

CRITICAL THINKING, AN EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL TOOL IN PHILOSOPHICAL COUNSELING

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Abstract: *The paper intends to start from a common element, derived from the interdisciplinary link between philosophical practice and didactic practice, to analyze the concept of critical thinking, considered an important element of educational communication and which can become a useful and effective tool in philosophical counseling. We will study some aspects of the application of critical thinking in the new applied field of philosophy, as an important communication element that can be used by the philosophical counselor, which will once again highlight the interdisciplinary connections that can be created by involving the analyzed concept of critical thinking, concept that can be included as an instrument recognized by both practices.*

Keywords: critical thinking; education; philosophical counseling; interdisciplinarity; didactic practice;

1. Introduction

The theme of the article was chosen from the perspective of the preoccupations with philosophy put into practice starting from the study of a new concept of philosophical practice recently published in the world, philosophical counseling, to which we have identified many interdisciplinary links with various other fields. We believe that this approach is important in clarifying the role of the concept of critical thinking in the development of theories of philosophy based on logic and arts of argumentation that can become effective and necessary tools in philosophical counseling, as a specialized practice of philosophy and implicitly a new profession with a liberal character.

2. Literature review

2.1. Introduction to Critical Thinking and Philosophy

If we look into the history of philosophy, we identify elements of the current concept of critical thinking, which has been used since antiquity by Plato, who presented the art of dialogue and interrogation, in the form of

socratic dialogues, or Aristotle's logic who formulated the principles of logic used in philosophy, but also by many other disciplines of science. Consistent with the proposed subject, we find that the current elements of the concept of critical thinking have been identified quite recently, if we are comparing to the first attempts of antiquity, and the first reference to critical thinking takes place in Romania only at the beginning of this century, when a first monography of critical thinking is published (Clitan, 2003). From the definition of the studied concept, its origin from logic and the theory of argumentation is observed, being presented for a long time in philosophical schools under these forms of study over the centuries and the transition to the education system was made later at the middle of the 20th century. An analysis of the concept of critical thinking, that we consider valuable for teaching it as a distinct discipline, is done by Philosophy Professor Gheorghe Clitan, who identifies elements specific to presenting the concept from a philosopher's point of view, with reference to how this concept was included in logic and theory of argumentation, a discipline that has become part of the basic training of a philosophy specialist, but which can be successfully implemented, in his opinion, in the thinking of ordinary people, as the author says: "Today, ordinary thinking becomes an object of application for philosophy, alongside daily life events and habits, and the practice of intellectual or imaginative skills or aptitudes become the most critical tool of critical thinking. Thus, centering on argumentation, philosophy gains the status of critical thinking, while critical thinking becomes applied philosophy"(Clitan, 2003, pp. 88-89). We note in this wording a reference to the applied philosophy, using the help of thinking critical point of view, on which we will continue to study, starting from its interdisciplinary links.

2.2 The interdisciplinary link between education and philosophical practice, realized with the help of critical thinking

A similar approach, highlighting the interdisciplinary link created between didactics and education on the one hand, and philosophy and philosophical practice, on the other hand, through the concept of philosophy for children introduced by Matthew Lipman, addressed to the educational system at all levels through educational programs aimed at students and young people, in various stages of training and learning. On this educational concept for children, Lipman states that it is "an example of the application of research in the field of education" (Cosentino, 2002, p. 43), where the emphasis is on learning a way of thinking, being different from to learn about thinking, must be done in a self-correcting way, based on research on a community. The same researcher notes the orientation towards critical thinking and advocates introducing it into his curriculum, showing that

“there is a general consensus on critical thinking, which develops the problem-solving ability and decision-making” (Cosentino, 2002, p.45). In this educational concept, there are many instruments of philosophy, specific to logical reasoning, which are actually basic elements of critical thinking recently developed as a distinct concept. The educational project developed by Lipman was also used and developed by philosophy practitioners, which included this field, intended for children, in their research and program concerns. In so-developed educational practices, either in the form of philosophy for children or in the form of community of inquiry or laboratory of research, all this didactic programs also include in their structure study materials taken from applied philosophy, we referring here to stimulus type materials and of the model type, (Cosentino, 2002) that support the specialists in education involved in such programs.

