

PHILOSOPHICAL PSYCHOTHERAPY IN VUCA WORLD AND BANI REALITY: REFLECTIONS ON HEALTH COACHING

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Purpose: The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that coaching is a helpful form of working with another person to discover possible strategies for solving life dilemmas, in particular those related to caring for one's own health and quality of life. When conducting my analyzes, I refer mainly the theses of the monograph *Coaching zdrowia...* by Zubrzycka-Nowak and Rybczyńska. The monograph is unfortunately the only publication in Poland that in a simple way describes/explains the style and technique of combining the coaching method with care for health; I also refer books by Białek and Ostasz.

Design/methodology/approach: The paper uses the method of comparative-descriptive analysis. The method used allows for a thorough analysis of the issue.

Findings: The analysis of the issue confirms the thesis on the significant influence of practical philosophy, on the quality of life of modern man and the validity of humanistic knowledge in solving social, cultural and economic problems of our times.

Research limitations/implications: This article addresses the issue of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic at a time when the effects of the virus on the human body are not yet sufficiently understood by medical professionals.

Practical implications: The text is an analysis of the socially important issue of health.

Social implications: The subject matter of the article covers issues important to the quality of life of modern man and society.

Originality/value: The article explores current ways of understanding and interpreting the world around us with a view to taking care of our own health.

Keywords: philosophical psychotherapy, VUCA and BANI world, health coaching, Cascio, Johansen.

Category of the paper: research article, viewpoint.

I wish to take care of my good condition,
to have the strength and energy to live

– Monica¹

¹ The issue of caring for health and effectively taking care of the quality of life is one of the most common topics addressed during coaching sessions (Zubrzycka-Nowak, Rybczyńska, 2013, p. 116).

1. Introduction

Putting classical philosophical thought into a form of philosophical psychotherapy, in this paper I describe the conditions of living in the uncertain world of VUCA and the unstable, pandemic reality of BANI. I also include contemporary methods for dealing effectively with the unpredictable situations of everyday life as dictated by the current context of the times. Using the method of descriptive-comparative analysis, I explain both acronyms, VUCA and BANI, in their classical meaning, attempting to include reflections on health care and health coaching in the considerations undertaken.

Coaching as a supportive form of working with another person, allows „to discover individual strategies for carrying out specific tasks and to skillfully apply them in areas, in which previously a person did not cope well, and in which they want to act effectively (or more effectively)” (Zubrzycka-Nowak, Rybczyńska, 2013, p. 119; Rosinski, 2011, pp. 29-38). The method of coaching involves a strict focus on the person and his/her goal/dilemma. Therefore, the aim of coaching is to help the other person. It is based on comprehensive humanistic knowledge: psychological, social and philosophical. In the article I assume that coaching is a specific form of work based on dialog, close to psychotherapy, especially philosophical psychotherapy (Zubrzycka-Nowak, Rybczyńska, Monostori, 2018)². I demonstrate that philosophical psychotherapy, drawing on the richness of classical philosophy, can become an important aspect of a coaching process focused on health dilemmas.

2. The tasks of philosophical psychotherapy

The role of philosophical psychotherapy is, as Lech Ostasz writes, direct influence on the mind and thus on the remaining parts of our personality, mainly on the character and its shaping. The essence and desirable task of philosophical psychotherapy is – according to the postulates of ancient Greek philosophy – shaping character by strengthening man’s ability to think independently and make wise, self-governing decisions. The goal of philosophy as therapy is to achieve a state of euthymia and ataraxia. Democritus’ euthymia as an expression of joy and peace of mind, together with ataraxia as achieving the state of satisfaction, control over oneself and efficient independence from unfavourable circumstances, as well as lack of confusion, anxiety, attitude of immobility, harmony and balance professed by sceptics, are nowadays

² Coaching, as opposed to classical psychotherapy, is used to help people who are healthy, that is, not mentally disturbed. The clients of coaching are people who want to cope better in everyday situations; coaching also serves those who strive for a chosen goal or want to make changes in their lives.

an important component of philosophical psychotherapy based on interpersonal contact (Ostasz, 2011, pp. 17-50; Irvine, 2019; Ilski, 2017, 2020; Wolska, 2017).

