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THE NEXT HORIZON OF CAREER COUNSELLING: ETHICS—THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIVING

INTRODUCTION

It is evident that scholars of the science and practices of career counselling have effectively assimilated the postmodern challenge to the epistemology that hitherto produced the accepted ways of knowing and doing in the field. Scholars have reached the horizon seen decades beforehand and the field has returned to a state of normal science. At this historical juncture, I introduce the epistemology of pragmatic idiographic truth as vehicle to understand how and why counsellor and client must co-construct fictions in order to live in the world of work. I advocate for a turn toward the philosophical study of living the good life—ethics—as a way to enhance the science and practices of career counselling, whereby career counselling is the idiographic crucible of personal truth for being in the world of work.

Maree and Di Fabio (2015) have compiled superbly crafted papers written by outstanding scholars in the multidisciplinary field of career development. I must admit to feeling frisson while reading the papers, thinking that, at last, the field of career development has made it to the horizon promised by pioneers decades earlier when postmodern thought gripped psychology (e.g., Gergen, 2001; Kvale, 1992), and vocational psychology and career counselling. In these papers I see innovative renderings and creative expressions of great ideas that were a few decades ago nascent ripples against theoretical and technical conventions. Yet, these scholars do not rest idly. Through their perspicacious vision they see farther; they see new horizons; they see more work to be done, and they raise the clarion to their lips and blow calls to challenge imaginations once more. I feel honoured and grateful for the invitation to contribute a conceptual coda, yet, in equal measure, I feel somewhat apprehensive. To merely summarise and synthesise the scholars' works herein would be little more than a rendition of my own theoretically entrenched perspective and would do an injustice to their labours. Instead, I should set aside my own preferred theories of career development and turn to philosophy. By doing so, I can do justice to these scholars' visions of the horizon that is expressed as their innovative ideas for the science and practices of career counselling. Indeed, throughout this book, the great problems of philosophy (cf., Russell, 1912/2004) can be seen shimmering under the authors' texts. Of especial importance is the problem of knowledge, of knowing, and, moreover, of knowing self, and, conversely, of not knowing that which is beyond the limitations of the psychological horizon of the conscious individual—the unconscious and the future.

ON PRAGMATIC IDIOGRAPHIC TRUTH

Is Kierkegaard's (1843/1967) proverb, that life must be understood backwards and lived forwards, not the ostensibly impossible question of career counselling?

> Philosophy is perfectly right in saying that life must be understood backwards. But then one forgets the other clause—that it must be lived forwards. The more one thinks through this clause, the more one concludes that life in temporality never becomes properly understandable, simply because never at any time does one get perfect repose to take a stance: backwards. (Kierkegaard, 1843/1967, pp. 450, IV A 164).

That career counselling entreats the client to live now and for the future is inherently limited by how it can—as a pragmatic way of knowing—aid a client who is reaching to know his or her self, as if it were, as if real and knowable by dint of oneself being in the past. That is, to live a life now, in the present moment, without truly knowing what the future will become on the basis of knowledge constructed from the remnants of the past. Thus, career counselling a collaborative process of looking backward in order to project a life forward.

As an intimate act of personal archaeology, career counselling excavates the psychological, social, and cultural past of an individual so as to inductively understand the present. Then, on the basis of this knowledge, the counsellor and client cast their psychological eyes into the future so as to imaginatively co-construct a story that may, or may not, generate active engagement in the world of work. Can career counselling be a solution to Kierkegaard's problem of living life forward by knowing it backward? It can be; but, only if, paradoxically, one bravely accepts that this putative knowledge of the future that is inductively created on the basis of the past is little more than emotive guesswork, if not a folly that should be tentatively grasped with fingers crossed behind one's back, hoping that one's predictions may come true.

It was David Hume (1748/2007) who challenged induction as a way of knowing the future. Hume suggested that humans believe in their predictions as result of intrinsic psychological architecture. Humans are inherently disposed toward committing the logical fallacy of *post hoc ergo propter hoc* or *cum hoc ergo propter hoc* (i.e., after this therefore because of this; with this therefore because of this). In other words, that B followed A, is no reason to believe A caused B; and, that A and B occur simultaneously is no reason to draw a causal relationship between the two. William James (1890/1952) deepened this idea in his argument that humans experience time because they experience thinking, metaphorically, like the flowing of a stream. Furthermore, James argued that consciousness of series (e.g., one event following another after another, and so on) is the source of rational thinking. Humans are not only psychologically capable of discerning series; they aim to do so in order to make sense of events they observe. Storying relies on this sense of time and inductive thinking so as to create connections between one moment in life and the next, *ad infinitum*.

