

APPA Year-End Report for 2010

Memoirs from the 10th International Conference on Philosophical Practice

Leusden, Netherlands, August 11-14, 2010



Ideas Hatched Here, 10th ICPP (photo copyright © 2010 Anders Holt)

Memoir #1: **Vaughana Feary**

Memoir #2: **Peter Simpson**

Memoir #3: **George Hole**

Memoir #4: **Michael Russell**

Memoir #5: **Lou Marinoff**

Vaughana Feary

As always, arrival in Amsterdam is energizing. It was wonderful being with my old friend Ida Jongsma in her lovely new apartment overlooking the canals. Ida and iris Deveer, who together gave a very creative and entertaining workshop on cultural diversity, treated me to a lovely few days sampling the cultural riches of Amsterdam. It was an appropriate way to celebrate the start of another conference, because my first workshop in philosophical practice was Ida's workshop in Vancouver at the first conference for all of us (July 1994).

Of course, our Dutch friends did a wonderful job of organizing the 2010 conference and keeping all of us focused on the practical implications of our theories. My compliments and thanks to all the conference organizers who made us feel so comfortable and welcome. And, of course, the only problem at a conference in Holland is trying to decide how to find enough time to see old friends, to make new friends, and to hear many of the numerous cutting edge presentations and workshops. I needed at least three more days.

Of course I can mention only a few of the presentations here. Somehow I had never managed to attend a workshop conducted by Oscar Brenifier. In part because our styles are so different, I learned a great deal from him at this conference and look forward to attending one of his trainings in France in the future. Other choices were dictated by current research interests. I wish I could have attended all the workshops conducted by our previous Norwegian hosts, but I loved Pia Hverven Axell's workshop on her work with geriatric populations. It included a fascinating and very moving film on dialogues with some of her clients. Hopefully there is a forthcoming training manual in English from which I am sure we would all learn much. Richard Levi and his associates from Sweden gave a cutting edge presentation on philosophical practice in a rehabilitative hospital with which the APPA, through the training initiatives of Lou Marinoff

and Michael Russell, has been intimately involved. It was also a joy to meet the new stars of philosophical practice and our hosts for the next world conference, our Korean friends, Kim Sun-Hye and Young E. Rhee. It was my first introduction to Humanities Therapy. Finally Lou and I have had many adventures since we founded the APPA, and it was great fun working with him in the master class we conducted together.

Again my thanks to all of our Dutch friends. Old friends and new friends please let us know if you plan to be in the USA, and we will give you a warm welcome. I certainly hope to see most of you again in Korea in 2012. Happy New Year to all!



Will Heutz and Vaughana Feary strike a happy pose.
(photo copyright © 2010 Anders Holt)

Peter Simpson

A very enjoyable occasion meeting lots of new and interesting people doing lots of new and interesting things in philosophical practice. It was especially pleasing to meet face to face the medical professionals involved in the Swedish project counseling people with traumatic injuries. Their report is in a recent issue of APPA's journal (Vol. 5.2) but putting faces to names is always a plus. An unlikely surprise was meeting a philosopher from Botswana who has been hired by the military there to train young officers in how to think outside the box: an unusual request and an unusual challenge. Another surprising experience was being Socratically dialogued by a Belgian school teacher into working out why it is impossible to find a single path that crosses all the bridges in Kant's Königsberg just once each. Meeting and listening to the renowned Gerd Achenbach was also a treat as was also helping three others to put his talk, which was in German, into decent English for those who could not follow the German original. In fact, being the bookish type that I am, what I most treasure coming home with was a copy of Achenbach's collected articles and talks as well as a book on Socratic dialogue, both in German. There's some good stuff in both which perhaps I'll try to put into English in an idle moment or two.



Peter Simpson (center right, in red) ponders a problem.
(photo copyright © 2010 Anders Holt)

George Hole

It was exciting to attend a conference on philosophical practice. Quite a refreshing change from the usual philosophy where overly specialized papers are read.

Several presentations stay fresh in memory. I attended a demonstration session on Existential Group Therapy, directed by J. Michael Russell. It was painfully evident how one volunteer member of the demonstration group was insensitive and obtuse in his persistently narrow analytical response to a woman who revealed a troublesome aspect of her life. As the session was ending, in front of all in attendance, I criticize his behavior. Even though several people in attendance complimented me on my forthrightness, I was troubled by my public criticism. At lunch I half apologized to the person I criticized. I explained why I thought he was insensitive, not revealing his feeling-full response, then acknowledge how I have done the same. I learned again, not easily, what personal issues are manifest in my angry moralistic response to another person.

Another session was presented by a medical doctor (Richard Levi) explaining his work with paraplegics. He was followed by therapist “interviewing” a person who suffered a cervical spine injury (Dr. Claes Hultling), leaving him paralyzed. In spite of his severe injury he completed his medical training and still has a long and successful career as a doctor. When the therapist asked him how came to accept his condition, he adamantly replied that he never would. He explained that if he accepted the label “paraplegic” he would limit himself in a demeaning way. Denial, I realized, can be life-affirming.

