

Philosophy in Practice - Beyond Ego Boundaries: The Experience of Quality

Paolo Quattrini G

Psychologist and Psychotherapist, Scientific Director of the Gestalt Institute of Florence, author of Books and Publications on the Topic of Gestalt Therapy, Italy

ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of practical philosophy in understanding and experiencing value, focusing on three fundamental elements: truth, goodness, and beauty. Through a phenomenological and existential perspective, the author examines how these concepts shape thought, ethics, and aesthetics, emphasizing their ineffable nature and historical evolution.

The analysis considers how the perception of beauty has transformed over time, shifting from classical ideals to a modern search for meaning rather than form. Goodness is discussed in relation to ethics, not as a fixed system of rules but as a lived and contextualized experience. Truth, in turn, is distinguished from rationality and interpreted as a creative process in which logic serves as a tool to explore possibilities and construct meaning.

Furthermore, the study draws parallels between philosophy and existential psychotherapy, demonstrating how both disciplines co-construct narratives that enhance the quality of life. Using examples from art, literature, and therapeutic practice, it highlights the significance of experience in defining the core concepts of human existence.

*Corresponding author

Paolo Quattrini G, Psychologist and Psychotherapist, Scientific Director of the Gestalt Institute of Florence, author of Books and Publications on the Topic of Gestalt Therapy, Italy.

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Value

Philosophy is knowledge of wisdom, conceptual knowledge of something that by nature is not conceptual: wisdom is the child of experience, and within experience it is articulated by value. For centuries the question of essence of reality took a lot of philosophical space in all its forms, until Kierkegaard stated that it is the question of value that deserves this central space: what is worth doing with one's life? And it is at this point, that we start talking about philosophical practice [1].

If philosophy is a practice, how can we actually practice it? Starting from the assumption that the reply cannot be univocal, a possibility is to observe how a person's behavior is oriented using the compass of value

Three are the fundamental mysteries of existence: truth, goodness and beauty. Why they exist is not possible to know, but without truth thought would not exist, without goodness there would be no sense of humanity, without beauty there would be no art: these are actually the mysteries supporting the meaning of human life.

Experience teaches that people are generally oriented by value, albeit, given the intrinsic ineffability of value, frequently with a rather vague idea of what they really mean by beautiful, good and true. Therefore it is important to focus on the development, that the sense of value underwent in the course of centuries: beauty, goodness and truth don't have the same sense for us now, as when Platon and Aristoteles founded the basis of western thought.

Beauty

Beauty, we do not know what it is, we only know that it has value and that is possible to experience it. No matter how much we try to define it, we cannot reduce it to an algorithm, that is to say to a repeatable sequence. So, for beauty there are no recipes. The same is true for the quality of life: there are no given prescriptions, and the procedures to look for beauty in art are the same as those looking for the quality of life.

Focillon, the art critic, said that shapes have a life of their own, that is to say they have a specific capacity to evolve towards beauty, regardless of meanings: a shape is beautiful because it allows the experience of beauty, not because it means or resembles anything [2]. This is the sense of abstractionism: Kandinsky, one of its pioneers, said that the line is the story of a point and that from this story it takes its sense, and that lines and colors give feelings and emotions, regardless of a naturalistic appearance. That is, an abstract painting does not necessarily mean something, it is a search for beauty through modulation of feelings: in other words, it does not create a sign, it creates sense.

Beauty is sense, not meaning: modern art has broken free from every rule and it experimentally pursues sense, in any way possible, with any possible material. Installations, for example, a specific art form of our times, consists of transforming chaotic conglomerates in meaningful wholes through little changes of elements: an artwork is for instance made in an abandoned building by arranging spots of lights and colors here and there, or other elements in themselves not congruent but capable of creating a whole of aesthetic value.

In psychotherapy with a phenomenological existential approach, procedures are similar: starting from the more or less disastrous stories that patients report, we co-construct with them stories with a meaning that can support a life of greater quality, through the experience of expressing other parts of their inner world hitherto suppressed or unknown, or simply still to invent.

Goodness

As for goodness, from the phenomenological point of view we cannot use moral rules, objective indications, signals, that be simple “authorities”, as Heidegger would say, or objects, like also concepts are, unless “being”, who “takes care” of the world, puts “elements”, what simply is in the world, more upwards of himself, that it would debase the story with a banal solution, like a “Deus ex machina”, that is to say the experience is offered like tool of co-subjective differentiation, that imposes itself by its sensory. Here we talk about ethics the way Kierkegaard does: obviousness and that cannot be possessed conceptually, being substantially ineffable and that can only be evoked, experienced [3,4].

To make an example, in an old film, “Hombre”, the hero does not defend a weak man from the abuses of power of a bully, that tramples the dignity of the poor fellow. At the end of the film the hero dies in defense of women and children, but the key point of the ethical value of his action remains in his non defense of the weak man. He is clearly aware of the weakness of one and of the arrogance of the other, but although capable of defending him because he is the strongest one, he does not take the role of judge and does not want to settle the world. Just at the end, he gets involved because there is the need to save a life, and not simply someone’s injured narcissism. He does not crush the bully with his superiority, that would be however an abuse of power: he does not yield to the temptation to commit an abuse of power, even with the best of motives: justice.

