

ACCESS TO THE PERSON VERSUS SPIRITUAL UNFOLDING

A dialogue between Existential Analysis and my Spiritual Path

Gabriel Traverso⁵

INTRODUCTION

Several times I have been consulted on how my being is compatible with the Existential Analysis (EA), in which I began my participation 23 years ago in Cafh, the path of spiritual unfolding I have been part of for 55 years. Are they beings compartmentalized and closed in my person, without mainly communicating with each other, or on the contrary, dialogue between them in a fruitful encounter? Due to the subtitle of the article, it is clear to me that it is the latter. While I refer specifically to Cafh because I am familiar with it, much of what I am discussing here can be applied to other spiritual paths.

Spirituality can be understood in different ways. In Cafh, one of the ways of understanding it is in connection with the state of consciousness. "We call the state of consciousness to the notion we have of ourselves, our environment, and our situation in life and the world" (Waxemberg 2012). The spiritual work to which Cafh invites us is directed to expanding the state of consciousness.

Längle (2013), on the other hand, affirms that the consummation of existence is based on spirituality, understanding this as the experience of greatness that surpasses us and of which we are part.

Afterward, I will describe the differences and similarities between the two approaches and what I consider complementary in my experience.

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

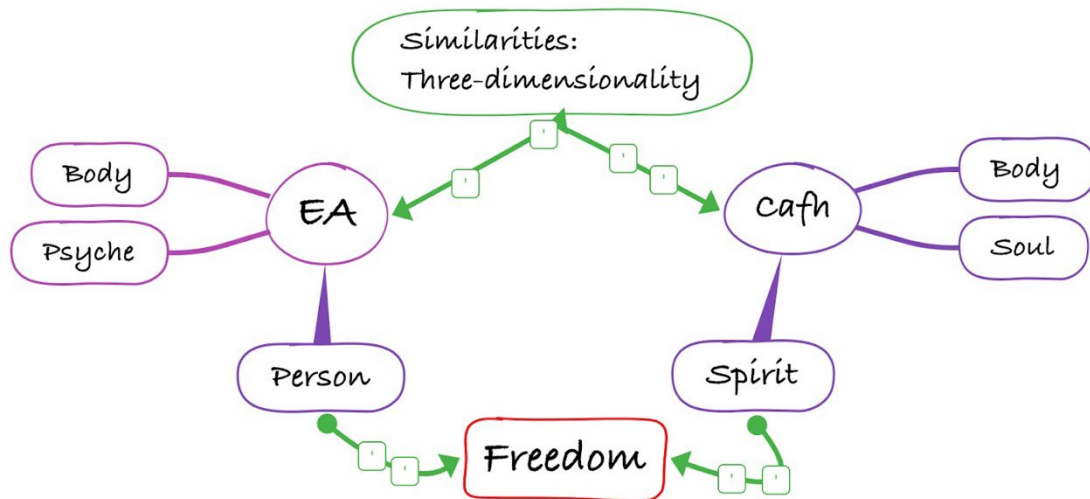
The two approaches have different purposes. Those who come to EA consult due to a problem or suffering may or may not be associated with psychopathology, which requires treatment. In the first case, the person goes to the EA psychotherapist, and in the second case, to the EA consultant. In both cases, the treatment period is limited. At the same time, those who approach a spiritual path are in an inner search process, which generally takes a lifetime.

⁵ Psicólogo, psicoterapeuta, director de ICAE.

However, the dialogue I want to show is not between the patient (or AE consultant) and the spiritual seeker, but between the therapist and the AE teacher I am and the spiritual counselor, a function that I still exercise to date.

EA and Cafh have a common anthropological foundation. Both approaches see the human being in the same three-dimensionality. Cafh defines these dimensions as body, soul, and spirit. Frankl (2006) calls them the same, although he uses the terms of Greek origin: soma, psyche, and nous. For this author, the essence of the human being is in the person and corresponds to the *nous*. He takes Scheler's concept of the person, as the spiritual and the freedom in the human being, as opposed to the soul and the body, in which there is no freedom.

In Cafh, the body and the soul are instruments of the spirit and are at the service of its unfolding. Moreover, as in Cafh, this is also common with the EA. Only the body and psyche develop, evolve, and get sick. The person unveils, unfolds, manifests, and does not become ill (Frankl 2003). When we cannot access the person, we are not free and are controlled by a reactive psychodynamic. In Cafh the process of unfolding is a process of inner liberation.



Scheme 1. Parallel between the respective anthropological approaches to the human being in his search for freedom.

To instrumentalize the body and soul at the service of the spirit, a method and techniques or exercises are necessary, such as daily meditation practices, detention exercises, and retrospective examination at the end of the day, among many others. In the EA, there is some correspondence with the practice of self-distancing, which allows us to observe ourselves and reach self-perception. A central method is a phenomenological attitude and practice, which gives us access to the understanding of the person entering his or her world of meanings, suspending his/her judgments and prejudices. Some of these elements are present in Cafh's practice of dialogue, whose rules are phenomenological, even though that name is not used.

