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**NEITHER THEORY, NOR PRAXIS: A STRATEGY FOR PERSONAL AND
COMMUNITARIAN HEALING**

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Abstract: Review of Sandu Frunză, *Filosofie și Pandemie. Dialoguri despre consiliere filosofică și practici filosofice* (Philosophy and the Pandemic. Dialogues about philosophical counseling and philosophical practices), Editura Eikon, București, 2021.

Key words: philosophy; applied philosophy; philosophical counseling; philosophical practice; pandemics; healing.

The book published by professor Sandu Frunză at the Eikon publishing house, with the title *Philosophy and the Pandemic (Filosofie și Pandemie)* brings together fourteen dialogues about philosophical counseling and philosophical practices. The author had the praise-worthy initiative of undertaking these meta-philosophical dialogues precisely during the pandemic, of sharing them on his blog, and then of offering them to us in the current book format.

I have to confess that I am positively surprised by two aspects: one regarding the form, and the other regarding the content - the substance - of the book. The first aspect is the image on the cover. The book welcomes us with stained glass painted by Marc Chagall, which is in fact an analogy. Just as in the bigger picture of the stained glass every single piece builds the image of a different world, each dialogue initiated by Sandu Frunză becomes a fragment of the bigger picture of philosophy as a strategy or technique of personal and communitarian healing. Indeed, each dialogue reveals philosophy as practical wisdom - the *phronesis* that we have distanced ourselves from, but which we should revisit, as Florin Lobonț pleads in his answers.

The list of the fourteen interviewees is the second aspect that I cherish about the book, for the reason that it enables me to go back to privileged places in my memory. I observe that a part of professor Frunză's dialogue partners are former professors at the Faculty of Philosophy of Babes-Bolyai University. They all belong to a philosophical space, or to the spatialization of a time of initiation and epiphanies that only philosophy can make possible: Aurel Codoban, Tudor Cățineanu, Virgil Cimosș and indirectly Mihaela Miroiu and Dumitru Borțun. The others are younger and more enthusiastic supporters of reclaiming philosophy as a 'profane initiation', and their publications and public activism are an affidavit thereof: George Bondor, Antonio Sandu, Laurențiu Staicu, Cristian Iftode, Florin Lobonț, Emilian Mihailov, Delia Balaban and Iulia Grad.

The core of the dialogues, resurfaced by Sandu Frunză through aptly formulated questions, is the positioning of philosophy beyond the theory / praxis divide - philosophy is neither just theory, nor just practice, it is grounded in the soil of life, of the world, of things themselves, in a pre-theoretical soil of the things that give themselves to us, as George Bondor claims in his answers. This givenness in which we find ourselves (tradition, corporality, memory), but also the substance of what comes towards us, needs to be refined and filtered and cannot be suspended at the level of bare experiences. I am in full agreement with this perspective, and I think that the grand merit of these dialogues is to bring our attention to the fact that philosophers have never endeavored to produce theories, even if that is how the majority perceives them. Quite the other way: philosophical systems, through tackling the big questions of humanity, have aimed to understand and even to transform, to dislocate,

our way of being in the world, our relationships with others and with ourselves. Consequently, philosophy is first and foremost this gridlock of concepts which filters phenomena, which clarifies them, and which prevents them from remaining blind intuitions. Through this filtering and refinement, philosophy saves us from prejudices, from the 'dogmatism of common sense' offering us the bigger picture and a sense of orientation in the world, as Laurențiu Staicu puts it.

Despite the subtitle *dialogues about philosophical counseling and philosophical practices (dialoguri despre consiliere filosofică și practici filosofice)*, I do not perceive professor Frunză's book only as a pleading for practical philosophy in the form of philosophical counseling, but primarily as a means to seize the pandemic as an opportunity to show us that philosophy has always been primarily a praxis. *Philosophy and the pandemic* is precisely about the unstable ground of what comes towards us, about the pandemic as a crisis situation, as well as the state of emergency that came with it. The pandemic was in fact a crisis, personal and/or social. Any crisis, according to the Greek *krisis*, is made of analysis and judgment, and then detachment to deliberate and discover solutions. From one dialogue to the others we discover that the pandemic is treated as a crisis that reveals the problems that we face personally and collectively; one by one, each interviewee becomes aware of the glitches and excesses of our world.

Building on this, it is necessary to summarize some of the dialogues. Aurel Codoban claims that philosophy continues to be a profane initiation in the name of an authentic human experience, the only change being that in contemporary society philosophy is at the stage in which it builds reality through communication, meaning that it must be associated with technology so that we can enjoy its power of shaping our communities. Antonio Sandu brings our attention to the absence of responsibility of the current generation towards alterity, encompassing future generations, animals, micro-organisms, AI, but not only, referring also to the phenomena of fake news, societal polarization, and suspicion towards science. Laurențiu Staicu talks about the necessity of understanding philosophy as an approach to reality through concepts as operational tools, and not romantic prejudices, as many still perceive it. Mihaela Miroiu sees philosophy as a coming-together, an inter-feeling which encompasses both empathy and rationality in order to overcome patriarchal attitudes and the internalized misogyny. Cristian Iftode shows that philosophy is an ethics of the self that needs to enable the emergence of authenticity as a product of practical reflection, and not merely as spontaneity. Florin Lobonț reminds us that philosophy has always been practical wisdom - *phronesis* - and that it needs to reclaim this role in everyday life and to make use of the social function for which it was designed. George Bondor shows that philosophy is neither theory, nor praxis: it is precisely the exploration of the pre-theoretical, of the already given, be it history, tradition, memory, or life. Dumitru Borțun believes

