VARIA

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ABSTRACT

The aim: The paper aims to examine the relationship between philosophy and mental health.

Materials and methods: The authors used integrative anthropological approach, interpretive research paradigm, hermeneutical approach. The data collection was carried out using Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, Google Scholar databases. Research papers were identified according to search terms: "mental health", "philosophy", "Ancient philosophy", "Epicureanism", "Stoicism", "Eastern philosophy", "Buddhism", "Taoism", "psychology", "psychotherapy", "anxiety", "depression", "happiness", "mindfulness", "meaning in life".

Conclusions: Attempts to cope with life challenges, frustration, fear, anxiety, stress should not be isolated endeavors, but they need to be placed in a wider philosophical context, as far as every issue, including mental health issues, has a philosophical perspective at its core. Such experience can cultivate human strength, self-confidence, awareness, empathy. In times of uncertainty, when we do not know where to go, when we do not understand who we are and what is our purpose on earth, philosophy helps us to find our way. In the most difficult times, philosophy acts as a guiding star and consolation reconciling us with what we are unable to change.

KEY WORDS: philosophy; mental health; Ancient philosophy; Eastern philosophy; psychology; psychotherapy

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INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the World Health Organization, together with United for Global Mental Health and the World Federation for Mental Health, encouraged world population to support a global movement calling for greater investment in mental health. The Director-General of the World Health Organization T.A. Ghebreyesus notes that this movement is more important today than it has ever been before: "We need to move for our own mental health, the mental health of our families, friends and colleagues, and more importantly, so that there is a massive increase in investment for mental health services at national and international levels" [1]. Nowadays, mental and substance use disorders are the leading causes of disability worldwide [2]. Studies conducted in low- and middle-income countries have demonstrated the effectiveness of both psychopharmacological treatment and evidence-based psychotherapy for the treatment of mental disorders [3-8]. Research on economic efficiency of mental health care highlights the economic value of disease prevention [9, 10].

However, the reality is different. Despite the validity of the effectiveness of measures to support mental health, there is a huge gap between their real application and the needs of any given society [11, 12]; and large-scale improvements in mental health are far from desirable. The costs of mental health care include social services, primary, secondary, and tertiary care. Financial resources are needed for treatment facilities, staff, administration, training, supervision, media, etc. Given the enormous burden of mental disorders, the available treatments are not enough to improve the mental

health situation in low- and middle-income countries. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation has become even more acute exacerbating mental health problems. The global health care system has already faced with the need to solve psychological problems and provide psychosocial support related to COVID-19. In Ukraine, the war unleashed by russia made the situation even worse causing anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, not to mention serious physical consequences. Such a situation in the world and in Ukraine in particular marks a turning point in which mental health must become a priority for the public health sector. The governments of all countries must recognize the tangible and intangible consequences of mental health issues and invest in this area.

Although funds are limited and the time frame for addressing these issues successfully is becoming ever tighter, the door of opportunity, which has existed since ancient times, is open for those who are looking for a way out. We mean philosophy and its practical implications. It is about balancing our mental and, accordingly, physical state, reducing anxiety and depression, realizing our delusions and false concepts, and regaining meanings of life in the ocean of uncertainty [13].

THE AIM

The paper aims to examine the relationship between philosophy and mental health.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The authors used integrative anthropological approach, interpretive research paradigm, hermeneutical approach.

The data collection was carried out using Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, Google Scholar databases. Research papers were identified according to search terms: "mental health", "philosophy", "Ancient philosophy", "Epicureanism", "Stoicism", "Eastern philosophy", "Buddhism", "Taoism", "psychology", "psychotherapy", "anxiety", "depression", "happiness", "mindfulness", "meaning in life".

