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**THERAPIE OU CONSEIL PHILOSOPHIQUE?
LES DIRECTIONS COURANTES DE LA PRATIQUE PHILOSOPHIQUE**

**CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE:
FORCES THAT FAVOR, AND HINDER, ITS PROGRESS¹**

LOU MARINOFF

Abstract. During the past several decades, philosophical practice has emerged as a viable and global movement of philosophers, who – notwithstanding the many methods, styles, and schools that have evolved – share the premise that philosophy has applicability to and indeed utility for addressing and resolving numerous problems that arise in the daily lives of individuals, groups, and organizations. A constellation of favorable forces has abetted the emergence of philosophical practice, but likewise another constellation of opposing forces has obstructed its progress. The aim of this article is to identify and analyze ten of the more prominent features of both constellations. As we shall see, in many instances these features are actually Janus-like; that is, they look in both directions at once, simultaneously helping and hindering.

Keywords: philosophical practice, media, academic philosophy, anti-academics, psychotherapy lobby, emergent phenomena

1. THE PIONEERS

Our main helpers have been, firstly, pioneering philosophers themselves who, in defiance of entrenched traditions whose main aim has been to make philosophy irrelevant to all but its own internal concerns, had the courage to return love of wisdom to the agora, and equivalent public spaces, with Socrates as their model. (As Odo Marquard, a primary influence on Gerd Achenbach, said “In the history of philosophy, the following applies in general: Tell me what you think of Socrates, and I’ll tell you what your philosophy is.”²) These pioneers, including Pierre

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¹ This article is adapted from my acceptance speech for the *Doctor Honoris Causa*, conferred by the West University of Timisoara, Romania, on April 23, 2019.

² Cited by Gerd Achenbach 2018. “What Matters? What is Important in Truth? What is Crucial in the End?” *Philosophical Practice*, 13.3, p. 2171–81.

Grimes in the USA and Gerd Achenbach in Germany, among many others, were and are, the prime movers of the movement. Absent their stalwart labors, nothing of this kind would have moved during this period.

2. THE MEDIA

A second major helper, but in Janus-like fashion, was the American newspaper and magazine media, centered in New York. When the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal* cover a story, it has the immediate potential to be reprinted in major newspapers world-wide. I am referring now to the 1990s, before the advent of the full-blown world wide web and social media, and the newer phenomenon of “going viral.” Philosophical practice has not gone viral, which is possibly just as well, but it most assuredly went global, which is on balance a good and needful thing. Since I am based at The City College of New York, a storied public institution in Manhattan, the New York media used me as a local “peg” upon which to hang their breaking news about our work.³ Stories published in New York were simply copied by other major newspapers in a variety of countries. There is a long-standing jest about journalism, which goes like this: If they spell your name correctly and run your photo, then it’s “good press.”

While this homily rings true as far as public exposure is concerned, it remains mute on content. And philosophy, as I need not remind you, is all about content. Thus the Janus-like media also did us a profound disservice, by “spinning” (i.e. distorting or misrepresenting for their own purposes) a mantra that also, and unfortunately, circulated globally. They often characterized philosophical counseling as a controversial new form of psychotherapy.⁴ We were never really allowed an opportunity to refute this outrageous and indefensible claim in the pages of the newspapers that printed it. Philosophical counseling is hardly new; leading the examined life dates back (in the West) to the ancient Greeks. Moreover, philosophical counseling was largely uncontroversial until declared to be controversial by an industry that manufactures revenues primarily from raw sensationalism. And philosophical counseling is scarcely psychotherapy; rather, it is meticulously positioned and carefully practiced as an educational activity, not a psychological treatment. During the ensuing twenty and more years since this mantra appeared, I have endeavored to educate the media itself: the verifiable claim they ought to be making is just the converse of their original assertion; namely, that much of psychotherapy is, in fact, a controversial new form of philosophical counseling.

³ The seminal article was by Alex Kuczynski: “Plato or Prozac?” *New York Observer*, August 4, 1997, p. 17.

