

Dare to Care: The Art of Confrontation in Philosophical Practice

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Abstract: The article addresses a common difficulty of counselors in confronting clients with the problems in their thinking and behavior in a way that they could start benefiting from a constructive self-reflective state in the long run, a state that would replace the common tendency to hide oneself, to blame, to victimize or to repress aspects of their humanity connoted as negative in order to maintain a positive self image. The highlight is on the main characteristics of efficient confrontations with oneself and others, so as to engender reasoning competence training without an unnecessary loss in the quality of the consultative relationship. Working in psychotherapy and having progressively integrated more philosophical work into this professional practice, the author puts together a few concepts and ideas that are likely to facilitate the processes in the psychotherapeutic and the philosophical approaches to intrapsychic and interpersonal dialogue.

Keywords: confrontation, reasonability, self-image, resistance, parrhesis

Introduction

There are no contests in the art of peace. Defeat means to defeat the mind of contention that we harbor within - says Morihei Ueshiba, the founder of Aikido, a martial art that translates as - The Art of Peace. The term "contest" has an inspiring meaning when we consider its latin roots, suggesting we witness together. An etymology dictionary that takes us back to the medieval use of the concept will tell us that one of its root meanings is to border - which basically describes confrontation as a form of contact and at the same time as a separation line. But in its common sense of competition, it reminds us of an atmosphere where contenders engage in the pursuit of power and they race against each other in a field where they wish to demonstrate their supremacy. People commonly tend to turn their dialogues into a competition and we can see how they put a lot of effort and a lot of emotion into winning the certamen as if the prize would be to attain holiness and be considered the bearer of the absolute truth. But each truth has a counterpart in this world and since we discover it through others or through life experience, each truth has a counterpart in our own minds. This is perhaps what Ueshiba regards as the contention that we harbor within. The conflict never ends, it merely switches from the interpersonal to the intrapsychic. Inner conflict has to be contained in a cognitive structure where the conflicting parts can coherently coexist and interlock. Otherwise, holding opposite beliefs, attitudes, behaviors or

values generates a psychological tension and discomfort, called cognitive dissonance,¹ where in order to regain tranquility, the individual denies one aspect of the issue or of themselves. One becomes certain but at the same time far from the truth. The extent to which we can reconcile opposites in our minds is the extent to which we can make peace with our perceived enemies and appreciate what we can learn from them, as Nietzsche² once wrote: “One should honor the enemy even in one’s friend. Can you step up to your friend without stepping over to him? In one’s friend one should have one’s best enemy. You should be closest to him in heart when you resist him”.

Problems with confrontation

I have been working as a psychotherapist since 2012 and in the first few years of my professional practice I was hesitant to confront my clients. Consequently the psychotherapy process was nice but produced no visible or significant effects. I will attempt to explain the main difficulties I had with facing confrontation and resistance. Throughout my training as a psychotherapist I was taught that I had to be gentle and to confront clients in a careful way. This kind of expectation sounded antagonistic and made me anxious, because in my previous worldview, confrontation and gentleness were opposites and I was struggling to reconcile them. Confrontation was associated in my mind with resistance, fight, violence and the destruction of one to the benefit of the other. Whereas gentleness was associated with surrendering, with welcoming the other, giving up yourself and your own ideas and with a peaceful nature of a dialogue. But gentleness was rarely reciprocal in my personal life experience, therefore being gentle was often a form of self-destruction for the benefit of the other, in the paradoxical attempt to benefit from safety myself. An implicit expectation of this relational position was that the other would be somehow stimulated by gentleness to become gentle as well, just as violence had a tendency to stimulate violent responses. But both ways were dead ends: clients were either gently leaving therapy prematurely or they were strongly denying evidence and conclusions that did not please them. I often asked myself how to help people reconcile with themselves, with others and with the world they live in, since life itself seemed to be an antagonistic process: where the human being rejects most forces that can transform it and mostly seeks what it can transform and use to replicate itself.

My preoccupation with responding therapeutically without sliding into discrete forms of implicit violence towards oneself or the other motivated me to explore the metaphorical load of philosophical consultations within the process of psychotherapy. Socratic dialogue is an important part of the process of almost any psychotherapeutic approach that relies on strengthening the cognitive capacities of the individual, in order to be able to revisit their traumatic past with a good anchor in the resources of the present.

I will describe some of the techniques of confrontation I discovered in the philosophical practice that I found to be different from those explored in psychotherapy. For now I just wish to highlight the distinctions I noticed:

- (1) **Focus:** psychotherapists write more about how to hold space for confrontation, while philosophical practitioners focus on types of confrontation, by criteria of *what* and *how* to facilitate a person’s facing her own limits, her implicit ideas and some consequences of her ideas.