Now, the ethical value of this behavior is felt in the first place through participated observation, and only secondly is it recognizable analyzing his behavior, about which we could argue until we arrive at quite different considerations. On the other hand, what we feel is indisputable, at least for the subject who perceives.

If ethics cannot be managed conceptually, ethics cannot be learned either, at least not in the traditional sense (the same is true for esthetics). What is possible, is to be introduced, “initiated”, to the ethical experience: we can learn to differentiate feelings and sensations, until we acquire a capacity to modulate the experience consciously, voluntarily, and responsibly.

In classic times good was to respect the will of the of gods formally; there is an example for this in “the Bacchantes” by Euripides, where the tragedy comes about through the lack of respect for the will of Dionysus, which tends to leave a taste of injustice in the contemporary observer.

True

Wittgenstein, one of the greatest teachers of contemporary thought, said that logic is like a ladder, it is useful to arrive someplace, then necessarily you throw it away and go beyond: that is to say that logic is simply a tool, that works to assure the functionality of the passages of what you want to say. Logic allows: for example, the logic of Einstein’s theory of relativity certainly allowed to bring about the split of the atom, but to say that it revealed the true nature of the world would be at least risky, considering that modern cosmologist think in terms of multiversity, and doubt that

in other universes the laws of nature are the same as in ours [5].

To think that logic allows, is a big change in our way of thinking. A story for example involves a plot, and the plot consists of a series of events that hold our attention because they provide a logic reason for the connection between the most disparate events. Mystery stories, even if they not written too well, however always have a plot, and even a banal plot can hold the attention of the reader: the discovery of the killer has usually a strong emotional effect, and that is why we read to the end of the book. The plot is nothing but sequences leading to a conclusion, to an energetically satisfactory effect: in a story, logical is what generates feelings, and brings about a narrative conclusion. That is to say when a sequence passes energy that can be described in itself as logic.

If logic does not obligate but only permits, it means that the connections of cause and of effect are not what they may seem: instead of obligatory they are only possible, and in fact when in a psychotherapy for example we work on the story of a patient, together we co-construct a narration: we look for sense and a plot that supports it, so that the events are not connected mechanically by causes and effects, but rather like architectural elements that, creating value, at the same time should allow the building to stand. In this field, the story does not correspond to the historical truth, but to a narrative sense, that the story offers to its main character: because psychotherapy should improve the client’s perception of the quality of his life.

Logic can be related to value only insofar as it produces truth, otherwise it is only rationality: if for example we add up the grocery bill, this is a functional operation, a closed packet that ends here. We are dealing with logic instead, when for example Hegel says that reality is produced by thesis and antithesis that melt into synthesis: a truth that opens entire worlds [6]. The logos, the Greek word from which ‘logic’ derives, means creative power, it is the human mind that gives shape chaos and opens new scenarios of truth. Truth comes from a creative action, from an invention: Einstein traced via logic the road that transforms matter into energy, the creative power of his mind invented a truth, the path that is, that arrives there.

Rationality can be taken as an instrumental use of logic, and morality as instrumental use of ethics: logic, even if it seems strange to say so, cannot be thought, but we can feel it, it has a smell. Philosophical thought does not have rules, and yet it is rigorous: it can state whatever it choses, as long as the passages are correct and lead to a widening of perspectives.

In the classic world logical was to think according to Aristotle’s teaching that describes the principles and the binding formal procedures: the laws of Aristotelian logic, in fact [1]. The expression “Aristoteles dixit” entered deeply into the Christian world. Like ethics and aesthetics, also logic was formal: it was its orthodoxy to consecrate it as such.

Transcendent

With time and the refinement, the processes of gaining knowledge, our consideration of value changes: Christ accompanies man beyond the formal level of ethics: beyond goodness as respect of the law, to goodness as experience. By saying “let the children come to me”, he implicitly that a child is capable of understanding the sense of good. For this it is not necessary to know the law, or to be of a special cultural level. Good here appears like an absolute: it is the transcendental level of the value of behavior.

In the area of logic, the transcendental is reached centuries later with Kant and his critic of pure reason: logical here corresponds to a truth to which earthing obeys, it is the concrete manifestation of the Transcendent. In this sense logical is the same as truth: what is true is logical, what is logical is true. Logical it is not therefore something to respect formally, but something to take as absolute value. In this conception only one logic exists: it contains reality with a biunique series of connections between causes and effects, and it remains hidden only for the mistakes due to human limitations.

As for aesthetics, in Christian times “not the beauty of a body... not the splendor of the light... not the sweet melodies... not the fragrance of the flowers...” says Agostino, but only God, “beauty of everything beautiful”, is the beauty [7]. And later on, during romanticism, Goethe accompanies Faust in search for absolute beauty. His pact with Mephistopheles sounds like this: if I say to the moment: “stay with me, you are so beautiful”, then You can put me in chains. He bets on the impossibility that this could happen, because according to the romantic view, it is aiming without reaching that is fundamental: beauty for man in the romantic period is a fleeting mirage. Not so in the second part of Goethe’s work: facing a vision of a free and peaceful humanity, Faust pronounces the sentence and thus, attributing absolute reality to beauty, Faust loses his bet with the devil.

