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The Potential of Irony in Philosophical Counselling: An Approach Based on Søren Kierkegaard's Ontology

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Abstract

In philosophical counseling, Kierkegaardian irony serves as an essential tool for recovering subjectivity from rational systems. The distinction between contemplative irony (a reflective distancing from mundane vanity) and executive irony (concrete action that annihilates existential constraints without an external purpose) avoids both pretense and nihilism, establishing an internal apriority that revalidates reality through personal appropriation. Grounded in Socratic spiritual exercises and existential psychotherapy, irony deconstructs social certainties, facilitating the counselee's maturation from inertia to responsibility.

Keywords: Kierkegaard, irony, subjectivity, philosophical counselling, executive irony, existential psychotherapy, Socratic exercises, existentialism

1. Introduction. The Individual Subject and The Abstract System of Thought

Søren Kierkegaard's work is, first and foremost, an exercise in recovering the individual from the anonymizing mechanisms of abstract thought, offering a profound critique of German Idealism and the Hegelian system. Kierkegaard maintained a paradoxical relationship with Hegel's philosophy, utilizing its very concepts to critique it and to forge a philosophy of his own—one positioned as far as possible from any unifying or universal system. This trajectory is evident as early as his master's thesis on irony and Socrates, where Kierkegaard begins his journey toward a philosophy of subjectivity and personal truth through the indirect method. For him, this method represents the only solution to provoke the individual

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toward self-reflection, ensuring they do not remain a mere participant in an all-encompassing system that reduces them to a component with a predefined role. The relevance of this approach for the philosophical counselor lies precisely in the modern condition of man as a battery powering capital. An abstract system that disregards human individuality, focusing instead on productive capacity, alienates the individual from their own subjectivity and enforces anonymity. Kierkegaard himself leaned into this anonymity through the use of pseudonyms, which represented various existential stances toward the themes he explored. Yet his anonymity functioned as an ironic detachment—an oppositional stance designed to turn the reader back toward themselves. For instance, Anti-Climacus, the pseudonym who elevates the standard of subjectivity, diagnoses despair precisely as the refusal to be a self. In his view, the sickness unto death is not a biological conclusion but rather the loss of interiority in favor of a flattened existence, dictated by the external demands of the Universal and the impersonal. For the philosophical counselor, this perspective is particularly relevant: in a world where the individual is frequently reduced to a mere production function, irony serves as a tool for redirecting attention, capable of suspending the validity of the system that alienates them. Thus, we intend to investigate how the philosophical counselor, utilizing the indirect method and the instrument of irony, can assist the counselee in recovering their selfhood.[2]

This recovery of the self, however, is impossible without critical engagement with the Hegelian System. To understand why today's philosophical counselor might turn to Kierkegaard, one must first grasp what he rejects: Hegel's vision, which perceives the world as an inevitable unfolding of Reason, where individuality is subordinated to and negated by the Universal. While for Hegel the self is absorbed into the rational system, for Kierkegaard it represents "a relation that relates itself to itself"—a dialectic that remains incomprehensible without identifying the points of rupture with German Idealism. Hegel maintained that the world is rational and can be understood through the dialectical method; however, it was precisely this rational stance toward existence that formed the basis for Kierkegaard's radical critique. The inner, subjective life of the individual is so vital to understanding the world that Kierkegaard argues that the human being has no place within the Hegelian rational System. Human choices cannot be reduced—even intentionally—to a set of logical directives leading toward objective truths, a fact the Dane experienced in a deeply personal way. For Kierkegaard, truth is not necessarily rational; it is an inheritance—a legacy whose recovery requires active,

[2] The essence of this recovery is also found in Jean-Paul Sartre's account of Kierkegaard's philosophy, who admits that his efforts to grasp the Dane lead him toward his own self-understanding as the "origin of all concepts." See Jean-Paul Sartre (Sartre, 2013, p. 167). This suggests that the Dane's texts function as mirrors of subjective existence.