⁴ E.g. see Daniel Duane, “The Socratic Shrink,” *The New York Times Magazine*, March 21, 2004, p. 34–37.

3. THE BOOK PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

But such journalism represents merely the shadows on the wall of a cave whose denizens have been psychologized, for decades, from cradle to grave. I would hazard a guess that at least 95% of Americans (and possibly more) have never taken a single philosophy course, and will never read a single philosophy book, in all their lives. Thus, when *Plato Not Prozac* was first published in the US, in 1999, it was classified as “self-help” and often shelved in Psychology sections of bookstores.⁵ This irony, of course, follows naturally just in case philosophical counseling is “a controversial new form of psychotherapy.” So it became apparent that the US publishing industry followed the media’s Janus-like lead: They rendered us an invaluable service by popularizing our work to potential clients world-wide, simultaneously stimulating an interest among philosophers to become service providers; but did so at the corollary cost of packaging our services in a quasi-psychological disguise.

One morning in 2000, when the paperback edition of *Plato Not Prozac* was going to press, the editor phoned me at home, and in a very sheepish voice (because he himself knew better) made the following request. Can we find a substitute, he asked, for the word “philosophy” in the subtitle? The original subtitle, *Applying Philosophy to Everyday Problems*, sounded (he said) too intimidating to American self-help readers, and might scare them off. The market forces that drive such worries left me little choice but to acquiesce. After some thought I suggested substituting “Eternal Wisdom” for “Philosophy,” to which the editor immediately and gladly agreed. “Eternal Wisdom” is a sugar-coated, New-Age, user-friendly term, inherently attractive and not at all frightening. So the US publishing industry severed the primary connection between philosophical counseling, and philosophy, on the very cover of a book devoted to helping ordinary readers to philosophize.⁶

4. ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHY

If we boldly inquire how the word “philosophy” ever became so intimidating to a popular readership, we will meet yet another Janus-faced helper and hinderer of philosophical practice; namely, the current state of academic philosophy itself. The Anglo-American academy has been dominated for decades by analytic philosophy, which studies and debates ideas for their own sakes, with little if any concern for human life outside of mind, and with little or no regard for

⁵ Lou Marinoff 1999. *Plato Not Prozac: Applying Philosophy to Everyday Problems*. New York: HarperCollins (first edition, hardcover).

⁶ Lou Marinoff 2000. *Plato Not Prozac: Applying Eternal Wisdom to Everyday Problems*. New York: HarperCollins (paperback edition)

philosophy's ability to address itself to a plethora of human problems. As John Dewey had remarked, "Philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men."⁷ But Dewey notwithstanding, the dominant mode of analytic (or theoretical) philosophy gradually alienated itself from other disciplines, prepared its graduate students for careers mainly as brains in vats, and became incomprehensible to the general public – a public that supports the academy itself, either via taxes in the case of public institutions, or by endowments and grossly inflated tuition fees in the case of private ones. At the same time, however, theoretical philosophy managed to preserve rigor of thought and argumentation, like a finger in the collapsing dike of a deconstructed and politicized humanities curriculum,⁸ even if the substance of analytic philosophy remained almost entirely self-referential. It also made the unforgivable error of misrepresenting itself as the whole of philosophy, even though it is demonstrably only a part of a much larger whole.

The composition of that larger whole is conspicuously visible across the spectrum of other disciplines in the academy. For example, one can pursue either theoretical or experimental science; engage in either the research or the practice of medicine; either study literary theory or do creative writing; either learn art history or create fine arts; and so forth. Only philosophy, or so it appeared, was purely and entirely a theoretical subject. This is what made the general public both ignorant and also afraid of the very word "philosophy", and what compelled editors of popular books to replace it with more soothing synonyms.

