their therapeutic dimension²⁵. The use of philosophical texts as part of counseling practice also gained renewed relevance. Lou Marinoff, for instance, advocates a bibliotherapeutic approach, in which philosophical works are discussed with clients as a means of reflection and orientation. This method, originally associated with the philosophical café movement initiated by Marc Sautet, proved adaptable to the online environment²⁶. In addition to

²³ Rick Repetti, “Existential Digestion: Philosophical Counseling during the Pandemic”, *Philosophical Practice*, 15.2-15.3, 2020, p. 2508.

²⁴ Peter Vernezze, “Suicide Happens: What the Philosophical Practitioner Needs to Do to Prepare in an Age of Pandemic”, *Philosophical Practice*, 15.2, 2020, p. 2546.

²⁵ Todd F. Eklof, “The Emperor Has No COVID: How Philosophy Can be of Help during the Global Pandemic”, *Philosophical Practice*, 15.2, 2020, p. 2560.

²⁶ Lou Marinoff, *Philosophical Practice*; Marc Sautet, *Un café pour Socrate*, Paris, Laffont, 1995.

philosophical texts, literary works addressing themes of crisis and epidemic – such as Albert Camus' *La Peste*, Philip Roth's *Nemesis*, Jean Giono's *Le Hussard sur le toit*, or Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* – were used as interpretive frameworks for understanding contemporary experiences. These works provide narrative resources that enable individuals to situate their own experiences within broader existential contexts²⁷.

At the same time, the pandemic intensified reliance on digital media, often leading to excessive or compulsive consumption of information, including unverified or alarmist content. Alexander Schumm warns that such patterns of media use may significantly affect self-perception and contribute to increased anxiety²⁸. In response to these conditions, philosophical practice migrated rapidly into the online environment, which became the principal space for interaction. Audio-video communication platforms enabled practitioners and clients to maintain dialogical engagement while respecting physical distancing requirements. This transition should not be understood merely as a technical adjustment, but as a transformation into the conditions under which philosophical dialogue takes place²⁹.

FORMS OF PRACTICE: INDIVIDUAL PHILOSOPHICAL COUNSELING

The transition to online communication was also reflected in the practice of individual philosophical counseling. Prior to the pandemic, many practitioners favored face-to-face encounters, often structured around thematic discussions, workshops, or dialogical sessions. The pandemic accelerated the move toward online interaction with remarkable speed. It allowed practitioners to continue working with clients through digital platforms and prevented many professional and personal relationships from being interrupted altogether during lockdown. It also changed the professional landscape for philosophical counselors themselves. International exchange, once occasional and logistically difficult, suddenly became ordinary. Organizations such as the APPA and the ICPP moved their meetings online, and with that shift a new kind of transnational routine emerged. The pandemic accelerated the move toward online interaction with remarkable speed. It allowed practitioners to continue working with clients through digital platforms and prevented many professional and personal relationships from being interrupted altogether during lockdown. It also changed the professional landscape for philosophical counselors themselves. International exchange, once occasional and logistically

²⁷ Shanti Jones, "Literature: A Useful Tool for the Philosophical Counselor during Pandemic", *Philosophical Practice*, 15.2, 2020, p. 2534.

²⁸ Alexander Schumm, "Philosophy and Social Media: Remedies to Compulsion and the Loss of the Self", *Philosophical Practice*, 15.2, 2020, p. 2573.

²⁹ *Philosophical Practice*, Journal of the APPA, Special Issue: "How Philosophy Can Help During a Global Pandemic", 15:2-3, 2020.

difficult, suddenly became ordinary. Organizations such as the APPA and the ICPP moved their meetings online, and with that shift a new kind of transnational routine emerged. The rise of hybrid models – bringing together remote and in-person participation – marks an especially important moment in this development. These models increase access for those who cannot travel, while still preserving something of the richness associated with direct encounter. Unsurprisingly, this shift has generated disagreement. Some practitioners continue to regard digital counseling as an emergency adaptation, useful but temporary. Others take a more expansive view and see in it a lasting redefinition of philosophical practice itself.