- (2) **Confidence:** philosophers seem much more confident when they make a confrontation (they trust the reasoning process and the others, whom they expect to understand common sense.) On the other hand, psychotherapists seem more reluctant when they make confrontations. They are concerned with the sense of safety that - if hindered - would likely stir the individual into psychological defenses. Psychotherapists often postpone confrontations till very late as they do not trust their clients to be able to carry the impact of a confrontational intervention in a reasonable and mature way.
- (3) **Gravity:** the therapeutic process is experienced as a kind of labor and hard work of care, whereas there is a lightness about the philosophical confrontation process, that comes with an implicit expectation of play and renunciation.

There are other differences as well, but these few were enough to stimulate a motivation for drawing the best tools from each approach in order to be able to maintain a good balance between “*care and dare*” that are so important in the growth process.

My aim in the mentioned research was to explore the various forms of confrontation and to explain why philosophical consultations had unpredictable outcomes. Why was it that philosophical encounters were sometimes peaceful dialogues and other times verbal war zones? One of the most important hypotheses was that individuals (both practitioners and clients) were likely to project their own life stories onto reality, becoming biased and selective with evidence, only to reaffirm their same old learned myths or life-scripts³ based on specific worldviews. This phenomenon narrows the span of their interpretation capacity and so they are probably going to experience the philosophical consultation as a familiar relational experience, in which they will fear what has hurt them in the past and defend themselves in ways that have made them feel safe before. This type of intrapsychic phenomenon has major consequences in the quality of interpersonal dialogue, as it sets an unsafe ground, where interlocutors are likely to hurt each other. Master Ueshiba showed that “*to injure an opponent is to injure yourself*” whereas “*to control aggression without inflicting injury is the art of peace*” that interlocutors (whether in the position of practitioners or clients) need to develop through systematic cognitive and attitudinal training by maieutics, dialectics and other collaborative thinking practices within philosophical consultations.

Confrontation in Consultative Dialogue

Some of the Ancient Greek philosophers found that philosophical endeavors were an important tool for the liberation of individuals from various kinds of excesses.⁴ They engendered social cohesion and they trained people’s reasoning skills as well as their capacity for self-restraint or self-discipline (*askesis*). When I discovered philosophical practice, I experienced it like the beginning of a martial arts training. As in any training, I realized there are two crucial ingredients for development: some tension (to build up resilience and competence) and safety (we were not going to be hurt, which means our limits would be found, inspected and pushed, but not trespassed). My expectations were almost completely met. I only sometimes experienced being hurt. I almost always was pushed beyond my comfort zone and I almost never regretted being in this process. Our tutors would invite us to criticize them, ourselves and the methodologies we would collaboratively

create to stimulate thinking. Consequently, I set out to explore what could be called an *art of confrontation*. By keeping an eye to what the philosophical interaction meant on a psychological level for the interlocutor (as well as for myself in the role of consultant), I became increasingly able to address those psychological obstacles to our collaborative reasoning practice by finding a meaningful place for *confrontation* in the background story of each encounter: to those who were motivated to learn about themselves, I proposed that *confrontation* was going to be a *mirroring* exercise. To those who had a hard time in relationships, I proposed that *confrontation* was going to be a *coping* exercise, a *mental mobility* training or a *form of intimacy*. To those who had a hard time self-reflecting, I proposed that the friendly and explorative confrontation with *rejected aspects of humanity* would lead to the creation of more peace with oneself and with others.

I live in a culture where “the mouth of the world” has constantly been viewed as a threat to the individual and family public image. This is a Romanian expression that refers to being spoken about in a condescending and disrespectful way by others. Many of us were raised with this awareness that we would be marginalized by the community and punished if we failed to appear *spotless* morally and developmentally. Many of us were brought up with shaming. Shame would not allow people to even acknowledge aspects of themselves of a culturally negative connotation. Faced with evidence of one’s own wrongdoing or inadequacy, one would immediately get tangled in long self-justification and avoidance of responsibility by attributing faults and failures outside of themselves. So how could they bear to even look at themselves and face their multifaceted humanity, which includes their greed, their laziness, their victimization and many other disliked labels? Conceptualization becomes - for this very reason - impeded by the contrary aspiration of the human being to stay in the moral category of *the good ones*. How would they be able to self-reflect about the various aspects of their humanity? This question has been important because the aspects of our humanity that we deny because we dislike them are those aspects of our humanity that we notice and dislike in others. Then we don’t know how to reconcile with others and how to allow them to help us reconcile with ourselves. But would the psychotherapist not be overly hurtful by showing people what they rather maintained away from their own awareness? When I sought philosophical counseling for the first time in 2016, my first encounter with a philosophical consultation was quite painful – because I had experienced something that felt a lot like public shaming: I had the impression that I was called lazy, greedy and immature in front of my colleagues whom I secretly wished to impress. These concepts were attributed to me based on a few details in my response to the tutor’s questions – so there was obvious evidence for such conceptualizations, which I could not deny. And so I rebelled against the method. The tutor went on noticing my reaction and asking me to name it, to explain what it was likely caused by and what I was aiming for, while driven by it. These questions represented an invitation to self-distance and to self-reflect. But looking at myself from an observer position was rather difficult at this point because a lot of my thinking was tightly captured by my survival instinct and biased by emotionally bound preoccupations and concerns. When the consultation was over and I got the chance to view the recording of the interaction, I was surprised at how stuck I had been. The stuckness with my own preservation was simply not allowing me to even hear or notice what my interlocutor was thinking and doing with his line of questioning. I wondered if my clients in psychotherapy were perhaps feeling like that and circumstantially unable to self-