If, at first, critical thinking was presented predominantly as part of the educational system, an area in which it originally manifested itself was that of applications for law students and teachers, and was subsequently taken over by the judiciary system, which identified the need for acquiring elements of critical thinking, especially in the form of items for the development of legal and investigative reasoning, with explicit application in the causes under judgment. Another component of the legal system has noted the same need to acquire the art of reasoning and applied logic, here we refer to law specialists working in the field of law, as a profession dedicated to the defense of the rights and freedoms of the person, and who are aware of the requirement of deepening the basic elements of critical thinking, as an essential and useful element in the preparation of good defense or pleading. At interference with philosophy, at first there were elements of critical thinking manifested in the discipline of Logic as a part of any training program in the field of theoretical philosophy, and which were put into practice in philosophy by the philosophical researches materialized only in academic papers, mostly addressed only to philosophers or those who study philosophy.

In this works and studies, critical thinking is one of the working tools used to present argumentative logic or other adjacent applications. Mircea Dobre, who supports the place of critical thinking “within the broader framework of logic” but also defines it interdisciplinary as “a *new logic*, which no longer emphasizes the formal, symbolic, rigorous aspects, instead focusing on the practical aspects of logic; it is a logic applied to ordinary thinking, perhaps even a training for the argumentative aspects of everyday life; it is a logic adapted to the requirements of everyday reasoning, but also to those of reasoning in certain sciences, since it was adopted with success by psychology, law, sociology, economy, etc.”(Dobre, 2013, p. 40), resulting

here the implicitly positioning critical thinking within the broader framework of his philosophy and practice.

2.3 Criticisms and support of the application of critical thinking

As an alternative to critical thinking, in 1994 Edward De Bono comes up with a new concept, that of *parallel thinking*, and draws some personal conclusions based on the socratic model from which he left. In the volume that he published on this theme, the author's stated intention is to show that "in a world undergoing rapid change, the traditional thinking system fails because it was not designed to deal with change." (De Bono, 2017, p.5). De Bono's critique is amplified in the chapter on *Criticism and the Deletion of Truth* (De Bono, 2017, pp. 42-49) where he states that the Western world has some obsession for criticism and attack, a trend that has its origins in the socratic method, remarking that "Socrates was delighted with rejecting" (De Bono, 2017, p. 43). The author himself becomes a critic of critical thinking, of which he considers that it can not be a maximum of the human intellect, and "Western culture has always privileged critical thinking in an exaggerated way" (De Bono, 2017, p. 44). To substantiate his claims, De Bono has some personal explanations that rely on the practical needs of education, the fact that often the participants in a conversation or analysis prefer to focus on the variant of failure, and criticism brings immediate emotional satisfaction or it can give a chance to the unfulfilled to be fulfilled, even if criticism is much easier. The conclusion of this author is tough when he states: "However, we must realize that critical thinking in itself is insufficient. We must temper our obsession with critical thinking. [...] We must be very critical of critical thinking, aware that this is often just an inexpensive and simplistic thinking exercise."(De Bono, 2017, p. 48). Criticism, in his opinion, is only a component of human thinking, being "a lower form of intellectual effort", and "alternative prospects can sit in parallel, side by side" (De Bono, 2017, pp. 48-49). The option proposed by Bono is considered to be particularly useful for a true and fair approach to education, which aims at developing a learning system based on both forms of human thinking.

In spite of all these criticisms, we have also identified support for the concept, especially in the field of education, through research by Professor Daniela Dumitru, a specialist in education sciences, who finds that critical thinking "will have to become an essential component of classroom work" (Dumitru, 2013, p. 11). She also notes the interdisciplinary perspective of critical thinking, being linked with philosophy through argumentation theory, with psychology through the development of critical attitudes, and the education sciences in general. (Dumitru, 2013, p. 23) The author states in her book, with the suggestive title: "Who is afraid of critical thinking?" that

although this concept has been initially used in the philosophers' community, in Romania since 2003 there is a promotion emphasis on the training of teachers in the national education system, for the implementation of critical thinking at all levels of education, from primary to secondary, to high school and in university through interdisciplinary programs. In 2005, the Institute of Magistracy launched a complex set of tests of critical thinking, adapted to the Romanian specificity, to which many specialist from law, educational, philosophical and other specialists worked. (Bieltz, et al., 2010).