FORMS OF PRACTICE: GROUP PHILOSOPHICAL COUNSELING

Group philosophical practice has been transformed in notable ways by the move online. Speaking at the 2020 ICPP, Carmen Zavala stressed that the philosophical café, long valued as a setting for collective reflection, has not lost its significance simply because it has entered digital space³⁰. Examples such as Antonio Sandu’s virtual cafés suggest, in fact, that established forms of shared philosophical inquiry can be reworked successfully without losing their identity³¹. These initiatives preserve the dialogical core of philosophical practice while adapting its structure to contemporary technological conditions³². At the same time, this transformation entails certain losses. Practitioners involved in such initiatives have noted the reduction of spontaneity and immediacy characteristics of face-to-face encounters. At the same time, online participation changes the character of group exchange. More people may be able to attend, but some of the finer textures of interaction become harder to preserve, especially those nonverbal cues that shape mutual understanding in subtle but important ways. Other forms of philosophical practice – retreats, walking conversations, collective reflection in natural settings – have likewise had to be reconsidered. Frédéric Gros’s writing on walking as a philosophical act, drawing on thinkers such as Thoreau, Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Kant, is especially instructive here, since it reminds us that thinking is not detached from bodily movement, environment, or pace. These models emphasize the embodied character of philosophical thinking and raise questions concerning the extent to which such practices can be translated into digital environments³³. In his APPA

³⁰ <http://raphp.ru/>

³¹ Antonio Sandu, “De la Etica apreciativă la cafeneaua filosofică virtuală”, in A. Sandu (ed.), *Consilierea filosofică apreciativă*, Iași, Lumen, 2019, p. 109.

³² Claudiu Mesaroș, “Filosofia în societatea contemporană: practici filosofice”, in C. Mesaroș (ed.), *Filosofia în universitatea contemporană*, Timisoara, Ed. Universității de Vest, 2017, p. 222.

³³ Frederic Gros, *Marcher, une philosophie*, Paris, Carnets Nord, 2009; Idem, *A Philosophy of Walking*, London, Verso, 2014.

article from 2020, Craig Merow revisits this perspective by proposing the integration of outdoor philosophical counseling as a complementary practice, emphasizing its potential to reduce anxiety and stimulate creativity³⁴.

FORMS OF PRACTICE: ORGANIZATIONAL CONSULTING

The transition to online environments has also affected philosophical consulting within organizations. The pandemic led many institutions to adopt remote working models, thereby transforming internal communication and decision-making processes³⁵. Philosophical frameworks such as utilitarianism and social contract theory have been invoked to interpret and justify measures adopted during the pandemic, including restrictions imposed for the collective good. These philosophical perspectives are useful in clarifying the ethical decisions that institutions, communities, and practitioners had to make during the pandemic³⁶. The shift to online communication allowed consulting practices to continue, with counselors meeting clients and groups in virtual settings³⁷. The advantages are evident enough: the format is more flexible, generally less costly, and no longer constrained by geography. But the benefits do not eliminate the difficulties. Online sessions often require stronger moderation and more visible structure. This can limit spontaneity and sometimes prevents conversation from taking the kind of unplanned turn that philosophical dialogue often needs. The effectiveness of digital consulting depends, to a significant degree, on whether participants can establish a genuine connection within the limits of a mediated environment. Even so, when in-person meetings are impossible, online platforms have proven not only convenient, but genuinely workable.

It thus contributes to the emergence of a digitally mediated “contemporary agora.”

³⁴ Craig Merow, “Outdoor, Peripatetic Philosophical Counseling”, *Philosophical Practice*, 15.2, 2020, p. 2529.

³⁵ Andre Almeida, “The Human Development Model of Philosophical Practice for Supporting Business Executives during the Global Pandemic”, *Philosophical Practice*, 15.2–15.3, 2020, p. 2585; Vasile Hațegan, “Practitioner Philosopher or Philosophical Counselor, options for new profession in Romania”, *Revue Roumaine de Philosophie*, 62(2), 2018 p. 191–212; Vasile Hațegan, Camelia Hațegan, “Sustainable Leadership: Philosophical and Practical Approach in Organizations”, *Sustainability*, 13(14), 2021, p. 7918.

³⁶ Will Buckingham, *The Philosophy Book. Big Ideas Simply Explained*, New York, DK Publishing, 2011, p. 190; John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism, Kindle Edition* by Amazon Digital Services, 2012; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract, Kindle Edition* by Amazon, 2025.

³⁷ Haim Weinberg, Arnon Rolnick, *Psihoterapia online. Teorie și practică*, Bucharest, Trei, 2020, pp. 356–379.

