Would Socrates be Diagnosed as Mentally Ill? Observations on our Mental Health Philosophy Café

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Abstract

This report documents an important new development in practical philosophy: a philosophical discussion café whose primary focus is on mental health and mental healthcare related issues. Discussed are the benefits of this group to so-called mental healthcare 'consumers,' family members, friends, mental healthcare professionals and administrators. Also considered are concerns raised about the advisability of training senior university students to facilitate this type of café. Endorsement for the program is included in the form of feedback from various participants and students.

Keywords: philosophy café, mental healthcare 'consumers', facilitator training, mental illness, psychotherapy, university students, feedback effect, charitable understanding, metaphysical shift.

Philosophers, Ethics and Emotions

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Abstract

In this paper I continue to probe the roles of philosophy and psychology in moral education. In a previous article published in this journal, I criticized the moral views of various schools of psychotherapy, and argued that philosophers are the sole professionals equipped to teach normative morality in a pluralistic, critical, and reasoned way (Amir, 2005). In this paper, I argue that effective moral education involves emotional education; that philosophers' views of emotions tend to be reductive, and when they are not, they point to an irreducibility of affectivity which is not amenable to philosophical investigation. While emotional and moral education should go hand in hand, philosophers seem poorly equipped for the former. Psychotherapists are trained in educating emotions and in attending the irreducible affectivity of individual emotions. Interested as we might be in psychotherapists' specialization in emotional education, we cannot dissociate it from moral education, as emotional education is not value-free. Recalling that psychological theories involve views of morality which do not withstand critical examination (Amir, 2005), we are reluctant to entrust psychotherapists with moral education. Turning once again to psychology, we realize that we have added a new complexity to the initial problematic status of psychological moral education. While emotional and moral education should go hand in hand, the untenable situation that obtains is that philosophers educate us morally while psychologists educate us emotionally. Moral education is impaired whether it is left to psychotherapists or to philosophers. I conclude by sharing some thoughts on the possibilities of amending this situation.

Keywords: Ethical theory, moral education, moral psychology, emotions, feelings, emotional education, psychology, psychotherapy

William James on 'Immortality' An Example of Group Philosophical Counseling

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Abstract

William James, phenomenologist and pragmatist, wrote and lectured much for the general public that was meant to be inspiring, liberating, and constructive for the practical needs of living. He was, in short, along with many other accomplishments, a philosophical counselor. In this essay, I look at his Ingersoll Lecture at Harvard as an example of James addressing the spiritual malaise of the age. The target issue, life after death, leads James into several conceptual revisionings that have profound human consequences.

Keywords: survival, consciousness, imagination, mind-brain theory.

Supervision and Case Notes in Philosophical Counselling Practice

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Abstract

This paper recounts experience from the author's philosophical counseling supervision experience. The paper then gives an overview of the narrative turn in bioethics, showing how the bioethical narrative turn disputes the assumption that client case notes can provide reliable empirical information about what happens in philosophical counseling sessions. The paper concludes that interpretation by philosophical peer reviewers is an in-eliminable aspect of peer review. Accountability for our counseling practices and improvement in them requires that we avoid a solipsistic stance and submit in some way to the interpretive interventions of other philosophical counselors.

Keywords: bioethics, narratology, supervision, philosophical counselling