

Narrative Flexibility and Meta-Stability: Philosophical Counseling as a Practice of Self-Reconfiguration

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Abstract

This paper proposes an exploration of the role of philosophical counseling in the development of narrative flexibility and the construction of identity stability, emphasizing how personal narratives, grounded in the fundamental narrativity of consciousness, contribute to self-coherence and mental health. Within the contemporary context, marked by acceleration and the social pressure to perform, particular attention is given to narrative rigidity as a central factor of psychological suffering, especially neurosis. The paper integrates psychoanalytic, narrative, and neurocognitive perspectives, showing that the fundamental difficulty lies not in the absence of meaning, but in the inability to renegotiate and rewrite narratives about the self. Philosophical counseling, through tools such as Socratic dialogue, reflexivity, dialectics, and the construction of a personal vocabulary, supports the client in reconstructing a dynamic, coherent, and resilient identity, offering a meta-narrative alternative to traditional therapeutic approaches.

Keywords: narrativity, philosophical counseling, narrative flexibility, reflexivity, neurosis, identity coherence, self, existence

1. Introduction.

In the contemporary context, as a natural consequence of the intellectual and political upheavals of the twentieth century, we are confronted with an increasingly visible fragmentation of identity, intensified – especially in its more extreme manifestations – by temporal acceleration and axiological pluralism (Taylor, 1992). Within such a framework, existential and psychological forms of suffering

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appear, in many of their instances, not as the result of an absolute lack of solutions, but rather as the consequence of the loss of a coherent narrative thread.

Many individuals are no longer capable of situating themselves within a story (understood here not as mere narration, but as the very coherence of consciousness) that integrates temporal dimensions (past, present, future), personal values, often paradoxical aspects of personality, and possible goals into a unified existential “space” as defined by Bauman (Bauman, 2000). This space is sustained by personal meaning(s), functioning as a gravitational center capable of supporting an identity structure in which these heterogeneous elements may coexist.

The self, far from being merely a remnant of essentialist philosophy, most often represents the fundamental framework of human existence. It can be argued that the self exists in a constitutive symbiosis with the narrativity of consciousness. Consequently, phenomena such as neurosis, anxiety, depression, or the pervasive sense of emptiness may be understood, from this perspective, as expressions of a rigidification or collapse of personal narrative. Within this conceptual framework, philosophical counseling can be conceived not as a technique aimed at symptomatic relief, but as a practice of clarification and reconfiguration of the ways in which individuals understand their own lives, values, and goals (McLean et al., 2023). The central hypothesis of this paper is that narrative flexibility (the capacity to rewrite, nuance, and pluralize self-narratives) constitutes a fundamental mechanism through which philosophical counseling can contribute to overcoming neurotic rigidities. Importantly, such flexibility does not imply the dissolution of the self, but rather a form of dynamic stability, which we will refer to, drawing from the ironist tradition, as meta-stability.

2. The Narrativity of Consciousness and the Construction of the Self

The idea that human identity is fundamentally narrative has been extensively explored in both philosophy and psychology. Thinkers such as Paul Ricoeur (1992) have argued that the self is not a static entity, but rather a continuously constructed narrative identity, emerging from the interpretative integration of lived experiences. From this perspective, consciousness itself is structured narratively: it does not merely register events, but organizes them into meaningful sequences.

The individual does not simply “have” experiences but constantly interprets and reinterprets them, embedding them within a broader story about who they are.

Psychological research further supports this view. Narrative identity theory suggests that individuals construct internalized and evolving life stories that provide their lives with a sense of unity and purpose (McAdams & McLean, 2013). These narratives are not neutral; they are shaped by cultural frameworks, social expectations, and personal values. However, this narrative process is not always flexible. In many cases, individuals develop rigid, repetitive, or self-limiting

narratives that constrain their capacity for reinterpretation. Such rigidity often manifests in neurotic patterns, where the individual becomes trapped within a narrow interpretative framework, unable to accommodate new meanings or alternative perspectives.