**SHORT DEBATE:
DOES ONLINE INTERACTION PREPARE
FOR FACE-TO-FACE DIALOGUE?**

A central question for both practitioners and researchers concerns the relationship between online and face-to-face philosophical dialogue: does online interaction function merely as a preparatory stage for in-person engagement, or can it constitute a sufficient and autonomous form of philosophical practice? One possible position, frequently implicit in practitioner-oriented literature, maintains that online dialogue develops transferable cognitive and reflective capacities. From this perspective, philosophical practice is defined primarily by the activity of questioning, clarification, and conceptual analysis, which may take place independently of physical co-presence. There is, however, another side to the matter.

Some critics argue that repeated exposure to online interaction may encourage a tolerance for exchanges that are flatter, more controlled, and ultimately less searching than philosophical dialogue ought to be. Authors such as Jean-Claude Larchet and Stefano Scrima emphasize the importance of embodied presence, vulnerability, and the unpredictability of direct encounter as conditions for meaningful engagement³⁸.

The analysis developed in this paper supports an intermediate position. Online philosophical counseling is clearly well suited to certain tasks. It can support conceptual clarification, the analysis of arguments, and the examination of beliefs or assumptions. Yet other dimensions of the practice may be harder to sustain in virtual form. This is especially true where emotional depth, existential exposure, or the difficult presence of another person becomes central.

The Socratic model is helpful at precisely this point. What matters there is not only the strength of argument, but the lived movement of the encounter itself: the pauses, the unease, the hesitations, the inability to retreat too easily from what is being confronted. Online, by contrast, withdrawal is always easier. One can disconnect, mute, turn away, or simply disengage. That possibility changes the atmosphere of the exchange, even when no one acts on it. For this reason, it is probably mistaken to treat online and face-to-face counseling as interchangeable. They are better understood as complementary modes, each with its own strengths, limits, and appropriate contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has considered the ways in which philosophical counseling adapted to online conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic and what those adaptations may imply for the future of the field. One conclusion is difficult to avoid: philosophical counseling has shown itself to be more flexible and more

³⁸ Jean-Claude Larchet, *Malades des nouveaux medias*; Stefano Scrima, *Socrate su Facebook*.

context-responsive than is sometimes assumed. It has moved beyond strict academic settings and entered practical situations in which people seek orientation under real pressure. The move online opened new possibilities for accessibility, flexibility, and international collaboration. At the same time, it also reactivated several fundamental philosophical questions: What counts as real dialogue? How important is presence? Under what conditions does interaction become genuinely meaningful rather than merely functional?

The online environment may function as a space for philosophical exchange, but it does not fully reproduce the public, spontaneous, and embodied character of the ancient agora. The evidence suggests that online and face-to-face philosophical counseling should be regarded as complementary rather than interchangeable forms of practice. Digital tools undoubtedly allow philosophy to reach more people than before. Yet they also modify the texture of practice. New tensions emerge – between access and depth, mediation and immediacy, connection and authenticity. In this context, philosophical counseling has an important role to play in shaping how human beings inhabit digital life. It may help prevent the reduction of the self to a merely connected being, a kind of *homo connecticus* marked by negative habits, diffuse dependence, and forms of alienation fostered by excessive immersion in virtual environments.

Digital technology is a major development and should not be treated lightly. Its value depends on the intelligence and care with which it is used. Employed thoughtfully, it can bring real benefits to many areas of life, including philosophical practice itself, where it enables counselors to work with individuals, groups, and organizations that would otherwise remain beyond reach. Online formats are particularly effective at lowering barriers to entry and enabling people to begin a philosophical process they might not otherwise have entered at all. That said, face-to-face meetings may still be necessary when the aim is deeper, more demanding, and potentially transformative work. In this changing landscape, the role of the philosophical counselor becomes more exacting. Practitioners must be capable of working across different communicative settings while also reflecting critically on the conditions that make genuine dialogue possible in an increasingly digital world. Their task is not merely to use technology, but to ensure that technology remains subordinate to the deeper purposes of philosophical practice.

Ultimately, the movement of philosophical counseling into online space is not just a technical adjustment. It is also an opportunity, perhaps even a challenge, to reconsider what meaningful philosophical exchange requires under contemporary conditions.