reflect. So I set out to achieve a capacity to maintain my reasoning skills during the most intense emotional and instinctual overtakings by my limbic system.⁵

The Importance of Confrontation in the Consultative Dialogue

In developing one's art of confrontation (including the confrontation with oneself) it becomes important to consider a few answers to a couple of questions. These are:

- (1) Why is confrontation important?
- (2) Why is confrontation difficult?

I shall attempt to provide brief explanatory responses below:

Confrontation is an indispensable tool for **self-awareness**, because it helps expand it, from the narrowness of one's perception that is focused only on what one is preoccupied with in his self-image, to the comprehensive perspective that encompasses the perception of oneself by others. However, a collection of various subjective points of view about one's being is not sufficient to reveal the observed individual. We would need to make use of what can be called collaborative examination of evidence in order to distinguish the individual subjective preoccupations of the observers (including oneself) from the evidence-based common sense view, which is often referred to as the "objective" view. In the process of psychotherapy self-awareness is one of the key categories of skills that characterizes the autonomous individual, because it enables the individual to take responsibility for oneself, one's own values, tendencies and patterns of relating with others. The ways in which we relate with others become one's inner dialogue, by mimetism. So it is crucial that these inner musings between various voices of oneself become conceptualized, worked with and freely changed according to the requirements of the momentary circumstance. In this way, one finds stable although simultaneously fluctuating places and roles for oneself within the natural world, including within society. Philosopher and physicist Fritjof Capra pointed out this dichotomous nature of living beings: we are simultaneously determined and free.⁶ The degree of our freedom depends on our awareness about what determines us and what are our options. We can develop strategies that utilize determinants at hand.

Another valuable role of confrontation can be conceptualized as **intimacy**. To be intimate with another human being requires confrontation through *parrhesia*⁷ (the courage and availability to tell your true opinion), because when people are too worried about hurting each other with honesty, they avoid exchanging authentic feedback, they prevent each other from examining themselves, from understanding their own impact and from learning about those aspects of themselves that they are ignorant of but which are visible to the others. Relationships in which reciprocal confrontation is possible are more prone to experience a sense of intimacy and comradeship in facing the common challenges of being human.

Confrontation can also facilitate **change**. For example, when the violent person is unaware of his own violence, confrontation will allow him to master his own aggressivity and power. In this way he can stop himself, think before acting and use his power appropriately, according to the uniqueness of each contextual encounter. Most commonly people hide their problematic manifestations and attitudes behind justifications that they

start to believe. Their attachment to these beliefs make people more fragile, as it reduces their freedom of choosing their state: *“hard as a diamond, flexible as a willow, smooth-flowing like water or empty as space.”*⁷ Their capacity to adapt becomes restrained. Then a rigorous step-by-step methodology of careful confrontation with the undeniable obviousness of their gestures, logically linked to the visible outcomes is going to reconnect the person with the reality of what they need and can change, be it for ethical reasons or for pragmatic ones. Despite its potential to produce change, confrontation can fail due to *bad faith* – a term employed by existentialist philosophers to describe a psychological state of acting inauthentically as a response to a perceived pressure to conform. A well argued confrontation pressures one to accept it – but some people will oppose it anyway, even if their opposition goes against common sense and against evidence.

Oftentimes in psychotherapy practice I learn that confrontation constitutes a helpful **protection** against rhetorical tricks and subtle manipulations from others. By simply learning a few ways to question ideas and to examine arguments, assumptions and objections, one becomes increasingly able to employ his reasoning skills in establishing a common, methodic way to communicate reasonably with the tricky people, the violent, the lazy, the greedy, etc.

Finally, confrontation is indispensable for interpersonal **co-regulation**. People impact each other in unexpected (and not just in intended) ways, so it is valuable to be able to inform and guide each other in arranging mutually respectful and inclusive ways of living.

Addressing Common Difficulties with Confrontation

The main difficulties that confrontation raises for people, irrespective if they are in the philosopher or client position, include: (a) we do not like to recognize our flaws and weaknesses, least of all in front of others (b) we fear hurting each other and losing relationships which are important to us, (c) confrontation tends to stimulate resistances in the confronted one and tempt one to dismiss what one's shown about oneself that does not correspond to the myth one has created about oneself, (d) the very individual who formulates the confrontation may hold on to beliefs such as: “confrontation is bad” or “confrontation is dangerous”, etc.