subjective appropriation rather than passive acceptance. While Hegel proposes an external truth attainable through his dialectic, Kierkegaard receives from his father a spiritual legacy that would weigh upon him for the rest of his life. From the very beginning, his path is marked by a profound existential tension, inherited through a somber upbringing centered on original sin and "authentic" Christianity. In his journals, on August 1, 1835, Kierkegaard reflects on his life, stating: "It is a matter of understanding my destiny, of seeing what the Divinity really wants me to do; the point is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I am willing to live and die" (Kierkegaard, 2013, p. 43). This personal search for a subjective truth addresses a crucial challenge facing contemporary philosophical counseling: how to facilitate the recovery of the individual's subjectivity from an abstract and rational system that dictates how one should think. Furthermore, immediately following this passage, Kierkegaard rejects the rote memorization of historical or Christian facts, the mere intellectual grasp of philosophical systems, or the construction of a formal system of thought. To him, all these represent "...a world in which, again, I myself did not live, but only presented for others to see" (Kierkegaard, 2013, p. 44). Surrounded by philosophical systems, social customs, the pretentiousness of the intellectual community, the Christianity inherited from his father, and even a failed love affair, Kierkegaard moves from the world's objectivity toward individual subjectivity. It is also worth noting that his view of the Christian world in Copenhagen is deeply critical—a "Christendom" that does not believe in the true sense of the word but rather exists in a state of inertia. Faith in Copenhagen appears to be an "enormous confusion" where Danish citizens are treated as Christians, yet they do not think of God, do not attend church, and do not consider themselves to have any duty toward the divine (Kierkegaard, 1998, pp. 41–42).

In Kierkegaard's view, the believer's effort to become an authentic self emerges as a necessity born from the discrepancy between social life and authentic faith—a process of self-recovery that is both solitary and arduous. For Kierkegaard, becoming a self is not a given, nor is it an attribute received at birth, as the Danish institutional context of the time suggested, where citizenship and faith were often treated as interchangeable.[3] Because the philosophical landscape of his era was dominated by the Hegelian system, Kierkegaard's turn inward challenges the authority of objective truth in favor of subjective truth (he describes the Hegelian system as a logical architecture that, despite its claim to explain reality in its entirety, fails to offer a space for the individual's concrete existence). Hegel

[3] Kierkegaard grounds his critique on the distinction between *Christendom* and *Christianity*, a point also noted by Lydia Amir, 2018, p. 163). *Christendom* refers to the illusion of the socio-political institution (toward which Kierkegaard remains critical), whereas *Christianity* concerns the ideal based on the New Testament—specifically, the individual's duty to become an authentic self.

constructed a system of rational ideas in which the human being—along with their suffering and decisions irreducible to logic—is left without a place.

Through this work, we aim to argue in favour of a primary and profound connection between Kierkegaard's thought and the practice of philosophical counseling. This link is not coincidental: both are centered on the recovery of interior life and the subjectivity of the individual. Both Kierkegaard and philosophical counseling center on the exploration and understanding of the self, employing irony as a tool that triggers reflection on one's own life. To ground this relationship, we will build upon Pierre Hadot's perspective—specifically as articulated in Philosophy as a Way of Life—to show that, much like Kierkegaardian irony, philosophical practice finds its roots in the ancient spiritual exercises (Hadot, 1995).

2. The Genealogy of Irony: From Spiritual Exercise to Existential Dialogue

2.1 Philosophy as a Way of Life: The Socratic Legacy in Pierre Hadot's Interpretation

Hadot demonstrates how these practices modeled a way of life in harmony with the rational order of the Logos. In contrast, Kierkegaard focuses on the phenomenological image of irony, arguing that it must be understood through the Socratic figure, given that "the concept of irony enters the world with Socrates" (Kierkegaard, 2013, p. 107). Here, the ancient practices as a way of life converge with irony as a "mask" in everyday existence: at a crucial juncture in the history of thought, where the legendary image of Socrates served as a model for lived philosophies, such as Stoicism.

Philosophical counseling inherits not only the discipline of spiritual exercise but also the deconstructive power of Socratic irony, once again becoming a method for activating subjectivity against abstract systems. The role of irony in philosophical counseling can be understood through the recovery of the ancient meaning of philosophy, as Pierre Hadot illustrates in Philosophy as a Way of Life. He argues that ancient philosophies represented a spiritual exercise—a practice intended to produce a radical transformation of the subject and their worldview. The ancient practices described by Hadot involve four primary directions: learning to live, learning to dialogue, learning to die, and learning to read. For our purposes here, and because Socratic irony demands it, we shall focus on learning to dialogue.