The described postulates of ancient philosophers, which, in addition to Democritus and the skeptics, are also found in the scheme of the Socratic dialogue, in the thought of Plato, Aristotle, and the Epicureans and Stoics. Today they are used in practical philosophy (Cf. Hadot, 2019, pp. 265-279; Stankiewicz, 2014; Fabjański, 2020, pp. 23-41, 103-125). One of the variants of practical philosophy is psychotherapy at the core of which is human-centered philosophical and humanistic thought. Because of this, practical philosophy is also applied today in different types of coaching, among others in health coaching and other therapeutic methods aimed at establishing well-being, improving mental health, developing social competence and relationships. Nowadays, the therapeutic and healing character of many classical philosophical concepts also effectively helps in coping with functioning in the world of VUCA and in the reality of BANI.

3. VUCA and BANI – acronyms of the modern world

The world of VUCA is a world of constant volatility, a constant sense of uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. The acronym emerged in the 1990s, i.e. in 1987 it was defined by the U.S. Army War College to describe the specificity of war reality requiring keen observation of the current situation and the ability to respond adequately to circumstances (Piątkowska, 2021, p. 15). The term VUCA has also been usefully adapted in the economic and business field. It is now used both in the way organizations and various areas of social life are managed and in the personal development space (Kucharczyk-Capiga, 2022; Ekes, 2022).

The volatility that distinguishes the VUCA world is one of the key features of the modern world. Both the nature and character of change are constantly reshaped. This means that the decision made today may turn out to be inadequate tomorrow, i.e. not adapted to the current circumstances. The described volatility is accompanied by uncertainty, i.e. lack of predictability of events. Uncertainty goes hand in hand with „everyday surprise and low awareness and understanding of existing problems and circumstances. We do not know what is going to happen, when it is going to happen, and most importantly, why it is going to happen” (Ekes, 2022).

Ignorance becomes a source of chaos and confusion. In turn, chaos and confusion give our reality a complex character. In this way, complexity is also a sign of the times and another hallmark of contemporary reality, in which an excess of striking information complicates its verification. In the atmosphere of informational chaos it is extremely difficult to grasp what is important. The last feature of the modern world is ambiguity resulting from the lack of clear meanings, conditions and different interpretations of causal relations (Ekes, 2022; Piątkowska, 2021, pp. 15-18; Krzemiński, 2021, pp. 14-15).

A sort of remedy for the VUCA reality was proposed by Bob Johansen a distinguished member of the Institute for the Future (Johansen, 2022; Musioł, 2018, pp. 371-382) by replacing the traditional acronym words with new words. These new words are vision, understanding, clarity, and agility – the sine qua non conditions for coping efficiently in VUCA world. Referring to the business sphere, Johansen recognizes that in turbulent times it is necessary to know the vision of one's organization, as awareness of the vision is a form of security for that organization and a guarantor of its survival. In turbulent times, a valuable attitude is the ability to understand, which extends traditional communication skills beyond the existing framework of dialog (including business dialog). New communication capabilities should support both decision-making processes, by providing clear and readable information, and should subsidize/sustain the ability to adapt quickly/nimply to change (Ekes, 2022; Piątkowska, 2021, pp. 195-205; Krzemiński, 2021, pp. 16-17).

The way of thinking about the modern world and contemporary reality changed with the outbreak of the COVID-19 infectious disease pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. At that time, many intellectuals, especially futurologists, recognized that the previously prevailing VUCA paradigm should be transformed, adapting it to the new conditions. Thus, a slightly different and changed pattern of thinking about the modern world was formulated, which was defined/named with the acronym BANI. The architect of the new idea of defining the world is a futurist, anthropologist, historian, and political scientist, a fellow at the Global Network and the Center for Responsible Nanotechnology, Jamais Cascio.

In 2020, Cascio described his way of framing reality and thinking about the modern (pandemic) world. He expressed his concept defining the conditions of life in a pandemic reality using the BANI model (Cascio, 2021). In his opinion, this model fits perfectly into our chaotic and unsettled current situation, helping us to understand the consequences of the pandemic, the speed of the changes experienced, and the strong need to „define ourselves and the world in a new reality” (Witkowska, 2022). This reality is specified by an acronym whose successive alphabet characters indicate the following characteristics of the contemporary world: brittle, anxious, non-linear, incomprehensible/imperceptible (Witkowska, 2022).

