



PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

Journal of the APPA

Volume 18 Number 2 July 2023

Editor

Lou Marinoff

Reviews Editor

Leslie Miller

Associate Editor

Carol S. Gould

Associate Editor

Johnson Cheung

Technical Consultant

Greg Goode

Legal Consultant

Thomas Griffith

Articles

Massimo Pigliucci

The Quest for Character: Five Insights

Jeremy Gallegos

*Hume's Psychology and Artificial Virtues
as Applied to Philosophical Practice*

Martin Carmann

*Obsessed with Truth? Deconstructing
Oscar Brenifier's "Phenomenology of Lying"*

Peter B. Raabe

*Approaching Elsewhere:
On Fear of 'The After-life'*

Book Reviews

La Regola Della Vita: Il Morire e L'angoscia di Morte

Reviewed by Anna Sordini

Sick Souls, Healthy Minds:

How William James Can Save Your Life

Reviewed by Peter Vernezze

You: A Natural History

Reviewed by Miriam Van Der Valk

Biographies of Contributors

Philosophical Practice

Journal of the APPA

Editor: Lou Marinoff

The City College of New York

Associate Editor: Carol S. Gould

Florida Atlantic University

Legal Consultant: Thomas Griffith

Macala & Piatt, LLC, North Canton, Ohio

Reviews Editor: Leslie Miller

Colorado Mesa University

Associate Editor: Johnson Cheung

The University of Hong Kong

Technical Consultant: Greg Goode

Davis, Polk & Wardell, New York

National Editorial Board

Kevin Boileau

Seattle, WA

Antonio de Nicolas

Biocultural Research Institute, Gainesville, FL

Vaughana Feary

Excalibur Center for Applied Ethics, Stockton, NJ

Carol S. Gould

Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL

Michael Grosso

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA

Chris Johns

Saint Xavier University, Chicago, IL

Andrew Light

University of Washington, Seattle, WA

Marianne Patinelli-Dubay

SUNY College of Environmental Science, NY

J. Michael Russell

Cal State Fullerton, CA

Lauren Tillinghast

New York University, NY

Seamus Carey

Manhattan College, Bronx, NY

Peter Dlugos

Bergen Community College, Paramus NJ

Andrew Fitz-Gibbon

SUNY Cortland, NY

Pierre Grimes

Opening Mind Academy, Los Angeles, CA

George Hole

SUNY Buffalo State College, NY

Ruth Kastner

University of Maryland, College Park, MD

Kate Mehuron

Eastern Michigan University

Christian Perring

Dowling College, Long Island, NY

Peter Simpson

CUNY Graduate Center, New York, NY

James Tuedio

Cal State Stanislaus, CA

International Editorial Board

Lydia Amir

Academic College Beit Berl, Israel

Paola Grassi

University of Padua, Italy

Henning Herrestad

University of Oslo, Norway

Andres Jaliff

University of Montevideo, Uruguay

Ignacio Miralbell

University of Adolfo Ibanez of Santiago, Chile

Tianqun Pan

Nanjing University, China

José Barrientos Rastrojo

University of Sevilla, Spain

David Berman

Trinity College Dublin, Eire

Ora Gruengard

Shenkar College, Ramat Gan, Israel

Alex Howard

Newcastle University, UK

Giselle Monges

Centro Cultural Borges, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Michael Picard

Douglas College, B.C., Canada

Thomas Schramme

University of Liverpool, UK

David Sumiacher

CECAPFI, Mexico City, Mexico

Subscriptions, Advertisements, Submissions

Publication Details: Published by the American Philosophical Practitioners Association. Three issues per annum. ISSN Online 1742-8181

Subscription Rates: Institutional and individual subscriptions are available, in either print editions or soft copy. Discounts for APPA members. Please see <https://appa.edu/journal/> for rates.

Advertising Rates: Full page \$750, half page \$400. Acceptable file formats include JPEG, TIFF, PNG. To place an ad, please contact lou.marinoff@appa.edu

Aims and Scope: Philosophical Practice is a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to the growing field of philosophical practice. The journal covers substantive issues in the areas of client counseling, group facilitation, and organizational consulting. It provides a forum for discussing professional, ethical, legal, sociological, and political aspects of philosophical practice, as well as juxtapositions of philosophical practice with other professions. Articles may address theories or methodologies of philosophical practice; present or critique case-studies; assess developmental frameworks or research programs; and offer commentary on previous publications. The journal also has an active book review and correspondence section.

Instructions for Authors: Papers may be theoretical, empirical or review articles. They will usually be around 6,000 words although, where merited, longer submissions will be considered. Shorter articles on research findings, methods and techniques (up to 4,000 words), or book reviews (up to 2,000 words) or compendium reviews (up to 3,000 words) are also invited. *Letters to the Editor* (up to 1,000 words), on any relevant topic, are invited as well. Manuscripts are welcomed from any country although the language of the journal is English. All contributions will be anonymously reviewed, either by members of the Editorial Boards or by panels of *ad hoc* Reviewers drawn from practitioners, researchers, academics or others who have made significant contributions to the field. Decisions regarding publication will be made by the Editors with advice from the Editorial Boards or Reviewers, with feedback provided to authors on decisions taken. Editors can be contacted by potential contributors wishing to discuss a proposal or seeking advice or guidance on preparation of a submission.

Address for Correspondence: Manuscripts should be submitted as email attachments in Microsoft Word, to lou.marinoff@appa.edu and cc'd to johnson.cheung@appa.edu

Guidelines for Manuscripts: Manuscripts must be double-spaced MS-Word documents (docx). The word-count should be stated. The title should be brief and indicate the main topic of the article. A list of up to eight keywords should be supplied, as well as a summary abstract of up to 150 words. Authors' names should be given in full on a separate sheet. Authors should provide brief details (up to 50 words) of professional autobiography. Authors' address, telephone, fax and email details should be included. Where there are two or more authors, a single contact for correspondence and proofs should be indicated.

Guidelines for Book Reviews: The main theme of the book should be clearly presented but it is not the purpose of a review to summarize the book. Reviews should evaluate the book in relation to other significant work on the subject. Reviewers should assess the book the author has written rather than use the review as a vehicle for their own opinions, and should back up criticisms with reference to specific instances in the text wherever possible. Apart from minor editions the Reviews Editor will not alter or cut without prior consultation with the reviewer. The invitation to review a book, however, does not constitute a guarantee that the manuscript will be published. To submit a book review, or a book to be reviewed, please contact leslie.miller@appa.edu

Referencing Books:

Feary, V. (2002). *Medicine for the soul: Philosophical counselling with cancer patients*. In H. Herrestad, A. Holt, H. Svare (Eds.), *Philosophy in Society*. Oslo: Unipub Forlag.

Grimes, P., Uliana, R. (1998). *Philosophical midwifery: A new paradigm for understanding human problems*. Coast Mesa, CA: Hyparxis Press.

Referencing Articles:

Koch, A. (2000). Absolutism and relativism: Practical implications for philosophical counseling. *Journal of Philosophy in the Contemporary World*, 7, 25-31.

Only works actually cited in the text should be included in the references. Indicate in the text by putting inside brackets the author's name and year of publication. References should be listed in alphabetical order at the end of the article. Publications from the same author in a single year should use a, b, c, etc.

Footnotes and Tables: Footnotes are not normally permitted but endnotes may be used if necessary. Tables should be Word objects, laid out clearly and supplied on separate pages, with an indication within the text of their approximate location. Vertical lines should be omitted, and horizontal lines limited to those indicating the top and bottom of the table, below column headings and above summed totals. Totals and percentages should be labelled clearly.

Guidelines for Graphical Images: Graphical images must be of professional quality and included as separate high-resolution files. Each image must be attached and named chronologically "figure 1," "figure 2," etc. Images must not be embedded in the manuscript itself. The approximate location of each image should be indicated in the manuscript with a stand-alone sentence: "Figure 1 approximately here," etc. Acceptable file formats: JPF and TIFF. Minimum resolution 300ppi. For images in other formats, such as AI, PSD or EPS, please consult with the editors prior to submission. Maximum image size: 1/2 page (approx. 6" wide by 4" tall).

NB: Images that do not conform to these guidelines will be rejected as unsuitable. If authors cannot furnish suitable images, APPA may undertake to produce suitable images, with prior consultation and subject to a mutually agreed-on set-up fee. Submissions that are otherwise acceptable, but which contain unsuitable images, may be subject to delays in publication.

Copyright: Manuscripts are considered on the understanding that they are not being considered concurrently by another journal. On acceptance you will be asked to assign copyright in your article to the Journal. Consent for reproduction of your article in collections of your work appearing subsequent to publication will be given without charge, contingent on full citation of your article herein.

Electronic offprints: Authors will receive stand-alone PDFs of their articles, reviews or letters, which they may freely disseminate in accordance with the provisions of the copyright agreement. Authors will also receive a complete PDF of the Journal issue in which their contributions appear, which in accordance with the copyright agreement is not for dissemination without the explicit permission of APPA.

Philosophical Practice is published under the auspices of the American Philosophical Practitioners Association (APPA). Neither APPA nor its Editorial Boards hold themselves responsible for the views expressed by contributors.

Editorial Office: APPA, The City College of New York, 160 Convent Avenue, New York, NY 10031, USA | admin@appa.edu | <https://appa.edu>

Philosophical Practice

Journal of the APPA

Volume 18 Number 2 July 2023

Table of Contents

Articles

- Massimo Pigliucci 3098
The Quest for Character: Five Insights
- Jeremy Gallegos 3105
*Hume's Psychology and Artificial Virtues
as Applied to Philosophical Practice*
- Martin Carmann 3116
*Obsessed with Truth? Deconstructing
Oscar Brenifier's "Phenomenology of Lying"*
- Peter B. Raabe 3129
*Approaching Elsewhere:
On Fear of 'The After-life'*

Book Reviews

- La Regola Della Vita: Il Morire e L'angoscia di Morte*
Reviewed by Anna Sordini 3142
- Sick Souls, Healthy Minds:
How William James Can Save Your Life*
Reviewed by Peter Vernezze 3145
- You: A Natural History*
Reviewed by Miriam Van Der Valk 3149

- Biographies of Contributors 3152

The Quest for Character: Five Insights

MASSIMO PIGLIUCCI

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY, CITY COLLEGE OF NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Abstract

Character is a central concept in virtue ethics, and therefore in a number of approaches to philosophical counseling. In this paper I summarize five practical insights from the research that went into writing a book on character and leadership, *The Quest for Character: What the Story of Socrates and Alcibiades Teaches Us about Our Search for Good Leaders*. The insights are derived from a study of Greco-Roman practical philosophical traditions, updated by the findings of modern research in cognitive and behavioral science.

Keywords: *character, virtue ethics, Socrates*

Introduction: The Quest for Character

Character, specifically my own and that of my clients, has been at the forefront of my thinking for a number of years now. After all, the betterment of one's character is a good way to describe the major goal of philosophical counseling (Fatic 2013), especially practiced the way I do it, heavily informed by Greco-Roman virtue ethics (Hadot 1995; Pigliucci 2017).

That's why I recently wrote *The Quest for Character: What the Story of Socrates and Alcibiades Teaches Us about Our Search for Good Leaders* (Pigliucci 2022). In a sense, the book puts together much of what I've learned about character from both a philosophical and a scientific standpoint, applying it not just to the specific question of what makes for a good leader, but more broadly the question of what makes for a good human being.

The Quest for Character examines the issue using examples from Greco-Roman antiquity, for two reasons. First, because human nature hasn't changed, and some of the insights of the best of our forerunners are just as good as those of any modern psychologist or sociologist. Second, because it's easier to learn from other people's examples if those people are sufficiently removed in time from us that we don't have much of an emotional stake in whether they were right or wrong, good or bad. Some people get upset at the mere mention of Barack Obama or Donald Trump, but hopefully they don't feel so strongly—and can therefore think more clearly—about Julius Caesar or Marcus Junius Brutus.

While the reader may be interested in checking the full book, here are the five major insights I have arrived at while writing it. With luck, they'll be useful to fellow counselors and their clients.

Insight n. 1: Virtue can (and should) be taught

Nowadays when we hear talk of virtue we tend to think of old fashioned Victorian characters, or perhaps of the Christian virtues of hope, faith, and charity (Murphy et al. 2003). But the word

“virtue” comes from the Greek *arete*, which means excellence. So a virtuous person is an excellent person, the best person they can be (Devettere 2002).