First of all, before arguing how philosophical counseling may be helpful at the psycho-emotional, existential, or clinical level (that is, precisely those problematic dimensions relevant for potential clients), taking into account the philosophical tools it offers and their relation to narrativity, it is necessary to clarify how (and indeed whether) the underlying hypothesis is valid and supported by contemporary research. The hypothesis according to which narrativity is central to consciousness is grounded in both theoretical observations and empirical evidence, which demonstrate that narrative structure is not merely a tool for explaining experience, but an active mechanism through which consciousness organizes events, maintains personal continuity, and generates meaning (as we see in Ricoeur, 1992). Studies in developmental and clinical psychology confirm that individuals capable of constructing coherent autobiographical narratives develop a clearer sense of purpose and identity, which translates into higher levels of psychological functioning, adaptability, and resilience (Vanden Poel & Hermans, 2019).

Beyond theoretical considerations, this hypothesis is also supported by a substantial body of empirical evidence. For instance, the longitudinal study conducted by Jonathan Adler (2012) demonstrates that levels of psychological well-being can be predicted based on an individual's capacity to construct a narrative identity. Furthermore, Baerger and McAdams (1999) identify a strong correlation between the "coherence of one's personal story" (that is, the life story of an integrated self) and psychological well-being. Within the cognitive sciences -offering here only a few, yet illustrative examples - it has been shown that the process of constructing narrative identity fundamentally involves autobiographical reasoning, a cognitive-reflective activity through which individuals derive personal meaning from past experiences and connect disparate events into a coherent narrative of the self. Neuroimaging research has demonstrated that autobiographical reasoning activates a specific neural network, including regions such as the medial prefrontal cortex, inferior frontal gyrus, middle temporal gyrus, and angular gyrus, distinct from those involved in the mere recall of events. This suggests that such a network is essential for the integrative and conceptual processing required to construct a life story (D'Argembeau et al., 2014).

This supports the idea that narrative identity is not merely a recounting of memories, but an active cognitive mechanism that organizes self-relevant information, contributing to personal continuity and identity development. Moreover, studies on neural synchrony during narrative engagement show that when individuals listen to or generate stories, activity across large-scale brain networks becomes synchronized, particularly within the default mode network

(DMN), which is involved in self-referential thinking, memory integration, and social cognitive processes. Higher levels of neural synchrony across individuals have been associated with deeper engagement with narrative content, suggesting that shared narrative processing activates common functional patterns related to meaning integration and the interpretation of self-experience. Taken together, this body of evidence indicates that narrativity involves both specific cognitive operations and distributed neural processes, underscoring its fundamental role in how consciousness organizes experience, sustains the sense of self, and contributes to the creative construction of identity.

In contrast, narrative incoherence or the inability to construct a narrative - typically caused by pathology or injury at the level of the brain - as observed in neurotic individuals or in other severe disorders, is associated with significant difficulties in maintaining a unified identity and with the exacerbation of symptoms. This suggests a functional relationship between the narrativity of the mind and cognitive stability. From this perspective, we may describe neurosis, without straying too far from the truth, as a pathological rigidity of narrativity. This understanding of neurosis as narrative rigidification is consonant with the Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective, in which neurosis is not primarily defined through symptomatology, but through a particular relation of the subject to *desire* and to the *symbolic order* (Lacan, 2004). For Lacan, the neurotic subject remains caught within a defensively stabilized structure of meaning, in which desire is repressed and translated into symptoms precisely in order to preserve a certain coherence of the self in relation to the Symbolic Law. The neurotic symptom may thus be understood as an excessively fixed "*narrative knot*": a rigid symbolic solution that protects identity, while at the same time rendering it incapable of transformation. The neurotic subject does not suffer so much from a lack of meaning (although so-called "nihilistic" cases do exist), but rather from a meaning that has become oppressive, one that can no longer be renegotiated.

Contemporary research in narrative and clinical psychology supports this interpretation, showing that psychological suffering is frequently associated with autobiographical narratives characterized by thematic rigidity, a lack of agency, and an inability to integrate negative events into a coherent yet open-ended life story (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Adler, 2012; McLean & Syed, 2015). What is emphasized here is the role of conceptual fluidity, integrated within the narrative system of consciousness. If, for the neurotic individual, there exists only one "valid" story and many others perceived as "false," "unreal," or "impossible," the role of the philosophical counselor is to assist the client in escaping these rigid vicious circles and in relearning a more fluid and complex mode of perspective-taking.