The world's brittleness means the impermanence of its order, the ease with which its order can be shattered and turn out to be a quasi-order/pseudo-order. Brittleness also means a certain inefficiency of the world, its tendency to break down or even to move towards self-destruction, preceded by the risk of the collapse of objective values. In a world that is interconnected by a system of links, local brittleness, limited to a particular place or group, creates a ripple effect throughout the world. The aftermath of constant fluctuations/variations can be catastrophic for the broader system. In the second instance, brittle foundations, instability and lack of resilience to all types of shocks threaten to collapse. Collapse in the sense described mainly refers to the security of an institution or, for example, a market when an adversary changes its logic overnight (See Sridharan, 2022).

Anxiety is another feature of the modern world. In today's anxious world, the constantly accompanying emotions are fear and anxiety. Fear refers to both the concern of losing or overlooking what is important, as well as the effort of making decisions, any of which may turn out to be the wrong decision or the wrong choice. As Mithun Sridharan, managing director of Blue Ocean Solutions, writes: „anxiety also reflects the anguish and stress of our current times, underscored by uncertainty about health and the risk of contracting Covid-19” (Sridharan, 2022).

The effects of becoming infected with Covid-19 and the long-term effects of the virus on the body are unknown. Also, the way the body functions, once the disease has passed, has not yet been fully recognized by medical professionals. This also reinforces the anxiety associated with the possibility of long-term health loss. Apart from fear, an emotion constantly present in human life is anxiety. Anxiety currently accompanies both our personal and professional lives. This emotion, combined with the fragility/unstable reality described earlier, has a significant impact on the personal lives of individuals and the professional/business sphere (Sridharan, 2022).

Another feature of our reality is its nonlinearity. This feature is characterized by the lack of clear causal relationships, also by the inability or difficulty to grasp them. As a consequence of the clear lack of cause-effect relationships, any results of our actions may be disproportionate to the causes. The dissonance of perception, proportion, and the aforementioned lack of dependence between cause and effect, becomes the reason for the loss of linearity as an arrest of continuity in the course of the process(es). This situation is directly related to pandemics: „It is impossible to predict how the emergence of a virus in one part of Asia might cause all the (unfortunately tragic) events we have seen around the world. The concept of flattening the COVID-19 case curve is inherently a war on nonlinearity” (Sridharan, 2022).

The last of Cascio's distinguishing features of the modern world is its unintelligibility. This characteristic implies a certain illegibility of data. The multiplicity and diversity of data causes overload and plunges the knower into incomprehensibility. This is fostered by the furtive/rapid pace of change. Even when, amidst the chaos of data and the accompanying incomprehension, we find an answer to our question, a moment later it turns out to be incomplete, outdated, or even wrong. Cascio opines that „we usually try to overcome this problem by increasing the amount of data available, but this can be counterproductive; the more we try to understand an incomprehensible situation, the more overwhelmed we feel” (Sridharan, 2022).

Cascio is looking for an effective countermeasure to the previously described characteristics/presences of BANI reality. Recognizing the problem, the futurist claims that if the contemporary times are characterized by brittleness, the way to overcome it may be through developed resilience and capacity. Conversely, if anxiety is a defining feature of our time, then empathy and mindfulness are the directive to reduce it. Nonlinearity requires us to learn context and develop adaptive skills; meanwhile, clarity and a high level of intuition should be effective remedies for the incomprehensibility of the present.

An effective method of developing resilience in the face of these two tendencies is – as I mentioned earlier – philosophical psychotherapy and coaching focused on the issue of broadly understood health care. Taking care of the psychophysical comfort and the spiritual aspect of functioning in the world, today constitutes an important element of the efforts to maintain the desired level/standards of life, or to raise its quality, along with the increase in the importance of social life.

4. Caring for body, emotions, thoughts and spirit in the face of multi-level health

Man is not only a social being – he is a multidimensional being realizing himself on the physical-material, intellectual (mental-mind), emotional, psychological and spiritual levels (Białek, 2012, pp. 118-127). Each of the levels highlighted impacts quality of life, including living life to the fullest, which requires „activating all levels of the self” (Białek, 2016, p. 32).

The physical level is the foundation. It is the level that is basic and accessible to every person because it is directly related to their physicality and the physical quality of their life. „Man is considered by academic science as a physical entity. His body is able to convey a lot of information for understanding himself and the world around, as well as his own history, which is the foundation of the quality of life” (Białek, 2013, p. 43). The stimulators deciding about health and life in the bodily-physical dimension include, among others: the environment, understood as the environment in which we function and which we surround ourselves with; taking care of sleep, especially its proper quality and length; taking care of regular/balanced breathing, because proper breathing triggers certain states both in the body and in the mind.