What does that mean? The ancient Greco-Romans thought that being excellent means performing one’s function well (Korsgaard 1986). For instance, I recently bought an *arete* bread knife. Meaning a knife that does well what it is supposed to do: cut bread.

By analogy, an excellent human being is one who does well what human beings are designed by Nature to do. Since our distinctive characteristics are that we are highly intelligent and highly social animals, our natural function is to use our brains to solve problems, and to do so in a socially cooperative fashion. That’s how we survive and flourish as a species. It’s not just the ancients who say so (Diogenes Laertius 2018, book 7), this view of humanity actually jibes well with the discoveries of modern primatologists and evolutionary biologists (de Waal 2016). Large brains are our chief evolutionary weapon, and social living is a crucial characteristic of our species.

According to the Greco-Romans, virtue understood as human excellence is a skill (*techne*) and therefore can be taught, just like any other skill (see the Protagoras: Plato 2005). Imagine you wished to learn a musical instrument, or maybe a new language. How do you go about it? You will learn some basic musical theory or grammar; you will get a good teacher who can guide you; and then you’ll practice, practice, practice. The same goes for virtue: you become a better person by learning a bit about ethics, by following a good teacher like Socrates, and by engaging in a lot of practice (Begley et al. 2006).

But how, exactly, does one practice virtue? Suppose that you feel like you are not generous enough, for instance. One way to improve at this might be to get into the habit of putting some change into your pocket before leaving your house, and then give that money to the first homeless person you encounter—no questions asked. This will initially be awkward, perhaps embarrassing even. But the more you do it, the more it will become second nature. And you’ll soon be on your way to becoming a more generous person.

Insight n. 2: If you are not virtuous, don’t get into politics

The subtitle of *The Quest for Character* is “What the Story of Socrates and Alcibiades Teaches Us About Our Search for Good Leaders.” That’s because that particular story provides the starting point for my project. And it is a story well worth knowing.

Alcibiades was a friend and student of Socrates (Stuttard 2018). He was impossibly handsome, uber-rich, brave, and descended from one of the noblest families in Athens. In other words, he had everything one might want in order to become a leader. Except a good character.

As recounted in the *Alcibiades Major*, attributed to Plato (Johnson 2002), Alcibiades goes to Socrates to ask for advice, and the philosopher basically subjects the young man to a job interview, where the job is leading Athens in the middle of the Peloponnesian War against its rival, Sparta (Thucydides 1972).

Socrates pretty quickly figures out that Alcibiades does not have what it takes. He is too narcissistic, wanting to be a leader not for the good of the people, but to engage in self-aggrandizement. Does that ring a bell? Does it perhaps remind you of some modern leaders? At one point Socrates lays it out clearly and bluntly to his friend. He says:

“Then alas, Alcibiades, what a condition you suffer from! I hesitate to name it, but it must be said. You are wedded to stupidity, best of men, of the most extreme sort, as the argument accuses you and you accuse yourself. So this is why you are leaping into the affairs of the city before you have been educated.” (Plato, Alcibiades I)

The Greek word usually translated in the above passage as “stupidity” is *amatia*, which is perhaps best rendered as “unwisdom.” Socrates is saying that Alcibiades lacks the wisdom necessary to run the country. Unfortunately, Alcibiades did not follow Socrates’ advice, went into politics anyway, and—predictably—led Athens to final disaster. The moral of the story: don’t get into politics unless you have a good character and good motivations.

Insight n. 3: A good character is an inside job

The Quest for Character examines a number of case studies from the ancient world, both of politicians that were advised by philosophers, as well as of statesmen who practiced philosophy as a way of life of their own accord. On balance, it turns out that when someone is not receptive to external advice, they will not fare well as statesmen. By contrast, when a future leader grows up wanting to be a good person and working on behalf of others, then they do much better.

For instance, Plato, the most well known of Socrates’s students, tried to instill virtue in Dionysius the Second of Syracuse, in Sicily (Reid and Ralkowski 2019). He failed abysmally, because Dionysius was simply not interested in anything other than self-serving behavior. In fact, Plato almost lost his life in the endeavor.

By contrast, the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius really did try to govern in the best manner possible, and he was guided in his efforts by his chosen philosophy of Stoicism (Hadot 1998). The important difference with Dionysius is that Marcus wanted to do good, and realized that listening to his philosophical mentor—a Stoic named Junius Rusticus—was important.

Modern understanding agrees with the intuitions of the Greco-Romans: while we can effectively teach ethics to young children, because their brains are not yet fully formed, adults will be receptive to such teachings only if they are already interested in self-improvement. Again, it’s like learning a musical instrument or a language: much easier if done early in life, though even old people can still do it, if they want to.

Insight n. 4: We should all be “philosophers”

These days philosophy tends to get a bad rap. Philosophers are imagined by people to be stuffy academics who spend their time engaging in navel gazing, thinking deep thoughts about abstruse matters nobody else cares for. There is, unfortunately, some truth to this view. But a philosopher, in ancient Greece and Rome, was someone who practiced the art of living (Sellars 2009), that is, who used critical thinking and wisdom in order to navigate life’s challenges.

In that sense, anyone can be a philosopher, no PhD required! All you need to have is a functional brain and the willingness to use it. A philosopher of this kind will spend most of their time actually living life in the here and now, paying attention to the world and the people in it, and constantly trying to handle situations in the best way possible.

A philosopher of the sort we are talking about will use, for instance, the four cardinal virtues as a moral compass of sorts: practical wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance (Carr 1988).

Practical wisdom is the knowledge of what truly is, or is not, good for us. (Regardless of what others, or society at large, may tell us.)

Courage is the willingness to act in the right manner even when there is a personal cost.

Justice means to treat others fairly and with respect, the way we would like to be treated.

And *temperance* means to act in right measure, neither too much nor too little.

For instance, suppose I walk into my place of work and find my boss harassing a co-worker. Should I intervene? How? I consult my moral compass:

Practical wisdom tells me that it is good for my own character to be helpful to others, because it makes me a better person.

Courage is required because my boss may retaliate.

Justice says that I should intervene because if I were the one being harassed I very much would like to have someone help out and diffuse the situation.

In terms of temperance, my intervention should be proportionate to the situation. I don't need to start punching my boss, for instance; but I also can't just whisper something under my breath and call it a day. I need to step in firmly but gently.

The radical Greco-Roman idea is that if we all tried to live like philosophers in this sense, the world would be a much better place. So, be a philosopher!

Insight n. 5: What works and doesn't work when it comes to improving our character

As we have seen, improving our character is a skill. But what sort of things work or don't work when it comes to becoming a better person? (See also: Miller 2017) Let's start with what doesn't work.

For one thing, doing nothing doesn't work. You often hear that people become wiser as they get older. But that's not really the case. There are a lot of cranky old people out there who are not wise (Sternberg 2005).

Age is necessary in order to become wiser, but it isn't sufficient by itself. It's necessary because wisdom requires accumulated experience—just like playing well a musical instrument is something

that requires a lot of practice. But it has to be *mindful* practice: we need to pay attention to what happens to us and why, and actively try to learn from our experiences.

A second thing that doesn't work is actually very popular these days: nudging (Hummel and Maedche 2019). If you are a man you have seen public urinals with a fly drawn where you are supposed to hit. That's an example of nudging: someone designs a system that effectively manipulates people's behaviors in a desired direction.

But nudging does not improve character since it isn't designed to do so. You will hit the fly not because you are convinced that it is good not to urinate on the floor; you'll hit the fly because now you are engaged in a game. Your motivation, in other words, is not the right one.

A third thing that doesn't work is virtue labeling, you know, as when you tell your child that he is brilliant even though he clearly isn't. Repeating the lie for encouragement's sake will not make him brilliant. Study hard might.

What does work in order to develop a better character? For instance, adopting a role model. Pick someone you admire, regardless of whether you know them or not. Pick Socrates, or Buddha, or your grandmother. It doesn't matter who you choose, so long as you always ask yourself the crucial question: "what would my role model do?"

That's what the ancient Greco-Romans did, and empirical evidence from modern science shows they were right: people tend to behave more ethically if they get into the habit of thinking about their role model (Brown and Treviño 2014).

Another thing that works, if we want to become better people, is to keep track of our own progress. It's sometimes referred to as philosophical journaling (Brett 2007), and a very good example is provided by Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*. In the book, which was really his personal diary, the Roman emperor critically examined his own behavior, repeatedly prodding himself to do better.

For example, let's say you had an altercation with your partner today. What did you do wrong? What did you do right? And what could you do better next time that something like this happens? By paying attention to both your mistakes and your successes, and by preparing your mind for future occurrences, you gradually become better at the business of life.

One more thing that works is to purposely seek out situations that train you to improve your character. For instance, let's say you realize that you are a bit deficient in temperance. Well, then, the Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus (2020) pointed out that we have at least three occasions daily to practice our temperance: every time we sit down to have a meal.

Before you start eating, remind yourself that you don't just want to nourish your body and enjoy good food. You also want to improve your character. Then visualize ahead of time how much food and drink is reasonable to consume, and try to stick with it throughout the actual meal.

It's okay if you slip up. You can make note of the mistake and correct it the next time around. The idea, which goes back to Aristotle and the Stoics, is that, in a sense, you fake it until you make it.

Initially the behavior will feel awkward, but you'll soon get used to it, and it eventually will become second nature.

Those are some of the insights from *The Quest for Character*. Let me leave you with an appropriate quote from one of my favorite Stoic philosophers, Seneca, about whom I write in the book. He said:

“Fortune has no jurisdiction over character.” (Letter 36.6, 2015)

Meaning that improving our character is up to us, while other things—like health, wealth, and reputation—are ultimately the result of external factors that are not under our complete purview. Let us work on our character, then, and we'll be in charge of what really matters in our life.

Presented at the APPA meeting on 16 July 2022.

References

- Begley, A.M. (2006) Facilitating the development of moral insight in practice: teaching ethics and teaching virtue. *Nursing Philosophy* 7(4):257-265.
- Brett, Z. (2007) Journaling: an underutilized school counseling tool. *Journal of School Counseling*, 5(9), 30 pp.
- Brown, M.E. and Treviño, L.K. (2014) Do role models matter? An investigation of role modeling as an antecedent of perceived ethical leadership. *Journal of Business Ethics* 122:587–598.
- Carr, D. (1988) The cardinal virtues and Plato's moral psychology. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 38(151):186-200.
- de Waal, F. (2016) *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Devettere, R.J. (2002) *Introduction to virtue ethics: Insights of the ancient Greeks*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Diogenes Laertius (2018) *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*. Translated by P. Mensch, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Fatic, A. (2013) Projecting “the good life” in philosophical counseling. *Philosophical Practice*, 8(3), 1242-1252.
- Hadot, P. (1995) *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Hadot, P. (1998) *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hummel, D. and Maedche, A. (2019) How effective is nudging? A quantitative review on the effect sizes and limits of empirical nudging studies. *Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics* 80:47-58.
- Johnson, D. (2002) *Socrates and Alcibiades: Four Texts*. Indianapolis, IN: Focus.
- Korsgaard, C.M. (1986) Aristotle on function and virtue. *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 3(3):259-279.
- Miller, C.B. (2017) *The Character Gap: How Good Are We?* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Murphy, N.C., Kallenberg, B., and Nation, M.T. (2003) Virtues and practices in the Christian tradition: Christian ethics after MacIntyre. Online at https://ecommons.udayton.edu/rel_fac_pub/65/.
- Musonius Rufus (2020) *That One Should Disdain Hardships: The Teachings of a Roman Stoic*. Translated by Gretchen Reydams-Schils, Yale, CT: Yale University Press.

- Plato (2005) *Protagoras and Meno*. Translated by A. Beresford, London UK: Penguin.
- Pigliucci, M. (2017) *How to Be a Stoic: Using Ancient Philosophy to Live a Modern Life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Pigliucci, M. (2022) *The Quest for Character: What the Story of Socrates and Alcibiades Teaches Us about Our Search for Good Leaders*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Reid, H.L. and Ralkowski, M. (eds.) (2019) *Plato at Syracuse: Essays on Plato in Western Greece with a new translation of the Seventh Letter*. Sioux City, IA: Parnassos Press.
- Sellars, J. (2009) *The Art of Living: The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy*. Bristol, UK: Bristol Classical Press.
- Seneca (2015) *Letters on Ethics: To Lucilius*. Translated by Margaret Graver, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Sternberg, R.J. (2005) Older but not wiser? The relationship between age and wisdom. *Ageing International* 30:5-26.
- Stuttard, D. (2018) *Nemesis: Alcibiades and the Fall of Athens*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Thucydides (1972) *History of the Peloponnesian War*. London, UK: Penguin Classics.