2.4 The role of critical thinking, as a useful instrument in philosophical counseling

The role of critical thinking in philosophical counseling is also pronounced by Elliot D. Cohen, a specialist in cognitive-behavioral counseling, showing how informal logic can be applied to philosophical counselors, or how logic can be used as a useful technique in the philosophical counseling, a new profession, which thus benefits from a new tool, by the critical thinking. Elliot emphasizes that critical thinking has contributed to philosophical counseling, which he says is more empowered to use logic than psychologists do, ending his article with a urge: "Just look at Socrates!" (Lahav & Tillmans, 1995, pp. 122-131).

Analyzing the work of this practitioner (Sulavikova, 2014, p. 575), some hypotheses underlying Cohen's logic therapy have been highlighted, namely: logical deduction can act on people's emotional behavior, which is prone to errors; the tendency towards perfection of people negatively influences the behavior, the problems thus generated can be overcome by the will; and critical thinking is a useful tool that can also be taken up in philosophical counseling. Among the practitioners or supporters of critical thinking as a useful tool for philosophical practice is Tim LeBon (LeBon, 2007, p. 4), who puts critical thinking among the five philosophical methods he proposed in his counseling along with conceptual analysis, phenomenology, thought experiments and creative thinking, showing: "Critical thinking is perhaps the single most useful philosophical method for the counselor. Its value is that it enables clients to be more rational and reasonable in their decision-making, beliefs, values and emotions (LeBon, 2007, p. 138).

2.5 Critical thinking and education

Remaining in the context of the same author, he recommends practitioners who have omitted critical thinking in their training, by eliminating it from the curriculum, to rediscover these thinking skills and introduce them into their counseling work. He reconsiders the use of critical thinking in the decision-making process, using logic as an inductive or

deductive working method for evaluating arguments: "Critical thinking helps us to be more rational and reasonable in life by helping us to evaluate arguments."(Le Bon, 2007, p.139).

Tim LeBon pronounced at the beginning of his work both in favor of applying critical thinking to the evaluation of philosophical theories, but also shows the help that this instrument can offer in counseling his clients for making decisions. "We will use critical thinking to evaluate philosophical theories and also investigate the extent to which critical thinking can help clients towards emotional wisdom, good decisions and enlightened values" (Le Bon, 2007, p.4).

Returning to the analysis of the classical educational system, which was considered to be traditional, based on a thinking considered to be "vertical," in 1967 another process that was then considered to be innovative was introduced, Edward de Bono's concept of lateral thinking (De Bono, 2010), which eliminates the patterns of thought in which logic was used, and proposes adding the creativity and intuition to be introduced into the system of thought used in classes, and which are, according to the author, ways of using the human mind, similar to logic, but they restructure the existing conceptual model or create new models, showing that the two types of thinking are complementary. (De Bono, 2010, p. 12). In this context, LeBon makes a remark that both the creative thinking, presented by Edward de Bono, and critical thinking, as originally presented (Ennis, 1996), are useful tools for decision-making. The research conducted by Daniela Dumitru to "study the correlation between integrated educational programs and the development of critical thinking" (Dumitru, 2013, p. 103) leads the author to some conclusions, namely: that caution is needed in the intention to generalize the capacities of critical thinking, the solution being to create programs specific to each field of work, and interdisciplinary courses are only useful for everyday use, where if properly used it becomes a character trait. The same study also resulted in the need for a mentor to assist in the training of a specialist in critical thinking.(Dumitru, 2013, p. 171).