In the same period, while the musical parameters come more formalized, the great composers respect them only when it is convenient for them, as it is beauty in itself, they pursue, disregarding the formal models.

Relative

In recent times it became obvious how that beauty, goodness and truth are characteristics that can be ascribed only to partial.

A frame in is what contains a painting and its beauty, and it excludes it artificially from the rest of the world, protecting its value. The frame that contains “good”, is the word “fact”: because ethical value is recognizable only in isolated facts: no event is good or bad in the absolute, if we look at the bigger picture of human history as it evolves.

Not even truth is excluded from this consideration: assuming that a person caught a cold because they went out in winter without covering themselves enough would be naive, because they could have either not caught it, or they could have caught it without going out. The frames that logic asks for are the grounds to which it is applied: if for example it is postulated that a cold depends on the fall of temperature, then the preposition above becomes logic.

If goodness, beauty and logic require a frame, this implies that they are values that depend on the connections between the parts of the whole, and they are therefore relational values, that is to say relative.

It is this realization that opened the way to modern art for example: it does not matter if in a work there is some naturalistic representation, because beauty is related to the connections between the shapes that compose it, with the relation they have with the frame of space and time. It is the whole that matters, the Gestalt therapy, that though transcending the sum of the parts and living an autonomous life, at any rate is circumscribed by a context [8].

It is in this manner that truths hold together a unit of sense, which exists, contained by these truths other truths could make another unit of sense, even if opposed, they to within logic.

Good and bad are always directions and never substances, Buber said: they are the horizon of actions, their connection with the motion of life, that runs incessantly and that for the individual has no other point of arrival but death.

There are three distinct ways, we can observe value: from the formal point of view a person will arrive at quite different considerations than he would from the transcendental one, and still different if he considers things from a relative point of view; here the possibilities of choices are much larger, and the relation with life can be more articulated.

Truth and Functionality

Now, one of the existentially indisputable forces of the universe is gravity, and any building has to face this: for a building to stand it needs keep this force in mind, that is called “weight”. The architectural elements should unload their weight to the earth, otherwise everything falls: arches and vaults transmit the weight of the roof across pillars and outer walls to the ground. The transmission of support is a key concept in building, and a metaphor of the basic rules of construction, even he construction of thought.

Truth involves therefore at least a correct transmission of support, without that no structure has chance to remain standing. It is not enough however to put bricks one on top of the other for a plausible building: logic, in agreement with its etymology, is an operation that uses rationality, in other words the transmission of support, to build an architecture with some the value of truth. Now, the term “value” describes something that can only be evoked, but not described, and is not to be confused with “price”, which is measurable quantity. The value of a work of art, like the value of a love or of a human being, is different from the price of a brick of gold. Even if it is not definable, value like an experience is knowable in terms of beautiful, good and true, and the value of logic refers to something that is not simple functional.

In everyday language “true” is often confused with “rational”, but in a relative view “rational” is not truer than what is not rational, it simply works better it is a correlation with which we can do something useful. We are not talking of the truth in absolute sense, but of a truth. Usefulness can mean a more ample view of the world that can open the doors to science, to a freer life, to dreams.

Logic in this sense is a creative act, is invention, and for how much it may seem weird to say, it does not stand on rational thought alone, but also on intuition. It is like when a painter in a painting sees the route that bind colors and shapes: there are not rules for this, despite that aesthetics, like logic, is strict. In art we can do whatever we want, but it should be beautiful, and also philosophy has not rules, and yet it is strict: it can talk about whatever in any possible manner, as long as the passages lead to an opening, to a space. When philosophy catches your attention it has a smell of space, and the soul of the Buddhist thought, to speak of a so-called philosophical religion, is the void, that is to say space.

Value escapes from the world of things: though the whole is more than to the sum of its parts, you cannot appreciate its value on the level of the parts. Value is essentially indefinable but you can experience it.

Ethics and Morality

If logical value is an experience, let us imagine the ethical one: humanity has tried to contain it in words and concepts. In the Christian tradition the subject of goodness is connected with that of the immortality of the soul: here a good behavior is what ensures eternal life. Actually, we are simply dealing with a grammatical illusion, how Wittgenstein would say: if mortality in fact is a concept that comes from the experience to be living beings who die, immortality is an extension of the word derived conceptually for contrast (if immortality is conceivable than it exists, S [9]. Anselmo would have assured) but limited in its existence to the abstract level.

The fear of death however is actually a biological mechanism, made to increase the possibility of survival, while the concept of the immortality of the soul is an attempt to manage the problem by reasoning for absurd, like in mathematics: that is to say, if for absurd there was an essential part that does not die, the danger of death would be escaped, and this would be very attractive.

If we take this point of view, the result is that it is necessary to worry of how to protect this essential part from the misfortunes that could arrive, that is to say: it is necessary to behave in a way that allows us to avoid to end in hell, that is what it is called improperly to be good.

The attention given to behavior and the care that gets from it, have clearly big advantages for the individual and species survival, and we can understand therefore how much the subject of the immortality of the soul persist in time and in the human culture and throw its shadow on every behavior.