In both cases, in the EA and Cafh practices, the aim is to achieve a higher level of consciousness. In Cafh, another way of referring to spiritual unfolding is to refer to it as a process

of expansion of consciousness. In the two meanings of conscience. 1. To be more aware of what happens in my soul (feelings, affections, reactions), in my body, what I want in my spiritual dimension, what happens in my environment, and the effects that my actions generate. 2. Listening better to the voice of my inner conscience also speaks to me about what is good and right to do in every situation. Frankl also referred to this conscience as the organ of meaning since it speaks to me of the highest value in every situation.

'To exist' comes from the Latin *existere*. *Sistere* means 'taking a position,' and *ex* means 'out.' Positioning myself in the world. Heidegger referred to the 'existing' as the 'being in the world.' To this philosopher, existence does not occur in facticity (the world of facts) but in the hermeneutics of facticity (the world of facts' meanings). Hermeneutics is interpretation, the art of interpreting, as Heidegger called it. Our experiences and actions have nothing to do with the facts themselves but how we interpret those facts and what meanings we give them. In Cafh, the spiritual process is often called a process of 'transcendence.' To transcend comes from the Latin word *transcendere*, which means 'to rise from one place to another' (*trans*= from one side to another and *scandere*= to climb). Frankl talked about self-transcendence, coming out of myself, and climbing up to my action of meaning in the world. Existing and transcending are close relatives.

COMPLEMENTS

What can the EA and Cafh learn from each other to benefit their goals?

The EA developed by Längle has two powerful pillars, which support therapeutic work and can be of great value for spiritual work. I refer to the structural and procedural axis of the EA. The structural axis is based on the four fundamental motivations of existence (Längle 1999, 2006). The procedural axis is based on personal existential analysis, or PEA (Längle 1993, 2000).

The four fundamental motivations (4 FM) are:

- being able to be in the world (1st FM), not to be in danger or under threat, for which we require protection, space, and support,
- liking, to like to live (2nd FM), for which we require relationship, time, and closeness,
- feeling free to be oneself (3rd FM), for which we require consideration, fair treatment, and appreciation,
- will to meaning (4th MF), for which we need a field of action, a structural context, and a value going forward.

When these conditions do not exist for each of the FM, we may not be able to position ourselves from our person at first. Then, protection reactions of a psychodynamic type usually appear, which we call coping reactions (CR), as protection almost instantaneously. In the 1st FM, these reactions are flight, fight, hate, and paralyzation. In the 2nd FM, the RCs are turning away/retreating, performing, raging, and devaluing. In the 3rd FM, estrangement, overreaction, annoyance, and dissociation. And, in the 4th FM are arbitrariness, provisional attitude towards

life, idealization, fanaticism, cynicism, and nihilism. For those working inwardly, it is essential to recognize and legitimize those reactions, understand their message, and thus move to a personal position, managing to elaborate and resolve the situation without staying in reactivity.

In the 1st FM, we go from psychodynamics to personal-spiritual dynamics through support/hold (accessing one's forces and abilities) and acceptance (I can be letting be the external conditions currently given). In both cases, I have free access. My world, my space of action, expands in acceptance as I let in my reality the new that I accept. There is an expansion of consciousness. In this FM, the question of trust is also relevant, allowing me to hold myself and yield to this support. Fundamental trust is related to the foundation of being, ultimate support in existence, which, when I go there, serenity appears as an internal state.

The 2nd MF contacts me with life by accessing my emotions and feelings. Let us remember that the traditions of spiritual schools have focused on cognitive and explanatory terms, with a certain disregard for emotional language and thus without access to it. I have heard expressions from acquaintances such as "the way must be arid" or "you must not indulge yourself because it diverts you from the path." The feelings tell me what is truly important to me, not the reasoning. Reason must come later to help me how to attain that value. Suppose I only remain in the pleasure that accompanies the liking. In that case, I fall into hedonism, and I happen to be a slave of my soul and body instead of being instruments of the spirit, of my essence, which is my person (personhood). Recognizing and listening to emotional language appears relevant to accessing my person. The issue of relationships, one of the conditions of this FM, has been taken as something vital in Cafh, at least over the past 40 years (Waxemberg 2015b), not so before.

The 3rd MF relates to self-esteem and authenticity. I allow myself to be as I am, delimiting myself, recognizing myself in my own self, and differentiating myself from others. I avoid the illusion of showing myself as I imagine I must appear to others to homogenize myself in what I interpret as seeing and behaving as a spiritual being. In this way, I incorporate and value diversity; I include myself and others different from me. Only in authenticity, by accessing myself and expressing myself from there, can I have a genuine personal encounter with someone else, which is essential for the spiritual counselor. This same thing we should also help to develop in the consultant.