2.6 Critical citizenship, an interdisciplinary component with educational implications

In the same direction of studying interdisciplinary links, there is a more recent concern of the citizen-oriented educational system, where critical thinking can become a useful tool for citizenship education. This innovation can rightly be considered an application of critical thinking, this time at the social level, where a new concept, the one of *critical citizenship*, is spoken of, about which we can say that it is still in a process of definition, whether it can only be followed at the conceptual level at first, afterwards it can be followed by positioning it as a practice of critical thinking in the social field

of the citizen who becomes more involved and more active in the democratic process of the society in which lives. Practically, this concept of critical citizenship attempts to take on elements of critical thinking, which can become useful tools in this area of the citizen's social involvement, but which, in our opinion, must be embedded in strategies and programs for the development of democracy within the applicant company. Intuitively, we dare say that the development of this concept, through its definition and implementation, can bring about beneficial changes in society, with effects both on the community and on the citizen. The proposed model was tested in smaller or isolated communities, specific to Nordic countries in Europe, where developments in citizens' involvement in community decision-making have been noticed and are being evaluated for the development of the concept and its application to larger communities. The proposed solution for achieving this implementation can be given by the support that should come from the state and the citizens' associations, to promote major projects in the citizenship and social field, in the sense of presenting and promoting the new concept of critical citizenship in various ways , starting with the educational ones, until it is put into practice, based on the programs developed within the community.

3. Methodology

In order to highlight the purpose of this paper, we conducted direct observations to study transversal programs conducted at the West University of Timisoara, as well another masters program specialized in philosophical counseling, started in collaboration with the Institute of French Philosophical Practice and Ca'Foscari University in Venice. Thus, in order to increase the students' interest in philosophy, the discipline of critical thinking was recently introduced in the interdisciplinary didactic projects carried out between the faculties of the University of Timișoara, attended by students from various fields, and where the philosophy professor presents to all participants, some elements of critical thinking, necessary to learn the art of argumentation and logic applied to any field of study.

The first attempts to put critical thinking into practice in a new orientation in philosophical practice, we referring here to philosophical counseling, were made in Europe by the practitioner Oscar Brenifier, who developed a method of philosophical counseling based on the art of questions, that he has successfully used in individual philosophical counseling but also at working group level. The French practitioner included in his work procedures elements of critical thinking that became work tools taken from the educational procedures originally developed by him and applied in the didactics of teaching philosophy of children and students through tools like the philosophical lab, community of inquiry, philosophy

for children, and narrative philosophy, where he used patterns of reflection from Nastratin Hogeia stories as models of reflection.(Brenifier, 2015). In Brenifier's view, philosophical practice is given by thought processes or philosophical reflection, which is manifested in 3 stages, the first being the identification of the dilemma or the problem, followed by criticism "for the identification we must think of the other person, for critique we must think through the other person" and the last is the conceptualisation: "that to think at yourself, in the same mode like at to other" (Brenifier, 2015, p. 29-30).

These procedures have led to the improvement and refinement of a questioning style of this practitioner, moving from the Socratic and Aristotelian logic model, being complemented by the instrument of critical thinking, a basic element in the art of asking questions, but also from educational applications developed by him. Brenifier is himself like advocate of a counselors, called to have a combatant style recently he introduced in counseling the procedure of making a socratic pact with the client which contains ten rules that are in the working procedure, based on the art of interrogation and dialogue between the parties (Hațegan, 2018, p. 162). Although we have not identified the practitioner's express reference to the concept of critical thinking, from the analysis of his educational applications, especially the philosophy for children and the description of other educational practices for school, as well as the observations made by participating in some of the group presentations or workshops that took place within the master program that we refer to, we can say that constant elements of critical thinking were used as basic tools in formulating the questions and counseling procedures of his practice.