Lou Marinoff delivered, with humor and passion, the closing remarks emphasizing the vitality and critical mission of philosophical practice. The sessions I attended showed not only how dedicated so many are to this international mission but also how varied practice is. (I

remember I was so excited to attend one session that I arrive early and took a seat in the front row. As the room filled the presenter began to converse in German. As the session began I realized it would also be in German. I made a clumsy exit, leaving my umbrella under my chair.) Conversations between sessions were stimulating. It was also heartwarming to renew contact and discussion with APPA members like Vaughana Feary.



George Hole, second from right, peruses a handout
Right: Richard Levi
(photo copyright © 2010 Anders Holt)

Michael Russell

Roughly one half a year later, the 10th International Conference on Philosophical Practice continues to sit well with me. The hospitality of our hosts had a lot to do with this. The ambience was practically flawless, both in terms of physical setting and the graciousness of those who put the event together. This, and limiting the number of attendees, contributed to an environment of cordial interaction and mingling. At the risk of demonstrating my own naiveté, I did not see much evidence of polarizing and politics, even at the meetings where political or ideological agendas could be identified. Philosophers with diverse agendas and perspectives seemed to be getting along well. Ruud Meij started off each day instructing us about this or that Dutch term, picking words that set the tone of the conference. *Gedogen*, for instance, means tolerance, and learning about this word led to suggestions about how philosophical practitioners might find constructive ways of tolerating different varieties of philosophical practice.

Granting the success of creating an amiable and tolerant climate, I will say that I often got the impression that many philosophical practitioners are too much wanting to come to some agreement about *the* (essential) nature of philosophical counseling or practice. What I would like to see is promoting philosophy and promoting creative and diverse ways of putting it into practice. Rather than pressing for an answer to ‘What *is* philosophical counseling?’ I would prefer ‘What *can* it be?’ so that there is an open-ended exploration of quite varied ideas on how philosophy might be put to practical use. I think—I hope—we are moving in that direction.

There were a lot of really fine presentations. Among these, Lydia Amir (Israel) gave a wonderful talk about it’s being a task for philosophy to change the values of society, and the role of laughter in promoting such transformation. Richard Levi and his Swedish colleagues gave an account of the dramatic utilization of philosophical counseling within a medical context, for

persons suffering spinal injuries. Lou Marinoff (USA) provided a first-rate set of reflections at the closing of the conference, including a portrait of Buddha and Confucius as philosophical counselors and practitioners. Workshop presenters were encouraged to highlight specifics in how they actually work and many of them did so. I would have liked even more “hands on” demonstrations, but there were plenty of good ones.

It was particularly gratifying to me to find such a high caliber of attendees. I think a fear I initially had about philosophical practice, when it first started to get some public visibility in the 80s, is that it would attract academics with clumsy interpersonal skills, or else flakey philosophers lacking in academic sophistication. It was a pleasure to find ample evidence at this conference (as I have found in numerous training and certification retreats) that really bright and responsible people are being drawn to this developing professional vision.



Michael Russell conducts a master class
Rear: Vaughana Feary, Gabrielle Aruta (standing)
(photo copyright © 2010 Anders Holt)

Lou Marinoff

We all have personal highlights from 2010. But the "collective" highlight for philosophical practitioners was surely the 10th International Conference on Philosophical Practice, ably organized by the Dutch Society for Philosophical Practice. Once again, they wisely sequestered us in the countryside, far from Amsterdam's distractions (or focal points, depending on your perspective).

This 10th conference was distinguished by a truly global representation. It included practitioners from Africa, East Asia, E.U., India, Israel, Scandinavia, South America, North America, and the U.K. It also featured a proliferation of master-classes and workshops -- many conducted by APPA faculty -- as well as entertaining plenary lectures by Ruud Meij, Lydia Amir, Oscar Brenifier, and Carmen Zavala. There were high degrees of collegiality, amity, and harmony at this event, and all participants are to be commended for their contributions. Leon de Haas, the conference organizer, deserves enormous credit for making everything run so smoothly and memorably.