One of the most difficult moments we have to face in life is while undergoing the deconstruction of our self-image. Self-image is a powerful and important part of the human being's identity. We cling to a set of ideas about who we are and who we are not and we believe them, because, as Millon writes: *„The concept of self provides a stable anchor of continuity or sameness across time in the face of changing experiences”*.⁸ The notion of *„who I am”* is a personally constructed story - partly conscious, partly unconscious - that can be more or less clearly articulated, more or less accurate. It is composed of sensory and emotional experiences, abstracted and conceptualized and inter-linked, like an intricate map of the world to which one belongs, from which one separates conceptually and with which one then relates personally. Multiple factors are thus involved in the construction of our self-image. In clinical psychology, self-image belongs to the structural domain of the personality and contains deeply-rooted organization of memories, attitudes, needs, fears, conflicts, etc which directly impact our perception, our experience of events and the way we organize our mental map of the world and our history.

Philosophical practice is based on the employment of reasoning in direct interpersonal consultation to examine discourse, with special emphasis on revealing what could be called "the archeology of the human subject". That is - the consulted participant who responds to the socratic inquiry of the philosopher is invited to progressively take distance from himself and to observe what his own discourse reveals about his being. Discourse contains both intended and unintended utterings, that is to say we are only partly aware of what we are saying. The other part is unconscious and often serves preoccupations linked to survival, of which one of the most significant ones is the very defense of one's constructed self image. The connection between self-image and survival is perhaps not obvious to common sense. But since self-image is made of beliefs about oneself and the beliefs are one of our key anxietytics, beliefs about ourselves are experienced as a hard core or foundation of our sense of existence. Threats to this belief system can thus be experienced as threats to one's very existence. And therefore primary psychological defense mechanisms are stimulated by interventions that deconstruct one's core belief system. This process is slow and filled with resistance, bad faith and defiance and some steps ahead now and then. These and a large array of defense mechanisms can be recognized by their characteristic immediacy. They are primary processes (based in the archaic areas of the brain) that take over secondary processes (facilitated by the neocortex), which are slow and which constitute the tools and resources that make up our reasoning capacity.

However, the deconstruction of our personal self-concept leads us to a more comprehensive image of ourselves than the self-created myth about who we are or ought to be. It brings about a certain liberation from the constraints of our defensive mechanisms - they may become contained reflexes or aspects of ourselves that we can be more reconciled with. So it is crucial that consultations are set-up in such a way as to make a fruitful confrontation possible. Peter Rober, a representative of the dialogical approach in systemic psychotherapy, has published extensively about what is required in dialogue from both client and consultant in order to facilitate the process of making the unspoken articulate and consequently becoming self-aware while experiencing a sense of safety as well. He assumes that "*the therapist's thoughts and ideas are informed by her limited perspective, they are historically situated and they are bound to their (conversational) context*". He concludes like Mikhail Bakhtin in 1986 that because they are constructed in the context of dialogue, thoughts and ideas belong to that particular context⁹ - that is to both interlocutors. In this view, interlocutors can benefit from these ideas (reflect, consider, examine, problematize, deepen, clarify, specify their limits and implications, exemplify, etc) which opens up an immense realm of thinking possibilities that can bring about awareness, reconciliation and transformation to all participants in the consultation. When ideas are viewed as belonging to the context, they become lighter. They are de-dramatized. They cease being heavy fatalistic labels and turn into light provisional forms of existence that enrich life experience with or without affecting the person's capacity to maintain her decision-making capacity and her existential stability.

Once one surpasses the difficulty of not knowing *who I am*, one learns to enjoy dwelling in a sense of wonder about who or what is this „*I*“, this being that experiences the world from within. Such openness to exploration of the "*I*" has led numerous dialogical psychotherapists to envision theories about "*I*" as constructed from a multitude of *voices*. Each voice represents an idea, which is the abstractization of life experience, be it one's own

or of someone in one's circle of friends, families, acquaintances, authors, movie characters, etc. The coherence of this multifaceted "I" is determined by the stability and ethos of the dialogic relation between these multiple voiced ideas, some of which become clear and coherent spoken narratives, while others are incomplete and contradictory. The individual is better supported in gaining mental stability by working on the examination and reconciliation of the voices in this *inner polyphony*.¹⁰ This metaphor is likely to help the individual detach from his own ideas and view them like products in a grocery bag, waiting to be taken out, examined, found a place to store and cooked sooner or later, as needed. In this type of frame of reference, individuals become less threatened by confrontation with themselves and more curiously open to exploring their communal inner heritage of worldviews.

