A New Mode of Social Casework:
Integrating Philosophical Counseling with Social Work

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Abstract
Philosophical counseling aligns with the goals of social work, and it overlaps in some of its methods with traditional psychotherapy. Social work casework as it is currently practiced draws heavily on traditional psychotherapy, but it lacks a philosophical component that can help people more deeply understand and better resolve the root of problems such as questions about the meaning of life or clarification of values. Social work currently employs psychotherapy models such as the psycho-social model, behavior model, humanistic model, family therapy model, and so forth. This paper constructs a mode of social casework based on philosophical counseling that draws together the similar goals of social work and philosophical counseling and complements the use of traditional psychotherapy approaches used in social work.
Keywords: *social casework, psychotherapy, philosophical counseling*

Introduction

Social work is a professional practice to help others. For more than a century, social casework has been one of the three areas of focus within social work (the other two being social group work and social community work). Philosophical counseling is a practice of philosophy initiated in the 1980s to help people gain more practical wisdom and to relieve suffering and confusion in their lives (Raabe). So, both social work and philosophical counseling have a common goal of helping others. Despite this similarity in goals, social casework has consistently employed theories and methods of psychotherapy in its practice, namely psychoanalysis, behaviorism, humanism, and family therapy, etc.

Philosophical counseling offers an overlooked alternative to psychotherapy that could be employed in social casework. Both philosophical counseling and psychotherapy share similar problems, objectives, methods, approaches, security, and a client-counselor relationship. Gerd Achenbach, a founder of modern philosophical counseling, insists that philosophy counseling may be a valuable alternative to psychotherapy. Although it is not itself a therapy, it has a therapeutic effect. (Achenbach, 1984) Lahav and Tillmans also insist that philosophical counseling is different from psychotherapy, but it was difficult to distinguish it from the latter. Lydia Amir said that it was not necessary for philosophical counseling to be opposed to psychology or psycholotherapy. (Amir, 2005)

The benefit that philosophical counseling offers is that people often feel dissatisfied and have various types of suffering that are not differently considered to be psychological problems. In fact,

many emotional problems are signs of an imbalance in a person's philosophical worldview. Viktor Frankl (1958) noted that the frustration of existence was not mental illness, but a "healthy pain" that needed a kind of existential analysis. The "healthy pain" does not stem from the psychological dimension but from pure rationality of human being. So philosophical counseling should be employed to deal with the "healthy pain" and "sane suffering" of human beings. Frankl pointed that existential analysis to the "healthy pain" and frustration of existence was not a type of neurosis treatments. So existential analysis does not belong to the work of psychiatrists, but of the philosophers (Zaiser, Reinhard, 2005). Likewise, Lou Marinoff believes that these kinds of problems are not the diseases of physical or psychological pathology, but discomforts (dis-eases) that are philosophical in origin. Rather than psychotherapy, philosophical counseling, the "therapy for the sane", is needed. (Marinoff, 1999, p. 11) Marinoff disagrees with psychotheraphy's medicalization of many life issues. These examples show that there is a body of research supporting the claim that problems of life can and should be appropriately addressed through philosophical reflection under the guidance of experts, namely philosophical counselors.

Scholars in the field of philosophical counseling have conducted deep exploration of methods and supporting theory. However, in the area of practice, philosophical counseling needs to be further expanded. This essay discusses why philosophical counseling should be applied to the casework practices of social workers and, further, aims to demonstrate its necessity and feasibility. Given that philosophical counseling is an alternative to psychotherapy, it is possible to construct a new mode of social casework by combining philosophical counseling and social casework methods.

1. The necessity of a new social casework mode based on philosophical counseling

The results of modern scientific and technological progress are surprising. Material developments enhance people's physical comfort and convenience, but also cause people to question whether these developments really enrich their spiritual lives and increase their happiness. Lou Marinoff noted that technology would benefit society if used correctly, but otherwise, it would cause harm. In fact, many advances in technology have not contributed to human well-being, but have caused a great deal of damage to the human spirit, resulting in interpersonal alienation, a disaster for mankind.