Massimo Pigliucci is an author, blogger, podcaster, as well as the K.D. Irani Professor of Philosophy at the City College of New York. His academic work is in evolutionary biology, philosophy of science, the nature of pseudoscience, and practical philosophy. Massimo publishes regular columns in *Skeptical Inquirer* and in *Philosophy Now*. His books include *How to Be a Stoic: Using Ancient Philosophy to Live a Modern Life* (Basic Books) and *Nonsense on Stilts: How to Tell Science from Bunk* (University of Chicago Press). Massimo's latest book is *The Quest for Character: What the Story of Socrates and Alcibiades Teaches Us about Our Search for Good Leaders* (Basic Books). More by Massimo at <https://massimopigliucci.org>.

Correspondence: mpigliucci@ccny.cuny.edu



Hume's Psychology and Artificial Virtues as Applied to Philosophical Practice

JEREMY GALLEGOS
FRIENDS UNIVERSITY, WICHITA, KANSAS

Abstract

In organizational consulting, the individual is part of the collective whole which fits David Hume's description of a naturally self-interested person in an artificial world. The description of the emotional reaction a person has to experience ties directly to the artificial virtues of property as resources and the rules, or formal procedures and policies governing resources in an organization. Further, language regarding 'allegiance' and political change are meaningful in organizational change. The philosophical move towards considering the disinterested spectator allows for individuals to review policies, procedures, and processes in organizational change initiatives.

Keywords: *David Hume, moral psychology, artificial virtues, organizational consulting*

Introduction

The aim of this piece is to employ David Hume's descriptive methodology in consultative practice. There is a thread of thought regarding natural passions and sentiment, beginning in the *Treatise* running through his vast compilation of essays and ending in his *Enquiries*, that creates a unified thought through his textual changes. While the movement of that thought regarding natural passions and sentiment to restrained taste and calm passions is interesting in and of itself, the focus again here is to employ that very movement of thought to consulting.

Self-Interest and Resources

Philosophers such as Hume regarded their work as a matter of description, not prescription. Hume never intended his philosophy to serve as the basis of anyone's particular behavior. Rather, Hume's endeavor was simply to explain human nature and human behavior. That is, Hume was only explaining behavior, not encouraging a particular set of actions.

Hume notes that all humans only work with and reference the perceptions in their minds. These perceptions can be either *forceful and lively* impressions or more faint ideas. Technically, simple impressions are just our sense data, simple ideas are merely memories generated from this sense data, and complex ideas are the work of our imagination on these memories. The complex impression, though, sense data with the emotional component, highlights the self-interested nature of our processing. In addition, this is precisely the beginning of the application of Hume's work to practical philosophy.

There is something gained, protected, and wagered in every decision. Many of our dilemmas pit ourselves against others or, maybe even ourselves. That is, nearly every decision comes by way of self-interest first, which can house a number of biases in our thinking. True, Hume does believe people can and do feel for others as, but that could be merely a version of self-interest. In short, perceptions of sense data with a component of emotional reaction sets the stage not only for the

development of his moral philosophy, but also for any consultative process. Further, coupling this belief that there is a great uniformity among the actions of men from the second *Enquiry*, which he sees in his views on passions, fits many current models of psychology (Selby-Bigge, 1975). For example, reactionary passions that are similar across time and space may resonate with psychological need theory of the direct passion; some are violent with respect to intensity and reaction and fear are prime examples. Taken with Maslow's hierarchy of needs as an example, fear most closely fits a level of when basic survival needs are not met. Hume, of course, does not say anything like this overtly, but consider how the *Treatise* is structured and his discussion of artificial virtues quickly follow this discussion in Book Three. Here, it is clearly delineated that there is an order to the development of the artificial virtues, property first then justice and finally allegiance (Selby-Bigge, 1975). Additionally, the first foundation for these artificial virtues is self-interest, the fear of loss of individual resources. This is a critical element to bear in mind to begin with and philosophical consultative practice. Before moving forward to the next artificial virtue of justice, it will be beneficial to consider how these concerns play out individually.

There are three elements of human psychology at work here. One is the moral psychology of individual human behavior. This moral psychology can extend into group psychology, and for whom it really is a matter of sort of political organization, but the same elements are at work in companies and organizations. While there may not be kings or Parliament's, there are CEOs and presidents and executive boards and boards of trustees and they may operate in similar fashion. Lastly, there is a sort of epistemic psychology that might be useful for change initiatives. There may be challenges between the is-ought fallacy and whether there is any sort of norm to adhere to in process improvement and change initiatives, but they do not have to be fatal to change processes.

Therefore, considering self-awareness, passions, reaction, and response, here they are really about managing needs and motivations. There is a connection already between complex impressions of reflection, self-interest, and property resources. Resources, though, refers to time, money and energy, not exclusively property, in the consultative process. In the short term, there is only access to individual perceptions and there are two varieties, impressions and ideas. Both can be broken down again into subcategories. The simple impressions are the impressions of sensation or sense data. The impressions of reflection are more important because that is where the impressions of emotions and passions are generated.

Moral Sentiments

Traditional explanations of Hume's complex impressions run along the lines of sense data laced with an emotional component or reaction. After some investigation of this emotional response, these are determined to be, in the *Treatise*, either calm or violent passions. The calm passions are often mistaken for some subversive view of reason, although that is completely wrong. The calm passions are still sentiments albeit "weak" ones. They may function more like matters of taste as when one finds a painting pleasing but is motivated to buy or steal it. Violent passions, on the other hand, do have more motivation behind them. In addition, the source of both of these passions is self-interest. Hume correctly notes that most of our thinking is clouded with self-interested thinking.

At the heart of this biased thinking lay the violent passions, which are either direct or indirect passions. Direct violent passions are fear, hope, desire, joy, *et cetera* as they center on the directness of

pleasure and pain. A personal reaction to something is going to be a direct reaction of fear, hope, joy, pleasure, pain, etc. Considering reactions like love and hate and pride and humility, those are intense as well as you can really hate somebody and you can really love somebody. But, these are differentiated as in the case of pride and humility, which can be more indirect and have a lower reactionary drive because they have objects as the focal point. For example, one can be proud of herself or some attribute of herself and she can also be proud of the work she created. Finally, with respect to the calm passions, which many mistake this for reason, is a more restrained or tamed sentiment, later called taste that can be similar to having a sense of seeing beauty in uniformity and symmetry. Here, again, individuals have an emotional response, in this case, a sense of uniformity to an external object. This perhaps is the seat of or drive of sense of individual preferences and wants as calm passions are motivating without the forcefulness of violent ones.

Hume and Psychology

John Immerwahr states that Hume's ideal is that the violent passions are undesirable as those are reactions whereas the calm passions are preferable as they are responses that create a greater "strength of will" in various situations and they can actually counter or weaken violent reactions. According to Immerwahr, this, for Hume, is a matter of maintaining happiness (Immerwahr, 1989). An individual's happiness often depends on the situation and, for present purposes, on resources. In fact, Hume's theory may fit a particular kind of need theory. In psychology, the endogenous theory of preferences is applied to businesses as humans effectively respond to external states of affairs and situations.

In the field of neuroscience, Richard C. Sha notes that Hume has undergone a resurgence for his claim that "reason is and ought only be a slave of the passions" (Neuroscience Has Much to Learn from Hume's Philosophy of Emotions | Psyche Ideas, n.d.). It is a famous quote from the *Treatise* and there is a realization that there is a lot of emotional regulation at play in the workplace. For Hume, these emotions come down to four basic moral sentiments of pride, humility, love and hate, potentially. It is important for Hume to talk about general agreement of sentiments to explain why there are agreements on rules about resources and the like, but to say there is just one size that fits all may be a mistake. The idea that people are really at the mercy of our sentiments, passions, emotions, most of the time may make it impossible to achieve agreements even in process improvement efforts. Therefore, in consulting and considering how people work together, before achieving teamwork, people work as themselves for themselves. All varieties of need theory, all the language of love, hate, pride, humility falls into this level of self-interest. According to Hume, when people come together, they will organize. Moreover, though it may be odd to discuss property as related to justice and allegiance here, the property conversation is needed to elucidate the connection between self-interest, sentiment or passions, and resources.

Managing Resources

People argue about resources; how much money they have, how much time they have, how much energy they have. In addition, those things trigger moral sentiments of love, hate, pride, humility, joy, fear, hope, desire, etc. Therefore, during the consultative process, one needs to be cognizant that if it is resources that are the primary concern, then those resources need to be reviewed to see how those are managed for people. A process improvement training is embedded into the consul-

tative process to generate real life examples. In process improvement, the first thing to consider is the voice of the customer. Take the first thing that customers want and work a process backwards to create what's called a pull schedule instead of a push schedule. Essentially, take the customer's timeline and work backwards until the schedule is filled forward for them. Potentially, employees may actually gain breathing room in terms of time and energy.

Specifically, many schedules are built to the demand of the bottom line. In some sense, this is ideal for the customer, if it saves her money. But, again, there are other metrics and considerations such as time. When the product is available can be as important as cost. The convenience of procuring the product is another consideration. Taking these into account in scheduling could indeed change the structure of processes and schedules.

Participants in a workshop are asked to engage in an activity to highlight how current models may create problems rather than solve them. The first time through, the exercise is a disaster, though, because people just work according to standard time lines set by 'management,' ostensibly for resource purposes. This exercise highlights how current efficiency-only processes often create bottlenecks, for example, putting employees into stress and then they react out of those violent passions towards management.

Case Study Part 1

During the process improvement facilitation embedded in the consultative process, there are four key points during the training. This case study centers on a facilitation from the fall of 2021 with a local non-profit. The first process improvement exercise was run and, in the follow up, a simple question was asked, "what is a process that you want to improve?" This is a conversation starter and it may not be addressed at any other point in the session. It is interesting, though, that there was a "uniformity" of "oh, this is a problem." "We know payroll is a problem." "This is a thing we want to fix or to adjust or update." Ultimately, this question is posed, "how do you feel about that?" Essentially, what is the impression of reflection? What is the self-interest sentiment that goes with it? Is it violent? Is it directed? Calm? This is a perfect example because payroll touches the most basic violent passion of fear and it relates directly to an individual's personal resources of money. Because of this, it does become imperative to address this concern for all the parties concerned, both staff and management.

Social Awareness of the Rules

Social awareness, in this paper, genuinely means understanding the rules that govern resources of time, money, and energy. In Hume's language, this is exactly what justice is, the rules that oversee the distribution of resources. Well noted in the *Treatise*, there are two foundations for justice. One is self-interest, again, concern about individual resources; individual property such as time, salary, wage, etc. Then, Hume says the second foundation is moral approval, found in the language of sympathy (Selby-Bigge, 1978). Technically, he is wrong, but, just linguistically he is wrong. In the *Treatise*, he says that sympathy is the mechanism by which another's pleasure or pain is communicated to myself. Essentially, the realization that the rules might work for more of us than just one individual is how that feeling is communicated.

In the *Enquiry*, he changes this language to utility in order to make it less confusing. Yet, there remain other confusing questions of, "what is best for everyone's approval?" This is not the same forward thinking utility as actually voting for something, so to speak. It is pre-Bentham and pre-Mill, but it is very much something that determines what benefits all of us. How does this really work? Clearly, it is not going to be the faculty of reason. Reason may surface mental models and data for the sentiments to judge but utility and reason are not motivating as they are impotent. Ultimately, this is a description for human action and behavior such that determining what is best for everyone is probably going to go through some conflict. Hume does speculate, or at least there is such a focus in his language, that there is a propensity towards calm passions and a sense of uniformity and preferences that may be an underlying corrective to conflict. In his philosophical essays, he often lauds the principled factions of change over the speculative factions that often sound like they are led by violent passions and sentiment rather than calm passions and taste (Haakonssen, 1993).

Hume's Foundations

A challenge many have towards Hume's descriptive theory is that his view seems to be relativistic, if not individualistic. Even in the context of calm passions, those are individual responses to situations. Sympathy and utility may help clarify a sense of connection to others or decisions with respect to others, but it is not clear where it comes from. In other parts of the *Treatise*, Hume mentions the general point of view or general standards, where people tend to agree this way and in other places, he refers to the psychology of custom and habit. Custom and habit language works for discussing human behavior and possibly about decision making as it is the thing that undergirds almost all decisions. In essence, our minds are pattern recognition machines and, because of this, most behaviors line up as a result of most everyone seeing the same patterns, in general.