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

In the ancient world, philosophy was a fairly common practice of social recovery, which helped people maintain mental health, relieve stress, and get rid of fears. The ancient Greeks were the first to take care of social health of fellow citizens at the state level. They developed special health rituals based on the principle "Pan Metron Ariston", which means "Moderation in All Things". The responsibility for taking care of one's own health was considered as the honorable civic duty. Moderation was interpreted as the ability to control oneself, one's feelings and thoughts; as the culmination of the path of knowledge and self-formation, in fact, as the ideal of ancient philosophy.

For the great Greek philosopher Socrates, a person who does not follow the doctrine of moderation is weak, unable to control himself/herself and actually an unhappy person, since he/she cannot achieve the pleasure that he/she desperately seeks [14]. Moderation is of great value for the distinguished Greek philosopher Aristotle; this idea was reflected in his rationalistic ethics [15]. To achieve pleasure and happiness, a wise person strives for harmony of reason and desires [16]. "Ancient philosophers often acted as a kind of private consultants who served as advisers in everyday affairs and at the same time contributed to the establishment of social equilibrium resolving disputes, leading politicians to balanced decisions, etc. But one of the most important functions of philosophy, in addition to searching for truth and justice, was concern for the human soul. Epictetus, for example, considered his school as a kind of psychological clinic, in which all students had to realize their mental state as pathological in order to "heal mental ulcers by bringing the mind to rest". Plutarch believed that "a doctor made a mistake if he thought that he could neglect philosophy; it would also be a mistake to reproach a philosopher for the fact that, going beyond the boundaries allotted to him, he addressed the issue of health" [17]. As I. Andreev and L. Nazarova emphasize, the field of medicine closest to philosophy is precisely the science of the soul, that is, psychiatry [18]. Contemporary psychology and psychiatry should embrace the phenomenon of a human being including body, soul, spirit, and their synthesis. This is a difficult task, and philosophy can provide invaluable assistance elaborating the "holistic approach, according to which a human is an undivided, alive and organic, ideal and material being" [19].

Modern psychology, psychotherapy and psychiatry are increasingly moving into the field of evidence-based medicine and evidence-based practices, which sounds quite contradictory when it comes to such a phenomenon as a human, each of whom has his/her own existential experience and is in some way unique. As the result, a mental health professional perceives his/her patient as a typical representative of some general norm or pathology, i.e., he/she misses the understanding of this person as a unique individuality, unique personality, which often leads to difficulties in the specific diagnosis and treatment. In addition, their adherence to guidelines and protocols largely determines the diagnosis

and course of treatment. Unfortunately, many medical specialists, as well as the representatives of other branches of knowledge, overlook the best evidence, especially if it is beyond the established scientific paradigm and, by doing so, they do not allow any room for alternative viewpoints, which can be more effective in this or that particular case [20, 21].

People do not question that the one who has good training and experience succeeds in treatment, rather than the one who has abstract knowledge. However, let's turn to Aristotle who said: "the physician does not cure man, except in an incidental way, but Callias or Socrates or some other called by some such individual name, who happens to be a man. If, then, a man has the theory without the experience, and recognizes the universal but does not know the individual included in this, he will often fail to cure; for it is the individual that is to be cured. But yet we think that knowledge and understanding belong to art rather than to experience, and we suppose artists to be wiser than men of experience (which implies that Wisdom depends in all cases rather on knowledge); and this because the former know the cause, but the latter do not" [22].

Being at the intersection of science and art, philosophy has great potential. It is the basis of all knowledge, and only philosophy can answer the fundamental questions of human beings, explain, console, create meanings which is absolutely necessary for our mental health. That is, philosophy answers questions about the ultimate foundations of existence. But this is not one protocol answer intended for everyone. This answer varies and depends on the degree of destruction of the personal worldview, on the level which S. Kierkegaard called "despair": "A person, who claims that life is the path of sorrow and that human's destiny on earth is to grieve, has joy outside himself/herself, just as a person who sees the meaning of life in pleasure and joy has sorrow outside himself/herself; joy can, therefore, unexpectedly overtake the former, like sorrow – the latter. Both beliefs are based on external conditions that are beyond a person and his/her will, and sorrows and joys are equally beyond control of a person; any worldview based on external, independent of a person, conditions is... despair" [23]. The answer depends on the "depth" of human "I", at which individuals are forced to look for the foundations of their existence that through their lens they perceive as the general foundations of the universe. It is philosophy that can help in understanding individuals as complex dynamic systems, as well as their feelings, interests, sociocultural mechanisms underlying their development, the multifaceted relationship between social, cultural, spiritual processes that shaped them; it is philosophy that can reveal their existential core.