The choice of neuroticism as a primary example is not arbitrary, but anticipates a major issue in contemporary society: namely, the increasing difficulty of the

subject to maintain a coherent identity within a context marked by acceleration, fragmentation, and constant pressure upon the self to be stable, performant, and transparent. Within a culture that demands continuous self-definition, optimization, and coherent self-narrativization, neurosis emerges as a structural side effect of this excessive demand for coherence (e.g., Ehrenberg, 1998), particularly in the absence of sufficient training in such processes. Neurosis thus becomes a paradigmatic symptom of our era, representing precisely the domain in which philosophical counselors will most frequently find themselves engaged.

Of course, defining neurosis today can no longer be reduced solely to psychoanalytic perspectives. What psychoanalysis (for example, the Lacanian orientation) has conceptualized under the term “neurosis” may now be understood, within the cognitive sciences, as a dysfunction in the mechanisms through which the mind constructs, maintains, and updates models of the world and of the self (Lacan, 2004). The brain is thus conceived as a complex mechanism functioning analogously to an inferential system, one that continuously anticipates events based on internal models and minimizes prediction errors through successive adjustments of these models (Friston, 2010; Clark, 2016). Moreover, the internal models of cognition are tightly shaped by past experiences, which are not inert memory traces but dynamic centers of action. Within this framework, cognition is not merely a process of statistical inference, but also acquires a narrative dimension, through which experiences are organized temporally and semantically into coherent structures of meaning. The mind does not operate exclusively with discrete predictions; rather, it constructs internal narratives that bind together past, present, and anticipated futures, thereby providing both continuity of identity and orientation for action.

Psychological suffering emerges precisely when these models become excessively rigid and resistant to various forms of revision, modification, or replacement, even in the face of new experiences. What takes shape, then, is a cognition intolerant of uncertainty (“if I can change what I have believed so far, where does certainty remain?”), accompanied by avoidant behaviors. At the level of the person - that is, within the dimension of identity- this narrative rigidity translates into reductive or linear narratives, repetitive autobiographies (consider, for instance, the ritualistic patterns of individuals with obsessive-compulsive disorder or the cognitive vicious circles characteristic of borderline personality), marked either by fixed themes or by a profound lack of trust in the possibility of change. Research in narrative identity psychology indicates that such narrative traits are frequently encountered not only in anxiety and depressive disorders, but also in obsessive-compulsive disorder, where cognitive hyper-control and the need for certainty generate highly constraining self-narratives, as well as in personality disorders, where narrative rigidity contributes to the persistence of dysfunctional relational patterns (interesting studies in this matter include (Adler, 2012), and

(McLean & Syed, 2015). A substantial body of studies on depression (as defined in DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) and DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 2022) points to the predominance of delusional and/or negative autobiographical narratives, in which the subject's identity narrative becomes overgeneralized and intensely self-critical, and life events are integrated into a global and invasive sense of absolute failure or complete lack of worth. Once caught in such a state of cognitive freezing, the depressive subject finds it difficult to reinterpret deeply sedimented thoughts, experiences, and beliefs, which severely limits narrative transformation.

Various forms of rigidity are associated, at the neurocognitive level, with hyperactivity in neural networks involved in self-referential thinking, particularly the default mode network, meaning a drift of the mind toward well-known phenomena of one's own identity, which are correlated with excessive self-monitoring and rumination (Northoff et al., 2006; Hamilton et al., 2015). Once again, neurosis appears as a paradigmatic case of narrative rigidity: a psychic pathology that does not necessarily arise from an absence of meaning (in so-called "nihilistic" cases, certain causes and approaches differ, though the instruments of resolution bear resemblance), but rather from the subject's inability to reconfigure and renegotiate lived events and experiences in accordance with the dynamic demands of life. Just as a skilled storyteller – the medieval minstrel- knows how to symbolically adapt his stories to his audience, so too must the neurotic learn to recreate their internal narrative, to reinterpret past and present experiences in such a way that they acquire meaning and coherence for the self, without becoming imprisoned within rigid or overwhelming scenarios.