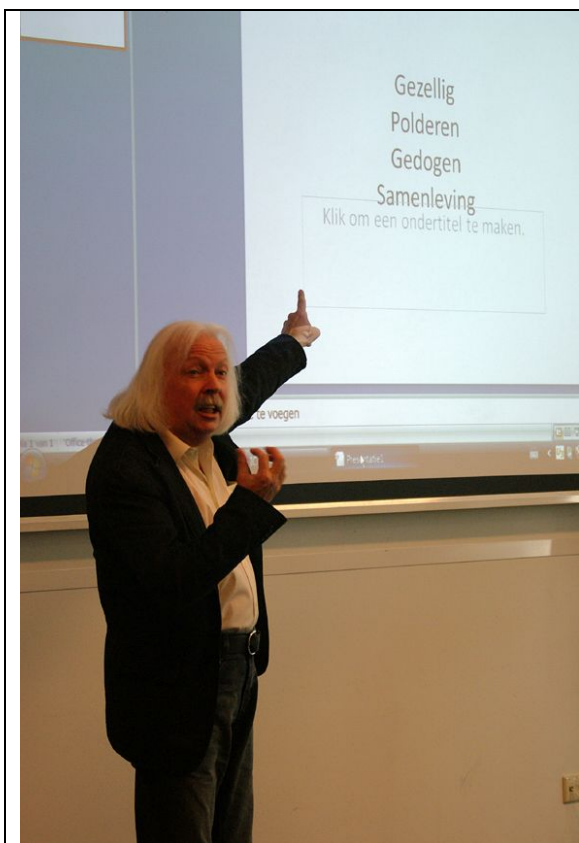
As far as APPA was concerned, all the presenters fared really well. George Hole led an exemplary workshop on Stoicism, drawing on Albert Ellis's R.E.T as well as on Zen. Michael Russell's master class on Existential methods generated a big buzz; everyone was talking about it afterwards. Our Swedish colleagues Claes Hultling Richard Levi, and Jon Aronsen gave a polished presentation on philosophical counseling for spinal-injured patients, which riveted the audience. Lydia Amir gave a wonderful plenary lecture on humor in philosophy, which had us all in stitches. Vaughana Feary, with whom I had the privilege of co-conducting a master class, commanded enormous interest and respect for her pioneering efforts and ponderable expertise in bringing philosophy to incarcerated felons as well as to cancer survivors.

Ruud Meij tried gallantly and humorously to teach us a new Dutch word, and cognate concept, at each morning's plenary. I for one did my best to learn Dutch, but probably failed. My keenest recollection is of the word "polderen." As far as I can recall from Ruud's lecture, "polderen" is something the Dutch do on their way to eating space-cake in coffeehouses. A great time was had by all at this conference, and no doubt by some immediately afterwards, as we strove to put our newly-acquired Dutch into practice.

On a more serious note, APPA will have the honor of publishing a special issue of our Journal (Volume 6.1) devoted to the 10th Conference. It will be guest-edited and introduced by Leon de Haas, and is slated to appear this March 2011. Contributors will include Roxanna Kreimer of Argentina, Carmen Zavala of Peru, Ibanga Ikpe of Botswana, Thomas Gutknecht of Germany, and Young. E. Rhee of South Korea. The South Koreans will host the 11th ICPP in 2012, and I hope to see you there.



Vaughana Feary and Lou Marinoff conduct a master class
(photo copyright © 2010 Anders Holt)



Above: Ida Jongsma leads a workshop

Left: Ruud Meij gives a Dutch lesson



Above: Oscar Brenifier leads a discussion group

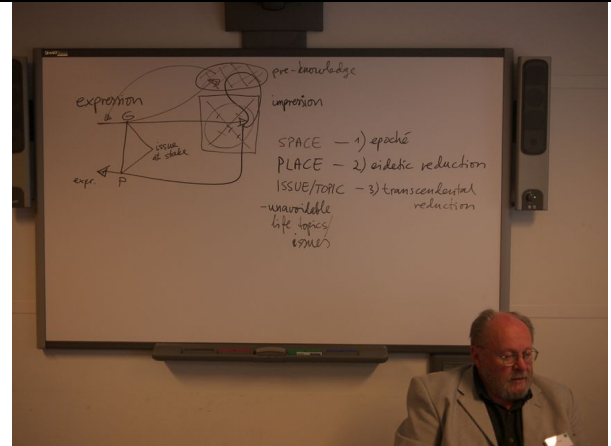
Right: Lydia Amir waxes eloquent



(photos copyright © 2010 Anders Holt)



Claes Hultling, Michael Russell, Jorn Kroll (on the left) and others share a laugh.



Anders Lindseth, the "Godfather" of PC in Norway, conducts a master class.



Dries Boele facilitates a Socratic dialogue



Lou Marinoff gives the closing plenary address



Absent space cake, philosophers revert to local vices.



Applause for Leon de Haas (in scarf) and other organizers

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Vaughana Feary is a founding Director and Vice President of APPA. She is also President of the Excalibur Center for Applied Ethics in Stockton, NJ, and former professor of philosophy at Fairleigh Dickinson University. Vaughana is a pioneer of philosophical practice with incarcerated populations, as well as with cancer survivors.

Peter L. P. Simpson is professor of Philosophy and Classics at the City University of New York, Graduate Center and College of Staten Island. His main interests and publications in philosophy are Ancient and Medieval Philosophy and Moral and Political Philosophy. He has an amateur interest in Theology.

George T. Hole is Distinguished Teaching Professor in philosophy at Buffalo State College. He is a certified philosophical counselor, and the Chair of APPA's Board of Professional Examiners. George has advanced certification in rational emotive behavior therapy from the Albert Ellis Institute. He is a regular contributor to APPA's journal, *Philosophical Practice*.

J. Michael Russell is professor emeritus of philosophy and human services at Cal State Fullerton. He has been a philosophical counselor since the 1970s (i.e. well before Achenbach). Michael is also a certified psychoanalyst and a training analyst. One of his specialties is existential group work.

Lou Marinoff is founding President of APPA, and founding editor of its Journal. He is also professor and sometime chair of philosophy at The City College of New York. He is a pioneer of contemporary philosophical practice, and the author of several books and numerous publications.