In both his epistemology and descriptive morality, custom and habit are the psychological underpinning for agreeing to general rules of behavior and the general rules of causation even. Interestingly, whereas animals have instinct for their survival, humans have causation as a thought process. But, this is not an instinct, per se. In fact, as a matter of Hume's epistemological psychology, humans cannot help but to think in terms of cause and effect. It is certainly a useful survival tool and, in so far as pattern recognition is useful, nearly everyone agrees out of custom and habit. That is not to say, however, that the answer is always correct. One can imagine that a motionless flat earth model made the most sense. And, one does not have to imagine how difficult it was to correct that model. In fact, the motionless flat earth was certainly more common sensical and agreeable. Such a seismic change did not come easily and is a good representative of how difficult change can be inside organizations.

There is an interesting parallel between organizational structures and behaviors as well as thinking being based on custom and habit. The idea of utility, to the extent that it works, works. However, it may also make changes difficult as there still can be differences as to what is perceived as useful pattern. In the case of lean enterprises, most can agree on making some changes but there is a great deal of hesitation if the changes comes at the expense of employees and eliminating staff.

Individuals to Organizations

Employment and organizational structures are truly supposed to be voluntary structures with exchange of money for time and services. Moreover, there are political arguments regarding resources

such as budgets between departments and divisions. The budget is a great source of conflicts and people look to the rules to solve those issues. This is no different from the artificial virtues used for politics. The only difference here is that perhaps it is better than just acknowledging tacit consent. Due to right to work laws in certain states, individuals can resign or they can be dismissed. This is akin to exile, political exile, if you want to put it that way. Nevertheless, some steps can be taken before complete separation or dismantling of teams. There are artificial virtues that could work here; obligation, exchange, fidelity, promise keeping, truth-telling, etc. Virtues come in varieties for Hume. There are some that are agreeable to us individually and those agreeable to the group. There are also those that are useful to individuals and those useful to the greater group. In that regard, systems within organizations that foster truth-telling, promise keeping obligations and the like, benefit all of everyone and may avoid pernicious splits as a matter of utility.

Still, everything above only reifies existing structures. None of them necessarily lend themselves to change or initiatives that allow for change. Problematically, there are no additional tools available for creating change. In Hume's descriptive analysis there are no divine laws or commands or alternatives to naturalism to find answers to difficult dilemmas. Somehow the 'answers' must already be present within the process.

Creating Ideal Processes

After conducting another round of manufacturing improvement exercises, even if the team has improved things from the last simulation, the team goes into a deep dive about eliminating wastes. Depending on the model used, there are at least seven forms of waste. In general, though, there is always a waste of paper and time and motion and energy. This implies a waste of resources, not just a waste of money only. And, often this waste is dictated by policy. It is often an old and unquestioned policy but, again, it is more efficient supposedly to continue as-is rather than stopping to address conflicts and issues in the system.

This discussion turns out to be a practical lesson on change coming from within existing systems and models. Indeed, change needs to take place but there is rarely reference to an external source for change. There can be, at times, external solutions such as new technology but more often than not, the change comes in the form of altering present conditions.

Case Study Part 2

Going back to that parking lot question in the payroll example, a question is directed, "Can you tell me about the problem. Do you really understand what needs to change?" It is a fascinating bit of exploration because one of the things that surfaces is why there is conflict. No one has the same perception of the thing that needs to change. They may all agree on what needs to change, but they have a different perception of it. In this example, some think the payroll specialist is not doing their job. Some think that person is just doing it wrong. Some think new technology and software will fix everything. Same problem and half a dozen perspectives and solutions exist. Additionally, with no agreement there can be no change.

Situational Management

To get beyond the language of *allegiance*, there should be a code switch to language about regulations and policy because once the rules of justice of the organization are in place, there must be a

policy, procedure, and process to reify them. This is typically short-handed as the organization or the institution. This will be the continued language in place of allegiance.

Of course, oftentimes the organization appears to be a monumental behemoth of bureaucracy that deflects change in near autonomous fashion. That mindset successfully freezes and eliminates change in most cases. In the instances where everyone has said there needs to be change, then there has to be even small change or there is no change at all. In the consultative process, this is referred to as the 3 degree change. A colleague of the author has used this term often because, even if it means making a shift of only three minutes or three degrees or three feet, at least it's better than nothing. However, it is always hard to discern what the thing that needs to change is. How do you actually accomplish this change?

A potential method is to walk the process. In many cases, differing perspectives can be brought together by investigating one process from the beginning to the end. As a group walks a process, everyone sees the same bottle necks, redundancy, waste, and stress on staff. While individually each saw their own issue in the process, bottle neck versus stress, for example, looking at the situation together can highlight multiple issues and possibly multiple solutions.

Sustainability

While Hume is not generally interested in developing moral oughts, he is quite adept at explaining moral judgment and choice. Moreover, he thinks he can explain when and how individuals change their mind or adjust their original judgments. Working from the *Treatise*, the answer developed is in the work of sympathy and the calm passions. Of course, all of this is removed in the *Enquiry*, but that could be a mistake in the larger context of explaining behavior. Hume drops this initial language because of the reception and repercussions of having made such bold claims such as 'reason is and ought only be a slave to the passions.' That was not received well by much of the eighteenth century. So, he assuaged attitudes and fears by switching to the use of the term of utility to cover the work of reason and its relationship to the judgment of approval or disapproval by sentiment.

It was an intelligent move but failed to account for the individual work of the disinterested spectator. Discussed in the *Enquiry* is the work of a magistrate, after discussing the artificial virtue of allegiance, whose sole motive is to see the rules of justice followed. He or she has no particular interest in who may win in a property dispute, but the magistrate is definitely motivated to see the rules adhered to and followed. By sentiment, this makes sense and explains the 'third party' nature of the adjudicator. But, it fails to be translated to individual decision-making and judgment.

The difficulty in reading and applying anything in Hume's philosophy is his own adherence to descriptive philosophy. For anything near a prescriptive approach, readers must delve into his essays. That is, there is a prescriptive view of social or political change in the essays that are grounded in social progress. Additionally, this resonates with the correction of sentiment by a fixed or steady general point of view. In fact, this may serve as a prescriptive basis for the disinterested spectator. For the consultative process, the analogous point is that there may be cultural corporate drivers for change. But, this does require either an analogous disinterested spectator or something better.

Defects

In the next round of simulations, even if the modified process to eliminate the waste worked, the new challenge to think differently is to explore where problems could arise. People often look at processes as “okay, how can we improve them?” as if they function well currently. The challenge at this point is to say, “No, make it worse.” “Take what you currently do now and make it 100 times worse for the customer or the client, whomever you are serving.” When people look to make things better, the brain already works in a way to find that uniformity that satisfies the calm passion or taste. The desire is to find that the structures all make sense. As a result, people avoid genuinely finding and solving problems. However, if people actually go make problems, then they actually do see problems.

Case in point, in training a local credit union going through some significant building and operational changes, this exercise showed them they were missing some significant pieces in their existing process improvement models. A new building was underway and current and new departments were working on a new joint venture within the organization. By most accounts, progress was positive even though some issues had been identified. In that framework, those identified issues had working solutions. Yet, after the exercise, more concerns surfaced for which there were no working solutions. Nevertheless, there are multiple ways to surface problems and conflict.

Case Study Part 3

In the example of the nonprofit payroll issue, the group is asked, “Why haven’t you made that change to payroll?” If everyone knew the answer because everyone saw the same problem, then why has not everyone had the same answer?” Fire the payroll specialist, for example. If they knew the answer, why did they not act on it? There was something else holding them back. Here is where my critique of Hume surfaces. If everything is set by custom and habit, how are changes made within the framework of custom and habit? Even when Hume pushes for approaches such as being disinterested or referring back to the general common point of view, it is still often in support of the existing set of rules as they benefit everyone. In essence, his concern is that only the rules are being supported. There may not be anyone trying to make the system better for themselves and thereby not necessarily trying to make it better for anybody else. It is a vague attempt to make the system better for everyone by supporting the current rules, which is often only the bottom line. And, most people have coached themselves to that level, to almost organizational detriment. As a result, the next challenge comes as matters of hard cases and situations of rule skepticism.

Action Planning

A hard case is, by definition, one where a right answer is not derivable from rules, but a right answer does exist and is the answer to its specific hard case. In rule skepticism, there is no certainty that the existing policies, procedures, *et cetera* will be of any decision-making assistance. Both of these concerns can be barriers to change. In the absence of a quick path to change, many will remain in a state of suspension and maintain the status quo. Interestingly, the paralysis may exist in terms of thinking only.

In essence, the consultative process regarding improvement has been an effort to get teams to get to a level of skepticism to not say there is no answer but to never just sit back and say, “Oh, I know

the answer." Quick answers are often wrong, especially those calling the other side 'wrong.' A good skeptic will find an answer and then put it into action to test. There will not exist any certainty prior to that test. Problematically, even using taste and calm passions does not negate the issues of the general point of view because it is about pleasure and of course, that goes to utility. Ultimately, then, the question of whose pleasure or whose utility will arise. For Hume, the judicious spectator is there to support their official virtues that already exist. In addition, any individuals "not partial to anyone" may be really trying to be partial to the existing rules only. With concerns of skepticism and rules and hard cases, individuals have to be open that maybe something else could be wrong, such as the rules themselves. As a result, the general point of view may not always be the answer and the efficiency model or bottom line only may not always be the answer.

In the Third Appendix to the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, "Some Farther Considerations with Regard to Justice," David Hume states, "the preference given by the judge is often founded more on taste and imagination than on any solid argument" (Selby-Bigge, 1975). In this section, Hume is discussing the machinations of law and politics but this troubling statement may be the basis of real organizational change as well. Consider that nearly any decision is founded more upon taste and imagination than argument. This appears to be the root and result of Hume's own descriptive skepticism. Perhaps, then, his "Essays on Happiness" are less about happiness and Hellenistic philosophy and more about what these Hellenistic schools represent in how one thinks with respect to 'taste and imagination' and change. This is to say, a reading of his four essays as a commentary on various biases may be enlightening for both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* and change initiatives. The consistent line of thought, missing from Hume's lexicon, may be his exploration of biases as rooted in sentiment, personality, and one's own perception of happiness.

Applying Hume's points to the consultative process, the right answer, in some cases, may be summed up as 'put people over the processes' in decision making. In law and reform, that social context drove presumably prescriptive dictates. In the consultative process, similar concerns should establish that the organization works better and is healthier when the people are deemed more important the processes.

Hume and Contextualism

The disinterested spectator called upon to adjudicate in disputes over the rules of justice must fulfill two requirements. First, she must be uninterested in who benefits from the decision. Secondly, she must be solely interested in the adherence to the rules of justice such that she is not completely uninterested in the outcome of the case. With this role model, individuals see that a decision maker must ascertain all of the facts first but sentiment will still make the final decision. The only 'rule' to follow is to decide based on utility, not speculations.

What has been set up is a battle of desires against reason or rationality simply does not exist. If self-interest is eliminated, reason does not remain behind. Even if it did, reason does not motivate human behavior. Rather, self-interest and sentiment motivate behavior. These elements must be resolved, perhaps, through what Hume calls "strength of mind" and the calm passions.

There is a quote attributed to Hume, 'truth springs from disagreement amongst friends.' Truth, as a useful artificial virtue as well as promise keeping, *et cetera* are non-rule oriented virtues of resolving

the conflict of self-interest and sentiment. They may not be natural virtues necessarily but, like the natural virtues, they also have sentiment at their base and, more importantly, they motivate human action without reference to rules.

Communication and Accountability

As only the passions can motivate one to decide and act, the object of the passion can make it reasonable or unreasonable but reason is not motivating any part of the decision making process. When people are 'calm,' however, Hume says it can give the appearance of someone who is reasonable and unaffected by emotions. Descriptively, Hume is correct in saying that it is appearance only and that reason does not indeed make the final decisions and cause people to act. At some level, decision making always pertains to an emotional response of some kind.

'Strength of mind,' as Hume calls it, is what overpowers or overrides the violent passions. The question is, then, how can this be accomplished? Not unexpectedly, Hume states that distance in time and space help to cool the violent passions. According to Baier, this evaluation by sentiment is not just emotivism but a reflective judgment on one's passions (Baier, 2009). Hume further notes things like 'general rules can influence judgment' and 'the imagination adheres to the general views of things' but there is not offered a definition of what these general rules and general views are. While Hume's descriptive philosophy is insightful, its lack of normative assistance can render it virtually useless.