5. INTELLIGENT LAYPERSONS

Yet at the same time, there persisted a segment of the public intelligentsia that, against all odds, had resisted the pervasive dumbing down of culture by both the politicized Western universities and mainstream media alike. This resilient segment had also rejected the relentless psychologization of the masses, in tandem with the spurious diagnosis and gratuitous drugging of every human complaint, regardless of its root causes. That segment of the public welcomed the return of philosophers to the role of what Nietzsche had termed "physicians of culture."⁹

⁷ John Dewey 1917. "The Need for the Recovery of Philosophy." In *Creative Intelligence: Essays in the Pragmatic Attitude*. New York: Henry Holt & Co, p. 65.

⁸ There is a substantial literature on the colonization and politicization of higher education throughout Western civilization by cultural Marxists. For example, see e.g. (1) Allan Bloom 1986. *Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon & Schuster; (2) Roger Kimball 1990. *Tenured Radicals*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee; (3) Alan Kors & Harvey Silverglate 1999. *The Shadow University*. New York: Harper Perennial; (4) Lou Marinoff 2019. *On Human Conflict*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

⁹ See e.g. Daniel Ahern 1982. *Nietzsche as Cultural Physician*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

They became our most willing clients and most avid readers, having grasped at once the meaning and purpose of philosophical counseling. But meanwhile, many philosophers of the analytic school denounced philosophical counseling, claiming rather absurdly that it was “not philosophy.”¹⁰ Thus the theoretical part remained determined to define the whole.

6. ANTI-ACADEMICS

As if this play of contending force were not enough, a schism soon fractured the nascent community of philosophical practitioners themselves. The community contained roughly two kinds of practitioners: those who were academic philosophers, and those who were not. The academic wing, to which I belong, sought to develop philosophical practice as a research and publication vehicle within the academy, to train and graduate professional practitioners from established academic programs, and ultimately to seek the recognition of philosophical practice by states, as a legitimately accredited profession. This seemed to us the best route to follow, as the universities train and graduate doctors, nurses, psychologists, social workers, lawyers, engineers, and other professionals whose services are licensed by states and rendered according to best practices.

However, a loose but vociferous coalition of non-academics, led by anti-academics, stridently opposed our mission, accusing us of “appropriating” philosophical practice and seeking to monopolize it. In fact, they tried but failed to stage a coup, appropriating philosophical practice to themselves, and ousting us academics, in the name of “anti-elitism” and “anti-fascism,” among other manifestations of populist sloganeering. This neo-Jacobin coalition of non-credentialed *sans-culottes* was soundly defeated, and a detailed account of that conflict and its resolution is contained in my textbook *Philosophical Practice*,¹¹ which Vasile Hațegan has translated into Romanian.¹² Our community has long-since healed itself, and a peaceful co-existence if not friendly association prevails between practitioners who are also professors, and practitioners who render services exclusively outside the academy. Some of the latter have earned very good graduate degrees in Philosophy, but had no urge to become academicians. There is no inherent contradiction between the two groups; merely a bifurcation of our path of practice.

While this brief sketch should serve to illustrate what a hornet’s nest was awakened by our use of the word “philosophy” in the phrase “philosophical counselling”, I must assure you that an even larger and angrier nest of hornets was

¹⁰ Philosophy departments grounded strictly in the analytic tradition were, and some still remain, resistant to implementing courses in Applied Ethics, Feminist Philosophy, Asian Philosophy, New England Idealism, in addition to Philosophical Practice among other non-analytic fields.

¹¹ Lou Marinoff 2001. *Philosophical Practice*. New York: Elsevier.

¹² Lou Marinoff 2001. *Practica Filosofică*. Translated by Vasile Hațegan. Introduced by Florin Lobont. Bucharest: Editura EIKON, 2019.

awakened by our use of the other word in that phrase; namely “counseling.” This usage precipitated both a firestorm in the media, and a constructive dialogue within the community of practitioners.