Immortality of the soul is however a way to take time, to postpone the moment in which we make a balance of our actual life, the moment where we look at what has been done and not done, and there is no other opportunity: it would be the time where we give up on the results of our actual choices and admit that “we wanted the bicycle, therefore now we have to ride it”. “No, no, no - says the human being - still a little time please, I have to finish what I am doing”, but that he’s actually not doing and would not ever finish: it is a deceptive and indispensable trick in inconclusive lives, as there are generally those of the human beings. When time is over, the account of what we have done and got actually falls, and the immortality of the soul gives a thread of hope to try and postpone the actual responsibility.

From a theoretical point of view the problem is not therefore what is the immortality of the soul, a question that Wittgenstein solved with the grammatical concept of illusion, but in order to worry for such a thing, and it becomes obvious that the question stands on the necessity that time does not finish: is an anxiety that coincides with a wish for chances we never had or that we missed, it is a symptom of Existential deficiencies, that would ask for a care of the soul rather than metaphysics speculations.

If in fact on one hand it is convenient to balance anxiety to imagine a life after death, it could be difficult to consider good a postponing that allows the person not to take responsibility of dealing with the needs of actual life, that is asking oneself what one wants to do with the time which is left. A good wine is undoubting good, and it is convenient for conviviality but one could not say “tout court “that drinking is a good thing: it is not good what is simply convenient.

But if good is not what it is convenient, how could we distinguish between the infinite options of doing?

As logical is experience, also good is an experience, that it has a taste: the taste of good, that is different from convenient. The taste of good, like that of logical, opens to existential possibilities: good is something that frees the human being from the constraints of destiny and from the limitations of the strict selfish interest and allows paths that would seem improbable. A taste is however immersed in a net of contingencies: coffee has good taste, salted has good taste, but getting back to the subject of frames, an excessive space and time closeness of two produces something literally disgusting. Therefore, also facts can have tastes that together with other facts transform themselves, and therefore the question on good is limited to the frame of context: a heroic episode does not lose its good taste at a time distance it produces bad results, but the observer who looks should hold it separated from any problematic proximities.

Like rationality is a formal use of logic, morality is a formal use of ethics: whatever prohibition is not ethical but morals, an indispensable level of responsibility for who does not reach the transcendental plan of ethics.

Beauty and Pleasure

As for beauty, a fundamental experience in life is pleasure, but this does have to be exchanged with aesthetic value: how Kant said, beauty is not simply what pleases [10].

Actually pleasure, nature and culture meet themselves without overlapping: if is true that many natural shapes, from the landscapes to the times, offer the experience of attraction, the aesthetic value takes off towards more complex goals. The attractions of nature are directly connected with the survival of the individual and of the species, while the aesthetic value is unfastened from this leading level. Writing, paints, sculpture and music, get so high they cannot be linked only to survival, if not across what Freud called sublimation, a movement of the instinct on transcending aims. The phenomenon of transcendence is tightly connected to the concept of meaning, the fact that the whole is more than the sum of the parts: from this point of view necessarily it is transcended, and the sense of value is simply the sight of what transcends the sum of the parts.

Beauty is nothing but one of the points of view on transcendence, and to identify it with what pleases would be rather reductive: if beauty pleases, not everything that pleases is beauty, or has aesthetic value. Sometimes for example people like places they are fond of, maybe because they come from there or they lived there some pleasant experiences, or fashion things, that is to say they are matched with people we copy the style: a fine garment has not an aesthetic value, and actually if it seemed smart the year before, the year after becomes ugly. Things that have aesthetic value survive to time, that cuts down via all things resembling: beauty is what stays.

Beauty is a pleasure, but sublimated, like Freud say but the connection between these, something which is not there in a tight sense (and in fact who does not know where and how to look at does not see it), but if you want you can perceive it in the whole of all the elements and on the effect that it is given to who looks at [11].

We can consider therefore pleasure as coming from two different experiences, the biological investment of objects of perception and that of wholes understandable with intuition, with gestalt perception, the sense of the whole together that transcends the tight needs of the Ego.

A pleasure wrongly confused with beauty is that of liking oneself, narcissism, that in itself is physiological for the balance of the organism: children, attractive or ugly they may be, like themselves naturally, if they are not troubled in this with strong disapprovals. Liking ourselves is natural, but it also needs to be cultivated from the feedback of the outside world: the organism adapts continually to the environment, otherwise survival is at risk.

Feedback orientates narcissism, and parents exercise unequivocally this function of orientation, that has a strong effect on the relation that sons will have with the world and that therefore involves necessarily unpleasant disapprovals, subjective but sold for objective: a useful work, but that carries often to believe that to like oneself has to do with having an aesthetic value, and to consider oneself for this especially important. But if the aesthetic value opens the horizons, narcissism closes them: Freud attributed psychosis to a leading narcissism from which the person had not succeeded to get rid of, an investment of the libido on oneself instead that the world, and a relational immobility for absence of perspectives.