Throughout the *Treatise*, Hume uses terminology such as the calm and violent passions and sympathy yet he abandons those terms in the *Enquiry* and, for present purposes, it may lend some assistance in decision-making. Hume is clear in the *Enquiry* that reason and sentiment are at work in moral determinations. The existing possibility for the resolution of conflicting sentiments in 'strength of will' may be more like a general point of view based on shared experience rather than mere rule support or as Baier notes, interpersonal agreement (Baier, 2009). Arguments over rules tend to be conflicts of self-interest. When individuals share experiences, it is easier for sentiments and taste to align. This may even have something to do with Hume's own view on commerce and how the arts are refined through trade with other countries. That is, more shared experiences and more understanding and a general, public good will is generated as delineated in the second *Enquiry*.

Case Study Part 4

Returning to the payroll example, at the end of the consultative process or the facilitation for the day, the process they wanted to evaluate or change is reviewed again. Understanding the difference between their individual needs, how time, money, resources, and energy are allocated in the future and the group dynamic of organizational rules relative to having a structure alongside personal needs and habits and behaviors forces groups to think through the things that can be done. People must think individually about their personal role in the process and what they can do to create a small sustainable change. There must be an action plan.

Annette Baier has, in her book, *Progress of Sentiments*, a note regarding Hume that people cannot change their nature. "We cannot change who we are." However, people can change their situation. This language is powerful insofar as many think character must be improved in many cases. There certainly can always be improvements but it must be centered on the situation or process.

This approach requires something that is not just a self-interested natural motive but a sort of corrected initial sympathy bias. In the current example, sympathy with this payroll specialist and this position or where it falls in process shows that termination or replacement is not the only answer. In fact, the solution turned out to be to change the timelines for the payroll process. Upon evaluation, a new person would not have had any more success in the current system. The current system only allowed for a part time position with offset hours to everyone else. No one could have been successful in that role regardless of software or technology.

Conclusion

In organizational consulting, the individual is part of the collective whole, which fits Hume's description of a naturally self-interested person situated in an artificial world that is government, politics, society, etc. The description of the emotional reaction a person has to experience ties directly to their artificial virtues of property as resources, and the rules or formal procedures and policies governing resources and organizations. Further, language regarding what one might call a "allegiance and political change" or meaningful organizational change and the philosophical move towards considering the disinterested spectator allows for individuals to review policies, procedures and processes in organizational change initiatives. Rather than just supporting policies and procedures and processes, genuine sympathy or sincerity or shared experience with others and supporting people over processes drives actual change.

References

- Baier, A. (2009). *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume's Treatise*. Harvard University Press.
- Haakonssen, K. (1993). The structure of Hume's political theory. In D. F. Norton (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hume* (pp. 182–221). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521382734.007>
- Immerwahr, J. (1989). Hume's Essays on Happiness. *Hume Studies*, 15(2), 307–324. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hms.2011.0408>
- Neuroscience has much to learn from Hume's philosophy of emotions | Psyche Ideas. (n.d.). Psyche. Retrieved August 2, 2022, from <https://psyche.co/ideas/neuroscience-has-much-to-learn-from-humes-philosophy-of-emotions>
- Selby-Bigge, L. A. (1975). *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Oxford University Press.
- Selby-Bigge, L. A. (1978). *Treatise of Human Nature*. Oxford University Press.

Dr. Jeremy Gallegos, tenured professor of Philosophy and Ethics at Friends University. He earned his B.A. degree from Wichita State University and was awarded his M.A. and Ph.D. from Purdue University. He is currently the Division Chair of Theology and Humanities for the College of Business, Arts, Sciences, and Education. He publishes on truth telling, particularly in applied ethics settings such as entrepreneurial ethics and medical ethics. He also consults in his spare time facilitating strategic planning sessions for various organizations in Wichita and currently sits as Vice Chair on the Wesley Medical Center Ethics Committee and a board member for Legacy Ministries.

Correspondence: jeremy_gallegos@friends.edu



Obsessed with Truth? Deconstructing Oscar Brenifier's "Phenomenology of Lying"

MARTIN CARMANN

MCI MANAGEMENT CENTER, INNSBRUCK, AUSTRIA

Abstract

Oscar Brenifier's approach to Philosophical Practice is contested. In this text I analyze his "Phenomenology of Lying" in a deconstructionist manner. I try to strengthen its strengths and make suggestions as to how to mend some important shortcomings that I find. First, I summarize and structure the 13 reasons for lying that Brenifier lists, and second the 21 patterns of lying that he identifies. Third, I discuss his notions of reality and truth, which are too much "correspondence-minded", hence the belligerence. Fourth, I explore coherence and consistency as valuable alternatives. Fifth, I follow the trace of the "dead philosopher", which is a very interesting concept of Brenifier's. It leads to confirming the coherence approach from within. Finally, I draw conclusions for the philosophical dialogue. I claim that Brenifiers' enlightening intentions can be implemented better with a peaceful and patient attitude towards the people coming for advice.

Key words: *Brenifier, truth, lying, coherence, consistency, reason, deconstruction*

Oscar Brenifier is one of the most controversial philosophical practitioners worldwide. Recently, he has written a comprehensive article about the "Phenomenology of Lying" which is circulating these days.¹ The text is dense and challenging, and it contains a lot of food for thought. Brenifier differentiates 13 reasons and 21 manifestations of lying. The reasons highlight the inner motivation of people who are lying, the manifestations describe communication patterns, which are lies, according to Brenifier.

Brenifier's focus is explicitly on the "cognitive aspect" of lying as opposed to psychological or ethical considerations. For Philosophical Practice, this focus is essential as it can claim its right as an independent practice only if it establishes human thinking as an "autonomous" realm within human existence.

My plan is this: I am reading the text carefully, reflecting on its implications in a critical way. First, I will summarize the 13 reasons and, second, the 21 manifestations of lying. I will put them into short messages and group them into clusters, in order to give a handy overview and make them more usable for Philosophical Practice. Third, I will check Brenifier's notion of reality and truth, his most widely used antonyms to lying. I will question his implicit model of reality as correspondence with language. Fourth, I am going to substitute correspondence with coherence and its connection to consistency. Fifth, I am going to check Brenifier's concept of the "dead philosopher", which is very interesting for our question. Finally, I will draw conclusions for the philosophical dialogue.

The 13 Reasons for Lying

I am reconstructing the 13 reasons for lying by putting them into a table (see table 1). While doing so, I am working with the text in three ways:

1.) I am clustering the 13 reasons into three groups, thereby imposing a structure onto them. This is, of course, a heuristic manoeuvre. It makes it easier to have an overview and then use the list of reasons. In column one, I differentiate between “fear-based reasons”, “goal-oriented reasons”, and “social reasons” that cause people to lie. Lying is fear-based if its basic motivation is avoiding or alleviating fear. Lying is goal-oriented, if its basic motivation comes from pursuing specific targets. And it is based on social reason if it has to do with following social rules, norms or the respect for other people.

2.) I am translating the key argumentation into messages. As most philosophical texts, Brenifier’s treatise on lying doesn’t disclose its intended circle of readers. It is own thinking put on paper, not communication in progress. There are a lot of reflective statements, hypotheses, explanations and arguments, there are no messages directed at anyone in particular, though. For reasons I have described somewhere else² I am giving this a twist. I am summarizing the text by putting it into messages that can be used in Philosophical Practice. The structure I am using is a conditional sentence: “You might be lying because ... ” and then follows the particular reason. The “you” in use refers to potential clients.

3.) One minor thing: By clustering the reasons, I am changing their order of appearance, while maintaining the names (column 2) and the numbers (column 4) from Brenifier’s text.

Cluster	Name	Message: You might be lying because ...	Nb.
Fear-based reasons	Self-Defense	you are afraid of somebody and want to defend yourself.	1
	Self-Justification	you want to justify yourself by offering explanations	11
	Fear of Reality	you do not want to face an unpleasant and harsh reality.	7
	Fear of Reason	you are afraid of the demands of reason.	8
	Pain	you are trying to deny pain.	10
	Mythomania	you are addicted to telling lies.	9
Goal-oriented reasons	Desire	you desire something that you wouldn’t get without “modifying the perception” of others.	2
	Complacency	you are not satisfied with your own limitations and hence you try to appear differently to yourself and to others.	3
Social reasons	Education	you have been educated to comply with social norms, conventions, and expectations.	4
	Diplomacy	you want to be diplomatic and not hurt others’ self-respect or feelings.	5
	Niceness	you want to be nice and not cause any trouble.	6
	Benevolence	you want to help or protect another person.	12
	Reassuring	you want to reassure someone with your message.	13

Table 1. The 13 reasons of lying and their underlying structure.

All of these reasons describe motives that might lead to either “saying what is false or hiding what is true”, as Brenifier puts it. If we hear a lie in Philosophical Practice, we can use the three clusters of reasons as a checklist for finding out the motivation behind the lie which can help understand our client better.

Now, the question is: How can we detect it? How can we know someone is lying and not rely on gut feeling only? In order to help out, Brenifier has set up another list. He calls it the 21 “manifestations of lying” which I, with my background of more than 20 years of coaching, translate into “communication patterns”. These communication patterns can be observed often. Whenever we see any of it being used, we know we might be hearing a lie.

The 21 Communication Patterns of Lying

Again, I am setting up a table (see table 2) in order to structure the complexity of the content. In principle, the same method as above applies. Column one contains the cluster title, column two the name of the pattern. Column three contains the message of the pattern in a nutshell and column five the number of the pattern from the text. Column four is new, though. It contains all the communication signals Brenifier’s text links to a communication pattern. When in use, a communication signal can indicate the pattern attached. All of the words used in column four are quotes from the text. When in simple inverted commas, the sentences come from the clients themselves.

This time I am putting the 21 patterns into five distinctive groups. I call them “Hiding yourself”, “Blurring reality”, “Fighting for acceptance”, “Insisting on own perspective”, and “Putting on a show”.

Cluster	Name	Message	Signals	Nb.
“Hiding Yourself”	Naivety	You are playing naïve, either seeing everything “nice and rosy” or, in the contrary, dark and dramatic.	Lack of experience of life or general knowledge, absence of good judgement; willingness to believe that people always tell you the truth.	1
	Ignorance	You pretend ignorance by saying “I don’t want to know” or by saying “I am not sure”.	‘I prefer not to know.’ ‘I don’t know.’ ‘I’m not sure.’	2
	Pretension	You pretend to have qualities you would like to have but have not.	About self-image; denial or bragging.	10
“Blurring Reality”	Chaos	You are using confusing communication as an immunization strategy against a reality you want to avoid. You prefer associative to logical thinking.	Lack of causal principle, of categorization, of reasoning.	3
	Vagueness	You thrive on vague hints and remain undecided, maybe even declare this a virtue.	Imprecision; no commitment to a given proposition.	5
	Diversion	You divert the attention of others by buying time.	‘I need time to think.’ ‘We cannot find the right words.’ ‘I can’t do it right now.’	6

	Smartness	You are using your smartness to confuse things with complicated arguments.	Semantic games and debates; vouching for the limitation of language; obscuring the discussion; gratuitous skepticism 'I am not sure this is the case.' 'I have some doubts about what you say.' 'I am not fully convinced.'	13
	Affirmation negation	You are weakening your own words by contradicting yourself.	Saying something and immediately denying it. 'Yes, but ...' 'I would not say it is ...' 'I was just joking ...'	16
"Fighting for acceptance"	Omission	You are only telling part of the story, omitting some important aspects.	None, you need to know/ fathom the omitted parts to be able to tell.	4
	Redescription	You redescribe reality with different words thereby giving it a twist to the positive or negative.	Switching from positive to negative connotations and vice versa; exchanging neutral words with emotionally loaded ones; political correctness.	7
	Explanation	You are making up explanations thereby trying to justify yourself.	'Let me explain ...' Using vague generalizations, referring to exceptions, extreme or absurd alternatives.	8
	Embellishment	You make reality more beautiful as it is.	Producing an artificial image with the purpose of arousing admiration and interest; seducing.	11
	Rhetoric	You downplay or inflate your messages with words.	Adverbs: 'a little', 'sometimes', 'partially', 'not always'; Hyperbolic expressions: 'very', 'wonderful', 'totally', 'perfectly', 'incredibly', 'always'; Indetermination: 'it depends', 'sometimes', 'maybe'	19