Socratic irony asserts itself as the central mechanism of dialogue, functioning as a spiritual exercise that facilitates introspection and self-knowledge. Through irony, Socrates forces his interlocutor to turn their attention toward their own way of life. Socrates does not intend to teach his interlocutors but merely to bring them into difficulty (Hadot, 1995, p. 89). This process produces a numbing effect—a form of torpor—which is necessary to shake the ego and clear the path for an

authentic recovery of the self through self-investigation. As an exercise of the spirit, this serves as an instance where the individual practices alongside other participants; Hadot terms this a "communal spiritual exercise" (Hadot, 1995, p. 90). In this way, Socrates acted as the catalyst that forced the individual to relate to themselves and to examine their own existence. Dialogue is not limited to an exchange between two parties or two potential examiners of their own lives; it also encompasses the dialogue with oneself, which Socrates frequently practiced—famously attracting notice by standing for an entire day and night lost in thought, in meditation (Hadot, 1995, p. 91). Meditation, representing here the dialogue with oneself, is a spiritual exercise that facilitates self-knowledge and, ultimately, the recovery of the self.

If this form of meditation is understood as a dialogical process, then Socratic irony must be regarded as a method of dialogue. The Oracle of Delphi, by challenging Socrates with the proclamation that he was the wisest man in Athens, provided the impetus for his method of self-dialogue: irony. If he could know nothing, he was then free to question and pursue further knowledge; yet Socrates himself was not immune to the very "stings" he administered to his interlocutors. Given that he would remain immobilized for hours and left behind no legacy of ideas regarding nature or other similar subjects, it is evident that his primary preoccupation was with his own person (an observation also shared by Kierkegaard), for he "was not clear about himself" (Kierkegaard, 1985, p. 59).

Kristof Van Rossem discusses Socrates' state of "unclarity," terming it "refutation" (elenchus), which refers to the experience of being cast back by one's own ignorance (Van Rossem, 2017, p. 1985). Van Rossem observed in prison settings that the Socratic method ceases to be a mere dialogical technique at the onset of this refutation, at which point it becomes a profound existential experience. Within the context of counseling, Van Rossem's distinction highlights the exact moment when Socratic irony takes effect, forcing the interlocutor to relate to themselves. An ironic counselor can thus play the role of transforming a logical contradiction into a crisis of conscience—one that, provided it reaches the point of elenchus within the counselee, ultimately serves as the debut of an examined life and the recovery of subjective agency.

2.2. Existential Psychotherapy and the Role of the Ironic Stance

The significance of existential psychotherapy is defined by its very nature, as outlined by Gerald Corey: a counselor must adopt a stance rather than a mere technique (Corey, 2008, p. 131). This existential attitude is grounded in the core dimensions of the human condition (Corey, 2008, p. 139), serving as pillars that broaden the horizons of self-knowledge—and ultimately the recovery of the self—for both the counselee and the counselor. For instance, dimensions such as anxiety

or the search for meaning cease to be viewed as symptoms to be eliminated; instead, they are recalibrated as essential indicators of a life lived consciously. Here, we see how the foundations of the existential stance align with the dialogical principle of Socratic irony, in that the counselor moves toward understanding the world of the counselee by actively engaging in a dialogue. The dimensions proposed by Corey—the capacity for self-awareness, the tension between freedom and responsibility, the striving for identity through meaningful relationships, the search for personal meaning in the face of anxiety, and the acceptance of one's finitude—serve as the counselor's landmarks for grasping the counselee's world. At this juncture, irony functions as a dialogical framework for self-relation precisely because these pillars are oriented toward subjectivity. The focus remains consistently on how the counselee perceives the world and how the counselor, in turn, understands that perception, thus enabling a genuine recovery of the self from the impersonal dictates of the System.

For each of these dimensions, irony plays an essential role; awareness, as the foundation of freedom, demonstrates that the more clearly we grasp our limits and potential, the more our level of freedom expands. This expansion of self-awareness requires the counselee to abandon the ignorance in which they took refuge to avoid confronting the uncertainty of freedom. While the act of deciding creates anxiety, it leads to significant fulfillment and the eventual recovery of the self. Socratic irony takes the counselee so seriously that they eventually realize the absurdity of claiming freedom from within a state of ignorance (or to renounce the refusal to become aware, which would in itself imply an ironic stance outside the counselor-counselee dialogue). This occurs precisely because the counselor participates in the dialogue through the phenomenon, while the essence must remain directed toward the counselee's subjectivity—searching for a thread of doubt that allows the counselee to discover their own subjective truth. Phenomenon and essence are terms used by Kierkegaard to explain how irony, as a figure of speech, generally manifests. The phenomenon (the words) is always the opposite of the essence (the thought); thus, the person who employs such a figure of speech is necessarily directed inward, for they know the nature of what was said not merely as phenomenon but also as essence (Kierkegaard, 2013, pp. 356–7).