It is essential to distinguish narcissism from beauty, as having this an important role in survival, it requires a specific training: to like oneself has nothing to do with aesthetic value, but is however fundamental for happiness, that in substance is the state in which the person is in agreement with themselves on the psychological and physical level. A serious problem is for example when, like today, the evolution of habits is so rapid that parents do not represent more the world in which children should live as adults, and their feedback become confusing instead that orientating: narcissistic investments become then ingenuously self-centered, and leave the people lost in their destiny.

One of the narcissistic most persisting signs, despite cultural differences, it is the pleasure of winning, which has clearly nothing to do with beauty. To cultivate the image of oneself as winning has implicit heavy consequences: besides the fact that for one that wins there are a lot that lose, one is that life usually does not allow to win often, and another one is that more we get old the less tools we have to win, besides accumulating richness or power.

In reality, to invest narcissistically in victories at all costs would be an authentic debacle for the Ego, if it wasn't for the capacity to identify with others (to be a fan for a team, for a party, for the actual family, for the actual nation, etc.) where people who do not win delegate narcissism.

The tendency to foster the narcissism of victory is physiological to the culture of capitalism, where value is attributed to everything we can produce, sell and buy: the west world stretches out to transform its citizens in a horde of fans that invest the actual narcissism in competitions where they can win for delegation, through their champions.

Everybody obviously wants to be someone, that is to say to gain space in social life, for the benefits that this implies for survival. Space in nature is obtained with violence, that in the social context is however rarely explicit, apart from wars and criminal actions:

generally, from ancient times it is acted across formal rituals. Sport is one of these ritual formal procedures, through which we can win or lose without destructive effects: these are limited to fans, that not having participated in first person to the struggle they still have to spend their aggressiveness in search of a personal victory. De Coubertin, the inventor of the Olympic Games it, said that important is not winning, but participating, however this great statement often remains like an empty speech in the world of sport: here beauty should be searched in the style of the athletes, instead that in their performances, because winning is a biological goal perfectly self-centered and banal, despite the romanticism of being champions.

Fanatics carries an important subject: to be someone. Fans are proud of their team: they belong to a team and the team belongs to them, in a way that when it wins somehow, they also win. In the past people, not being able to be Sirs, were actually proud to carry the livery of a specific Sir, and still today for example in Japan is common to be proud to be employed in a large economically powerful firm. If we look at it may seem pure insanity, and certainly human being are not lacking this really: and yet looking closer things are more complex than what it seems.

For example, a human being lives thanks to their continuous exchanges with others, but we know well that commerce is not made only of punctual exchanges: from the house, to the car, to the household, everything is bought in installments, that is to say with the promise to pay. Promises lean on something, on how the person present themselves, that is to say their image. The image is the interface with the world, is the tool with which we ask credit, we ask others to give us something without paying immediately: image is so important that it can determine the success or the ruin of business man, none gives him loans if he does not have credit on the market. Appearance is so important to push people to do anything simply not to lose their face: scandals ruin, how Anglo-Saxon know so well, that traditionally have a special horror of them.

To be socially important implies the potential benefits of credit, with which we can do business: to be someone gives credit, and is not considerable a simple option, because credit influences survival. But to be someone implies that other are nobody, because we cannot be someone in absolute but only in connection, that is to say being someone more than others.

In times of absolute monarchy, the problem was resolved institutionally: the king, that was such for divine will, chose by authority who could be noble, while the other stayed anonymous. In democratic times the matter is quite different, and it is resolved personally: all have the possibility to be someone, given that they manage. And so, there are some who, just to become someone, climb to the top to a palace and put fire on the crowd, preferring to rot in prison for the rest of life that to remain unknown to the public. For these who succeeded to be someone this appears crazy, but it is necessary to remember what Bakunin said in due time, when he warned the bourgeoisie with respect to the proletariat [12].

The west world stretches out to ensure its citizens the minimum for survival, and tries to ensure also the minimum narcissistic requirements through the use of the courtesy and the habit to call all sirs: also, a beggar today has the right to be called sir, and to be treated politely.

To be all sirs does not ensure however social importance: if whoever is a sir, a sir is whoever, and we are again to point zero. And those that do not succeed to be someone, beyond obviously to be a fan for a team, what do they do? A popular activity is that of telling stories on our actual importance: we either dream of being important, or we tell ourselves we are so, so to like ourselves somehow. To support these stories whatever is useful, from being right, to have a right political position, to have a superior taste, to be victim of large abuses of power. Whatever is good not to vanish in social invisibility, that, like the non-EEC know, is a deadly danger.

Actually, a realistic tool to succeed to be someone would be the family, where everyone has a specific place that ensures a minimum of visibility. The family is also the place where the image of the person takes shape, it is educated and it is developed, grows strong and healthy or gets sick bringing every type of disasters on the existential level. Here to be someone and to have a narcissism in good conditions is the same thing, always keep in mind that narcissism is like the salt in the water of the pasta, the right point is when you cannot feel it nor for excess nor for lack. When being someone does not mean to be above others, then it means to be a partner of exchanges that is not exchangeable with another one.