Notwithstanding the flaw of inductive thinking, it is in existential torment that one must carry on with life, believing, and hoping, that the future can be known, albeit a fiction that is composed as an open-ended story that seems to contiguously follow on from the previous chapter of a life (i.e., *post hoc ergo propter hoc*). This fiction is exactly what people construct in order to make sense of their past and current phenomenal world, and it is this fictional existence that permits the activity of narrative career counselling as a way of knowing. In this way, counselling produces therapeutic truth—a benign white lie with generative intent. Accordingly, career counselling, especially narrative career counselling because it is the most doubtable form of personal knowing toward the creation of personal truths, has no more compelling a purchase on creating personal truths than psychoanalysis, which is a most exquisite form of personal archaeology.

Although I intend to cast a sceptical pall over career counselling, I do so out of boldness born of *pragmatism* inspired by James (1907/2000). Here, I use pragmatism as the epistemology of personal truth, that which I call "pragmatic ideographic truth". That career counselling depends so much on the psychological archaeology of a client's past to construct an imagined future is evidence of its inductive logic and, therefore, its inherent flaws as per Hume's problem of induction. James, like his great scientific contemporary, the legendary psychological archaeologist, Sigmund Freud, believed that the past has an enduring effect on the present of a person by way of *habit*.

> We are spinning our own fates, good or evil, and never to be undone. Every smallest stroke of virtue or of vice leaves its never so little scar. … Nothing we ever do is, in strict scientific literalness, wiped out (James, 1890/1952, p. 83).

However, James would eschew a purely historical deterministic stance, for he articulated the notion of psychological *plasticity* and the inherent potential for change, despite the present influence of the past.

James' pragmatism posits that the proof of a theory's truthfulness is metaphorically like the pudding: the proof is in the eating.

> Pragmatism, on the other hand, asks its usual question. "Grant an idea or belief to be true," it says, "what concrete difference will its being true make in anyone's actual life? How will the truth be realized? What experiences will be different from those which would obtain if the belief were false? What, in short, is the truth's cash value in experiential terms….Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events (James, 1907/2000, p. 88).

Thus, as a way of knowing, pragmatism holds up experience as the *sine qua non*. With respect to career counselling, therefore, it is interpretation and reinterpretation of experience that provide the truthfulness of a personal theory or, more accurately, a personal theory of one's person.

People remember, or confabulate, that which contributes to their construction of personal truths. In career counselling, *co-construction* (Brott, 2001) of narrative becomes a "co-truth" co-created by the counsellor and client in dialogue with one another. The proof of their co-constructed truth is tested by the client's present experiences, which necessarily become past, and future experiences. With expectations established by the co-constructed narrative, the client sets out with a *confirmation bias* (Nickerson, 1998) to find evidence so as to inductively affirm its veracity, especially interpersonal interactions that serve as an source of *perceptual confirmation* or *behavioural confirmation* (Snyder & Stukas, 1999). Should actions based on this personal truth generate new experiences that affirm the truth's veracity, then the client's trust in its truthfulness will deepen.

When experiences contradict the truth, the client may seek other experiences that are confirmatory so as retain the preferred truth, rather than risk discombobulating one's self and discrediting the story.

> An *outré* explanation, violating all our preconceptions, would never pass for a true account of a novelty. We should scratch round industriously till we found something less eccentric. The most violent revolutions in an individual's beliefs leave most of his old order standing. Time and space, cause and effect, nature and history, and one's own biography remain untouched. New truth is always a go-between, a smoother-over of transitions. It marries old opinion to new fact so as ever to show a minimum of jolt, a maximum of continuity. We hold a theory true just in proportion to its success in solving this 'problem of maxima and minima' (James, 1907/2000, p. 31).

Thus, pragmatic idiographic truth is that which, on the whole, explains the past and predicts the future, as proven by successive experiences that are consistent with its tenets.

> But success in solving this problem is eminently a matter of approximation. We say this theory solves it on the whole more satisfactorily than that theory; but that means more satisfactorily to ourselves, and individuals will emphasize their points of satisfaction differently. To a certain degree, therefore, everything here is plastic (James, 1907/2000, p. 31).