The 4th FM, the one of meaning, is essential in Cafh (Waxemberg 2011 a, 2011b) as it is in the EA. Here Frankl's concept of self-transcendence is strongly associated; I leave myself to give myself to what the world requires of me. Frankl even used the term "forgetting myself" in that offering. Today in the EA, we speak of a selfless offering, where I do not seek my benefit; however, in that giving, I go and am with myself; I do not leave myself aside. I'm also part of the world. Forgetting can be confused with amnesia or abandonment. Längle makes a distinction between ontological and existential meaning. The ontological meaning is related to asking life or god, the reason for which there is no explanation, such as the "why me," or assuming supernatural responses, like believing that I was born destined for such a thing or that the mission with which I come into the world is such and such. The existential shift is to reverse the direction of the question; instead of asking god or life, I assume that life is asking me, with the given circumstances, and I respond with my action. The existential meaning is my response to what I perceive as the greatest value I experience in every life situation. To live existentially is to respond continuously to the questions that life and the world ask me. This means always being open to being touched by life and responding instead of remaining closed in what my belief tells me to do (coping with idealization or fanaticism). The members of Cafh mustn't forget the work in the three previous FM.

Those who are learning the EA processes must fulfill many hours of self-exploration, in groups and individually, to achieve experiential self-knowledge of their existence, passing through each of the FM. This way of working has benefited members of Cafh who have gone through these formative processes.

Will is structured by the same four pillars that support existence. To be able to decide and act, the (1st MF) must be fulfilled, I must like it, liking, (2nd MF) because this FM gives us energy; it must be ethically and morally appropriate for me (3rd FM), and it must have an existential meaning (4th FM), that is, respond to a need, whether it is ours or the external world. When there is a lack of willingness to do something, paying attention to what FM might be weak to carry out this action, is good. The spiritual counselor can help the consultant become aware.

The processual stages of the EA, that is, the PEA-model, was analyzed regarding spiritual work in a previous article (Traverso 2019), linking it to the **ten words** of spiritual unfolding (Waxemberg 2015). As Waxemberg points out, these words were mentioned by Santiago Bovisio, the founder of Cafh, in 1937, defining them as the basic words for spiritual unfolding; however, he did not develop them except to indicate that the key is in the first one, silencing, which solves the other nine. The words are: silencing, listening, remembering, understanding, knowing, wanting, daring, judging, forgetting, and transmuting.

Waxemberg deepens into the understanding and meaning of each of the ten words. By linking them to the PEA, however, we seek to give them operational value in every situation and experience of our lives.

The following figure, taken from Traverso (2019), shows the stages of the PEA and highlights the ten words. In everyday situations, regardless of their duration, minutes, days, or months, from the moment we are questioned until we answer, we go through the steps described, corresponding to the ten words.



Scheme 2.- Parallel between the AEP and the 10 words of the development.

The first phase of the AEP, until reaching the full possible understanding of the situation, before taking a personal position, is a phenomenological process that begins with an internal silence (silencing). It is essential to be able to observe myself, to perceive my (pre)judgments, feelings, and interpretations, to be able to put in parentheses everything that could interfere with a "clean" listening, both internally and externally, to be a witness as neutral as possible to my first impressions, and of attendant emotion and impulses. Remembering here means being able to observe and put in brackets the associations and emotions that are activated, which are related to my past. Only then I can enter understanding, both what is personal and what is external to the situation. In this way we can get to know what mine is, what is my own, what my conscience tells me about what is understood and thus be able to take a personal position that tells me what I want to do, what is my willingness to respond. Daring here is the step to action, for which many times I require courage; is to face the world. Now comes the judging, not before. In the judgement I interpret what was done and its consequences; I take responsibility. Forgetting here is equivalent to letting go, disengaging, letting go. There I can transmute, assume the transformation, the change, open myself to the new, remain available for whatever comes.

The AEP helps us to give a situational operative character to the ten words, following the process and observing in which word I stopped, when the process is interrupted without being able to get to the action.

CONCLUSION

I want to close this writing by quoting the founder of Cafh in words written a year before his death.

Signs are signs; tradition is tradition; empiricisms are empiricisms; possibilities are possibilities; but only an essential, determined, formal and evident knowledge is a truth. (...) The teaching is precise, with an appropriate language and terms already consecrated and applied. Language is the soul of facts and words must not be confused or misapplied. (Bovisio, 1961).

These words invite us to develop a work that allows us to make evident what was previously only possible and to achieve greater rigor in language. In the same writing, he invites us to approach the social sciences, among which psychology is obviously included. The dialogue between EA and Cafh can be very fruitful, as has already been evidenced by about 15 members of Cafh that we have formed in EA.

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