The importance of liking ourselves is enormous and, from a low point of view, quite more large than beauty: given that in terms of value there is no place for an objective judgment, is clear however that, at least, liking ourselves and beauty have not to be confused absolutely. Fashion and winning models are not aesthetic values, but narcissistic phenomena that are liked without for this being attractive. Beauty is simply experience of beauty: this does not tickle vanity, but conveys beyond the boundary of the Ego in a mysterious esteem beyond actual interest. Paradoxically what is very attractive, like for example a painting of Leonardo, generally we do not want to possess it, it is enough to experience it.

Conclusion

When we work in the helping professions, it is necessary to co-create with the other experiences that allow changes, possibility of ethical searches, aesthetics and logics that open to a future of infinite possibility: from the moment we see value, there is no more absolute necessity of conceptual parameters, because the value is in itself the polar star of life.

In philosophical practice we start from concrete episodes, episodes in which the person would want to change their actual behavior, and we go to see if they stumbled in the ethical area, aesthetics or logic. Then we see if the level of the value that the person used to move about in that experience is the formal one or the absolute one, and we work in order to reach the relative one. It is not addressed to pathology, the philosophical practice involves a connection between the help professionals and customers rather than between therapists and patients, and it is part of the activity of Counselling rather than of psychotherapy.

Session

C (Lient)

Years ago, I used to work in a shop, and there I met a guy who claimed to be a painter. He was always talking to me, and he finally asked me if I would like to pose for a couple of paintings. I found the idea interesting and so I went to his studio.

In his studio he told me that the painting was to be a nude, and that I should pose without clothes. It was very difficult for me to say no in that moment of my life. And therefore, I said: "All right,

there is no problem!" in truth, I did not like to do it. I posed even twice for this painting. He promised me a big earning, saying that this painting had been commissioned and that I would have earned a lot of money. However, after these two times I did not return: he came to the place where I worked, promising me money that I never saw. I would have liked not to have given in to him.

H (Elper): Take the scene that you would like to change.

C: The scene that I would like to change is the one where I am in his studio, and with nonchalance he proposes me this thing and I, pretending to be a woman of the world, tell him that "Of course it is all right, there is no problem". Instead, I would have wanted to tell him "No, absolutely no. You had not told me about this, I have no desire to do it. Goodbye". And then leave.

H: Why did you not say no? Would it have been an ugly, a bad or a stupid behavior?.

C: In order not to disappoint his expectation.

H: In order not to make him suffer and not to be bad.

C: Yes.

H: You do not say no in order not to do something ethically disagreeable: for you it was disagreeable to disappoint the other. Let's see what kind of ethics you use here: is it formal ethics, that is to say there are things that can be done and things that cannot be done because so it is written?. Or is it absolute ethics: it is bad to make someone suffer.

C: I don't know ... in that moment of my life I did not want to disappoint anyone, I always wanted to be able to correspond to everybody's expectations.

H: Therefore, what you use in this situation is absolute ethics. Look: is it bad in absolute to disappoint someone?.

C: No.

H: And how would you establish the differences?.

C: I Believe it is good to look at the expectations of the other according to the context, and see when is the case to meet them.

H: What would be good? To satisfy the expectation of others, to satisfy yours, to satisfy both?.

C: I believe that it would be good before all to satisfy mine, perhaps...

H: If you say that it is good to satisfy yours you put yourself in trouble, because your ethical needs do not confirm this (actually you were not able to say no). Buber said, goodness and nastiness are never substances but always directions: it seems to me a rather bright definition.

Try to think in this direction: if ethical value relates to a direction and not to an absolute, in your story what could be a direction? You can say yes going where?. You can say no going where? Imagine possible openings, that satisfied you ethically: to say no satisfies only your own need at the expense of the expectation of the other. If you put it in perspective, then how could you see it?. Try to find a perspective for a satisfactory no: is there something

beautiful or good that could come out of saying no?. Ethical does not stop to the boundary of the Ego, therefore whatever you say, simply in your defense, will not be sufficient on the ethical level: you need to find a perspective in which your choice has a good direction, that has something that is good for you, for him, for the rest of the world, otherwise you won't be satisfied. You should look forward, towards a polar star, to something that does not exist yet.

C: I can only see what is good for myself... to say no I see it only related to me... I like a kind of conflict between me and him...

H: Until you see it as a conflict, there is no ethical possibility of perspective. Try to imagine how it would be interesting not only to you but also to him. Try to give a perspective to your no, in a way that will eventually be good for him too.

C: My no would be due to the fact that he did not explain things completely, so I cannot accept, because he said things at the last minute....

H: According to you, is it good for him as a human being, to cheat others?.

C: No, of course not. And so, it would be about letting him understand this...

H: We all think, that making others understand, sorts out all the problems! What comes to my mind is, for example, to prevent him from harming himself by cheating. By cheating you, he actually does something hurtful to himself too: he creates a kind of squalor and then he has to live with it. Then an ethically sensible perspective would have been, for example, to say no with a smile?! A sympathy for him and his soul...

C: Yes... Without anger!!!!

C has a fundamental insight: the difference is between to say no with anger or without anger. Not to get angry means not to feed a sense of frustration due to her impotence in the situation, and at the same time not to attack the painter, that C really does not consider guilty, realizing that the difficulty of the situation, is due to her difficulty to say no, rather than the wickedness of the other.

H: And how do you feel if you imagine to say it?