Therapeutic Principles of Confrontation

General psychotherapy and psychological counseling training proposes to professionals four major principles of confrontation that are protective of the psychotherapeutic effect of the consultations. This classification is a proposal based on the exploration of the topic in relevant reference literature¹¹ and finding common components of authors' take on how confrontation is to be effectively delivered. The list is not exhaustive: (1) speaking in first person and tentatively, (2) clarification or specification of limits, (3) harm reduction agreements and permissions, (4) presentation of discrepancies. Wondering aloud and providing one's personal observation of the process includes forms of speech in which one does not make use of one's authority to impose - instead one proposes to have a look at data, particularly the one situated in client's blind spots. This approach softens the confrontation by adding this reflective dimension that starts its comments with "I wonder..." A person who wonders is perceived as a flexible thinker, thus not seen as a threat, so the clients are more open to consider as well as to dismiss the comments and the observations that they receive in this way. The clarification of limits is thought to be an effective confrontation type because it relies on the assumption that people are usually prosocial and willing to abide by the rules of the interaction as long as these rules are clear or clarified and as long as the participants are allowed to consent to them after given the chance to discuss the possibility of enriching these rules with particular details that are important to the individuals. Rules are generally proposed as limitations designed to provide interpersonal safety. For example: "*We do not have to agree, but we have to understand each other.*" Such a statement proposes an active listening partnership, in which various points of view are considered without an expectation that one will win over another at the end of the conversation, yet with the clear agreement that they would collaborate in making each point of view visible, clear to common sense and easy to understand by common sense. Needless to say, when one has been given permission to perform a confrontative intervention, the confrontation is much easier to take, as the client is curious and ready for the challenge. Finally, the best confrontations are thought to be those that identify and reveal discrepancies: between values, speech, behavior and experience.¹²

Forms of confrontations

The following forms of confrontation are another proposed and non-exhaustive list inspired from psychotherapeutic and clinical practice, some of which can as well be found in

philosophical consultations. This list can be used for diversification of confrontational techniques as well as to stimulate various aspects of the thinking capacity. The first five are more popular in psychotherapy and the last five are inspired from philosophical practice. While confrontational interventions can take a variety of forms, the following ones are only a few examples and their implications:

- (1) **Invitation to observation** by asking a direct self-reflective question, in the form of: "Do you notice something peculiar about your discourse?" or "On one hand - this, on the other hand - that... Do you notice a contradiction?" Such a question disrupts the discourse of the client and invites the client to distance himself from his own speech and to examine it, only to find interesting and meaningful structures and details that were perhaps not intentionally chosen but which were shaped by unconscious drives or by consciousness about previous utterances. It can be interesting or disturbing for the person to notice herself and perhaps easier to notice phenomena or circumstantial details that she doesn't identify with.
- (2) **Describing the process** as seen by the consultant is a confrontative intervention that bears the risk of client's submission to it or rebellion against it - a direct consequence of the position of authority held by the consultant. It is much easier to accept the description provided by the consultant when the consultant openly distances herself from her own idea and assumes it to be simply one view which can be problematized too. Here are a couple of examples of what the consultant can describe about the process: we can point to an impasse, which is essentially an inner conflict between contradicting wants or needs within the client and which shows up through contradictory utterances. We can point to a performative contradiction, which can take the form of a discrepancy between what the client says and what the client displays on a nonverbal level of the communication process. We can describe a common type of social play starting from an emotional reaction of the consultant, regarding this reaction as interesting and making hypotheses that deepen our understanding of its probable meaning in context.
- (3) **Making indirect confrontations**, like in family system psychotherapy, where the therapist speaks to one of the members but mentions ideas that are intended for the other family members to hear as well: "*I don't think she is ready to hear you out - she seems impatiently looking forward to her turn to tell you her version right now. We might have to listen to her first and see if that makes her more able to listen to you after she has enough of a sense of being heard and seen*". The *her* in this example receives input that someone is making room for her self-expression and at the same time she receives feedback about what she signals to the others in the room about her state of mind through her behavior's communicative dimension.
- (4) **The normative type of confrontational** intervention is one in which the client is told what to do instead of what the client is doing. It can take the form of a firm proposal, that can be as well backed up by a clear, concise and sensible argument ("*I propose you formulate it again, this time more concisely*"). It can as well take the form of a direct order, but with consideration for the type of tone

that the consultant likely sets with the performative (or nonverbal) cues of the message: *"Please, don't speak at the same time, or else it is impossible to hear one another"*, or asking for a paraphrase, in order to either reconnect the interlocutors or to point out their lack of attention to each other: (*"Have you heard what your partner said? What was it? Please repeat it as you heard it"*). Such interventions reveal existing discrepancies in communication between what was said and what was heard, generally reducing the amount of projection the clients perform and increasing their contact with reality, that is with what is obvious to outside observers.