Openness to modifying a personal truth or abandoning it in favour of another truth that better fits the facts of experience is a process of judgment that is relative to the individual and his or her criteria for determining what is truthful. This may well seem like a relativist sham; it is; but, there is no other way of being human with a will to choose between alternatives.

The existential conundrum of openness to amending personal truth requires bravery in the face of the unknown, because somewhere "between understanding and willing lie excuses and evasions" (Kierkegaard, 2002, p. 262). One is compelled to believe in one's own personal truth (viz., fictions) or be condemned to insanity whereby every experience carries the risk of a being interpreted as a contradiction and the attendant terror of psychological obliteration of what one knows as one's self.

None other than Shakespeare timelessly captures such existential torment in the face of uncertainty:

> To be, or not to be: that is the question:
> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
> And by opposing end them?....
> Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
> And thus the native hue of resolution
> Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
> And enterprises of great pith and moment
> With this regard their currents turn awry,
> And lose the name of action…(Shakespeare, 1603/1996, p. 688)

Tragically, many individuals do suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and never find the will to oppose them.

Career counselling must afford clients the scope to truly believe in their co-constructed truth so as to motivate their action, to engage in life, to create, to bear up against the vicissitudes of being in a world of work that is objectively disinterested in any one person's aspirations. Thus, career counselling, as the

crucible of pragmatic idiographic truthfulness, must inspire within clients the courage to thrive in, not merely survive in, the rolling swell of existential angst.

ON ETHICS

Psychotherapy is a human technology born in the modern epoch. Its emergence in industrialised society is evident in the mechanical and hydraulic metaphor that imbues drive theory of classical psychoanalysis. Similarly, career counselling is a human technology of the industrial era, born of the goal to support disadvantaged individuals into the labour market. As a technology, career counselling is deployed for the ostensible good of the client, to: (a) facilitate his or her developing self-awareness and insight into the psychological, social, cultural, and economic issues that impinge on his or her career; (b) make successful transitions through, and adjustments in, the domains of learning and working; all to the effect of, (c) living a more satisfying life.

When deployed for the greater good, inclusive of the individual, career counselling is a socio-political instrument that engages with the vagaries of economic conditions and contemporaneous public policy issues (e.g., Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2004), most notably, the transition from study to work and *employability* (Guilbert, Bernaud, Gouvernet, & Rossier, 2015). The *psychology of working* (Blustein, 2006, 2013) is paradigmatic in this regard because it justifies career counsellors' and career counselling's raison d'être to be of service to the client and the community, amidst contexts of economic and political conditions that create structural disadvantages for both. Deployed for the interests of both the individual and society, for good or evil, career counselling is a *technology of the self* (Foucault, 1988) that can mediate the individual's self identity and his or her positioning within society. The *life-design* paradigm (Savickas, 2012; Savickas et al., 2009) and its signature construct, *career adaptability*, is a quintessential technology of the self that proffers interventions for composing career identity in the contemporary world of work.

The applied psychological science that informs career counselling should ensure that the technology is effective. On the basis of gold-standard research studies, this applied science may accrete tomes of evidence that inform practice in the contemporary parlance of "evidence-based practice" conducted by "scholar-practitioners". However, neither volume of evidence nor commitment to evidence in practice can dictate the choice that a career counsellor takes to determine what he or she believes is the good life to be extolled and imbued into his or her discourse as co-editor of clients' pragmatic idiographic truth. Of course, a ledger of evidence that one way of living produces certain outcomes may sway opinion; however, the choice of what composes a good life is a philosophical matter. Thus, to adumbrate my key point, I contend that the branch of philosophy that deals with ways of living a good life, *ethics*, is the next horizon for the field of career development. The progenitor text, The Nichomachean Ethics (Aristotle, 1976) has, for or more than two thousand years, profoundly influenced Western moral philosophy and other intellectual disciplines (e.g., theology, political science, English literature), yet its contribution to career counselling is yet to be explicated.

Just as the stereotypical idea of the psychoanalyst sitting behind the analysand who is freely associating is no longer seriously deemed a scientifically disinterested practice, career counselling cannot be seen a technology applied by an objective and morally inert practitioner. On the contrary, the career counsellor is subjective and morally active, and consciously or unconsciously promulgates or projects what he or she deems the composites of a good life in the given world. At this crucial juncture, I do not find solace in the amoral relativism of postmodernist thinking that made way for social constructionism in career development. Nor should I. For if I am to be honest with my clients and myself, I must admit to (a) the limitations of scientific research that provides the evidence for my practices of career counselling as a technology of self; (b) the fictional qualities of pragmatic idiographic truth that comprises the co-construction of stories that generate action; and (c) my will that is inherent in my ethical stance, as it were: that is, my belief on what composes the good life.