Inducing the desired states in the body, body and mind, nowadays is the basis of the activity of many organizations dealing with caring for physical and mental health, through professional stress and anxiety reduction. An example is the non-governmental organization *The International Art of Living Foundation* operating at the United Nations³. The physical level of the body is also coupled with proper nutrition related to the knowledge of the principles of diet that have a natural impact on human development and well-being, and the maintenance of physical activity through systematic attention to movement (Zubrzycka-Nowak, Rybczyńska, 2013, pp. 35-65; Białek, 2016, pp. 32, 45).

The emotional level deals with feelings and emotions, containing specific information about our reactions – human reactions to certain life situations. This level also includes the matrix of developed patterns of our behavior and the range of learned responses to stimuli that strike us.

³ The Art of Living Foundation is dedicated to promoting healthy living, eliminating poverty and violence, and fostering educational values. The mission of the organization is to spread a holistic approach to health. For more information about this organization, please visit: www.artofliving.org/pl-pl/organizacja.

Not infrequently and directly, emotions are referred to as the language of our heart. Although emotions come from within us and depend largely on our mood, they are shaped by the culture in which we are born and raised; the society in which we function; our family; and our faith (Zubrzycka-Nowak, Rybczyńska, 2013, p. 67; Białek, 2016, pp. 139-142).

The emotional level outlined in this way is inalienably linked to emotional intelligence. „It happens that untamed emotions take over the control of a person's life so that he or she ceases to have any influence on what is said, what is done, and how he or she behaves” (Zubrzycka-Nowak, Rybczyńska, 2013, p. 68.). Therefore, taking care of one's own emotional sphere as a systematic development of the ability to react appropriately, distinguish and name feelings and emotions, preceded by the ability to observe „how I react and what I react to” (Zubrzycka-Nowak, Rybczyńska, 2013, p. 68), is the essence of understanding oneself in the chaos of feelings and emotions born under the influence of the environment. Consequently, the appropriate response, as well as the ability to distinguish and name one's own feelings, determines the quality of coping with the environment (Białek, 2016, p. 36; Białek, 2018, pp. 9-16).

The intellectual level relates to how one thinks about health. „How a person thinks about health is the basis of a self-fulfilling prophecy, which is why it is so important to create a safe – for the person – metaphor of health” (Zubrzycka-Nowak, Rybczyńska, 2013, p. 950). The essence of caring for one's own health on a mental/intellectual level is to become aware of what we have control over and to detect/find a mechanism to release any discomfort from the body and mind in order to return to and maintain good health (Zubrzycka-Nowak, Rybczyńska, 2013, p. 104). Awareness of the factors within our control and the language in which we express our well-being allow us to decide our fate with confidence. The way we think about health engages a sense of responsibility, the sources of which we see either outside or within ourselves. Placing responsibility externally when talking about one's health involves the construction of an expression that anchors the cause of one's own ill-being in an external object. Such a person, instead of taking responsibility for what they do with their health, wrongly „puts the power over their body in the hands of the accused” (Zubrzycka-Nowak, Rybczyńska, 2013, p. 97). Meanwhile, a reliable/effective remedy in caring for one's own health is to shift one's attention from others to oneself and one's own needs.

The spiritual level includes the element of full presence, well-being as awareness of one's own sensations, and open-mindedness. The spiritual realm also includes a concern for energy intensity and broad vision. The sense of being filled with energy correlates with a sense of strength, power, agency, and life. The vital energy corresponds to the rhythm of the body resonating with the breath and the heartbeat. On the other hand, the ability to see widely implies the ability to blend with one's surroundings. Using wide vision, a person expands the horizon of attention to identify with space, without losing the ability to name inner experiences, and with a greater awareness of the impact of environmental conditions and a sharpened sensitivity to perceive all phenomena individually. Elements of the spiritual level support and

foster a sense of balance optimizing the quality of human/individual functioning in the world. This balance can be equated with the state of centering as the moment of achieving wholeness, harmony and peace. Harmony and peace are associated with the development of trust in Life (Zubrzycka-Nowak, Rybczyńska, 2013, pp. 124-126; Białek, 2013, pp. 78-86, 98-106; Aron, 2021).