	Manipulation	You are telling others what they want to hear in order to get from them what you want.	Telling someone what he wants to hear, to please or flatter him, to seduce him, to lure him ...	21
“Insisting on own perspective”	Sincerity	You insist on your sincere feelings and convictions without any self-criticism.	Emotional and cognitive attachment to an opinion; 'good conscience', Being in the right; well-meaning and honest; always truthful.	9
	Myth	You create myths by telling and re-telling stories in a peculiar way.	Establishing identity; telling stories, periodically repeated.	12
	Wishful Thinking	You describe things not how they are but how you want them to be, good or bad.	'Things are this way' instead of 'I would like things to be this way'. Idealizing.	14
	Bad Faith	You deny reality by stubbornly blaming some and declaring yourself or others to victims.	Denying a truth that is obvious for others; a form of stubbornness; avoiding responsibility for own actions and mistakes, and their consequences; victimizing.	20
“Putting on a show”	Narcissism	You are creating a show in order to get attention.	Seeing oneself as either great, powerful, smart, beautiful, or on the contrary, as a poor victim, as weak, stupid and ugly.	15
	Playing	You like to play with your imagination. You are joking a lot.	Inventing fiction; joking; irony; provoking; inducing laughter, thinking, emotional reaction.	17
	Bullshit	You don't care about rationality, reality or objectivity. You are just telling impressive stories.	Ignoring rationality, reality or objectivity; being full of conviction, not having distance to oneself or one's own speech.	18

Table 2. The 21 communication patterns of lying and their structure

Each of the communication clusters is tied to a peculiar way of dealing with the dichotomy of lying and truth:

- “Hiding yourself” means the person is trying to hide their perspective/ qualities behind a shield of defense mechanisms, such as naivety, ignorance, or a self-image that doesn’t reflect the person’s “true” self.
- “Blurring reality” refers to a class of communication strategies that obscure the truth by all sorts of relativizations, contradictions or vague general statements which are not clearly related to the present situation.
- “Fighting for acceptance” is subordinating the truth to social acceptance. It is more important to gain the “yes” of the other person than to share the truth.
- “Insisting on own perspective” claims the own position to be the only true one, seeking constantly for confirmation. Thereby, all true dialogue which equals the essence of two-way communication is refused.
- Last but not least, “Putting on a show” is a class of patterns that don’t care for neither truth nor lying. They are focused on impressing others without any expectation towards finding the truth.

Having created a well-structured overview over all the patterns that Brenifier has described in detail, I need to state two things: We know now how people lie and what causes them to. This is useful when we have clients that seem to not tell the truth. We hear their words, see their patterns and scrutinize their motives. The question is: Why is this important for Philosophical Practice? Why would we want to figure out whether or not somebody is lying? What is the mission here? The second question is closely linked to the first one. Let’s assume somebody is lying and we have found out. Why would we want to disclose/ address it? What is the purpose here?

Both aspects, mission and purpose are to be clarified. If we manage to do so, I assume, we can clearly describe and define the value and contribution of philosophical consultation as such. As is the custom with deconstruction I will not approach these questions from an outside perspective but follow the traces within Brenifier’s text. Does it show any concern with these questions? Affirmative.

Questioning Reality

In order to answer the first question, we need to consider the peculiar relationship of language and reality. Hegel, in his “Phenomenology of Spirit” of 1807, is probably the first one to state that there is no fixed bond between a word and the reality it indicates.³ Ferdinand de Saussure, in his famous “Course in General Linguistics” (first published in 1915) points out that the creation of meaning in language has to make do without any natural attachment to perceptions of whatever kind, not to speak of any trans-verbal reality.⁴ The young Nietzsche, in a fragment of 1873 called “On Truth and Lies in an Extra-moral Sense”, claims language to be a system of loose metaphors whose very condition is lying, as there can be no truth in metaphorical language.⁵ I like the fervor with which he accuses all language of lying and attenuates truth to a simple feeling of being obliged to certain social communication rules.

How does Brenifier handle the difference of language and reality in his text? He doesn’t seem to bother. He uses the notion “reality” as a singular term, indicating there is one reality out there that

can be perceived and accessed. He seems to insinuate a relationship of simple representation in sentences such as: “Reality is often unpleasant and harsh, in particular when compared to our wishes.” Or: “Reason is a powerful tool . . . to better access the nature of reality.” Or: The person “protect(s) himself from any intrusion of reality”. He commands a “reality principle” that keeps us from buying into our own self-delusions or speaks about “the way things are”. And he speaks about an “objective reality”. Language as such, concedes Brenifier, can be ambiguous, vague, imprecise or illusionary. It can even “de-realize the world and events”. This is interesting as he seems to set up a juxtaposition of one unequivocal reality and its unclear, subjective descriptions.

Reality as such is clear, language is not. At times, Brenifier uses the word “perception” or “our perception”. It indicates that humans perceive reality, before they describe it in language. They tell the truth, if they describe their perceptions correctly, they lie if they don’t. Now, how does Brenifier know that what humans perceive equals one objective reality? And that their descriptions are correct or wrong? How can he secure one objective reality in spite of subjective perceptions and descriptions? And how can he then tell, e.g., that a “manipulator fabricates a false reality through speech”? He uses a Kantian approach. Kant, in his “Critique of Pure Reason”, solves the tension of subjective perception and objective knowledge by establishing the “I think” as a set of logical rules that guide, or rather: should guide, and limit, individual imagination.⁶ Brenifier takes the same route. He uses the notions of “reason” and “logic” to secure the objectivity of one joint reality we all are supposed to perceive in the same way. If somebody thinks and communicates logically and rationally, they will recognize reality as it is. The problem with this approach lies in the ambivalence of “is” and “ought”, does guide and should guide. Logical thinking or reason is a talent we all share, as opposed to: Logical thinking is an obligation we should all comply with. In the end it is all about the normative control of individual imaginative forces, or isn’t it?

Brenifier would most probably deny that. He uses the expression “common sense” in order to indicate that this is not only a theoretical problem but is also reflected in how most people are understanding things. He states that terms can be “obvious to common sense” or speaks of “a truth that is obvious for others” and for ourselves, “if we accept to refer to a minimum of common sense”. He even equals “common sense and logic” in one sentence. I object. While common sense was an emancipatory movement in the 18th century, it has a perilous connotation in the more and more diverse societies of the 21st century. Majorities are no clear indicator for truth anymore, they can be, however, for group pressure.

At its core, the problem is connected to how we understand the correlation of “truth” and reality. If we presume a correlation of correspondence, which is the easiest understanding, we will take reality as granted. In that case, the clarity of its cognition and descriptions is dependent only on the intricacies of language and how we master them. Despite his subjective turn, Kant has not fully abandoned such an understanding of reality as I have shown elsewhere.⁷ And Brenifier is heading down that road, too. He thinks that we can see and describe our joint reality clearly if we think, act, and communicate in rational and reasonable ways. And he uses common sense to support that hypothesis.

While we need to acknowledge the reference of language to perceptions, there is no way of ever securing firm bonds between the two of them. We only have access to language and the experience that most people in most cases (with the exception of poetry or art) intend to indicate a “some-

thing” beyond language. But luckily, correspondence is not the only option available, there is also a second one. We can understand truth in terms of coherence. If we presume truth and reality to be in a correlation of coherence, the picture changes. It is no more about finding out what is out there and whether the reality of it is being represented correctly. If truth is a question of coherence, then we are observing whether or not the mental constructions of a person, expressed in their words, sentences, lifestyle, and body language, are coherent. Whatever a person utters becomes part of the text we are studying in order to find out whether everything is fitting. This has a significant effect on the question of truth and lying. Lying would mean that some aspects don't seem to fit.

Checking Coherence and Consistency

There are traces of coherence truth in Brenifier's text, especially when he talks about the “self-delusion” of people. People are deluding themselves by playing more naïve than they are, by pretending ignorance when they have the knowledge, by hiding aspects of their thinking and being from themselves and others, by fabricating “creative” self-images etc. If deluding yourself equals lying, then being true to yourself equals truth, or truthfulness. The shift from truth to truthfulness which I use doesn't happen by chance. Heidegger has claimed Nietzsche to be the last metaphysician having taken exactly the shift from ontological truth to subjective truthfulness.⁸ Again, we can find a trace of this shift in Brenifier's text. Let's listen to his own words:

Authenticity is “the quality of being genuine and true, more endowed with integrity. Authenticity denotes an emotionally appropriate behavior, more distant and reflective, a significant and responsible mode of existence, since it is defined through a clear and conscious purpose. Authenticity implies a critical dimension because it maintains a broader scope, towards the person itself, including its inner conflicts; it maintains a relation to reason and reality.”

With Brenifier, checking coherence equals checking authenticity. How authentically does a person handle the diverse aspects of their life, including references to self and reality? That's the question Brenifier is dealing with. Integrity, handling emotions, reflection, responsibility, purpose – these are the dimensions of authenticity he focuses on. Inner conflicts are hints at gaps in the coherent reality of the other person as is the language the person uses. The language signals Brenifier has listed do indicate issues with the truthfulness of a person, whether they emerge unintendedly, subconsciously, or are created on purpose. At the same time, he uses to watch his clients very carefully, he reads their body language and compares it to what they are saying. So he constantly checks the coherence of their reality, i.e. their truthfulness.

Let's pursue another trait that is part of the quote mentioned: the sequence of “reflective”, “conscious”, “critical”, and “reason”. Summarizing the text, we can state: Reason denotes conscious, critical reflection and, as such, it is part of an authentic personality. At the same time, conscious critical reflection can only take place on the level of language. So, there is a difference between checking the overall coherence of a life and checking its verbal description as such. I call the latter “consistency”. The coherence check takes everything into account, all the manifestations of a life plan (language, lifestyle, body language). The consistency check focuses on the logical use of language when talking about certain issues. Thus, consistency is the logical, language-bound part of coherence. The coherence check can be seen as a wider, aesthetic approach to life whereas the consistency check focuses primarily on the logical aspect of thinking.

Of course, one could argue that, especially in Philosophical Practice, we are mostly confronted with the verbal self- and life-description of a client. As such, coherence and consistency might be overlapping to a great extent. Or, with Derrida, we could extend the meaning of text to basically everything⁹ which again would cause the distinction of coherence and consistency to collapse. I still insist on differentiating the two for heuristic reasons. There are people, clients, who rely more on their thinking than others. For them, the consistency check is more important. Others do have other issues. For them, a coherence check in the wider sense of the word may suffice. Just offering a consistency check to everybody would not be enough.

The Dead Philosopher

Philosophical Practice is a practice that is based on theory but mustn't be mistaken for it. While this statement sounds trivial enough, it is very important. Academic philosophy, usually, makes do with scrutinizing a text and drawing intellectual conclusions from the examination. We have also done that with Brenifier's "Phenomenology of Lying" up to this very moment. We could close the file now stating there to be an issue with his notion of reality and making suggestions as how to mend that flaw. Things are more complicated, though.

Brenifier has mentioned at times that philosophical practitioners, when doing their work, need to be "dead as a person"¹⁰. This sentence sounds weird to most people. For our discussion of what "reality" means in Brenifier's universe, however, it matters a lot. "Being dead as a person" is a metaphor, of course. You can't be "really dead" and practice philosophical dialogue. But what else could it mean? In which context would such a statement make sense? In order to have a closer look, we need to refer to Brenifier's book on "Philosophical Consultation"¹¹, where he states: "To philosophize is to cease living"¹².

Brenifier himself admits this to be a symbolic remark¹³ which he then illustrates by highlighting different possible meanings: philosophy as "learning to die", overcoming desires, creating abstract discourses and conceptualizations. All of these are, according to Brenifier, "contrary to life", "a rupture with life"¹⁴ or "the way in which the intellect denies life"¹⁵. He calls "this inner philosopher" a "demon" which "prevents us from living"¹⁶. Then he moves on to the "ability to problematize" which "must examine the limits and falsity of any given opinion"¹⁷ including one's own dearest principles and assumptions. Again, he likens this radical self-relativization to death:

"And in order to accomplish such a change of attitude, one must actually 'die to oneself', 'let go', one must give up momentarily what is dearest to him, whether it be ideas and deep emotions. ... By observing how the people involved in a discussion get heated when contradicted, how they use extreme positions and strategies to defend their ideas ... we can conclude, indeed, that to give up one's own ideas is a kind of 'little death'".¹⁸

All of these arguments are not convincing as they are only playing with words. So far, death has been a weird metaphor for the different aspects of the lives philosophers live and the work they do. The metaphor is too strong and too weak at the same time. That intellectual work can create orgasms of its own—"little deaths", as they say in Italy—may be a smug anecdote but it can't bear any argumentative weight. So why bother? Because there is one more relevant thought in Brenifier's

text. It reaps most benefit, although it seems to be mentioned just as a side remark, when Brenifier equals Socrates' philosophical work to soul-searching:

Socrates wanted to “examine the minds of his fellow-creatures by searching their souls. It was in this unique place, the soul of the others, that he found the truth. ... Our proposition is that Socrates found the truth in people because they gave him the opportunity to give up his own thought, by penetrating theirs, they allowed him to die to himself, to give up his own being by penetrating theirs.”¹⁹

Again, the comparison to death is disputable, but the scenery as such is not. Most philosophical practitioners may have made the same experience: Good philosophical dialogue can be described as soul-searching where the practitioners are invited to sort of ‘enter into the life concept’ of their clients. They are shown around and get to see inner assumptions, values, principles, thoughts, self-explanations, feelings, and desires of the other person. It is indeed like entering into a stranger's house, leaving your own home behind, even forgetting about it momentarily.