7. THE PSYCHOTHERAPY LOBBY

In the USA, psychologists had grown accustomed to associating the word “counseling” uniquely with psychotherapy for patients suffering from DSM-diagnosable “mental illnesses.” I digress to note that a diagnosis is necessary if the psychotherapist seeks third-party reimbursement from an insurance company. They must find something “wrong” – that is, must submit a claim form with a “paint-by-numbers” diagnostic label – in order to receive payment. In some states, such as Texas, the psychology lobby has accrued sufficient political power to appropriate legislative monopoly over the word “counselor.” No-one in Texas can legally call himself a “counselor” unless he or she is a licensed psychotherapist. The British Psychological Society recently attempted the same move nation-wide in the UK, having produced a white paper claiming that “counseling” is uniquely a psychological activity, and demanding a legislative monopoly over the term. Fortunately, UK philosopher and practitioner Sam Brown produced an apodictic rebuttal of the BPS’s untenable claim. In a paper entitled “The Meaning of ‘Counselor’”, Brown cited no fewer than fifteen historical usages of the term that pre-dated psychology itself.¹³ Take Seneca, for example. In his *Letter* 48, dating from the first century C.E., Seneca wrote “Would you really know what philosophy offers to humanity? Philosophy offers counsel.”¹⁴ Since that time, there have also appeared pastoral counselors, legal counselors, financial counselors, debt counselors, marital counselors, vocational counselors, guidance counselors, and career counselors, not to mention astrologers, psychics, and authors of messages in Chinese fortune cookies, all of whom plainly offer counsel, and none of it aimed at clients with psychopathologies, be they real or merely reified. In light of Brown’s rebuttal, the BPS’s white paper was discredited and dismissed.

Nonetheless, the hubris of some psychologists and (for that matter) psychiatrists led to unsubstantiated and irresponsible allegations to the media. For example, clinical psychologists panicked some people by alleging that philosophical counseling was “unvalidated treatment” likely to do more harm than good.¹⁵ That they were unable to produce a single case in which anyone had ever been harmed by philosophical counseling did not stop the media from disseminating their baseless allegation. A psychiatrist claimed to a major newspaper that a philosopher

¹³ Sam Brown 2010. “The Meaning of ‘Counselor’.” *Philosophical Practice*, 10.1, 549–566.

¹⁴ Lucius Annaeus Seneca. *Moral Letters to Lucilius*, Volume 1. translated by Richard Gunmore 1917. London: William Heinemann.

¹⁵ See e.g. Ron Pies, *Psychiatric News*, Letter to the Editor, May 15, 1998.

who dispenses ethics counseling to a client with a moral dilemma is practicing medicine without a license¹⁶ – a sublime accusation, to which I responded that anyone who believes a that a moral dilemma is a mental illness needs philosophical counseling himself.¹⁷ A former president of the American Psychological Association told a television audience – during a so-called “in depth” report on philosophical counseling that lasted seven minutes – that she simply could not imagine how anybody could be helped by philosophy.¹⁸ Rather than mustering a salient critique of philosophical counseling, or voicing a credible objection to it, she simply betrayed both a total ignorance of philosophy and a complete failure of imagination, as well as displaying a wealth of hubris.

Our use of the term “counselor” precipitated a firestorm of protest and alarm from psychologists and psychiatrists that seemed entirely out of proportion to our meager numbers, there being at the time tens of thousands of them and only dozens of us. Were they merely waging a reflexive “turf-war” against perceived poachers on their territory – the human psyche – or were they worried that philosophers might explode some of the untenable myths and conceptual muddles on which their professions reposed? During World War II, it was remarked by a high school teacher that one hundred physicists were worth a million soldiers.¹⁹ Perhaps, in our contemporary culture wars against humanity itself, in which predatory pharmaceutical companies endeavor to convince consumers that they are fundamentally sick animals whose brains are in constant need of chemical balancing, it might be said that one hundred philosophers are worth a million psychotherapists.

Yet by the same token, a number of enlightened psychiatrists, medical doctors, psychologists, and social workers identified with our movement, sought to collaborate with us, and have even trained with us, so as to develop and deploy philosophical insights in their own practices. Over the years I have collaborated with a good many psychiatrists, and have had as clients a good many psychologists, all of whom were and are appreciative of philosophy’s historically ancient and contemporarily relevant role among so-called “helping” professions.