- (5) **The ultimatum** is perhaps the toughest form of confrontation: *"I will not continue to work with you if you cannot or will not stick to our agreement"*. We call it tough because one of the participants in the communication process is announcing renunciation facing repetitive disruptive behavior on the side of the interlocutor. Renunciation can be perceived in several ways (a threat with loss, an attempt to manipulate, a dramatic performance with no real consequence, etc) - the rarest one being that renunciation is a form of preserving the integrity of a relationship by clarifying its fragility and implicitly the necessity of both parts to take up an active role in maintaining it by abiding to the most important agreements.

Some of the aforementioned confrontation techniques studied by psychotherapists have been successfully employed in philosophical consultations as well.¹³ What I had the impression to have missed from the psychotherapy training and I found in the philosophical practice training includes the next five forms of confrontation, which I will carry on listing. These are designed for more specific uses and are more easily delivered in the positive relational climate of mutual consent, but they are as well powerful in situations where consent to confront one another has not been expressed and instead there is an ongoing discussion that starts from implicit agreements to the articulation of and the consent to new agreements between the interlocutors.

- (6) **Parrhesia** is known as the courage to tell the truth about what one thinks or experiences in relation with another. When the interlocutors explicitly agree to include parrhesia in their relationship, acknowledging that it will be regarded as an act of care, this type of attitude makes space for friendly and reciprocal confrontation. The risk with parrhesia is that people's opinions can be problematic and they may be more or less open to examining them. Consequently, resistance and antagonism can come up in the consultative dialogue, exerting an inhibitory force on the openness to speak one's mind. Critical examination will require further confrontation of the interlocutors with their own speech, with aspects of their being that they are not yet comfortable with and with evidence that they have a tendency to overlook. Foucault¹⁴ recognizes there are risks in telling one's truth, yet it is also a moral duty to take these risks and overcome our rhetorical tendencies, in favor of pursuing authenticity.
- (7) **Problematization** is a type of objection or questioning in which the author or defender of an idea is faced with his idea's limits, structural problems, implications, contrary evidence that has been ignored, paradigm shifts or

contexts in which the idea does not apply, etc. The questioner asks something that puts into doubt an assertion that the author took for granted in their original position. To include problematization in the list of confrontation techniques is to acknowledge its power to change people's minds, their focus and their worldviews. They will at least temporarily have to cope with the unfamiliar. Their senses, their reason and their intellect will be required to navigate the novelty, but they can as well force their way back into familiarity by various tricks, familiarization of the new or intentional dismissal of what provokes cognitive dissonance.

- (8) **Conceptualization** is a type of questioning where a concept is explored or a concept is chosen to denote an object, a phenomenon, a character, a type of attitude, a behavior, etc. As a confrontational technique, the individual is asked to find a concept that best describes his gesture or the type of character who performs such gestures on a regular basis. People tend to choose rather positively connoted concepts to describe themselves (*ambitious* instead of *obsessed*, *creative* instead of *chaotic*, etc) but with a few verification steps that are specific in conceptualization work, they will realize their own inclination and the more appropriate name for the aspect of human nature which they demonstrate.
- (9) **Evidence-based argumentation** is a type of questioning or comprehension task by which the person who holds on to an idea is asked to present and then to examine arguments both for and against it, as well as to consider various possible ideas that could account for the given position. When faced with such a task people can notice their inclinations, their difficulties with arguing for the point of view that is antagonistic to their own, and thus not only do they arrive face to face with who they are, but at the same time they get a chance to distance themselves from who they are and to observe the world through other types of lenses.
- (10) **Gamification** means transforming the training activity of each cognitive competence practice into a game, in order to make it stimulative, engaging and likable so that the whole motivational system of the individual remains interested in continuing it on a daily basis. Exercises are carried on in a relaxed, playful and leisurely attitude. Novelty and repetition are bound together by changing stimuli, strategy, approaches of problems, agreements about the rules to follow in existing and in invented exercises, the use of art, short stories, visual material, poetry, religious tales, family myths, dreams, fantasies and so on. Gamification helps the client be less defensive and more open to playful exploration of ideas. Such an attitude represents an invitation to consciously and intentionally use the consultation process as a playground. Within the playground one can also play judge, prosecutor, accused, defense attorney and public - switching among these roles in order to see the evidence from multiple positions, perspectives and intentions. Confrontation with various parts of one's being is easier in playground philosophical practice.

The practice of self-confrontation

As any art, the art of confrontation is developed through continuous conscious practice. Once an individual manages to create an agreement between his various motivational voices to maintain a philosophical way of life, the new habit to confront one-self and others generates and sharpens the various competences involved in this type of proces. The exercise of confrontation needs not be too sophisticated. One can start simply from considering a recent preoccupation, formulating it into a question and writing it down – thereby immediately having exercised to articulate an impression into a discursive expression. Expressed ideas can then be examined in many interesting ways, in an exploration of their implications and limitations and connections with other ideas. The reader of this article can participate in reflecting about the art of confrontation by taking a few minutes to generate a few responses to “*Which competencies are people seeking to train through philosophical practice?*” or even “*What are the characteristics of confrontation in philosophical practice?*” and “*How is confrontation different and similar from other interpersonal phenomena?*” With a few ideas written down, the reader can become his own confronter and explore his ideas further in a moment of self-consultation.