3. Meta-stability

It is no secret that there exist diverse models of psychotherapy that explicitly claim, both at the theoretical level and in clinical practice, an affiliation with existential and/or narrative perspectives. Inevitably, the question arises: Does philosophical counseling, then, become unnecessary and redundant? A belated attempt to reintroduce philosophy into psychology, thereby rendering it "relevant" once again? Such a conclusion, however, as will be demonstrated, overlooks the fundamental differences between the two domains, their respective aims, and the distinctive attributes of philosophy in practice. Narrative therapies (often amalgamated with existential approaches or with person-centered psychology, as developed by Carl Rogers) typically operate within a strictly clinical framework, with the primary objective of alleviating symptoms and restoring optimal psychological functioning, in accordance with social expectations and accepted definitions of health, illness, and the social order (Rogers, 1961). Here, narrative becomes a therapeutic instrument, yet the fundamental character of narrativity

itself is not brought into focus, nor is the symbolic or conceptual status of meaning, identity, the good (“What is good for you? What is the good?”), and truth, critically problematized.

Philosophical counseling, by contrast, indeed aims at healing, but does so through the clarification of the ways in which the subject understands existence, the concepts they employ, their values and principles, and their relation to self and world. Its tools, although they may appear, in one form or another, within the repertoire of psychotherapists trained in such approaches, remain nonetheless distinctive to this domain, being deployed free from the inevitable constraints of the psychological field. These tools, insofar as they relate to the narrativity of consciousness, intervene at a meta-narrative level that traditional therapeutic models do not ordinarily encompass.

A central concept for understanding narrative flexibility is that of *meta-stability*, which may be elucidated through the figure of the ironist. *Irony*, in the philosophical sense, does not denote sarcasm or the facile relativization of all commitments, but rather the subject’s reflexive capacity not to fully identify with their vocabulary (in Rorty’s sense), with the narrative through which they describe themselves (and its idealizations), or with the various “idols” that surround them, in the sense suggested by Francis Bacon (2000). The attainment of such an ironic dimension constitutes one of the aims of philosophical counseling. The ironist is aware of the contingent character of their own descriptions, beliefs, and opinions, recognizing them as cultural, biographical, pathological, or historical products, rather than as expressions of an immutable and/or metaphysical essence, as we see in Ricoeur (1992) or Bruner (2004). Yet, although one might anticipate a fatal difficulty within such a perspective, critical consciousness does not lead to pathological instability or to the loss of identity coherence; rather, paradoxically, it grounds a superior form of stability.

The concept appears in Sartre, yet, as will be shown, there are important differences that philosophical counseling must assume if it is to remain productive within a clinical or counseling setting. Our analysis advances a radical critique of substantialist identity and, in line with Sartrean perspectives, rejects the idea of a “strong” Self conceived as an immutable essence. Consciousness, in this context, remains marked by a certain non-identity, in the sense of “leaving room” for new movements and possibilities within identity; that is, a distance from oneself and a fundamentally projective character (Sartre, 2004; Sartre, 2021). However, unlike Sartre’s approach - which remains, albeit with certain modifications, within a logic of radical instability, of ontological wounds perpetually open at the very core of identity -the concept we propose aims at stabilizing the reflexive process itself, akin to a “storyteller at the point of confluence,” without introducing a fixed ontological center. Both perspectives, in their radicality, may prove problematic within the counseling setting: absolute instability is not sustainable as a form of

guidance, just as the attempt to construct a “ready-made Self” (constant, fixed, and perfectly aligned with what is deemed an acceptable identity) is equally unproductive, and may, in fact, constitute a fatal error.

The concept of meta-stability designates precisely this reflexive position: an identity grounded not in fixed contents, but in the capacity to interrogate, deconstruct, and reformulate its own narratives (McLean & Pasupathi, 2011). In this sense, the self becomes capable of maintaining a reflexive “center,” an instance of internal narration that traverses narrative transformations without collapsing alongside them. Within this framework, the subject’s reality does not lose its objectivity and consistency entirely, dissolving into a universe of pure relativism. Putnam’s conception of objectivity, for instance, offers a compelling argument in this regard. Coherence and truth are neither absolute in a metaphysical sense nor arbitrary; rather, they depend on rational conceptual frameworks, cognitive models (less fluid than they may initially appear), intersubjectivity, fundamental rules of language, and, implicitly, logical propositions, as well as epistemically significant values such as clarity, empirical adequacy, the spectrum of the acceptable, and coherence (Putnam, 1981; Putnam, 1987).