Very often, traumatic events and their psychological consequences lead to the loss of self and, ultimately, to the loss of the meaning in life. This is one of the most dangerous "non-protocol" situations, in which the very existence of a person becomes really meaningless, with all the ensuing negative outcomes. Philosophy addresses this acute problem enabling the individuals to create new meanings. F. Nietzsche said: "If you have your why for life, you can get by with almost any how" [24]. It is the meaning of life that has become the cornerstone of logotherapy – a therapeutic approach developed by the psychiatrist and psychotherapist V. Frankl. Believing that it was possible to turn suffering into self-development, V. Frankl helped clients to struggle with existential vacuum and uncover their true meanings. V. Frankl himself was a clear example of the effectiveness of his theory: his ideas helped him survive in the concentration camp and motivate other prisoners to continue living in inhuman conditions, in which their strength was running out and death seemed the easiest way out. According to V. Franks, the purpose of logotherapy is to cope with the suffering caused by the philosophical problems posed by life [25]. Thus, philosophy carries out the function of intellectual therapy, which is especially important in situations of instability, social explosions, wars, when a person is in a borderline situation, on the verge of being and non-being.

Modern people live in the era of upheaval. However, there is nothing new under the sun, and our ancestors went through the same existential challenges. For example, the Hellenistic period brought much to the table giving rise to Cynicism, Epicureanism, Stoicism, Skepticism. These schools of philosophy oriented the ancient Greeks and Romans in the world of turmoil and uncertainty trying to provide individuals with peace of mind and happiness. Getting rid of all misfortunes was seen primarily in autarchy (human self-sufficiency), adiaphora (indifference), ataraxia (equanimity). Of course, painful, destructive mental states cannot be eradicated as they are a part of human life. However, humans can turn them into something more bearable and even overcome a fear of death, one of the basic human fears. In his letter to Menoeceus, Epicurus addressed this issue: "Become accustomed to the belief that death is nothing to us. For all good and evil consists in sensation, but death is deprivation of sensation. And therefore, a right understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not because it adds to it an infinite span of time, but because it takes away the craving for immortality. For there is nothing terrible in life for the man who has truly comprehended that there is nothing terrible in not living. So that the man speaks but idly who says that he fears death not because it will

be painful when it comes, but because it is painful in anticipation. For that which gives no trouble when it comes, is but an empty pain in anticipation. So, death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist. It does not then concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not, and the latter are no more" [26]. Inner balance, self-control, restraint of emotions and desires – this is the path of the sage striving to live a serene, healthy, stress-free life. This is a kind of victory over oneself, which makes it possible to overcome all difficulties and hardships.

The representatives of Stoicism argue that some things are in our control and others not. For example, Epictetus said: "Things in our control are opinion, pursuit, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever are our own actions. Things not in our control are body, property, reputation, command, and, in one word, whatever are not our actions. The things in our control are by nature free, unrestrained, unhindered; but those not in our control are weak, slavish, restrained, belonging to others. Remember, then, that if you suppose that things which are slavish by nature are also free, and that what belongs to others is your own, then you will be hindered. You will lament, you will be disturbed, and you will find fault both with gods and men. But if you suppose that only to be your own which is your own, and what belongs to others such as it really is, then no one will ever compel you or restrain you. Further, you will find fault with no one or accuse no one. You will do nothing against your will. No one will hurt you, you will have no enemies, and you not be harmed" [27]. In fact, the only thing we can control in this world is our attitude to the situation. It is our attitude towards it that causes our poor mental health and well-being. Emotions are the result of our judgment, while things/situations themselves are neutral. They become positive or negative after we have thought about them in a certain way, i.e., have attributed certain value characteristics to them.