If Philosophy for children was originally intended for children who participated in the programs developed by Lipman, he later recognized the importance of extending it to the educators and teachers involved in the process of learning philosophy, reaching the point of doing philosophy in the classroom, generating the concept of Philosophy in the Classroom (Volpone, 2013, p. 60) involving both children and adult learners. On this reasoning, the transition from P4C to a philosophy addressed to all - Philosophy for all (Volpone, 2013, p. 61), which continues through another extended concept from the philosophical counseling, called Philosophy for Community - P4Co (Volpone, 2013, p.61). The philosophers' preoccupation for this field materialized more recently through the contribution of philosophy to the training of specialists in education that can successfully apply the philosophy for children program, in which the discipline was included in the masters programs of philosophy, we note here the program *Philosophical counseling and consultancy* from Timisoara, where the participants did practice in some schools in the city, along with educators or school teachers, who were

interested in learning new working skills with students in the field of philosophy and implicitly of critical thinking.

In the pilot project of training for the new profession, through the Philosophical Counseling and Consultancy course started in 2015, we noticed the situation where, if the educator comes from the theoretical field, he tends to stay on that direction to present the concept of critical thinking by limiting it to what is often a strictly academic approach to philosophy, without including in its presentation useful elements of practice specific to philosophical counseling. When the trainer comes from the area of philosophical practice, there is a change in the way of teaching, it involves the introduction of critical thinking elements in the learning of techniques to generate questions for counseling, but it rarely makes distinct remarks or explicit references to the various ways of applying critical thinking, case which doesn't show the real value of these tools in the professional training.

Before conclusion, we can say that the position currently held by educators working in the field of philosophy, especially those in universities, is focused on maintaining and presenting the concept of critical thinking strictly in the theoretical field, i.e. to develop some useful skills to understand philosophy. If we look at philosophical counseling as a practice of philosophy for ordinary people, where philosophical counseling specialists can come from different fields with basic training, then an identical approach as in theoretical philosophy of presenting them critical thinking, like they were students in philosophy, can not be too productive at all. For that reason we propose the implementation of a middle solution that can eliminate these shortcomings in the sense of taking over the elements of the teaching of critical thinking in education which are included in the training programs of the new specialists and which together with other seminars and applied workshops of critical thinking, can become useful tools in the new profession, of a philosophical counselor.

4. Conclusions

At present there is a serious concern for the creation and development of distinct training programs for educators and educational trainers in postgraduate training programs in which they can be trained in these new specializations, both useful and necessary to an efficient educational system. We must also take into account the current tendency in various countries of the world, within already existing trends, to implement philosophical counseling as a distinct regulated profession, a situation requiring an adaptation of the way in which the philosophic counseling specialist learns to apply critical thinking, as a working tool of its practice. In order for the result to be real, it is necessary to move from the classical philosophy course to an adaptation of the professional training program to the new profession, so that

critical thinking is easily understood and put into practice by any practitioner.

Based on this study, we can state that the application of critical thinking in the new philosophical counseling profession, as a philosophical practice, improves the performance of the practitioner and the specialist formed in the counseling service dedicated to a person, helping both sides to understand the issue or topic proposed to counseling by generating options or arguments, followed by their assessment with the help of this critical thinking tool, which can lead to a clarification of the attitude to the problem under consideration or its resolution, but also to taking decisions useful for person.

From the analysis of these interdisciplinary links result the role and contribution of critical thinking as a necessary and useful tool in the training of a practitioner in philosophy. If in the previous paper on philosophical practice (Hațegan, 2018) we have advocated the need to introduce philosophical counseling as a distinct profession, we consider that we need to pay more attention to the possibility of including critical thinking in the basic training of new specialists trained in philosophical counseling.

We consider it useful that this topic be subject to further research, both from the point of view of the interdisciplinary links generated by the involvement of critical thinking in various fields of activity: starting from the field of education where other forms of application of the concept can be developed, with diverse destinations, from educators and trainers involved in the educational process to the beneficiaries of the educational process, through the extension of coverage and in the systems of professional training or adult learning; the link with various philosophical practices and, in particular, the new philosophical counseling profession through future assessments on how to implement and implement the concept in practice. Another application that is outlined and made only briefly in this paper is the development of the new concept of critical citizenship, which takes on elements of critical thinking that can be implemented in the educational programs needed by the citizen in the process of participation in making decisions in society, according to democratic principles. Of course, the list of these concerns will remain open to other areas where critical thinking can become an application useful to the development of new skills in the field in which the concept studied by us in this paper is applied.

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