8. THE NOMENCLATURE DEBATE

Ironically enough, and at the same time, there was no consensus within our movement on the use of the term “counselor.” Language being malleable and cultural contexts being diverse, philosophical practitioners in many different

¹⁶ See Amy Westfeldt, “A Consulting Philosopher Aims to Help the Ethically Challenged,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 5, 1998. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1998-apr-05-mn-36147-story.html>

¹⁷ See Lou Marinoff 2004. “Thus Spake Settembrini,” in *Philosophy and Psychiatry*, eds. Thomas Schramme & Johannes Thome. Berlin: De Gruyter, 27–49.

¹⁸ Lifetime Channel, *New Attitudes*, September 1998.

¹⁹ A. Compton 1942. “War Problems of the Physics Teacher,” *The Scientific Monthly*, 54, 370.

countries have described themselves variously as “consultants,” “advisors,” “assessors,” “coaches,” “companions,” and “mediators” – as we have also evolved various ways to describe our clients. To us within the movement, our professional titles are less important than the actual services we render.

Perhaps the most cogent comment on nomenclature was made many years ago by Paul Sharkey, a co-founder of both the American Society for Philosophy, Counseling and Psychotherapy, and later of the American Philosophical Practitioners Association. A true visionary and early pioneer of our current movement, Paul opined that he looked forward to a day when we could simply call ourselves “philosophers,” and the general public would immediately understand that we were people who thought deeply about ideas, issues, and persons; who engaged in teaching, research, and publication; and who offered a range of services to individuals, groups, and organizations.²⁰ In other words, Paul believed that our challenge is not to need to explain what “philosophical counseling” is; but rather (and reminiscent of the earlier quote from Dewey) to recapture the original meaning of philosophy itself, as a discipline that spans the entirety of its own historical spectrum, rather than confining itself to selected wavelengths (e.g. analytic or continental philosophy) or reclaiming selected wavelengths that other disciplines had borrowed from us (e.g. existential or cognitive psychotherapies).

As the challenge of redefining philosophy itself – both to academicians and the public at large – is obviously greater than that of merely defining philosophical practice, perhaps we have a lot more work to do than we had initially conceived.

9. THE ULTIMATE SANCTION

If we inquire of philosophical practice, as did John Stuart Mill of utilitarianism, in what consists its ultimate sanction, the answer is perhaps revealing. Recall that Mill’s common-sense empiricism led him to claim, with justification, that the only possible “proof” of a thing’s desirability is that people actually desire it.²¹ Since most people desire happiness rather than unhappiness for themselves, and moreover would prefer to live in happy rather than unhappy families, and to inhabit happy rather than unhappy polities, it follows that the greatest happiness for the greatest number is that which most people desire. Moreover, since this is none other than the definition of utilitarianism, its ultimate sanction lies in its near-universal desirability. So argued Mill. Following Mill’s lead, but to a different conclusion, I would suggest that philosophical practice consists of the greatest discernment for the most discerning number. And if that be the case, we can similarly and readily infer its ultimate sanction as well.

Empirically, we find that our clientele comes from among the most discerning echelons of society, just as our philosophy graduates in the university

²⁰ E.g. see Paul Sharkey in Lou Marinoff 2001, *Foreword*, xv–xviii.

²¹ John Stuart Mill 1879. *Utilitarianism*. London: Longman's, Green & Co. 7th ed. chapter 4.