In narrative terms, meta-stability can be understood as the condition of an individual - the ironist- who manages (though not invariably; the perpetuation of the ironic stance is impossible) not to cling to a fixed description of the world and of personal identity, while nonetheless preserving the capacity to evaluate and revise their own narratives, to compare them, and to retain a gravitational center amid the flux and ambiguities of experience. This approach allows the individual to recognize the contingent nature of their life stories while simultaneously maintaining standards of consistency and meaning, thereby avoiding *the trap of absolute relativism*. One may say: Perhaps what I believe now about X and Y is neither correct nor absolutely true, but it is what makes sense to me at this moment, given the point in life I currently inhabit. More than that, it appears to be a sense that yields real consequences in the lived world, responding to my needs and projects, where the past is integrated and the future is afforded a coherent place. If my internal structure requires transformation, I will allow it, but with careful deliberation. Such is the manner in which an ironist thinks.

Meta-stability is thus, at once, a dynamic and robust concept, capable of integrating ruptures and contradictions (so prevalent in contemporary society), of overcoming trauma and misunderstanding, and of opening a broader horizon for the construction of the self (an exit from the constraining, neurotic dimension), without sacrificing critical judgment, meaning, or a functional form of realism. One in which objectivity remains present, albeit in the absence of metaphysical dogmas that are difficult to sustain within the lived realities of most prospective clients.

4. The special tools of philosophical counseling

In the context of exploring narrative identity and cognitive and emotional rigidity, philosophical counseling offers specific instruments that enable the subject to interrogate, examine, and reconfigure their own narratives without being confined to traditional therapeutic approaches. First and foremost, the well-known Socratic dialogue constitutes a central and almost proverbial tool of philosophical counseling, one that is difficult to ignore in practice. The Socratic mode of dialogue does not aim at the transmission of normative content or at the intrusive correction of the other's errors, but rather at facilitating a space for inquiry and self-inquiry through systematic questioning that brings to light limits of understanding, borrowed assumptions (proverbs, quotations, traditions, and the like), hasty presuppositions, and internal contradictions (Kremer, 2004). Thus, as an instrument which, once learned and integrated into the subject's internal structure, fosters an awareness of the constructed (often artificially so) and contingent character of beliefs and convictions, it appears to be a fitting means of attaining an "ironic" stance. Through Socratic dialogue - which may also take place in the absence of another interlocutor (as in internal, self-regulatory conversations)- one arrives at a form of narrative "unfreezing": the attachment to a single dominant story is loosened, thereby creating space for interpretative plurality and transformation. From a psychological perspective, this practice is associated with increased cognitive flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity, both of which function as protective factors against the narrative rigidity linked to psychological suffering (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010).

Secondly, closely related to the first instrument, we encounter *reflexivity*. More precisely, systematically cultivated reflexivity, not merely the basic operation of consciousness that unfolds at the cognitive level with or without the subject's volition. Reflexivity, in this context, designates the subject's capacity to relate to their own experience as to an object of interpretation, rather than merely as a flow of immediate lived states. It involves not only observing one's thoughts and emotions, but also recognizing how these are embedded within a broader narrative context, thereby enabling the individual to assume a meta-narrative position. In this way, the client becomes capable of maintaining a flexible "center" of identity, one that can integrate ruptures, ambiguities, and experiential changes without collapsing alongside them (van Tongeren et al., 2017). The subject, through philosophical counseling, is no longer entirely absorbed by lived experience and its contents, but acquires the capacity for thematization, for symbolic (re)articulation, and for reinterpretation. Cultivated and sustained reflexivity thus functions as a mediating operator between lived experience and meaning, a modality through which raw experiences are transformed and superficial (or, at the opposite pole, traumatic) meanings are integrated into a

broader and more permissive horizon of sense, one that preserves the integrity of identity.

Philosophy further deepens the understanding of reflexivity through reference to Ricoeur's distinction between *idem-identity* and *ipse-identity*. Within this perspective, and taking into account the narrative elements of Ricoeur's thought, the fundamental distinction lies between the apparent stability of the self, understood in terms of the permanence of individual traits, and meaningful continuity, understood as an ongoing construction of sense (in a properly narrative manner). If "idem" refers to permanence, a permanence born of repetition (in psychological terms, we might speak of "patterns"), recognizability, and habit, "ipse" designates the individual's capacity to remain "the same" even while embedded in a constantly changing universe of discontinuities, paradoxes, forgetting, and transformation (perhaps it is precisely this fluidity that makes narrative identity possible).

