

A philosophical jam session on an existential theme

An experiment in philosophical group counselling in Carloforte, July 2008

A contribution to Section 3b (Projects and experiments in philosophical practice - A philosophical group) of the IX International Conference on Philosophical Practice. (Section 3b: "Philosophical groups which work on the real experiences of its same members and on the direct interaction between them. There is no general topic of discussion given, rather it is taken from the real lives of those taking part.")

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Abstract of the idea and method of the jam session

INTRODUCTION

This contribution to the IX International Conference in Carloforte, July 2008, will be a philosophical jam session on an existential theme. We will experimentally investigate the thesis that, in the year 2008, a philosophical practice has to account for both the linguistic and the existential turns of philosophy in the 20th century. In this philosophical jam session, we combine public dialogue in our group and each participator's experiences and inner dialogue.

SUMMARY

The philosophical jam session is supposed to facilitate and intermingle both the inner dialogue to realize an a-personal relation towards the participator's own feeling and thinking, and the interpersonal dialogue to support an a-personal sphere of thinking and awareness.

In Carloforte, we will jam philosophically on an existential theme, and we will investigate this way of philosophizing in a group.

The question is, is philosophizing in a group possible in such a way that a dialectic between collective and inner dialogue will unfold?

My hypothesis is, that at least these three conditions must be fulfilled. At first, the collective dialogue is charged with everybody's experience (a cacophony / polyphony in the collective space). Secondly, everybody gets room for the own inner dialogue (silence in the collective space). Third, everybody exerts oneself to transcend the own inner dialogue in such a way that a collective 'supertone' develops.

THE LINGUISTIC AND EXISTENTIAL TURNS IN PHILOSOPHY

The linguistic turn in philosophy is irreversible. Since about half a century, philosophers have to account for their thoughts to be words and sentences, i.e., for the relationship between philosophy and language. This certainly does not necessarily exclude philosophy to be an existential philosophy. The existential turn of modern philosophy is as irreversible. More specifically, we have to deal with Merleau-Ponty's notion of the thinking and experiencing body, that we find back in neurological studies. It means, that the relationship between (personal) experience and philosophizing has been changed.

This kind of existentially enriched linguistic philosophy, or linguistic enriched existential philosophy, is existential, not by advancing existential wisdoms, but by thinking critically in a radical way. In the line from (the not 'idealized') Plato to (the not 'conceptualized') Wittgenstein, sense, truth, truthfulness, enlightenment, autonomy, authenticity, freedom, morality, etc., are not defined con-

cepts, nor conceptual theories, but practices of thinking, awareness, acting. Philosophy as a way of thinking and as an attitude.

PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

This style of philosophy is at the same time an academic activity and a lifestyle. Academic, because philosophy is the difficult and time absorbing craft of logical investigations ('logical' in the way Wittgenstein used this word). And it is a lifestyle, because these investigations not only last a lifetime, but first and foremost because philosophical investigations imply the philosopher's critical relation to his or her own thinking and experiencing.

To philosophize in this way is to enact four strategies:

1. To observe one's feelings, thoughts and habits without judgement and censorship (a kind of meditation; "I am my feelings, thoughts and habits, but I don't fall in it.").
2. To think about it clearly, logically, and disinterestedly (philosophical, logical analysis; "Can I think and say what I think and say?", "How are these words and sentences used in ordinary life?").
3. To take the absolute responsibility of one's feelings, thoughts and habits (moral attitude; "I am my feelings, thought and habits, and I can blame no one for them.")
4. To act disinterestedly in the interest of the situation you are part of, this being your own interest (moral acting; "I am this situation, this situation is me.").

So, the four strategic rules of philosophical practice in the mentioned style are:

1. Unconditional attention and awareness!
2. Think clear, and be radical in it!
3. Be absolutely responsible for whom you are and what you do!
4. Have the situation act, not just you!

Thus, the first meaning of philosophical practice is the philosopher's own philosophical way of living. From this, 'economic' practices of philosophy are possible. We can discern embedded and explicit philosophical practices.

Embedded philosophical practice

Embedded philosophical practices are *prima facie* not philosophical practices, but counselling, coaching, management and organization consultancy, group brainstorming, etc. etc. They are philosophical, because the counsellor, coach etc. puts up philosophical ends and approaches in the regular counselling and consultancy methods. The client may, or may not know this. That is to say, the client's target has to do with problem solving, not with philosophical investigations.