come from among the most discerning segments of the student body. Philosophy is one of the most demanding disciplines in the academy, and so empirically we find that philosophy departments are smaller than psychology departments, and students of philosophy less numerous than students of psychology. Similarly, even if philosophical counseling reaches a saturation point as a professional field, I hypothesize that psychological counselors and their clients will always be more numerous than us, and ours. Why? It seems clear that most psychotherapy is grounded in affect and its expression, whereas most philosophical counseling is grounded in reason and its exercise. If Hobbes, Hume, and Freud are correct, and I suspect they are on this point, then most people's reason, at least in the shorter run, is enslaved to their passions.²² But if Daoists, Buddhists, and Stoics are correct, and I suspect they are as well, then most people – wittingly or not – co-create their experiences of life, at least in the longer run, by intentionality and volition.²³ People who seek either to alter such circumstances of life as are malleable, or else to alter the way in which they experience and interpret such circumstances of life as are fixed, can do so most expediently by discerning the importance of intentionality and the efficacy of will. That kind of discernment is grist for the mill of philosophy, not psychology. It requires comparatively less discernment, and less associated exertion, to have one's emotions validated in the sympathetic light (or diagnosed in the pretentiously pseudoscientific darkness) of psychotherapy, rather than to examine one's life through the dispassionate lens of reason.

So philosophical practice offers the greatest discernment for the most discerning number, which may be far fewer than a majority of society. It is therefore not utilitarian, but by the same token is not elitist. Why not elitist? The short answer is that education broadly construed, in its most salutary sense, tends to smarten people up, not to dumb them down. Per contra, Western civilization has

²² Hobbes called will “the last appetite” (i.e. the final desire or aversion in deliberating an act) and considered it “free” only to the extent that the deliberated act is unhindered by external forces (Thomas Hobbes 1651. *Leviathan*. London: Andrew Crooke, chapter 4). Hume wrote “Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.” (David Hume 1739. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. London: John Noon, book II, section III). Freud wrote “our intellect is really a feeble and dependent thing, a plaything and tool of our instincts, and affects.” (Sigmund Freud 1914, *Letter to Frederik van Eeden*. In *The Complete Psychological Works*, Volume XIII (1913–14). London 1955: The Hogarth Press, p. 301.

²³ For example, Lao Tzu wrote “He who engages himself in Tao is identified with Tao. He who engages himself in virtue is identified with virtue. He who engages himself in abandonment is identified with abandonment. Identified by Tao, he will be well received by Tao. Identified with virtue, he will be well received by virtue. Identified with abandonment, he will be well received by abandonment.” *Tao Te Ching*, trans. Chu Ta-Kao. London: Allen & Unwin, 1937. One of the most important texts of early Buddhism begins with this twin verse: “1. All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage. 2. All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.” *Dhammapada*, translated by F. Max Muller. The Project Gutenberg: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2017/2017-h/2017-h.htm#link2HCH0001>

for decades been in the grip of a congeries of maleficent forces, ranging from corrupt politicians and predatory capitalists, to cultural Marxists and parasitic bureaucrats, to mindless demagogues and soulless technocrats, who agree collectively on nothing save the premise that sheep are easier to govern than discerning citizens, and that undiscerning citizens are easier to fleece than sheep. However much at odds with one another, these forces have embarked on a relentless but perilous course of dumbing people down. Whereas education consonant with its mission, including philosophical practice, tends to smarten people up. It is hardly an elitist mission to guide the *hoi polloi* out of Plato's cave; but (as Plato was well-aware) it is a realistic prognostication to expect that not everyone will choose to exit.²⁴

10. EMERGENT PHENOMENA

The last section of this article will identify a set of emergent phenomena that are proving inimical to the health and well-being of Westerners and, increasingly owing to globalization, to peoples world-wide. At the same time, this creates enormous and largely untapped potential for the growth of philosophical practice. While philosophical practice is hardly a panacea for the perennial cornucopia of ills afflicting humankind, it nonetheless sits at the core of a cluster of remedies – called “Humanities Therapy” by our Korean colleagues – for what I term “culturally-induced illnesses.”²⁵ When an illness is rooted in biology, its epidemiology and pathology must be understood in order to effect a biological cure. But when an illness is induced by culture, it is useless to treat its somatic symptoms alone; one must understand and effect positive change in commensurately cultural domains.