Another dimension refers to the fact that, as we are thrown into the world, we have no say in the matter of our birth. In this context, Corey draws upon the concept of bad faith from Sartrean philosophy, noting that the excuses offered by a counselee may take various forms, yet all represent an evasion of responsibility. Certainly, the counselee must be assisted in realizing that freedom is anchored in responsibility (Corey, 2008, p. 141). However, Socratic irony can unmask this bad faith from within. Often, the counselee will find excuses external to themselves or their choices, opting to ignore the possibility of personal agency; irony intervenes precisely at the point where the choice to "have no choice" becomes manifest. The

counselee must participate as actively as the counselor; the responsibility for reaching an existential dialogue lies with both parties. Therefore, the counselor must employ Socratic irony toward the same ultimate goal: the recovery of the counselee's subjectivity. The decisions we make shape the identities we subsequently construct. The role of Socratic irony is to compel the counselee to realize these decisions—to not only enact them but to own them, acknowledging that the individual seeking counseling is, at least fundamentally, the sum of their previous choices. Corey argues that assuming an identity is an act of courage—a refusal to wait for external confirmation and a commitment to autonomy (Corey, 2008, p. 143). However, the traditional concept of courage retains a less subjective dimension; typically, a courageous person must be recognized by others as such, since it is the "others" who perceive the objective danger. Socratic irony, by contrast, offers a closure of the self toward subjectivity, severing external relations. Thus, the counselee is forced into a recovery of identity in a space where external validation is impossible, as this assumption of self no longer relies on a social concept like courage that depends on the external recognition of peril.

Another vital point addressed by Corey is the meaning of life—a lifelong pursuit that often surfaces only once the search itself has concluded (Corey, 2008, p. 145). Corey suggests that meaning is not naturally occurring; it must be carved out through the active adoption of one's own values. This intersects with the dimension of anxiety: without personal values and a committed engagement with one's life, meaning erodes, leading to a state of paralysis where the counselee exists on autopilot. To counter this, the individual must be encouraged to validate their own beliefs—a feat possible only after the recovery of an identity that allows for free and responsible choices. From childhood, we are inundated with social values and customs that shape our adult persona. Unless these values are interrogated for their personal relevance, they remain external impositions for which the individual cannot take responsibility. Choosing a value system is a decisional act that demands the exercise of freedom and the acceptance of responsibility for oneself. Socratic irony operates precisely at this juncture, where subjectivity is most active: in the self's relation to itself. It is precisely this closing of the self within its own relation to itself that provides the opportunity to discard values that do not represent us and commitments for which we refuse to take responsibility. Ultimately, it leads to the realization that truth is not something to be sought objectively within the sphere of philosophical counseling; rather, it involves an effort to ironize one's own existence, much like Socrates did, in order to bring intrinsic truths to light. All this culminates in the ultimate human irony: death. As life's only certainty, death is of crucial importance because it determines how much of life is lived concretely and how much time remains for each individual to experience existence in their own way. Yet, death is often ignored precisely because it is a certainty, suggesting that it becomes a form of "seriousness"—whether born of ignorance or deliberate

consideration, it remains a gravity that looms over us. Socratic irony places both the counselor and the counselee in a position to take death seriously through dialogue, yet the thought must remain in opposition. Thus, in thought, death is not "serious"; instead, it highlights the trivialities and the "unserious" preoccupations that consume our daily lives, facilitating a final recovery of what truly matters.

Consequently, it can be stated that existential counseling, as articulated by Gerald Corey, derives its power from a fundamentally dialogical stance centered on the counselee's subjectivity. Socratic irony becomes the privileged framework for this approach because it suspends ready-made certainties and carves out a space where the individual can confront themselves authentically. Through these existential dimensions, the counselor accompanies the counselee in the process of discovering subjective truths, ultimately facilitating a recovery of the self. In this manner, irony functions as a method of internal accountability, exposing the individual's choices, values, and evasions. Existential counseling thus aids in clarifying the individual's relationship with their own life, enabling it to be lived lucidly, freely, and with meaning, even under the inevitable shadow of finitude.