C: Like if it fits me perfectly!

H: And do you feel better?

C: Yes. And it fits the person I was then, so frightened to say no... Yes, yes, it is true. **H:** Here you see the difference between an ethical approach in absolute and that of a frame of relevant ethics. Relevant to a perspective, to a future, relevant to something that is not there, but somehow it is, even if not yet. Does it sound ok to you?

C: Yes. Perfectly.

H: It is very difficult to do make this operation on the spur of the moment, and even after all this time it you did not find it easy, but once you have done it, it is simple: is, probably for cultural reasons, because we are anchored to the absolute level of these three values. The large path of humanity was to move from the formal level to the absolute level of the value: arrived at the absolute, the path towards the relative level is recent, it belongs to the philosophy of the '900. It is existentialism, the thought that

ripens with the theory of relativity and that has opened all the field of the knowledge, from physics, to philosophy to psychology.

An important thing is that you said that the thing fits you perfectly. It is not actually difficult, it is easier, but it is the back-ground of normal thought that makes it difficult.

C: Yes. When you said that, I thought: but yes, certainly!

H: The difficulty is to move from the absolute to the relative: is the same as moving from Newton physics to the Einstein physics, and it is not really a joke.

Session

C: They call me from another association to make a project, and I ask the vice president: "What do you need exactly?". And she answers: "I want you to write a project of training for our volunteers. The project comes out in the name of our association, but obviously remains yours." "Ah, all right then: the project is mine". And the thing ends here.

H: What do you want to change of yourself in this scene?

C: I would have wanted to say: if this project is not approved and accepted, it does not show anywhere that I worked for you. And how do you mean to quantify my work?

H: In other words, what did you want to ask her?

C: A recognition with a letter of assignment, or a payment of at least a third of the work...

H: Did you want a letter or a payment?

C: The payment. A contribution at least for the work made up till now.

H: How should you have asked for it?

C: Listen, I am available to work for you, but if my name or that of my association does not appear, I need another kind of acknowledgement of my work. This can happen in two ways: or a formal acknowledgement with a letter, or a partial anticipation of the payment, which could be reviewed when we get the reply for the call. What I did for you is however work: passing on ideas, selling ideas."

H: For what reasons you did not say so? It did not seem attractive to you, a good thing, or a logic request?

C: Let's say for an ethical reason. It seemed pretty to me not to deal with business.

H: Look: which kind of ethics did you use answering like that? Did you care about a formal or an absolute model of behavior?

C: It seems formal to me.

H: A formal goodness is a goodness that answers to rules, to a standard formulation. On what rule of goodness did you rely to make what you did?

C: (laughing) When we talk about creativity we do not talk about money: is not chic to talk about money.

H: But chic has nothing to do with good, it has to do with

beauty. It is not beautiful to ask money at the first meeting: this is the formal rule that you respected. If you followed an absolute beauty instead, what thought would you have respected?

C: it is nice to create a project and to make it available to many people that otherwise would not have the opportunity to know about it.

Or: What do you consider beautiful beyond the formal? The respect of formality tells you not to ask money for creative things. But, for example, Michelangelo that paints the Sistine Chapel is beautiful or not?

C: Beautiful... ‘

H: But he took the money ... Then, if you stretched a little the vision of beautiful beyond the formal level, what would beautiful be? Look at yourself while you present this project. What would be an attractive scene if you saw it from the outside, looking from an absolutely aesthetic point of view: if it was a painting, a piece of theater, what scene would you like to see?

C: The vice president that says: “Splendid, a splendid idea, I can rely on it... is what I would have wanted to do and you had the courage to do it”.

H: And this is attractive, or is it convenient for you?

C: Well...

H: Can you feel Kant that turns around in the grave? “It is not beautiful what pleases, beautiful is what is beautiful!” Look for something beautiful.

C: Three people, in an ugly studio... there is nothing of beauty...

H: You do not think that beauty is made of things explosively colored and marvelous? In “Waiting for Godot” it seems to me that there are two characters and a tree. What I asked you if it is an attractive scene: beautiful means that if an audience is watching they say “ what a beautiful scene!” While you look for the beauty, how do you look for it, where? Where do you see beauty in the words... where do you focus your attention? We are looking for the passage from formal aesthetics, (where you cannot ask because it seems ugly), to a more dramatically interesting scene. Where do you look for beauty, what is the compass of your search? With what criterion are you trying to create this scene of theater?

C: I have no compass...

H: If you don’t have it, then look for it, it is useless to move without. Where can you find the compass of beauty? To find it, you need to look for experiences where you lived beauty, in the memory of experiencing it. Tell us of an occasion when you lived beauty, an interaction between two people that you liked.

C: It is a scene where I say: “But do you realize what you are doing!?” ... and my partner answers... “What are you saying? I do not understand what you talking about...” et cetera. The beauty is in the fact that two people that had two different stories revealed themselves.

H: The beauty was in these differences. What was attractive in this?

C: Attractive was the interaction...

H: The beauty is this disentanglement of the differences: but what is attractive in this? It was an experience of beauty, and there you have a hint. There is a beauty, it is necessary that you pull it outside to carry it in this other episode. Why to say “pay me” is ugly, and why instead these two characters that meet each other in the differences is attractive? Try to explain this, and remember that you should carry with you something of what you discovered.

