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Philosophical counseling: A form of applied philosophy

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Abstract

Four fundamental questions of existence concern all of us. Who am I? What do I really know? Where am I going? Where should I go? Philosophers from Pythagoras to the present time tried to tackle these questions. In seventies philosophy began to interest psychiatrists, psychologist and other practitioners who deal with issues of mental health. In particular existentialism and phenomenology become inseparable components of their therapeutic mission. In the end some philosophers encouraged by the interest in philosophical knowledge and skills, accepted the challenge and begin helping people to reflect on everyday issues. The practice of philosophical counselling can be found in countries like USA, UK, Italy, Africa, Canada etc.

Keywords: Counselling, psychotherapy, existence

Introduction

Philosophy as a way to address painful and disturbing life problems exists earlier than psychotherapy. Even before Socrates, philosophers helped people to think through their problems. It is a rebirth of something very old, perhaps close to the authentic origin of philosophy, for example Socrates philosophical dialogues at the town square in Athens, as the philosopher in ancient India and China, who ordinary people could come and consult regarding their daily problems. Philosophers such as Zeno the stoic, Epicures and others viewed philosophy as a practical aid to their daily problems or effective living. Over the years, however philosophy has become an almost purely academic discipline detached from day-to-day personal concerns. A philosophical counselling practice was opened by German philosopher Gerd B. Achenbach in the first of May 1981. In 1982 he founded the German society of philosophical practice and ever since. The phenomena have spread all over the world. The movement received popular attention as a result of several well written popular books about ways that philosophy can assist people with life crisis and decisions. Philosophical counselling appears to be a loosely connected movement with several organizations and many individuals who share a love of philosophy and a common goal of using cherished philosophical wisdom as a means to improve the day to day lives of individual.

Philosophical counselling as a tool to solve practical problem of life

Philosophical counseling is a relatively new and evolving field that offers individuals a way to engage with philosophical ideas and concepts in order to gain insights and make progress in their lives. As a philosopher, I would like to explore the nature of philosophical counseling, its origins, and some of the ways in which it can be used to help people address personal and existential issues.

Philosophical counseling can be seen as a form of applied philosophy, which uses philosophical concepts, arguments, and methods to help individuals explore and resolve practical problems in their lives. It is distinct from traditional psychotherapy in that it focuses on philosophical inquiry and reflection rather than on psychological diagnosis and treatment. While psychotherapy often employs empirical research and clinical techniques to address mental health issues, philosophical counseling is more concerned with the exploration of philosophical ideas and concepts to help individuals gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world.

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Philosophical counseling has its roots in the ancient Greek tradition of philosophy as a way of life. Socrates, for example, was known for engaging his fellow citizens in philosophical discussions and questioning their assumptions about the world and their own beliefs. Similarly, the Stoics believed that philosophy could provide practical guidance for living a good life, and emphasized the importance of self-reflection and self-improvement. In the modern era, the development of philosophical counseling as a distinct field can be traced back to the work of Gerd B. Achenbach in the 1970s. Achenbach, a German philosopher, began to offer philosophical counseling services to individuals who were seeking guidance in their personal lives. Since then, the field has grown in popularity, and there are now numerous philosophical counselors and organizations around the world.

Philosophical counseling can be used to address a wide range of personal and existential issues, including questions of meaning and purpose, relationships, career choices, and ethical dilemmas. One of the key advantages of philosophical counseling is that it allows individuals to explore these issues in a non-judgmental and open-minded environment, where they can freely express their thoughts and feelings without fear of stigma or diagnosis.

In addition to offering a safe space for exploration, philosophical counseling also provides individuals with a way to develop their critical thinking skills and gain a deeper understanding of the philosophical concepts and arguments that underlie their personal beliefs and values. By engaging in philosophical inquiry, individuals can develop a more nuanced and reflective approach to their lives, and learn to question their assumptions and biases.

Another key benefit of philosophical counseling is that it can help individuals develop a more coherent and integrated sense of self. By exploring their beliefs, values, and goals in a systematic way, individuals can gain a clearer understanding of who they are and what they want out of life. This can lead to a greater sense of confidence and purpose, and can help individuals make more informed and intentional choices about their lives. Of course, like any form of counseling, philosophical counseling has its limitations and potential drawbacks. One potential criticism of philosophical counseling is that it may not be effective for individuals with more severe psychological issues, such as clinical depression or anxiety disorders. While philosophical counseling can certainly be helpful for individuals who are struggling with existential or philosophical issues, it may not be sufficient for individuals who require more intensive psychological treatment.