What matters for identity, then, is not what is invariable or absolute, but interpretative coherence. This narrative commitment to one's own sense is closely bound to reflexivity. Reflexivity is the instance that sustains a form of dynamic fidelity, one that is not arbitrary, yet avoids the extreme rigidification of identity construction. This is the open hermeneutic process articulated by Ricoeur (1992). Consequently, the counseling (or even psychotherapeutic) intervention assumes, more appropriately, the form of collaboration: a co-construction of meaning between counselor and counseled. Reflexivity thus becomes more than a technical instrument; it emerges as a genuine existential practice, situated at the intersection of hermeneutics, the ethics of the self, and psychology.

Thirdly, closely related to the first two instruments discussed, we encounter the *dialectical technique*. This framework of systematically confronting oppositions and contradictions, both at the level of internal narrative and at the level of pure conceptual analysis, is an ancient philosophical tool whose various transformations have secured for it a privileged status up to the present day. Emerging in ancient Greek thought, dialectic originally designated the bringing-forth of truth through dialogue (implicitly, between at least two differing viewpoints). Socrates, as portrayed through the hand -or mind - of the almost divine Plato, employed critical questioning to destabilize common opinion (*doxa*), guiding the interlocutor toward the recognition of ignorance and the clarification of concepts. With Plato, dialectic becomes the supreme method of philosophy, oriented toward the knowledge of the Ideas through processes of conceptual division and reunification. In Aristotle, dialectic acquires a more technical character, functioning as a means of testing the coherence of positions and their argumentative resilience, distinct from scientific demonstration (*apodeixis*). In modern (or romantic) philosophy, especially with Hegel, dialectic undergoes yet another transformation, being situated at the very heart of totality as an intrinsic

modulation of the Absolute. In the Hegelian view, it becomes a fundamental structure of thought, and thus of reality itself, far more than a mere dialogical technique. Here, contradiction is no longer an obstacle to be overcome, but the very motor of conceptual development (*Aufhebung*).

However, within philosophical counseling, dialectic cannot be employed as a purely theoretical or ontological structure of reality and absolutes, for the counseled subject does not benefit from speculative games or abstract constructions. Rather, dialectic is reoriented as a profoundly practical instrument for existential clarification. The counselor deploys dialectical dialogue to examine the client's beliefs, the internal tensions between their values, and the contradictions between what they claim and what they actually live. In this sense, dialectic also functions as a safeguard against certain risks inherent in the previously discussed instruments: such as an uncritical acceptance of paradoxes and contradictions within the self, which may lead to moral incoherence (for instance: "I am good, yet I sometimes steal from others - and this is acceptable, because..."). The emphasis here does not fall on abstract philosophical truth, but on the coherence of one's life, on the rational assumption of personal positions, and on the identification of contradictions that ought not to be passively accepted, but rather overcome or altogether abandoned. The capacity to endure, at the level of thought, certain dichotomies is as important as recognizing that, at times, the dichotomy itself is misguided or unnecessary.

Another defining element of the counseling process, and one that plays a more guiding role for the counselor than for the counseled, is the idea of a *private vocabulary*, through which the individual narrates their own life. One frequently encounters individuals who rely on borrowed language (perhaps again, *doxa*?), inherited or appropriated from various social contexts, which functions as a rigid grid of (self-)interpretation. This drastically reduces the plasticity of experience and the fluidity of identity, constructing a pre-established universe of labels and fixed structures.

In contrast, philosophical counseling encourages the construction of a personal vocabulary, in which terms are chosen and negotiated according to the meanings they hold for the subject, rather than according to external authority. This perspective aligns with Rorty's view of language and the notion of a "*final vocabulary*," capable of sustaining an authentic mode of understanding both world and self. In a distinctly Nietzschean tone, narrative rewriting thus acquires a profoundly poetic character. Not in a decorative, aesthetic, or superficial sense, but as an essential and existentially creative act through which the world is articulated and rearticulated. Even if we remain actors within a socio-cultural context, the possibility of islands of authenticity persists, even if only sporadically.

Philosophical counseling distinguishes itself through its engagement with the individual's subjective experience and through the attention it grants to the

personal vocabulary by which one narrates one's life. As Rorty (1989) emphasizes, individuals often rely on a "borrowed" language drawn from psychological, moral, or social discourses, which fixes experience into rigid categories and reduces existential complexity to pre-established labels. In contrast, the construction of a personal vocabulary enables the individual to negotiate the meaning of terms in accordance with their own experience, thereby transforming self-narration into a creative and reflexive act.