The alienation-characterized society has been described in many books, including David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*. From Riseman's research and the research of other scholars, there are three primary adverse impacts of technology on society. First, technologies have destroyed the connections between man and nature and weakened human nature. Second, technologies have transferred a significant amount of human interaction from real to virtual space, which has made human bonds ephemeral and less sentient. Virtual interactions promote social dysfunction. Third, technologies have pushed people from being active producers to passive consumers. This work echoes what Henry David Thoreau once warned of more than 100 years ago—that people would become the tool of their tools in wealth-driven and comfort-driven society, which wouldlead to separating mind from body, self from society, and man from nature. Rabindranath Tagore, the eminent poet, wrote "the human being loses sight of the self when existing in isolation." (Marinoff & Ikeda, 2012)

*Zhang Lizeng & Gao Lijuan*1729

The tangible result of the losing of the broken relationship with others, nature and society is a decline in health. Science, including psychology, can give us some useful knowledge on how to cure diseases and how to make us happy, but it can't tell us what happiness is or what it means to live a good life. Science may be helpful, but what it can provide is not enough. (LeBon, 2001) Victor Frankl notes that for most people, the cure of their fundamental problems is something beyond medical and psychological treatments. He regards the state in which a majority of people live as "an existential vacuum," which is an inner emptiness, a sense of the total and ultimate meaninglessness in more and more people's lives. Frankl defined this "existential vacuum" as a frustration that is the most basic motivating force and the will to struggle for meaning. Since science and technology contribute to the problem, they cannot be the solution. A new way out should be found. (Marinoff, 1999, p. 15)

Marinoff wrote that people "need dialogue, not diagnosis." (Marinoff, 1999, p.4) Individuals in trouble need to understand their problems in a deeper and wider perspective. Philosophical expertise encompasses logic, ethics, values, meaning, rationality, decision-making in situations of conflict or risk—all of the complicated things in human life. People can more easily and effectively build a problem-solving framework if they understand their personal philosophies of life through the assistance of a philosophical counselor who draws on the wisdom of current and past thinkers.

Martha Nussbaum wrote, "The whole point of medical research is cure. So, too, the whole point of philosophy is human flourishing." In today's barren society, to lead enjoyable, vibrant and meaningful lives, we need philosophy to illuminate the minds of human beings like the light of the sun. Philosophy is indispensable in helping people maximize their potential. In our world today, we need philosophy to encourage and cure those who suffer and help them awaken their power to face the challenges and troubles in their lives. Philosophy is the power and wisdom to illuminate the meaning of life and awaken people to live well (Marinoff & Ikeda, 2012, pp. 59-60).

It is essential for social workers to conduct social casework based on philosophical counseling because social casework based only on traditional psychotherapy is not enough to promote people's spiritual harmony and happiness. Philosophical counselors can help clients in ways different from those of psychotherapists; philosophical counseling can deal with many problems that the latter cannot. Philosophical counselors can help clients think about the nature of their problems by discussing issues related to clients' worldviews. It is fair to describe philosophical counseling as the restoration of a soul-caring tradition of philosophy. By applying philosophical wisdom to people's lives, philosophical counseling helps people solve their problems, enhance their well-being, and more importantly, attain internal peace, which can lead to greater harmony of groups and even the whole society. In this sense, philosophical counseling plays role as a "social buffer."

2. The feasibility of a new social casework mode based on philosophical counseling

Philosophical counseling is similar to social casework, and its use of psychotherapy models, in several respects: the purpose of helping people, the way of using conversation, and the inter-subjective relationships between counselors and clients. These similarities form sufficient reason to believe it is feasible to integrate philosophical consulting woth social work and create a new casework mode.

*Integrating Philosophical Counseling with Social Work*1730

2.1 The same purpose: helping clients

Generally speaking, the purpose of social casework is helping others, while it also is the purpose of philosophical counseling. Philosophical counselors explore the world that clients understand by probing into their emotions, behaviors, thoughts, hopes and desires. With the help of philosophical counselors, clients can develop a new way of life and broaden their understanding of how to live a good life, including exploring themes such as pretentiousness, mediocrity, humiliation, cowardice, and courage, and the relationships among them. By understanding these concepts and their relationships, clients can be prepared to confront and solve their personal problems in wiser ways. (Lahav, 1996)