3. Irony in Kierkegaard: From Infinite Negativity to the Discipline of Subjectivity

To understand the discipline of subjectivity, one must first address what Kierkegaard terms "absolute infinite negativity."[4] Irony is negative because it only negates; it does not establish any new certainty in place of what it has dismantled. It is infinite because it is not directed at a specific phenomenon or a single false belief, but at the entirety of the given actuality—the System itself (Kierkegaard, 2013, pp. 364–365). In the context of philosophical counseling, this negativity acts as a radical clearing of the ground. Before a recovery of the self can occur, the individual must first experience the total collapse of the external structures and social customs that previously provided a sense of borrowed identity. This "infinite" negation ensures that no residue of the old, impersonal "autopilot" remains to obstruct the emergence of a truly subjective truth. It is crucial to distinguish this negativity from the "unfettered" play of Romantic irony. While the German Romantics sought a nihilistic suspension of all historical and social constraints, Kierkegaardian mastered irony does not aim for a vacuum. It is not a "foolish un-history" but a controlled detachment that allows the subject to inhabit social customs without being defined by them. In counseling, this prevents the

[4] This discipline of subjectivity differs significantly from the "liberal ironist" described by Richard Rorty. While Rorty's ironist treats all beliefs as purely contingent and replaceable, the Kierkegaardian ironist uses negativity to clear a path toward a non-contingent, subjective truth that is "true for me" and worth living or dying for (Rorty, 1989).

ironist from becoming a mere "poet of their own life" in a way that ignores the ethical reality of others.

Death, as the final irony, directs the individual toward concerns more pressing than the trivialities that occupy daily life, but only insofar as this irony is taken seriously by the subject. This seriousness presupposes that irony be a controlled moment—one that lends consistency to existence through the constant provocation and reevaluation of personal values. In this context, irony acts as a path that orientates the individual prior to any subjective construction, thereby enabling a genuine recovery of the self. In philosophical counseling, for instance, irony can help individuals identify and transcend the prejudices that limit their self-understanding. Irony as a figure of speech, as presented thus far, can be employed as a dialogical tool wielded by the counselor. However, the risk for the counselor lies in the fact that irony compels the counselee to turn toward their own subjectivity without guaranteeing its acceptance. The counselor's role, through the use of irony, is to facilitate the client's transformation into an active and independent subject, capable of achieving a full recovery of their own subjectivity. There is a constant risk that the counselee will seek an answer or an external solution from the counselor—a means of escape intended to alleviate the anxiety caused by the weight of their own decisions. For this reason, irony must be cultivated within the counselee so that it may be mastered; this cultivation requires, symmetrically, that the counselor also master their own irony, given the dialogical nature of the counselor–counselee relationship.

In this context, Lydia Amir takes a significant step by introducing the concept of *homo risibilis* (Amir, 2018, p. 387). This concept proposes a skeptical and secular worldview that requires no prior metaphysical assumptions to be functional. Accepting the ridiculousness of one's own condition becomes a form of profound self-knowledge, capable of transmuting suffering into joy through detachment. The concept aims at the liberation of the individual through laughter, understood as a form of self-referential irony in which the phenomenon of lived ridiculousness and the essence of assumed finitude exist in a constitutive tension.

Existential tensions can be accepted by the counselee as certainties through this embrace of the ridiculous; however, the counselor has the duty to guide the process so that the counselee may achieve a recovery of their own self-defined subjectivity, free from the need for external approval. It is precisely for this reason that humor initially directs the counselee outward—toward others and life' s situations—but the exercise of assuming one's own ridiculousness redirects them inward, toward a reflexive subjectivity. This subjectivity, however, may become doubled or distorted if it begins to seek excessive confirmation from the counselor. Homo risibilis thus carries a major risk for the counselor's objective: prompting the counselee to liberate themselves through laughter might simultaneously

legitimize the liberation from others, resulting in an ironic distancing from the responsibility toward alterity.