The problems of trust and faith in human life are included in the category of philosophy of life. Trust and faith are accompanied by intuition. Trust, faith and intuition take part in stabilizing the mental-psychic dimension of a person. Intuition supports the process of finding „the inner essence of oneself, one’s identity” (Białek, 2016, p. 249). These emotions help a person in moments of self-doubt and self-capabilities; in moments of breakdown, disorientation, and loss of self-confidence.

However, as Lech Ostasz, an advocate of philosophical psychotherapy already cited in the article, writes: „intuition, trust and faith must give way to experience and reason, especially when there is a conflict between them” (Ostasz, 2011, p. 163). Good, neutral and therefore non-dogmatic, open and free from religious context, faith helps in situations where experience, logic and reason fail. Consequently, „trust-faith makes it possible not to fall to the bottom of psychic experiences when experience and reason fail the individual” (Ostasz, 2011, p. 164). Faith supported by trust means both faith in the meaning of small, seemingly insignificant things, as well as faith in great things, faith in people who are close and trustworthy, and faith in oneself (See Ostasz, 2011, p. 165).

5. Achieving goals related to health and a sense of well-being

For us to cope with the modern reality described by the acronyms above with dignity and efficiency, we should pay more attention to our health in its holistic dimension. Only efficient implementation of goals related to physical, mental-intellectual and spiritual health will allow us to adapt to troublesome/difficult situations of our everyday life. Nowadays, both philosophical psychotherapy and coaching method of work (health coaching) belong to the reliable method of achieving selected goals related to holistic health care (Białek, 2016; Whitmore, 2011).

Any implementation of goals, including those related to health, is closely related to the ability to formulate them precisely. This description should specify: where the person wants to go; the physical well-being that accompanies being in the desired place; the feelings experienced as a result of being in the desired place; and a summary of the state that the person will experience once the action plan has been implemented/the goal has been achieved.

The most important part of describing a desired state of well-being is to engage all levels in the description: physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. It is a serious mistake to focus only on the head realm in describing one's well-being, and thus to consider only the level of thought, the intellectual-mental realm. Significant errors that accompany the goal of well-being are tying the desired goal to a problem or bad condition, focusing on a goal that is someone else's or independent of us, and concretizing the desired goal by negating it. Each of these errors is most often revealed at the intellectual level: in the zone of thought. Monika Zubrzycka-Nowak and Katarzyna Rybczyńska write: „When asked what they want, people very often answer that they don't want to be sick, they don't want to be in such a relationship, they don't want to be tired any more. Their statements perfectly locate the problem, but they say absolutely nothing about what they want in return or what they are aiming at” (Zubrzycka-Nowak, Rybczyńska, 2013, p. 111).

For this reason, the coaching goal, especially the one concerning health, should be positively formulated. It should be specified in such a way that it describes a specific need of the person who formulates the goal and is dependent on it. Effective care for one's own health involves responsible and dedicated cooperation with one's own organism on all described levels, that is, on the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual level (Zubrzycka-Nowak, Rybczyńska, 2013, p. 100).

6. Conclusion

Classical philosophy, transformed into philosophical psychotherapy, also confirms its validity today. Today, it is successfully used as a humanistic basis for coaching. In particular, for health coaching, which aims to focus on the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the client. Meanwhile, as Philippe Rosinski writes in his book *Coaching across cultures*, „well-being is important, and human development is the main way to achieve good results” (Rosinski, 2011, p. 28).

Proper health care involves an awareness of the conditions in which we live. These conditions today are outlined by the acronyms VUCA and BANI. The range of these conditions affects the personal life of an individual as well as economic and business relations. Therefore, an attitude worth propagating today is undoubtedly coaching taking care of one's good condition, strength and energy for life as well as spiritual strengthening as shaping a strong character.

Coaching as pragmatic humanism involves taking care of oneself, one's own development and increasing the quality of life. Professional health coaching emphasizes the importance of well-being and fulfillment (White, 2014, p. 121). It is an attempt to pragmatically enact the ancient Aristotelian eudaimonia as the fullness of life. It shapes human sensitivity on „subtle

levels”; with the help of the coaching method of work, a person gains a „sense of mission”, seeks positive solutions for themselves, the systems in which they live, and Life in its holistic view.

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