Now, how is this experience connected to our question of reality, truth, and lying? What kind of truth is it that we can find in the other person's soul? It is *their* truth, of course, we embark on *their* reality. Otherwise, “dying to yourself” would not make any sense even as a metaphor. We leave our own reality and truth behind in order to “search” and “examine” theirs as Brenifier puts it. We are invited on an adventure trip coming back enriched, as we have seen the world from a different angle. Returning into our own realities with our own truths, we are not the same anymore. We have expanded our worldview and, as such, our identities have changed as well. Our old worldview, “reality”, has disappeared, a new one has emerged with the perspective of the other person being integrated to a certain extent.

So, the metaphor of the dead philosopher has a double meaning here: The philosopher is “dead as a person” as long as he or she is fully immersed into the reality of the client, helping sort things out or putting them into perspective. This “death” is temporary, as it ends at the latest when the client pays their bill. The other “death” is figurative, indicating that the self-concept of the philosopher, their perspective on life, is changing with each new, meaningful, “mind-boggling” philosophical encounter. It dies, so to speak, whenever a new concept arises.

Implications for the Philosophical Dialogue

Our discussion of reality/ realities, coherence, and consistency has significant implications for what we do in Philosophical Practice. While there are some traits in Brenifier's argumentation and methodology that I subscribe to, there are others that I think need a change of concept. Let me start with the insights the text provides:

- One goal of philosophical consultation, next to amplifying autonomy, is increasing authenticity. Authenticity is not the “core” of a person, but their way of openly handling cognitive or emotional dissonances within themselves or with others. It is at least part of the mission of Philosophical Practice to help people become more authentic.
- Lying to themselves and/ or to others limits the innate potential of a person. This is especially true for fear-based lies. But, also, goal-oriented or social lies limit a person

as they weaken their resolve and their readiness to stand and face conflict. Part of the purpose of Philosophical Practice is to provide the client with sufficient feedback so that they can become aware of their subconscious, or half-conscious, or full-conscious sacrifices of personal freedom which they make for the sake of something else whenever they are lying.

- The gaps, cracks, and fissures in language and lifestyle can be used for checking the coherence or consistency of a life concept. This is probably the essence of Brenifier's work and the most valuable insight he has been providing us with.
- Reason is the ability to create meaning, to interpret, judge, evaluate and decide.²⁰ It is the ability to problematize and to conceptualize. It claims general relevance and it doesn't care about idiosyncrasies. It is demanding, it can be harsh and even brutal at times.²¹ This power needs to be trained, cultivated and kept under control in order to not be hijacked by individual aggressive tendencies.

Here are some suggestions for a change in theory design:

- Reality is the reality of the client that needs to be checked in terms of coherence. As it is their reality concept it needs to be treated with respect, patience, and clear feedback. I am aware that these aspects can collide. Nevertheless, we need to help the clients understand their own way of thinking in order to reach the authenticity-goal mentioned. In addition to that, I suggest using the term "reality" in its plural form, "realities", for the sake of epistemological clarity.
- We enter into the world of our client if we are invited in. This is not a "penetration"²², however, and soul-searching very rarely takes the form of a "hand-to-hand combat with reality"²³, especially not if the reality concept of the other person is at stake. Being aware of the raw powers of reason, I nevertheless advocate a disarmament of words when it comes to the intimate encounter of joint philosophical practice.
- We can check the conscious life plan of a person in terms of consistency, if the person wants us to. Inconsistent thinking creates trouble, either emotional or cognitive. However, freedom is also the freedom to create trouble for yourself. We can't do the work without conscious permission. We can only offer observations and feedback. It is up to the person whether they take it or not.
- The notion of "common sense" needs to be dealt with cautiously. It doesn't serve the cause if we use it to increase pressure on our client. Thus, common sense would only be the philosophical equivalent of group pressure which an independent person will always resist against, with or without a consistent life concept. For dependent people, however, this kind of pressure limits their autonomy right from the beginning which we cannot want.
- Suppose we critically examine the consistency of a life concept and detect flaws in its rational construction. Suppose we manage to feedback this to the client in a constructive way. If the client's answer is "I don't know", this doesn't indicate ignorance. It indicates that the client hasn't thought about this aspect yet and needs time to reconsider his or her life plan. The same holds true for sentences such as "I need time to think". With a notion of consistency in place, these sentences develop a new meaning, they need to be taken literally. People do really need time to ponder over their principles, assumptions, and convictions. If we think about truth in terms of correspondence, there's no need for

waiting. Just look and describe what you see “out there” or within yourself, and don’t lie! If truth is a question of coherence and/ or consistency, it makes sense to ask for reconstruction time, ideally in an authentic way.

- With the change in truth, also the notion of lying becomes way less important than Brenifier has put it. Lies are just fissures in the life-plan of a person. As Brenifier states correctly, lying is not always conscious, and if it is conscious, the intentions are not always bad. From my perspective, creating a trans-moral, pure cognitive meaning of the word “lying” is too much of an effort. In most language systems, lying equals cheating and is deemed bad. In Philosophical Practice, it is not important to figure out whether a person is lying or not. This is not an end in itself. This is just one possible entry point to philosophical dialogue. The important question is for which purpose the person is telling lies and if there are other, less harmful or more effective ways to serve this purpose.
- A “Phenomenology of Lying” is indeed very helpful insofar as it supports the philosophical practitioner with identifying the traces of self-delusion in language and lifestyle. From my perspective, it would be too much to expand it to a quasi-ontology of communication. Brenifier doesn’t seem to intend that, but he seems to make theoretical ground for it, especially in connection with the recurring notion on one “reality” that needs to be referred to. When talking about sincerity, Brenifier himself discusses similar deviations. I suggest changing the headline of the text to “Phenomenology of self-delusion” and re-arrange the argumentation accordingly.

I am coming to the end of my analysis. The text provides plenty of inspiration which we can use very well in Philosophical Practice. I have started out with the question of whether or not Brenifier’s text is obsessed with truth. It is, from my perspective, as lying conjures up truth as its identical twin. For me, neither lying nor truth are in the center of my attention, my mission is autonomy. However, freedom has a close connection to truth and truthfulness, as Jesus has already remarked: “Truth will set you free”²⁴.

Notes

1. Not having been formally published yet, the text is difficult to quote. Here’s how I do it: If not marked otherwise, each quote in inverted comas comes directly from Brenifier’s text.
2. See M. Carmann (2020), *Martha’s Messages*, where - building in the works of Austin and Searle - I show how to substitute denotative with appellative speech-acts.
3. G.W.F. Hegel (2011), *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Cambridge Hegel Translations), transl. by T. Pinkard, Cambridge.
4. F. de Saussure (2011), *Course in General Linguistics*, New York.
5. F. Nietzsche (1999), *Unpublished writings from the period of the Unfashionable Observations* (The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Vol. 11), transl. by R.T. Gray, Redwood City.
6. I. Kant (1999), *Critique of Pure Reason* (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant), transl. by P. Guyer and A.W. Wood, Cambridge.
7. M. Carmann (1999), *Mensch: Moral – Religion. Kant-Lektüren aus der polykontexturalen Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt/ Main.
8. M. Heidegger (1991), *Nietzsche*, transl. by D.F. Krell, New York.
9. “There is nothing outside of the text [there is no outside-text]” (J. Derrida (1997), *Of Grammatology*, Corr. Ed., transl. by G.C. Spivak, Baltimore, p. 158).
10. O. Brenifier in a training session on Jan 7, 2021.
11. O. Brenifier (2020), *Philosophical Consultation*. Downloaded on Jan 28, 2021, from <http://www.pra->

tiques-philosophiques.fr/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Philosophical-consultation-last-version.pdf.

12. Brenifier, Philosophical Consultation, p. 55ff.
13. Brenifier, Philosophical Consultation, p. 56.
14. Brenifier, Philosophical Consultation, p. 68f.
15. Brenifier, Philosophical Consultation, p. 74.
16. Brenifier, Philosophical Consultation, p. 76.
17. Brenifier, Philosophical Consultation, p.77.
18. Brenifier, Philosophical Consultation, p. 78.
19. Brenifier, Philosophical Consultation, p. 83.
20. Brenifier, Philosophical Consultation, p. 81.
21. Brenifier, Philosophical Consultation, p. 74.
22. Ibid. Penetration as a metaphor is violent in most cases which it is not in consensual sexuality.
23. Brenifier, Philosophical Consultation, p. 74.
24. John 8:32.

References

- Brenifier, Brenifier (2020), Philosophical Consultation. Downloaded on Jan 28, 2021, from <http://www.pratiques-philosophiques.fr/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Philosophical-consultation-last-version.pdf>.
- Brenifier, Brenifier (2021), Phenomenology of Lying (unpublished).
- Carmann, Martin (2020), Martha's Messages. Zur Nutzung philosophischer Texte in der Philosophischen Praxis am Beispiel von Martha Nussbaums Buch „Anger and Forgiveness“
- Carmann, Martin (1999), Mensch: Moral – Religion. Kant-Lektüren aus der polykontexturalen Gesellschaft, Frankfurt/ Main
- Derrida, Jacques (1997), Of Grammatology, Corr. Ed., transl. by G.C. Spivak, Baltimore
- Heidegger, Martin (1991), Nietzsche, transl. by D.F. Krell, New York.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich (2011), Phenomenology of Spirit (Cambridge Hegel Translations), transl. by T. Pinkard, Cambridge
- Kant, Immanuel (1999), Critique of Pure Reason (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant), transl. by P. Guyer and A.W. Wood, Cambridge
- Nietzsche, Friedrich (1999), Unpublished writings from the period of the Unfashionable Observations (The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Vol. 11), transl. by R.T. Gray, Redwood City
- Saussure, Ferdinand de (2011), Course in General Linguistics, New York

Dr. Martin Carmann, born 1969, has studied Theology and Philosophy. His doctoral thesis on Derrida and Kant was published in 1999. Since then, he has been working worldwide as a leadership and organization development coach. His philosophical background is Derrida, Luhmann, Kant, and Hegel.

Correspondence: mc@carmann.at



Approaching Elsewhere: On Fear of ‘The After-life’

PETER B. RAABE

PROFESSOR EMERITUS, UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY, B.C., CANADA

Dying takes little effort, but writing about death is hard.

Abstract

Research data shows fear to be the predominant emotion accompanying thoughts of one’s own death. This is because there’s no convincing evidence of exactly what to expect thereafter. There’s also considerable confusion about which of the three main traditional hypotheses¹ of the ‘after-life’ is correct. The problem is that none of them can be empirically proven to be true. The upside is that this allows for equally plausible alternatives. In this essay I present a fourth, more reassuring, hypothesis that’s much more useful in reducing the fear of death and the ‘there-after.’

Introduction

My wife’s brother, Dick, has survived nearly a century on this earth. But now that his failing health has made a hospital stay imperative, it has compelled us to think about what the future will hold for him. Of course, by ‘future’ I mean what he will experience, if anything, after his death. And what will happen to the ‘him’ that he has been to us.

Death is a difficult topic to discuss objectively, dispassionately, philosophically. Beyond middle age, mortality is acknowledged but rarely welcomed. The arrival of death is almost always perceived as untimely. It’s rarely openly discussed, not only because it’s an uncomfortable, even frightening topic but also because so little about it is actually known or understood. There are no eye-witness accounts of a transcendent ‘after-life.’ No journals or books have been published about the subjective experience of disembodied selfhood after an individual’s verified death. The books that are available lack credibility in the scientific community. They generally fail to meet the minimum criteria for being reliably factual. Medical science can tell us the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of a person’s death, “What did he die from?” “Why did those organs fail?” But it can’t answer the metaphysical question, “What happens to him next?”