Marinoff emphasizes that philosophical counseling aims to help clients find philosophical methods that are consistent with their belief systems and the principles of ancient wisdom, which can be used to help clients live more virtuous and effective lives. (Marinoff, 1999) According to Ran Lahav, philosophical counseling is divided into grand philosophical counseling and small philosophical counseling by its goal. Small philosophical counseling is used to solve the problems in clients' daily lives, including dealing with the relationship with their bosses, finding their satisfying jobs, enhancing their self-confidence, solving marital relationship problems, and so on. Grand philosophical counseling is used to help clients make profound changes in their lives, to change their coordinate systems—the basic needs, hopes, fears, and attitudes of individuals, and to improve their lives to a higher level. What the grand philosophical counseling deals with is to help people leave "Plato's Cave", and enter a broader and clearer reality. In grand philosophical counseling, philosophical counseling is seen as a way of life, and the personal journey of life. (Lahav, 2006)

2.2 The same way of work: conversation

It is well-known that the way of casework is conversation. By way of conversation, social workers understand, diagnose and resolve clients' problems. Likewise, through philosophical dialogue, philosophical counselors help clients understand themselves and solve their problems. Therefore, social casework and philosophical counseling share the same way of work.

The purpose of conversation in philosophical counseling, though, goes further than the use of conversation in social work. In social work, conversation is used to uncover information about the client. In philosophy, it is used to reveal people's inner powers and potential. Philosophical counseling stresses a dignified philosophical dialogue between counselor and client with mutual respect (Marinoff & Ikeda, 2012, p. 4). In philosophical counseling, because philosophical thinking is not solipsistic, work is not limited to the client thinking only of himself or herself; the client's thinking is expanded to encompass human life in general and a wider worldview.

As expressed by Pierre Hadot, wisdom is a perfect state of existence; it can only be divine knowledge; and it is not in the world. Wisdom does not derive from human psychology, but from the world where people philosophically meet with virtue. (Lahav, 1996). Dialogue is an important tool of philosophical reflection. Plutarch noted, "Philosophical dialogue does not try to create a stationary statue, but to render something vivid, lively and effective that inspires the power to make a judgment for effective action and a good choice for praise." We can define the philosophical dialogue as a spiritual practice; in other words, it is an attempt to bring great change or transcendence into a person's life.

*Zhang Lizeng & Gao Lijuan*1731

2.3 The same counselor-client relationship: inter-subjectivity

In social casework and in philosophical counseling, building and maintaining a relationship between the social worker and the client is very important. The social worker-client and counselor-client relationships are both considered inter-subjective relationships. However, the social worker pays more attention to the client's self-determination, and treats the client as a subject rather than an object. In philosophical counseling, the counselor-client relationship is highly valued. However, the client is viewed quite differently in a philosophical counseling relationship than in a social work relationship. In the counselor-client relationship, clients are respected and seen as equals and as individuals by philosophical counselors.

In philosophical counseling, the autonomy of the client is given great respect. Faced with the client who is suffering, the philosophical counselor attempts to conduct a dialogue with the client and arrange the relationship from an unbalanced state to a balanced one, which can deepen the understanding of client's problems. It can be seen as a transformation from Buber's (1970) I–it relationship to an I–thou relationship in which neither the counselor nor the client is objectified. This level of dialogue is more real, open and non-confrontational than the conversations between social workers and clients. In Buber's dialogue, the practitioners must leave their own inner world and care for the other with empathy and tolerance, but they cannot lose themselves in the relationship with the other. (Babara, 1995) Philosophical counselors do not force clients to accept specific views, but rather enable clients to express themselves freely. In philosophical counseling, counselor and client should share a reciprocal relationship in dialogue. (Schuster, 1999; Ellenbogen, 2006) Stan Van Hooft believes that human actions are triggered by rationality rather than cause. When individuals are able to use good reasoning skills, they can take more control of their lives and thus take actions in more responsible ways rather than allowing themselves to succumb to the power of motivation. (Stan Van Hooft, 2008, p. 20) Shlomit Schuster (1999) claims that the counselor-client relationship is an equally dialogical and dialectical relationship rather than an authoritative and hierarchical one. Philosophical counselors regard clients as independent individuals. (Ellenbogen, 2006)

3. The uniqueness of a new social casework mode based on philosophical counseling

A new casework mode based on philosophical counseling is distinguished from any of the casework modes based on psychotherapy, not only in terms of the theories that are relied on, but also in terms of the methods used. In short, the social casework mode based on philosophical counseling is constructed according to theories and methods of philosophy, and these theories and methods provide benefits to the clients and counselors that psychotherapy cannot.