The construction and co-construction of self is an ideal point of departure for an ethical study of career development practice. The evolution of self is documented as the transition from *object*, *subject*, to *project* (Savickas, 2011), and as *actor*, *agent*, and *author* (Savickas, 2012). This latter model implies a continuum of proactivity with the author is in charge of writing the story of his or her life, as distinct from simply acting out the roles written by some other author. The burden of angst falls heavy on the shoulders of the author who must take ultimate responsibility for the life he or she writes and the risk of failing to live

a good life composed under his or her hand; whereas the predictability of precast roles carries less responsibility, for there is always some other entity that shares in the culpability of failure. "No one dares to be himself; everyone is hiding in togetherness" (Kierkegaard, 2002, p. 235). In either case, careers must be managed in a world of work that is disinterested or perhaps does not care for the individual. Knowledge and skills are needed apropos employability, of course, but it is philosophy—ethics—that can provide novel intellectual perspectives to enhance career counselling as a technology of self that can bolster clients' capacity to face the world of work and their existential fears therein.

From the perspective of the stoicism, the metaphor of actor is apposite with respect to living a good life. The core tenet of stoicism is that a person should strive to become indifferent toward the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune (e.g., the travails of working in challenging conditions). Ideally, a stoic person would learn and work with minimal complaint and take satisfaction in carrying out his or her duties as per role requirements. Stoic philosopher, Marcus Aurelius (171-175/2011), exhorted "Don't work as a miserable drudge, or in any expectation of pity or admiration. One aim only: action or inaction as civic cause demands" (9.12; p.86). Economic conditions may never be ideal for any individual. Taking a stoic attitude toward challenging circumstances may moderate their perceived and felt effects.

A decided advantage of adopting Stoicism into career counselling is that it already takes a significant place in the philosophical foundations of rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT; Ellis, 1980), the progenitor of cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) that is so widely practised by counsellors and psychologists.

At the decidedly proactive end of the spectrum of career identity is the author, the person avowedly in charge of creating destiny. That a person can be the author of his or her life is metaphorically captured by Nietzsche (1878/1994) who asserts "Life as a product of life. However far man may extend himself with his knowledge, however objective he may appear to himself—ultimately he reaps nothing but his own biography" (p. 238). Nietzsche charges the individual to live life with no regrets and, if given the opportunity to live life over, the same individual would do it all again making the same decisions.

As for pragmatic idiographic truth, Nietzsche states (2003) "there is an innocence in lying which is the sign of good faith in a cause" (p. 107). Nietzsche provides a rendering of the individual as noble in so far as the individual recognises that life is to be lived with gusto and impunity, and not slavishly to another's cause. Nietzsche's philosophy is a psychological antidote to the pernicious effects of disempowerment by institutions of society and it requires the individual to assertively stake a claim on life. It is an unapologetic stance that is not to be conflated with misanthropy or anti-social personality traits. My reading of Nietzsche marks him as the first iconoclastic postmodernist; however, unlike the relativism present in postmodern thinking, Nietzsche firmly posits the individual as the self-referent measure of good and bad.

Will a self. Active, successful natures act, not according to the dictum 'know thy self', but as if there hovered before them the commandment: will a self and thou shalt become a self. (Nietzsche, 1977, p. 232)

Thus, unlike other philosophies that are tantamount to pusillanimity in the face of the vicissitudes of life, Nietzsche's philosophy entreats a person to boldly stare into the unknown and impose a future on it; that is, to live out pragmatic idiographic truthfulness.

CONCLUSION

To summarise, Maree and Di Fabio (2015) have compiled a portfolio that demonstrates the extraordinary evolution of career counselling in recent decades. Of course, these practices will continue to evolve and substantiate the theoretical paradigms that underpin them as an activity of *normal science* (Kuhn, 1996). It is my contention that on the other side of this normal science is the next horizon: that is, moral philosophy and career counselling for the ethics of living. Toward that new horizon, the epistemology of career counselling should be reconsidered as pragmatic idiographic truth. Therein, the study and explication of ethics can articulate the moral compass of career counselling and require the counsellor and client to take a genuinely honest position with one another and, reflexively, with themselves.

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