C: In that context the disentanglement of the process could be ampler and richer...

H: Therefore, what would have been attractive is a disentanglement of the process. Instead of saying, I want to be paid, to do something that would have been able to disentangle the process. And what could that have been? What could you have said? What would they have answered? How could this conversation have developed? Remembered the feeling of beauty that you had in your memory, and try to hold it like a compass... and invent a conversation with a satisfactory development. What do you want C to say to the vice president?

C: “I would like you not only to do part of the work, but that you felt how much of you there is in this project...”.

H: Go back to the scene you liked and listen to the sense of beauty. Where was it? What was creating it? You say from the disentanglement of these differences. But was it like, of what does it consist?

C: There were two people, facing one another, trying to find the out why..

H: These are abstractions... what theater does are words and the tones of voice: what do they say that you like? Why does it strike you, where is it beauty? what words and w what tone of voice?

C: There is was a direct debate, and at a certain point I surrendered to the evidence that I was not right

H: The scene than you use like compass is a scene between two people having an affective bond, and this you cannot bring to this case, where characters do not have this bond: go back there and see what you liked. In the scene she says “but what are you doing” and he answers “but what do you say, I do not understand anything of what you say.” Where does it hit you, what kind of interaction is it? Saying “but what do you say?”, “but I do not understand” ... what are they doing?

C: It seems to me that one simply reveals himself... “I am like that “ ...

H: He does something from which you get a sense of beauty... but what does he do? It says “but what are you saying!” What does he do? If you look at it well you see that he simply holds the point without offending.

C: It is true, he holds the point without offending!
C realizes something that she would not have remarked without the help of H, considering it too small to be important: this is the key point of the session, where something different appears and operates a transformation of the experience of C.

H: to Hold the point without offending is difficult, and it is satisfactory from an aesthetic point of view.

C: Actually, it is what I try to do with my partner...

H: Here you have a hint. You say: "To ask them money would be ugly", and then "a time when I saw beauty was an interaction in which a character held the point without offending the other". Now carry this over to the other situation: how would it be to ask her the money without offending, without telling them "I want the money", that would be like saying "Pay me, exploiter!" According to me it would be better that first you make a plan and then put it in words: how would it be not to offend her... how is it possible not to offend while asking money... how can you put it? Start to put down something positive ... how can I ask them money without making her look like someone who wants to exploit me?"

C: Apart from the kindness of voice ...

H Eh... the kindness of the voice makes a difference...

C: ... that opens to two or three possibilities...

H: For example! This is also something to play with. Therefore, the project would be to say it with a kind voice and to keep in mind the fact that miraculously there is more than one possibility.

C: (with neutral tone a ...) "we agree on the contents of the project, however if I should go ahead I need to know if you recognize at least a part of this work, independently if you pay me or not..."

H: Try to add a spoonful of honey.

C: (with courtesy) Then it seems that we are...

H: (laughing) You are surviving to the kindness, who would have guessed ...

C: The passage is from diplomacy to kindness!

H: Yes, and maybe a little spoon of sugar...

C: (with courtesy) "It seems to me we are going well in the agreement for the planning... I am very satisfied of our meeting. However perhaps we could think about a practical side on how to go ahead."

H: The other thing you can rely on is that you have at least an alternative...

C: Yes... "And how can we consider the future of this project... (with more down tone...) we can hope for the funding I can have a guarantee..."

Or: You finished with sweetness: do you know what makes you quit it? Fear! Then, the more you are afraid, the more you should use honey. Now you should go ahead: until here the honey is there, then it ends when it is time to talk of the agreement...

C: Then... "we are going well, we could focus on the contract for this project, we can define something very simple... you can choose if you want to pay me for what I have done so far or send me a letter of assignment for the work I should do."

H: Very well. Can I propose a synthesis?

C: Yes.

H

Or: (with funny kind voice). What do you prefer, to give me a letter of assignment, or to pay me an advance?" Try to say so and see what happens...

C: (with kind voice) What do you prefer, give me a letter of assignment, or an advance?

H: Do you feel that your voice remained soft and you did it without effort??

C: Ah, yes...

H: When you are afraid words die in your mouth, and instead of saying as little as possible, you say too much. In this other manner there is a beauty. It is easy for you because it sounds beautiful. The problem is that beautiful or ugly have an enormous weight on the soul, if a thing seems ugly it gets stuck in your throat, you cannot say it ... Beauty is the experience of something that has the permission to come out: if you find it attractive it opens the channel, otherwise one usually gives up. Working on it, these were the steps: seeking the memory of experience of beauty, and by bringing the experience of it on the problematic situation, you were able to imagine to say your thing without problems.

C: There is something else that helped me: the compass. C recognizes a fundamental passage of the session, the development of a tool of orientation.

H: Yes. The compass is a useful metaphor, very important: without do and do no find what is useful for you. If instead you dis and think in terms of tools, you find the compass: Yes, it nice core: beauty was to hold the point without offending. And you noticed how much is difficult to do it and how much however, it is noteworthy, attractive, interesting.

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