These ideas became inspirational to the development of cognitive-behavioral therapy [28]. The Stoic belief that not things make us happy or unhappy, but only the idea of them, became the background of rational emotive behavioral therapy founded by A. Ellis [29]. A recent study conducted at Birkbeck University of London indicates that cognitive trainings based on the ideas of Stoicism have a positive impact on the individuals with emotion regulation disorders [30]. One of the researchers A. MacLellan stated: "Our findings demonstrate potential for supporting emotional wellbeing through the practice of Stoicism which can be combined with other established cognitive interventions. Our study has implications for augmenting and supporting existing therapies, as well as providing a promising solution to bolster resilience in those at risk of anxiety and depression in an accessible and cost-effective way" [31]. Another study shows a positive effect of Stoic trainings on resilience and empathy of medical students [32]. In this way, in times of turmoil and uncertainty, ancient philosophy comes back into our life offering centuries-old recipes for overcoming crisis situations, thereby expanding the psychotherapist's toolkit.

In Eastern cultures, significant attention was paid to physical and mental health. Eastern philosophical traditions have greatly enriched humanity by providing methods for dealing with difficult life situations. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the spiritual heritage of the East attracts close attention and arouses keen interest of psychologists and psychiatrists, not to mention philosophers, religious and cultural scholars. For instance, Taoism, which has become increasingly popular, includes three relatively autonomous, but deeply interconnected levels – philosophical discourse, religious doctrine, and psycho-techniques. "Taoism is perhaps the only one religious and philosophical system that encourages its adherents to live a happy, long, healthy life in this (not in the transcendent) world. For Taoists, life is the highest value… Taoism has contributed to the development of science and medicine in China. Many herbs, minerals were discovered in the search for extraordinary means to prolong life or achieve immortality. Taiwanese say: "Confucianism is a food store, Buddhism is a department store, and Taoism is a drug store". Nowadays, Taoist practices of physical and spiritual healing, universal human development are well known outside of China" [33].

The Taoist worldview is based on the idea of qi – the grand vital force that permeates everything in the world; and the world exists due to its transformations. When something blocks the flow of qi in human body, an imbalance occurs and symptoms of disease are manifested. The experienced physicians can help to regulate the normal flow of qi and accordingly restore the balance that leads to healthy life. This is the basis of traditional Chinese medicine, which is closely connected to the practice of Taoism.

In contrast to the Western thought, which cut the world into material and ideal components, the Chinese philosophical tradition proposed the "third way" thereby overcoming the insurmountable boundary between matter and spirit: they are the different modes of one unified Qi. These ideas were manifested in the interpretation of the "mind-body" problem. According to Y. Lee and colleagues [34], Qi (Gih) is not static potential, but activation without

a goal. Qi (Gih) defines a two-way interaction between subject and object and is seen as a psychosomatic phenomenon that connects the mind and body. Y. Lee et al. distinguish between blood-Qi (Gih) and mind-Qi (Gih): "Blood-Gih denotes passion and intention and represents the activation from body (blood) to mind (emotion). By contrast, mind-Gih corresponds to the health and physical conditions as instances of activation from mind to body. Therefore, blood-Gih and mind-Gih possess features that can be characterized as activation and together represent a bi-direction of Gih, mind-to-body and body-to-mind. The question arises regarding how the blood or mind is compounded with Gih to direct the other. Both the blood and the mind are hypothesized to attain their relative properties. It is through psychosomatics that the body (blood) works with the mind" [34]. From the standpoint of Eastern philosophy and Eastern medical science, Gih (Qi) attempts to incorporate mental and biological processes by performing psychosomatic work [35]. Gih (Qi) has "the potential to activate and influence both the mind and the body, and its function is mediated by the hormonal metabolic and automatic nervous systems" [34]. Thus, Eastern philosophy laid the foundation of Eastern medical science, which is based on the control of the balanced circulation of Qi and aimed at harmonizing physical states and mental processes.