If a type of consultation is really philosophical, it must contain several methods rather than only a special one. Franca D'Agostini, an Italian philosopher, said, "philosophy has several methods, and it is a multi-methodological activity." Neri Pollastri (2006) believes, "philosophical counseling is nothing but philosophy, and it is an exact 'practice of philosophy.' So philosophical counseling like philosophy should not contain only one method." Philosophical counseling involves a broad range methods based on different lines of thought rather than a uniform method. However, in philosophical counseling, these various methods involve some similarities, because, after all, all of these methods should apply philosophy in their practice and combine with the accepted body of research.

Integrating Philosophical Counseling with Social Work 1732

If philosophical counseling is to produce a positive effect on clients' lives, it must help clients adjust their worldview and attitudes, at least the ones contributing to the problems the clients are seeking help with. Philosophical counseling must strengthen clients' abilities and confidence as well. The clients' changes must come from the changes in their philosophical thinking. Using philosophical thinking, clients can clarify their core concepts and perspectives, and then make correct evaluations of their current states and target states. What philosophy can provide is not readily available theories, but rather the skills that are cultivated in philosophical reflection. It is the elements of philosophical reflection that can make the clear distinction between the casework mode based on philosophical counseling and any of those based on psychotherapy.

3.1 Analysis of concepts and their networks

A prominent element of philosophical reflection is analysis of concepts. In order to prevent confusion and clarify the topic of discussion, it is necessary for consultants to analyze concepts. In philosophical counseling, the most important concepts to analyze are the concepts closely related to clients' daily lives, such as freedom, work, wisdom and love, etc. Conceptual analysis involves meticulous inquiry into clients' language and usage, including definitions and distinctions related to their key concepts. Conceptual analysis generally goes beyond the standard meaning of the concepts under discussion. Philosophical counselors must be sensitive to the significance that clients implicitly express about key concepts. (Hoogendijk, 1995)

3.2 Critical thinking and testing

For philosophical counselors, critical thinking may be the most useful of the many philosophical methods. Critical thinking can make clients become more rational in their decision-making, formation of values and beliefs, and managing of emotions. Better critical thinking allows clients to evaluate philosophical theories, test those theories to determine how they can aid in improving emotional intelligence, and make choices that lead to a better quality life.

3.3 Logic analysis and argument

Philosophy can cure diseases of people's souls using logic. These diseases typically arise from clients' false beliefs. (Nussbaum, 1994, p. 15) The false beliefs often rest upon flawed reasoning; philosophical counselors counter this poor reasoning using arguments rather than declarations to guide clients to find their own answers to their philosophical questions. Philosophers who cure people's souls by philosophical arguments are the same as doctors who treat diseases of the physical body. Philosophy is the living art of soul.

3.4 Phenomenology and interpretation of problems

In philosophical counseling, counselors help clients explain their lives and thus direct them to think about their lives. Peter Harteloh (2010) believes that philosophical counselors need three competencies: questioning, interpreting and understanding. For philosophical counselors, phenomenology may be the most familiar theory to use in counseling clients to reflect on their experiences, but it is also the most controversial one. Phenomenology, "believes that for events and objects in front of us, we understand them according to our direct experience of them." (Fetlham and Dryden, 1993)

*Zhang Lizeng & Gao Lijuan*1733

Another method, philosophical hermeneutics, seeks to interpret and understand texts, which include not only traditional texts, but also the interrelationship of language, meaning and the world. Philosophical counseling tries to reveal significance of clients' experiences in their lives by hermeneutical interpretation and understanding (Ricoeur, 1981, pp.145-164).

Conclusion

It is important that social workers integrate philosophical counseling in casework methodology. Philosophical counseling can enrich implementation of casework and expand casework theories and methods; accordingly the addition of philosophical counseling would make social work more effective in helping people. Casework modes are currently based on psychotherapy methods, which only help clients deal with their psychological problems. Psychotherapeutic approaches cannot handle the complexity people face regarding the meaning they attach to concepts, their values, and their worldviews. These kinds of problems require philosophical counseling because philosophy uniquely is equipped to help clients resolve them.

In addition, the construction of a social casework mode based on philosophical counseling will expand the form and scope of applying philosophy. Philosophical counseling has become a type of philosophical practice in many countries, including Germany, Holland, England, Canada and America. However, in China, philosophical counseling is still very strange to Chinese philosophers in the academic field of philosophy. Combining philosophical counseling with social casework can provide a new area of study and practice to scholars in the fields of both social work and philosophy. Philosophical counseling will be an alternative to psychotherapy, and social work can use it to help people achieve more happiness, and perhaps even make society much more harmonious.

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