Early in this 21st century, it became clear that citizens of affluent Western societies were and are suffering, in ever-larger numbers, from so-called “epidemics” unprecedented in the annals of medicine, as well as from precedent problems now manifesting on unprecedented scales. These so-called “epidemics” include attention deficit hyperactivity disorders, bullying, depressions, social anxiety disorders, obesity among other eating disorders, sleep disorders, chronic fatigue syndromes, sexual dysfunctions, repetitive stress disorders, addictions to prescription drugs derived from opioids, addictions to illicit drugs such as heroine, along with unidentified ailments arising from unforeseen aide effects of prescription and other drug cocktails. All these problems are diagnosed, drugged, and re-drugged as though their root causes were biological (which they are largely *not*); and the net effect of

²⁴ See Plato's *Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett 1888. New York: Anchor Books 1960. “Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to lose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death.” Book VII, 207–208.

²⁵ See Lou Marinoff 2012. “Humanities Therapy: Restoring Well-Being in an Age of Culturally-Induced Illness.” Keynote address, in *Proceedings of the 11th International Conference on Philosophical Practice*, Humanities Institute, Kangwon National University, South Korea 27–48.

this malpractice is in many cases to worsen the problems themselves. In Germany, these epidemics are called “diseases of civilization”; in Japan, “lifestyle maladies”; in Sweden, “diseases of affluence”; in the US “affluenza”²⁶ For the first time in more than a century, life expectancies in the US have fallen instead of risen.

As our Korean colleagues ably pointed out in their *Call for Papers* for the 11th International Conference on Philosophical Practice, held in 2012:

Many people in affluent societies have become increasingly vulnerable to motivational problems and mental illnesses ... This is the paradox of material wellbeing ... the relentless pursuit of material wealth neglects basic human concerns such as happiness, morality and mental health, in turn causing emotional and motivational difficulties with potentially serious psychological, social and economic consequences. The underlying problems are philosophical in nature and cannot be resolved by scientific, technological or medical interventions. They require solutions drawn from philosophy and the humanities.

Korean philosophers are in a far stronger position to levy such charges, partly because they can lay claim to indigenous and empirically efficacious East Asian systems of philosophical practice (e.g. Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism), and partly because they can discredit Western psychotherapy and psychopharmacology as manifestations, respectively, of cultural and economic imperialism.

Another timely development pioneered by the Koreans, and entailed by their *Call for Papers*, was the coinage and creation of Humanities Therapy, an alliance of practices not unfamiliar to the West, but not allied with one another in the West. Whereas cognate Western professions – e.g. Art Therapy, Dance Therapy, Music Therapy, Poetry Therapy – tend to vie competitively against one another, Korean philosophical practitioners were able to strengthen each of their hands by forging an alliance among them. At the same time, this brought philosophical counseling out of isolation, giving it broader ground upon which to stand. As a result of these among other sage strategies, Korean philosophical practitioners were able to garner approval from both university administrations and governmental agencies, essential pillars of support for any nascent profession, thereby making more rapid advances as a profession than have Western philosophical practitioners who had initially mentored them in theories and methods of practice.

Interesting enough, the year 2013 saw a landmark development in the US as well. The National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH), a federally-funded operation and the world’s largest scientific organization for research on mental illness and mental health, repudiated the DSM-V as fundamentally unsound. The DSM, or *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, is published by the American Psychiatric Association, and has become the so-called “bible” for diagnosis of mental illness by clinical psychologists as well as psychiatrists. The main reason

²⁶ See Vaughana Feary and Lou Marinoff 2014. “The Case Against a ‘Philosophical DSM’,” *Journal of Humanities Therapy*, 5, 47–70.

for its rejection by the NIMH is its “diagnoses” chiefly of symptoms, and of clusters of symptoms, as though they were actual illnesses, without reference to or elucidation of underlying biological pathways.²⁷

This defect is scarcely surprising, since the DSM is a political rather than a scientific manual: mental illnesses are “elected” to the DSM by majority vote of psychiatrists at APA meetings. A perusal of the five editions to date, starting from the 1980s, reveals that prevailing cultural norms as well as entrenched research interests of “big pharma” heavily influence votes. The NIMH’s repudiation of the DSM was both a rebuke of the practice of paint-by-numbers diagnosis and gratuitous drugging, and a vindication of the same criticism that philosophers had drawn fire for voicing during the 1990s.