The philosophical ideas of the East have gradually evolved into practices that are now available throughout the world. Mind-body practices have attracted attention as useful complementary methods for dealing with chronic pain and distress associated with noncommunicable diseases. Although this approach alone cannot completely eradicate diseases, it can significantly improve psychological well-being and quality of life by reducing relevant symptoms along with physiological consequences of distress [36]. Mind-body practices may be seen as a fruitful strategy of complementary, holistic and integrative medicine that "focuses on the interactions among the brain, mind, body, and behavior, and the powerful ways in which emotional, mental, social, spiritual, and behavioral factors can directly affect health" [37]. These include Eastern physical, spiritual and intellectual practices such as yoga, tai chi, qigong, meditation, and mindfulness.

The practice of mindfulness is inextricably linked to psychological well-being. Awareness and non-judgmental acceptance of our experience are "regarded as potentially effective antidotes against common forms of psychological distress –rumination, anxiety, worry, fear, anger, and so on…" [38]. Mindfulness is the way of attentive living, attentive presence, attentive mind; this is the way to full human flourishing. The lesson we can learn from it is how to balance our actions with contemplation, which is to a large extent the task of philosophy.

Meditation, according to K. Wilber, is a "sustained instrumental path of transcendence" [39]. It is the deepest personal spiritual experience that can completely change the state of our mind. The goal of meditation techniques is to give our consciousness positive directions [40]. Mindfulness meditation is most systematically conceptualized in Buddhism; it is the method of dealing with consciousness, which has a philosophical and conceptual background and should be applied in accordance with special instructions. Buddhism as a universal theory of reality elaborated a concept of void – the ontological basis of freedom. "Modern psychotherapists often turn to the practice of meditation, because it leads to the true source of human beings, their true essence. A state of relaxation and an altered state of consciousness are both achieved through meditation that is especially effective in psychotherapy. But more than that, meditation is used as a method of personal growth so that a person can develop a more positive attitude towards life in general" [41]. The growth of interest in Zen Buddhist philosophy in the last third of the 20th century contributed to the popularity of meditative techniques and to their use in psychotherapy [42-46].

In the late 1970s, the practical implications of Eastern philosophy began to be studied as a method of improving psychological well-being. J. Kabat-Zinn [47] explored the use of mindfulness meditation in the treatment of patients with chronic pain that led to the development of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) were established on the basis of mindfulness-related principles and practices [48- 50]. Mindfulness meditation practices are associated with higher levels of positive emotions, optimism, life satisfaction, adequate self-esteem, empathy, autonomy, competence [51-55]. Mindfulness develops the ability to "detach" from one's thoughts and emotions and perceive them as transient mental "events" [48]. This helps to break the chain of negative thoughts, which is a risk factor for a number of mental disorders [56].

Practices based on Eastern philosophical traditions teach us to be "here and now" [57, 58], be at peace with ourselves and the world around us; they pave the way to a harmonious, balanced, and happy life.

CONCLUSIONS

It is no wonder that the influential Roman philosopher Boethius named his book "The Consolation of Philosophy". This book was written while Boethius was impris-

oned and was waiting to be executed; and this activity helped him to come to terms with the tragic situation.

Attempts to cope with life challenges, frustration, fear, anxiety, stress should not be isolated endeavors, but they need to be placed in a wider philosophical context, as far as every issue, including mental health issues, has a philosophical perspective at its core. Such experience can cultivate human strength, self-confidence, awareness, empathy. In times of uncertainty, when we do not know where to go, when we do not understand who we are and what is our purpose on earth, philosophy helps us to find our way. In the most difficult times, philosophy acts as a guiding star and consolation reconciling us with what we are unable to change.

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