3.1 Mechanisms of Liberation: The Distinction Between Contemplative and Executive Irony

Therefore, we must proceed to provide the counselor with the conceptual framework of mastered irony as defined by Kierkegaard, while subsequently exploring its application within the counselor-counselee relationship. This ironic distancing from responsibility toward others marks the point where counseling must transition from a pragmatic endeavor to the mastered irony defined by Kierkegaard. Mastered irony opens the counselee to a discipline of subjectivity, manifesting on two fundamental levels: the contemplative and the executive. Kierkegaard begins by establishing the distinction between irony and pretense; the difference lies in the pleasure of irony, derived from being "delivered by irony from the constraint in which the continuity of life's conditions holds him, so that it may even be said that the ironist fights to be delivered" (Kierkegaard, 2013, p. 366). Furthermore, while pretense has an external purpose, irony is a movement toward the subject with no interest in the exterior; irony is its own end. This battle for liberation manifests gradually in philosophical counseling to lead the counselee from a passive state toward a sovereign one, facilitating the recovery of their own subjective authority.

The stages of this process are defined by the level of engagement that both the counselor and the counselee maintain toward irony. Starting from irony as a figure of speech, the most accessible point of departure, the counselor establishes the dialogical framework, while the counselee internalizes these discussions. Contemplative irony represents the theoretical dimension of this process, wherein the counselee learns to recognize and analyze the contradictions between inner thought and the external perception of existence, viewing them as devoid of objective validity (Kierkegaard, 2013, p. 367). This exercise involves a distancing, a form of control that enables the self to emerge from the "object" (mundane trivialities or social pressures). The object does not leave the mental space; instead, it is meant to be held under reflection. Given that this irony is contemplative, the counselee is encouraged to approach the mundane with reflective distance or as a mere "idea." The counselee performs no concrete action and observes no concrete action, unlike the case of the irony of nature,[5] which pertains to executive irony

[5] Kierkegaard describes the "irony of nature" as a projection of the subject onto the objective world. Nature is inherently unconscious, yet to the ironist, its phenomena seem to mock human efforts. In the context of counseling, this correlation is useful for teaching the counselee to view external forces (social or biological) not as entities with absolute

(Kierkegaard, 2013, p. 364). In contemplative irony, the counselee is limited to identifying the vanity of the world as an element subordinated to thought.

In contrast, executive irony presupposes a phenomenon or a concrete act that mocks reality, though this action must not be understood as mere scorn. Kierkegaard draws a line here between the ironist and the hypocrite: hypocrisy belongs to the realm of morality (e.g., appearing generous to receive something in return), whereas executive irony has no interest in the external object. Irony is a pleasure in itself, a way of affirming independence and facilitating the recovery of the self. In this movement, the ironist maintains a strict tension between the phenomenon (the outward action) and the essence (the internal truth). While the phenomenon appears to participate in the mundane world, the essence remains directed toward the subject's own integrity. Executive irony is thus the "silence of death" in action: a way for the counselee to conduct themselves in reality while simultaneously mocking that reality's claim to absolute authority over their selfhood. In the counseling process, this distinction is vital: the counselee should not become a hypocrite who lies to their social circle; rather, they must become subjective through the executive act of irony. Existential tensions, such as anxiety and insecurity, must be removed through contemplative refusal and annihilated through executive action. Mockery is thus a method of viewing existential constraints as elements lacking objective validity.

Executive irony serves as the salvaging of the counselee's own vanity (Kierkegaard, 2013, p. 368) protecting the self from being absorbed by the objective, mundane world. It refers to the capacity to act ironically, maintaining a critical distance from external reality so that the individual is not dominated by social pressures or external expectations. While the contemplative stage views the world as emptied of objective validity, the executive stage represents action in relation to a world so contemplated. Executive irony constitutes the consistency of the ironic subject: if they have perceived (contemplatively) that the world is empty, they must now conduct themselves (executively) as such. This is why Kierkegaard describes it as a "silence of death"; it represents a necessary space where subjectivity is free. For the counselee, this signifies a transition from the passive state of a victim to an active ironic engagement with their own existence, ultimately facilitating a recovery of the self. Thus, the individual becomes capable of retreating from the object to preserve their integrity. The counselee's liberation to underestimate reality carries a significant risk: the devaluation of the external object. If the external object is treated in this manner, the counselee may conclude that nothing has meaning and fall into nihilism, where subjectivity loses itself in a contentless infinity (Kierkegaard, 2013, p. 439). Philosophical counseling aims for

power over them, but as an indifferent background whose "seriousness" depends solely on the measure the subject accords to it.

the subject to rediscover the validity of reality through their own action, facilitating a genuine recovery of the self. For the counselee, this means that the meaning of their life is no longer a given passively received from society, but something actively produced through their choices. However, this action must not be chaotic or a "foolish un-history," (Kierkegaard, 2013, p. 368) meaning an impulsive reaction disconnected from the context of one's own life. It must possess an inherent apriority: an inner discipline and a set of principles internalized through the ironic process. In this way, mastered irony functions as an instrument of measure and limit. It allows the counselee to re-engage with the world (the phenomenon) without "idolizing" it (Kierkegaard, 2013, p. 440). They act with seriousness in their projects, yet always maintain the awareness that it is they who bestow validity upon reality, and not the reverse.