What is more: Also in 2013, the Association for the Advancement of Arts and Sciences (AAAS) submitted a report to the US Congress, citing marginalization of Humanities as a leading cause of cultural decline and social malaise.²⁸ To reiterate, things that American philosophical practitioners landed in trouble for saying years prior, are now being said by large and authoritative public institutions in the US, and are supported by at least one East Asian government (namely South Korea).

So now let us voice a corollary concern, in the form of a rhetorical question. Picking just one so-called “mental illness” from the basket of culturally-induced epidemics, we observe the following: the number of man-hours that patients spend in psychotherapy has risen exponentially for decades; the consumption of mood-enhancing formulations prescribed by physicians and psychiatrists has also risen exponentially for decades; and yet, somehow, the percentage of people suffering from so-called “depression” has likewise risen exponentially for decades.

Now ponder this: wherever medical science successfully carves nature at its joints, we witness without exception a negative correlation between treatment and incidence of a given illness: for example, widespread introduction of hygienic measures in Victorian hospitals put a virtual end to post-surgical gangrene; dissemination of the Salk vaccine put a virtual end to polio. And so forth. Now a question: why, then, have widespread increases in psychotherapy and prescription drug consumption not put a virtual end to depression, but in fact are correlated with its steady increase? Could it be because they are part of the problem, and not part of the solution?

In light of these and kindred developments, one might be forgiven for imagining that new doors were now opened for the furthering of philosophical practice in the US and other Western countries. Ironically, more doors than ever appear to be slamming shut. In this century, the Humanities in Western universities are virtually under siege. From within, cultural Marxists have largely converted traditional liberal arts education into insidious if not vindictive political indoctrination²⁹ (e.g. Revisionist History, Critical Race Theory, GLBTQI Studies,

²⁷ <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/side-effects/201305/the-nimh-withdraws-support-dsm-5>

²⁸ http://www.humanitiescommission.org/_pdf/hss_report.pdf

²⁹ E.g. see Lou Marinoff 2007. *The Middle Way*. New York & London: Sterling, chapters 9 and 11. See also Marinoff 2019 *passim*.

etc.); from without, traditional humanities programs that do not espouse radical political causes are seeing their budgets savaged, with ever more funding diverted away from humanities and toward STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) programs.

These shifts within the academy are exacerbated by the wholesale supplanting of the written tradition and all its noetic benefits, by the digital revolution and all its cognitive deficits. A culture of instantaneity has destroyed attention spans; a *modus vivendi* of apps has demagnetized moral compasses; and a pervasive but uncritical mistaking of appearance for reality has herded consumers out of the Enlightenment, and back into the depths of Plato's Cave. Western civilization is plummeting into a new Dark Age, governed not by theocracy but by technocracy, whose emergent elites are the FANG: Facebook, Amazon, Netflix, Google.

CONCLUSIONS

In sum, philosophical practice is more relevant and necessary than ever before, and in every sector of society. As I have maintained from the outset, credible philosophical practitioners must be trained in the academy, as are credible practitioners of every other profession. And indeed, a small but pioneering vanguard of universities, from several European and Asian countries, are now offering graduate programs in this nascent field. I salute West University of Timisoara for joining this historic and timely vanguard. It may surprise you, or not, to learn that not one single American university has yet established even an M.A. Program in Philosophical Practice. Although at least one such formal proposal was resoundingly approved at all academic levels, it was placed in an administratively induced coma by a once-storied institution now sadly committed to furthering culturally-induced illnesses, instead of their prevention and cure.³⁰

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³⁰ The City College of New York (CCNY) twice approved a proposed M.A. Program in Philosophical Practice at every governance level, including by its Provost and President, only to see the proposal buried in administrative "red tape" by the inaccessible Chancellor's office of the City University of New York (CUNY), of which the formerly free-standing and storied City College (CCNY) has been a mere appendage since the 1960s.

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