In practice, we can review the notion of confrontation through observing the phenomena that are part of it and that accompany it. Participants in individual sessions and group workshops describe an array of skills and of temperate states of mind gained through confronting themselves and each other such as: the enjoyment of conflict, an increase in openness to collaboration, the emergence of new ideas and perspectives, a reduction in defensive attitudes and more trust in interlocutors, an increased mobility of the mind which becomes visible in the taking of various options into account, an increase in intimacy, the strengthening of the capacity to have a reasonable talk, the more noticeable ability to articulate ideas and to express oneself more clearly and concisely, an increase in the availability of the participants to listen to one another and to form partnerships in the exploration and examination of ideas and reality. If these outcomes are due to efficient confrontation, we can assess our interventions by checking their impact. Other criteria that distinguish efficient from inefficient confrontation are provided by psychotherapists, such as the following model of D.E. Harding.

On the efficiency of confrontation

When two or more individuals gather with the intention to illuminate the evidence, to examine their theories about how the evidence can be conceptualized and interpreted and to make attempts at refuting ideas in an incessant quest for the truth, the participants will sometimes find themselves in hostile argumentative situations. It is not unusual to witness a battle of opposing ideas, but the key issue in an effective confrontation is to what extent do the participants involved experience their battle of ideas as an enjoyable activity between collaborators who share a passion for research and a readiness to face themselves during a never-ending and often difficult quest. In order to bring about change, growth or healing, confrontation will be necessary in its philosophical and therapeutic form as the naming of a noticeable problem that the other is likely not conscious of, in order to bring it to his attention and consideration.

Transactional analyst D.E. Harding warns us that sometimes confrontation does not fulfill its best purpose but rather takes the form of a psychological vicious circle encompassing one or more participants as well as the following key characteristics:¹⁵

- a) **Lack of consciousness** - Although the participants may experience it emotionally as threatening or disturbing, this *game* goes on unrecognized as a confrontation. So the interlocutors cannot use it.
- b) **Lack of intimacy** -- The awareness, responsibility and sense of intimacy that confrontation is supposed to bring about for the participants are spoiled and replaced by familiar beliefs and superficial yet intense emotional states and reconfirming the same worldview for each participant, despite the fact that it is a pain generating worldview.
- c) **Defensiveness and resistance.** Although to resist and to defend oneself are natural reactions to worldview deconstruction and are to some extent expected and rather easily handled collaboratively, ineffective confrontations are hard to unmask because of them. We should be able to stop at any time of the process and enter a meta-dialogue in which we are able to discuss what is happening between the interlocutors, so that obstacles can be removed and the collaborative reasoning process can be resumed. But when one suggests that *we are in an ineffective confrontation* and this comment raises not awareness but anger, fear, shame and denial – in this case one or all parties may be holding a negative connotation of the term *confrontation* or are stuck in themselves, with their cognitive energy bound to a survival theme that is relevant to them personally. In this case they are not likely to draw value from the feedback because they are busy rejecting it, hiding it, ending it and denying it.
- d) **Lack of tolerance.** When confrontation takes place candidly and the emotional experiences of participants remain within a window of tolerance,¹⁶ these states can be easily recognized, conceptualized, explored and even changed. But when candidness is missing and the confrontation is experienced by one or both sides as threatening or bad, the individuals tend to exit the emotional window of tolerance and slide into hyperarousal or hypoarousal. The first makes the arguments heated and the latter makes them unappealing, so the interlocutors will tend to either fight chaotically or renounce involvement in the dialogue. In psychotherapy processes we keep an eye on the emotional barometer. A degree of tension promotes growth. But too much of it is likely to cause trauma and to weaken the capacity of the person, instead of increasing it, like efficient training would. We are always at risk of too much and not enough, but we should be able to notice these variations and to freely slide back into the window of emotional tolerance.
- e) **Cognitive processes.** When confrontation practice has been learned as a primary process (which means the participants are involved with the more archaic parts of their neuropsychology) it will be impulsive, rushed, blinded by unconscious drives. When confrontation streams from a secondary cognitive process (that is when it takes place in collaboration with the neocortex and is thus rather reasoning-based), then participants are rather peaceful, the

interaction is slow, methodical and clear, while the general atmosphere is one of enjoyment, curiosity and openness to being changed by new perspectives.