Explicitly philosophical practice

The client of an explicitly philosophical practice knows he or she is going to philosophize, and he wants to do this. I.e., he wants to radically criticize his own thinking and his relation to his thinking and feeling. Here, the counsellor or coach is a teacher, he introduces his guest into the philosophical traditions. This teacher can and must be a severe master, because philosophy is severe and demanding to the student. The more the study of philosophy is connected with the student's personal life, the deeper and the demanding this study will be to the student's thinking.

A PHILOSOPHICAL JAM SESSION

In this session in Carloforte, I will invite my guests to an experiment, in which we investigate the

possibility and desirability of a philosophical practice based on an existentially enriched linguistic philosophy. In a philosophical jam session, we are not aiming at definitions or theories; we are thinking and interacting in a specific way. In Carloforte, we, the 'jammers', will both philosophize on an existential theme of our own, and reflect upon this process and the hypothesis.

This practice is a philosophical investigation in a group. As in jam sessions in improvised music and dance, we agree upon a theme and on rules about starting, ending, playing together, and so on, to improvise together on the question of this session.

A philosophical jam session is a philosophical act in which philosophers meet to 'play-think' (jam) without extensive preparation of pre-defined arrangements. Jam sessions can be used to develop new material, find suitable interpretations, or simply as a social gathering and communal practice session (in a way, the so-called 'philosophy café' is a jam session). Philosophical jam sessions may be based upon existing themes or methods of conversation, may be loosely based on an agreed theme or argument suggested by one participant, or may be wholly improvisational. Jam sessions can range from very loose gatherings of amateurs (like the mentioned philosophy café) to sophisticated improvised thinking (like in Nelson's socratic meetings) or writing sessions intended to be edited and released to the public.

In this meeting in Carloforte, we are a group, for the occasion. We don't know each other, and yet we start to the deepest possible between people, i.e., to philosophize together. We go into this curious meeting consciously, and we investigate this very meeting.

Rules for jamming

To start with, I will introduce an existential theme, which is a real existential theme of my own.

The first rule is, that we work on this given theme, but that each participator associates this theme with his or her own real experiences, in inner dialogues.

The second rule is, that, during the session, I will stick on this theme as long as possible; that is part of my role. And, in addition, the third rule is, that my guests must have convincing arguments to change the theme, based on their relation to their own associated experiences and thinking.

The fourth rule is, that we switch between public dialogue and private inner dialogue. This ongoing switch is crucial for the kind of philosophical practice we are investigating.

The distinction between public or group dialogue and inner dialogue is an important feature of this kind of philosophical practice. The philosophical meeting is aimed at the individual's relation towards his own thoughts, feelings, inclinations. To be a philosophical relation, the philosophizing person's thinking must get an a-personal quality, i.e., a thinking and an awareness free from personal sticking to specific thoughts, feelings etc. In the philosophical group meeting, we use the public dialogue in the group as a means to gain this philosophical quality.

Concise method

Being a jam session, it suffices methodologically to agree upon the theme of the conversation, as well as upon the rules of playing (thinking, talking and discussing). First of all, the 'initiator' of the jam session, facilitates the jamming, by supporting the process of agreeing upon theme and rules, and by supporting the dialectical process of private dialogues (the solo parts, both in the inner dialogues as in the public conversations and discussions) and the public dialogue of creating a philosophical quality of thinking and awareness.

The jam session has three layers. The most important layer is each participator's inner experience and dialogue. The second layer is the sphere of words, sentences, arguments etc. which is being created by the 'publication' of the participator's contributions to the collective thinking. The third layer is the set of agreements on theme and rules, explicitly guarded by the 'initiator'.

The central methodological principle is, that philosophy is getting a free relation towards thoughts, feelings and habits, and that this free relation can be created by collectively sharing our attempts to 'depersonalize' ('free') our thinking.

So, the methodological paradox here is that of two opposite rules: 'be personal in thinking and experiencing!' and 'be a-personal in your relation to your thinking and experiencing!'. The jamming is supposed to drive the paradox to extremity, and this will be the drive of the meeting.

Time schedule

Provisional timing of the jam session:

00:00	Welcome, acquaintance, and introduction to the idea and method of the philosophical jam session
00:10	Agreement upon theme and rules
00:20	Start of the jam session
01:10	Discussion about the idea and method of the philosophical jam session
01:30	Finishing

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