Another potential limitation of philosophical counseling is that it may be less structured and goal-oriented than other forms of counseling, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy or psychoanalysis. While some individuals may appreciate the open-ended nature of philosophical counseling, others may find it frustrating or unproductive.

Despite these limitations, philosophical counseling has much to offer for individuals seeking to explore their personal and existential issues in a thoughtful and reflective way. By engaging in philosophical inquiry and reflection, individuals can gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world, and develop the critical thinking skills and self-awareness necessary for personal growth and development.

While philosophical counseling has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy, it has since evolved to incorporate a range of philosophical traditions and approaches. Some philosophical counselors draw on existentialism, emphasizing the individual's struggle to find meaning and purpose in a seemingly meaningless world. Others draw on Stoicism, emphasizing the importance of developing resilience and self-mastery in the face of adversity. Still others draw on feminist philosophy, emphasizing the ways in which social structures and power dynamics shape our lives and experiences.

That being said, for individuals who are seeking a more reflective and intentional approach to their lives, philosophical counseling can be a valuable and transformative experience. By engaging with philosophical ideas and concepts in a structured and supportive environment, individuals can develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world, and learn to approach their lives with greater clarity, purpose, and resilience.

A philosopher counsellor is deeply committed to helping individuals explore these questions and develop the insights and understanding necessary for personal growth and fulfillment. Whether you are grappling with questions of meaning and purpose, struggling to make a difficult decision, or simply seeking a more reflective and intentional approach to your life, I encourage you to consider the transformative potential of philosophical counseling.

In the words of the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, "The only constant in life is change." By engaging with philosophical ideas and concepts, and developing the skills and insights necessary for personal growth and development, you can learn to navigate the constant changes and challenges of life with greater wisdom, courage, and resilience.

In conclusion, philosophical counseling is a valuable and evolving field that offers individuals a way to engage with philosophical ideas and concepts in order to gain insights and make progress in their lives. By exploring questions of meaning, purpose, and values, individuals can develop a more coherent and integrated sense of self, and learn to approach their lives with greater intentionality and reflection.

As a philosopher, I find it deeply rewarding to work with individuals in this way, and to help them navigate the complexities of their lives through the lens of philosophical inquiry. While the field of philosophical counseling is still relatively young, I am excited to see how it continues to evolve and grow in the coming years, and how it can continue to contribute to the broader fields of philosophy and psychology.

In the words of Socrates, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Philosophical counseling offers individuals a way to examine their lives in a deep and meaningful way, and to gain the insights and understanding necessary for personal growth and fulfillment.

So, if you find yourself grappling with questions of meaning, purpose, or values, or simply seeking a more reflective and intentional approach to your life, consider seeking out the services of a philosophical counselor. You may be surprised at the insights and perspectives that you gain, and the ways in which they can transform your life.

In the words of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, "It's not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters."

Through philosophical counseling, you can learn to react to the challenges and opportunities of your life with greater mindfulness, wisdom, and resilience.

Conclusion

Philosophical counseling is a form of counseling that draws on philosophical ideas and concepts to help individuals explore questions of meaning, purpose, and values. It has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy, but has since evolved to incorporate a range of philosophical traditions and approaches. Philosophical counselors work with individuals in a way that is respectful, collaborative, and non-judgmental, helping them to develop greater clarity and coherence in their thinking and decision-making.

While philosophical counseling may not be appropriate for individuals dealing with severe mental health issues, it can be a valuable and transformative experience for those seeking a more reflective and intentional approach to their lives. By engaging with philosophical ideas and concepts in a structured and supportive environment, individuals can develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world, and learn to approach their lives with greater clarity, purpose, and resilience.

Philosophical counseling is not a replacement for traditional therapy, but it offers a unique approach to personal growth and development that can be particularly beneficial for those grappling with questions of meaning, purpose, or values. By working with a philosophical counselor, individuals can learn to navigate the challenges and opportunities of their lives with greater mindfulness, wisdom, and resilience, and develop the skills and insights necessary for personal fulfillment and happiness.

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