The journey of the counselee unfolds as a maturation of the spirit: it begins with irony as a figure of speech and traverses the stages of contemplating vanity and action. This path is not a gradual ascent; rather, it represents a method of prompting the counselee to relate to themselves as authentically as possible. By acquiring an internal apriority, the counselee revalidates reality through their own action, ensuring that it is not lost to nihilism. Thus, the journey from rhetoric to existence concludes with a subjective counselee—one capable of inhabiting the world once more without being absorbed by it, employing mastered irony to facilitate a recovery of the self while maintaining a meaningful relation to the external world.

4. Applications and Conclusions: The Recovery of Subjectivity through Action and Internal Apriority

Through this work, it is contended that Kierkegaardian irony, in its mastered form, provides the counselor with a practical tool for the recovery of subjectivity. It has been demonstrated that this recovery operates through three interconnected stages: (1) the destruction of the idolatry of the phenomenon through contemplation, (2) ironic action, and (3) the protection of the self through internal apriority. Rather than a mere chronological sequence, these stages represent the manifestation of a practiced relationship with one's own freedom.

Through contemplative irony, the counselor and counselee identify how the 'judgment of others' belongs to the sphere of the Universal—a valid social logic that, however, possesses no essential authority over the individual's Absolute relation to themselves. The counselor encourages the counselee to treat the public space as a phenomenon that lacks essential power. This transition is not a form of psychological desensitization, but a philosophical relocation of authority from the external world to the internal apriority. As a conceptual tool, irony is in a promising position to become an established instrument of philosophical counseling directed

toward this recovery. From the Socratic "numbness" analyzed by Pierre Hadot to the unmasking of Sartrean "bad faith" in Gerald Corey's view, irony functions as an actualization of freedom. It is developed as a method to deconstruct the "idolatry of the phenomenon" ((Kierkegaard, 2013, p. 440). that tendency of the counselee to accord absolute weight to finite, mundane problems. By training both the contemplative and executive levels, counseling allows the subject to annihilate the objective validity of existential tensions, salvaging their own vanity—or inner integrity—in the face of the world's vanity. The potential of irony resides in its mastery. In practice, this manifests through three concrete movements. A counselor, for instance, may encounter a client suffering from social anxiety rooted in the fear of judgment. Through contemplative irony, the counselor and counselee together identify how the idea "the judgment of others annihilates me" constitutes an idolatry of the phenomenon—an attribution of absolute power to a contingent thing. The counselor can then encourage the counselee to adopt actions through executive irony: integrating external judgment as a mere idea that lacks any essential connection to their own person, or speaking in public without focusing on their appearance or voice, but rather on the subject at hand. Consolidating an internal apriority, a set of personal principles that allow the client to inhabit the world without losing their integrity, represents the final step in which the counselee is capable of using irony to overcome personal problems and achieve a recovery of the self.

The difficulties encountered, which warrant further study, primarily concern the method of applying irony within a counseling context. Many of the conceptualized applications bore marked similarities to therapeutic practices such as cognitive-behavioral therapy or exposure therapy, a factor that required careful navigation to avoid methodological overlap. Kierkegaardian irony appears best suited for extensive dialogues that prompt the counselee to reflect on themselves through the subject at hand. These interactions orient the individual toward their own interiority without explicitly mandating introspection. Irony is the path, not the end; thus, a more faithful interpretation—though perhaps more complex within the counseling relationship—would be for the counselor to adopt an ironic stance, leaving the task of deciphering it to the counselee, just as a reader discovers themselves while reading Kierkegaard. Nevertheless, the potential of irony remains fertile for various approaches as long as it is naturally integrated into the counselor's attitude. This work has presented one such approach, the exercise of irony, to test its validity. In future endeavors, we will further explore the mechanisms of applying irony in philosophical practice and counseling, given the promising foundations established here for the recovery of the self.

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