that through philosophy each age forms its collective imaginary which is necessary to shape autonomous and responsible citizens. Emilian Mihailov pleads for the necessity of ethical expertise as a professional engagement towards society. Virgil Ciomoș, from a psychoanalytic perspective, asserts that humans need to reclaim their originary unicity which stems from the moment of their creation, and that philosophy is the way towards that lost paradise. Delia Balaban shows the challenges of the virtual world in crisis situations, whereas Iulia Grad and Joana Rita Sousa talk about philosophy for children as examples of applied philosophy. A special place in my heart - and I believe also in professor Frunză's heart - is claimed by the dialogue with Tudor Cățineanu, who recently passed away. Cățineanu talks in a revolted fashion about the state of exception instituted by the pandemic, reminding one of the analyses of Giorgio Agamben of the state of exception as a governance practice that enables the surpassing of the juridical realm.

I have briefly summarized the parts of the interviews which point towards glitches, excesses, and actual problems precisely in order to emphasize the idea that philosophy is already performative, precisely since one of the interviewees expresses the fear that philosophy as counseling could become just another artifice. The crisis situation of the pandemic has showed us that philosophy needs to remain anchored in life in order to decide and solve the problems identified above. Building on the dialogues, it follows that in contemporaneity philosophy is bifurcated in:

1. the long way of self-care as a way of claiming what is already present in the human being, as George Bondor reminds us. The long way requires a detour through the other, through radical alterity and through culture, implying a plural and permanent construction of identity on the border between experience and meaning. At the same time, the long way requires the creation of concepts as tools to solve contemporary problems, especially for admitting our vulnerabilities and for giving up on anthropocentrism.
2. the shortcut of techniques, methods, and operational practices through which we can identify our personal and collective crisis, and then claim that as part of ourselves and give them value through assigning them meanings. This is the way of algorithms and recipes that take shortcuts for the sake of efficiency.

Sandu Frunză brought together these dialogues about the role of philosophy in judging and deciding critical situations precisely to warn us to not fall into the trap of taking the shortcut. Philosophy is not just an instrument or a technique to get out of crisis situations, but we have to see it as a complex strategy for personal and collective healing, but healing is predated by the analysis of symptoms, a diagnosis, and following a treatment with minimum side-effects. Thus, the crisis of the pandemic has

showed us only what are our problems for individuals and communities alike, but healing needs to take the long way of practical wisdom. Only by looking at it through this lense we can prevent philosophy from being reduced to an alternative therapy or a punctual intervention in crisis situations. Philosophy is much more than that - it gives us a perspective that can orient our lives in order to show us how to deal and even how to avoid crises.

I believe that the shared call of the dialogues is to reunite the ways of philosophy in order to avoid the fragmentation of the discipline in counseling, ethical theories, deontologies (which are, of course, all necessary), so that we can keep philosophy as a filter for refining our way of being the world, our relationships with others and with ourselves. This filter can help us deal with and even avoid crises and excesses. Authentic philosophy was always a strategy for personal and collective healing, which adapted itself to each age with its corresponding way of being. As Virgil Ciomoş puts it, it was not just a luxury or a 'place populated with ideas'. If philosophy lacked this practical dimension, then let's ask ourselves - as the participants to the dialogues did - who would even spend time on the romanticized version of philosophy, that which dominates the prejudices of those considering it gratuitous or useless?

To conclude, professor Frunză's initiative is all the more welcome as he himself has realized that the pandemic gave us the opportunity to analyze what philosophy can do in a crisis situation. The book shows how philosophical analyses and judgments can reveal limits and glitches that we can then heal also through philosophy. Reading the book, we discover through each dialogue that we can avoid both collective and personal crises if we heal from our ignorance, dogmatism, anthropocentrism, misogyny, lack of autonomy, in order to become independent humans and, implicitly, responsible citizens. The final dialogue gives us the trust that philosophy can really teach us how to practice a way of life, and is not a mere discursive artifice, as Cristian Iftode feared. *Philosophy and the pandemic* has the added value of a confession about how we can think about the crisis itself, even during the crisis, with lucidity and detachment. This makes the book all the more interesting.

At the end, I will raise two small objections. First, there is too much emphasis on the situation created by the pandemic, and not on the effects of the liminal situation that it represents (the glitches and excesses that we mentioned earlier). The second is about the title - it would have been much more appropriate to entitle it, as the author confessed to me that he intended to do, *Philosophy in the time of the pandemic*. Despite the obvious analogy with Garcia Marquez's *Love in the time of cholera*, professor Frunză could have chosen this title even if only to adopt Florentino Ariza's final line: How long and when should we practice philosophy? *Our entire lives!*