This dimension is concretely illustrated by Laing (1960), who highlights the experience of individuals marked by ontological insecurity or schizoid modes of being, for whom the world and others may appear as threats, and the self as fragmented. Philosophical counseling allows for the exploration of such experiences not through diagnosis or external normativity, but through reflexive dialogue, facilitating the reconstruction of identity and of one's relation to others in a manner that is both personalized and responsible. Moreover, philosophical counseling is capable of addressing questions that cannot be reduced to issues of mental health: questions of meaning, authenticity, freedom, or existential contingency. It acknowledges the irreducible plurality of ways of living a life and provides a privileged space for the exploration of the possible, cultivating narrative flexibility not for the sake of conformity to predefined norms, but for the expansion of the field of meaning within which the individual may inhabit their own life. In this respect, philosophical counseling does not merely complement narrative approaches within psychotherapy, but becomes an essential framework for reflection upon the human condition itself.

An ontologically secure individual lives in the world with a felt sense of presence that is alive, integrated, and complex, *situated in meaningful relation to the alterity of the world*. Such a person will inevitably encounter the difficulties of life (change, disruption, even trauma) but, possessing a stable identity center, they are capable of withstanding these challenges. Aware that things and other persons exist in states of perpetual transformation, transition, or even contradiction, the ontologically secure individual does not lapse into negative or delusional states of mind. This form of security does not refer to social, emotional, or material safety, but rather to a pre-reflexive certainty of one's own existence.

By contrast, ontological insecurity describes a condition in which this certainty of being is either fragile or only precariously sustained. The individual no longer experiences existence as something secure, but as something constantly under threat. The anxieties that emerge in this context are not ordinary fears directed toward concrete objects, but profound forms of anguish related to the potential dissolution of the self. Philosophical counseling, through the instruments outlined above (and some more), possesses the capacity to assist the suffering subject in constructing a form of existential security through an understanding of narrativity.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the narrative orientation of philosophical counseling approaches enables individuals to integrate experiences, temporal stages of life, memories, traumas, and paradoxes while maintaining a coherent subjective continuity. The stake here is not objective truth, which, in fact, often constitutes a major error within therapy or counseling, but *meaning*. It is the individual's existential coherence that renders life navigable, inhabitable, and genuinely lived in the present, without the constant threat of identity dissolution. If absolute, theoretical truth becomes both inaccessible and ultimately irrelevant within concrete experience. And it may even give rise to forms of neurosis. So, as we argued, meaning (its creation and its openness to transformation) becomes the pragmatic criterion employed by the counselor and gradually appropriated by the counseled.

Unlike narrative or cognitive-behavioral therapies, the philosophical counselor, also oriented toward the narrativity of consciousness, does not seek to alter the subject on the basis of predefined narratives, nor to forcibly eliminate behaviors or symptoms, but rather to facilitate reflexivity and to cultivate the resilience of the self. Overall, the present analysis has shown that the psychological suffering associated with neurosis may be more adequately understood not as a mere absence of meaning, but as the effect of an excessive rigidification of meaning and of the narratives through which the subject organizes both self-experience and the world. Psychoanalytic, narrative, and neurocognitive perspectives converge toward the idea that the fundamental difficulty lies not in the absence of coherence, but in the impossibility of renegotiating it in relation to the change, uncertainty, and discontinuity inherent to existence. Neurosis thus appears as a pathology of identity fixation and intolerance of ambiguity, further amplified within a socio-cultural context that simultaneously demands stability, performance, and narrative transparency.

Within this framework, philosophical counseling emerges as a distinct and necessary space, capable of intervening at a meta-narrative level inaccessible to standard therapeutic interventions. Through instruments such as Socratic dialogue, cultivated reflexivity, dialectic, and the work upon personal vocabulary, philosophical counseling does not aim at imposing a "correct" narrative or optimizing the subject's adaptive functioning, but at developing a stable reflexive capacity. One that remains open to revision and to a plurality of meanings.

As we have seen, the concept of meta-stability expresses precisely this form of dynamic equilibrium: an identity that neither rests upon immutable contents nor dissolves into a fragmenting relativism.

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