Any intervention within a consultation process can be assessed in terms of efficiency considering the impact it has and the effects of the discrepancies between the actual impact and the intended impact. If the intention of a confrontative intervention was to facilitate self-reflection but instead the interlocutor responds with denial, then we can think of the intervention as inefficient (in the sense that it did not take enough of the subjective conditions into account to produce this intended effect). Several of these conditions are in the interlocutor: the feeling of safety, the trust in his counselor, the capacity to tolerate frustration or cognitive dissonance, the capacity to self-refrain and to contain one's own emotions and internal reactions, etc. The conditions that are in the facilitator's hands are the characteristics of the formulated confrontation, which should be: caring, gentle, constructive, clear and concise. When the consultant conveys *care* the interlocutor receives the unspoken message that he or she is safe with this consultant and does not require much alertness or readiness for a probable defense necessity. When the consultant is gentle, an atmosphere of peace is created and the process of thinking is slowed down. Clarity and concision reduce the amount of data one has to process in the interpretation of the confrontative message and that makes it easier to decode and to integrate. The risk of clarity and concision is that a certain (perhaps hard to digest) idea about oneself becomes so visible that it shocks the interlocutor. This would be a probable moment of vulnerability which can be contained with the safety created by the other fulfilled conditions (consent to confrontation, readiness to be surprised, normalization of features as human, the sense of comradeship, etc).

Concluding Thoughts

This article has raised a few important questions regarding some of the main difficulties encountered in philosophical consultations and the art of confronting them effectively. It also has suggested a few inspirational ideas on how to integrate good practices of confrontation in consultations. We need not be surprised to encounter all facets of humanity in working philosophically with human beings: we can find preoccupations with survival and with the reproduction on one's own ideas, we can encounter resistances which we can approach as areas of contact where the sense of threat is reduced by making room for consent. We may as well come across feelings of shame around the self-image constructs, feelings of fear and reactivity around the deconstruction of core beliefs. We may gain subtle insight into human laziness, greediness, ambition, self-sabotage, fear of making mistakes and fear of one's finitude in various forms. Whichever of these or other human aspects we uncover in our philosophical encounters, we have at least some basic tools and principles to approach them in a safe yet challenging manner by facilitating our interlocutor's thinking and expecting our interlocutor to do the same for us. We can be mindful of growth factors such as: letting ourselves and others formulate the ideas, letting ourselves collaborate in the examination of evidence and of contrary points of view in an orderly and systematic manner, remaining careful about emotional states and helping each other distance from them, distinguish them and learn to contextualize their regulatory function. We can keep promoting an organizational culture of readiness to consider ideas, of playful and leisurely conversation, of elegant use of humor and irony, of wondering, improvising and researching

whatever appears in our way. We can approach a variety of themes and explore a series of responses to them together. We can notice the *quantitative semantic dominance* of certain topics and the variety of human manifestations of *interpersonal dominance*, the proximity of one's stream of consciousness to common sense, the narrative areas in the structures of our co-created discourse about diverse issues under scrutiny and so on.

This article has put together important insights from psychotherapy and philosophical practice to help us contemplate the basic ingredients of an efficient confrontation. The art of confrontation however is a personal journey of self-awareness, self-transformation and self-abandonment. Comparisons between psychological and philosophical approaches to counseling and cognitive training reveal that both approaches can benefit from each other in an interdisciplinary effort to increase the quality of transformative consultations. Philosophers can learn from psychologists about how to create and to maintain a space of experienced safety for the clients to explore more of themselves and of the diverse world around them, to find that there is more than what one's own mind has conceived. On the other hand, psychologists have much to learn from philosophers about maieutic, dialectic, rhetoric, ethics and diverse paradigms of thought in order to be equipped with a variety of useful confrontative techniques leading to cognitive enhancement and psychological development.

We need not be afraid of confrontation, but thankful for it and always ready to improve our art of performing it in ways that stimulate and train our thinking capacities. When we come across interlocutors who are open to confrontation we still are likely to encounter resistance, even more so when we face people who are reluctant to confront or to be confronted. In each case we can find a way to decrease the anxiety that may be aroused by the individual's subjective view of what can be expected from social interactions.

When everything one discovers about oneself is recognized as an aspect of humanity, which other people sometimes have to deal with in themselves and in others as well, confrontation stops hurting and becomes an enjoyable aspect of conceptualization, allowing the individual to accept more of himself and of others. Each participant joining a group of philosophical practice can better handle the conceptualizations made about themselves when at least one member of the group acknowledges this person's belonging to the common family of humans and validates the contribution of the respective participant to the overall group development, by accepting to work with such aspects of himself on behalf of the others. To end as we started, with a word or two from Aikido master Ueshiba, let us reflect about what it means to *illuminate the path according to one's inner light* and to *meet and greet our opponents*, to respect the gifts their being brings along to the conversation that we too benefit from as interlocutors, since all of us are in constant training. *"You must test and polish yourself in order to face the great challenges of life. Transcend the realm of life and death and then you will be able to make your way calmly and safely through any crisis that confronts you"*.

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