I’m not as old as my brother-in-law, but I’m getting on in years. And since I’m also dealing with life-threatening medical issues, I’ve been doing some serious thinking (some grave cogitation) on the topic of what I could expect might happen after I’ve used up my life. Taking on such a deep and important topic might seem quite presumptuous for someone like me who’s not a famous name in philosophy nor a media spokesperson for the field; I don’t even look like a philosopher. But this essay is first and foremost a profoundly personal project, one which, I hope, will bring some comfort to my wife and son, and to anyone else who has the time to read it.

I’m also writing in order to try to sort out in my own mind what I’ve long suspected are serious problems with the ‘after-life’ beliefs that have been circulating for many centuries among the deeply religious, the intensely philosophical, and the good people in our neighborhood. Mortality can’t be approached ontologically because there’s no science capable of providing the ‘what’ of some-

thing that doesn't objectively exist. "The physical and biological sciences point only to a final end" (Mathur p. 215). Therefore mortality's 'existence' in this essay is an epistemological construct. And it's also a call to view the impending end of life in a more benign way, based on what little information is currently available. I have no personal wisdom to offer because wisdom is based on experience, and the only experience of death resides in the dead. So I'm forced to apply a philosophical method to the ubiquitous problem of the fear of death—also sometimes referred to as "the end-of-life terrors" (Marano 40).

The topic of mortality remains salient in a number of professional and semi-professional fields: the field of medicine where every effort is made to avoid or postpone it; the field of palliative care where it's made as painless as possible; the field of religion where darkening spirits are salved with stories of rewards in a better place; and in academic philosophy which has stalled at the only two logically possible hypotheses about 'the after-death': either complete nothingness or some unspecified 'after-life.' While there are a number of books offering advice on 'dying well,' so far I've found little comfort in either the writings of philosophers, the theological pronouncements of religious professionals, or the pseudo-magical thinking of so-called 'New Agers' regarding what sort of future state I can expect after my death.

Assertions

I see death as a closed book (or computer file) whose contents are inaccessible. As an abstraction death is known only from the standpoint of reflection. Sociology tells us that every human being has their own way of grieving both their own mortality, and that of loved ones. Their many meaningful end-of-life rituals are collected and visibly listed on the cover of that book. But the enigma of what might come after death is hidden within its pages, unavailable to mortal eyes. Phenomenology can describe the activity of conscious living, "the essential or ontological structure of experience" (Fernandez, 193). And it can describe the consequences of a spent life. But there's no phenomenology of death because the very definition of death is the absence of consciousness phenomena; it's the non-existence of existence. There's no 'lived experience' in death.

Most of the great philosophers have touched on the problem of death, but few have dealt with it systematically or in detail. In the mid-17th century, English philosopher and physician, John Locke, postulated that the dead would be miraculously resurrected during the 'Last Judgement.' This is when the 'worthy' will be allowed to live for ever, but the 'unworthy' will be returned to eternal death. Late 17th century Dutch/Portuguese philosopher Baruch Spinoza suggested that fear of death can be overcome through distraction, by focusing on the enjoyments had in life instead. Mid 19th century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer declared that the fear of death is the driving force behind all human activity as a denial of death itself. Early 20th century phenomenologists Max Scheler and Martin Heidegger attributed the lack of knowledge about death among both philosophers and the masses as psychological repression. Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud went so far as to hypothesize that "the goal of all life is death" (Chodorow p. 130). By 1967 the number of experimental studies undertaken on attitudes to death was still disappointingly small (Edwards Vol. 2, p. 307). It has never been a well-funded research topic.

Whenever science suggested that death is just a natural phenomenon that affects all living creatures, the Catholic church's doctrinal response for centuries has been that the ending of a human

life should be understood as punishment from God for Adam and Eve's disobedience in Eden. One of the early Christians, Augustine of Hippo, said that the fear of death can't be relieved by means of any human efforts. It can only be overcome through Divine grace.

Many well-known writers have suggested that life is absurd, first because death seems to be a pathology for which we have not yet managed to find a cure. And second because all the hard work over our life spans just advances us to that inevitable end. What's even worse is the feeling that life itself is merely engaging in mindless drudgery—like in the Sisyphus myth whose main character had to repeatedly push a boulder up a steep hill for all eternity. (Note: The gods didn't sentence Sisyphus to death. They doomed him to push a boulder up a hill *for all eternity*. Some people would consider living for all eternity a good thing, even if it meant repeatedly pushing a boulder up a hill!). But thinking of life as just the downhill slide to death is a reductive line of thinking. It assumes that the purpose of life is merely to arrive at "the other side of life" (Sartre p. 691). It's as though the experiences of life are worthless, and the destination is all that matters; as if life's desired goal is in fact, as Freud hypothesized, the non-conscious state of being dead.

Contrary to the pronouncements of many authors, I disagree with the *cliché* which says that 'death is a part of life.' I tend to agree with Sartre when he wrote that, in metaphysical terms, death "isn't an ontological structure of being" (Sartre p. 710). Technically, death is the cessation of "the being of a being" (Heidegger p. 7), followed by the absence of life. And neither is it the end of a story. Death is the cancellation of a dynamic narrative, the utter sublimation of a life like dry ice.

In his letter to Menoeceus, the early Greek philosopher Epicurus said that 'death is nothing.' It doesn't concern the living because they're not dead, and it doesn't concern the dead because they don't exist any more. The Stoics, like Epicurus, called the fear of death irrational. But this doesn't help anyone to feel better when their fear of death is based on the expectation that dying will be unpleasant or painful, or when belief in an 'after-life' includes the worry about Judgment Day and Divine retribution which may also be unpleasant or painful.

Furthermore, the virtually universal fear of death isn't irrational at all when death is defined as the complete annihilation of a person; or when the word 'fear' refers to worry or disappointment, as in "I fear my projects will remain unfinished." If, in hindsight, life has been enjoyed, but it's believed that death will be the end of love, and joy, and everything else of value, then it seems especially justified to fear its loss. To overcome the fear of death the Stoic Seneca advised thinking of it constantly, but in a manner which acknowledges the human animal as part of nature; as participating in the natural cycles of death and new birth. But I don't see this as very useful either because, for one thing it distracts from more creative things I could be thinking about. And for another, it doesn't give any real hope for the survival of my consciousness, the continuation of my subjective, although perhaps not embodied, 'selfness.'

Twentieth century French existentialist philosopher and feminist writer Simone de Beauvoir saw death as an alien intruder into life. In her book, *A Very Easy Death*, she wrote,

There is no such thing as a natural death: nothing that happens to a man is ever natural, since his presence calls the world into question. All men must die: but for every man his death is an accident and, even if he knows it and consents to it, an unjustifiable violation (pp 105–6).

Her partner, existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, insisted “what we should note right at the start is death’s absurd character” because of our inability to stop it from carrying us away at any moment (Sartre p. 692). In his major work, *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre saw death as an outrage that comes from outside us, and wipes out all our projects.

Death is never what gives life its meaning: it is, on the contrary, that which eliminates all meaning from it. It can’t be prepared for, or accepted, or incorporated into life, or tamed to suit oneself. Worst of all it’s the end of all possibilities. In considering death, we should avoid the temptation to regard it as a resolution chord at the end of a melody...We ought rather to compare ourselves to someone sentenced to death who is bravely preparing himself for his execution (pp. 700, 692).

Late 20th century British philosopher Richard Wollheim saw death as “the great enemy” because it takes away our capacity to experience anything at all (Bakewell p. 299-300). During the same time period, American philosopher Galen Pletcher suggested that perhaps more than anything death is “a constant reminder that you cannot proceed endlessly through the projects of your life” (Pletcher p. 72). Elias Canetti, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1981, denied death any positive meaning. He warned that “we shouldn’t acknowledge death as something positive” because this will exert “a corrupting influence” over the enjoyments of life (Canetti p. 233). So what are appropriate thoughts and feelings when considering the end of life?

Emotions

The best known summary of the emotions likely to be experienced by most people as they approach their own mortality comes from Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in her seminal book *On Death and Dying*. She observed five ‘stages’ of dying in this order: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. But sociological research has shown that people can also feel anxious, traumatized, and even deathly afraid of dying. In fact it’s been argued that not being anxious would be remarkable, and perhaps even diagnosable as a so-called ‘mental illness’ (Warren p. 43) We fear and hate death because it removes us from our family, friends, and community. It disappoints our expectations of the future. It frustrates us with our own powerlessness. It makes us realize that sending our prayers ‘up to the gods’ will ultimately do nothing to delay it. Our expiry date comes according to its own timetable. While it may be hastened through self-destruction, it’s generally assumed that, when an individual’s ‘appointed cosmic time’ arrives, it can’t be avoided.

Our attitudes toward our own death might also be “a source of anguish” because it’s a topic within the realm of the unknown (Sartre p. 732). And when something is unknown it’s easy to assume and fear the worst. The Spanish existentialist philosopher Miguel de Unamuno said he was never afraid when being shown horrifying pictures of torturous ‘Hell.’ What terrified him most was the thought of his non-existence, an absolute featureless and futureless nothingness devoid of him.

In 1951 the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas published a poem titled “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night.” In it he passionately insisted that his father rage against his impending death.

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;

Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
 Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
 Because their words had forked no lightning they
 Do not go gentle into that good night.

But Thomas's poem leaves unanswered the question, "Why should his father rage against the dying of the light?" The answer might be because Thomas assumes that some very undesirable state will be experienced by him (and by us) when his life is finished. But there's no evidence in all of medical science that supports this assumption. And religions can't do anything more than tease believers with fanciful or horrific *a priori* tales of what might possibly occur after life. Their flagrant and somewhat naïve claims of unsubstantiated *possibilities* don't offer any estimates of logical *probabilities*. This leaves frightened believers with only a single option: praying for Divine intervention.

Thomas's poem is in sharp contrast to the 1976 Blue Öyster Cult lyrics to their rock classic "Don't Fear the Reaper."

All our times have come
 Here, but now they're gone
 Seasons don't fear the reaper
 Nor do the wind, the sun or the rain
 We can be like they are
 Come on baby, don't fear the reaper...

So then which of our emotions are the most appropriate when facing death? What is our best course of action: to rage against death or to have no fear of the Reaper?

Visceral dread grows from the anticipation of contingent *possible* outcomes, and from the anguished expectations of imagined states. "What if heaven isn't real? What if there's only the empty nothingness that Sartre spoke of? What if I'm reborn as a lowly worm?" But the dread subsides when these sort of tremulous 'what-ifs' are abandoned. What makes us afraid are the grim metaphysical assumptions inherent in the various long-established responses to those questions. The certain prospect of death not only creates fear whenever the thought of personal mortality arises, but as the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche put it, it also "makes the whole of life repulsive," (Kaufmann p. 165). So, after careful contemplation, it seems to me that it's better to just wonder what will come after the end of life without inventing metaphysical worst-case scenarios that are guaranteed to cause unavoidable trepidation.

For the young dying of old age is an inconceivable occurrence in a far too distant future. The knowledge that one will die begins to provoke the greatest anxiety in late mid-life with the arrival of grandchildren, retirement, unfortunate chronic health issues, and the realization that the family name might not be carried into the next generation. There's also the uneasiness about whether one has done enough with the opportunities life has offered. There's regret over ventures that won't be realized because plans for one's own future, and that of friends and family, will never be implemented (Doka, p. 114, 116). So it can be felt as an abandonment not only of family and friends but of projects as well.

It doesn't help much to argue that fear of death is pointless, because that doesn't avoid it. Though logic tells us that fearing our eventual end is psychologically harmful (Murphy p. 52), the feeling of fear can't simply be turned off at will like a light switch. Our fear is based on what we've long been led to believe and expect. It requires a reconsideration of beliefs and expectations, and a reforming of our thoughts so that fear will subside of its own accord. Like Epictetus, assistant professor of Modern Eastern Civilizations, Aruna Mathur, insists that "our capacity to deal with the mortality issue depends greatly on the beliefs we harbor" (p. 215).

Even just thinking casually about our own ending can bring all sorts of other emotions to the surface: embarrassment at being unable to stop the dying process; frustration and anger with the lack of personal power to prevent it; sadness because it stops our ability to care for our family and improve society for future generations, and so on. Not surprisingly, if illness, frailty, and pain are part of the process of dying, the positive emotion of hope may arise due to the belief that death means relief from suffering. But no matter what emotions are felt, there will almost always be some amount of doubt, uncertainty, and fear in what most people believe will come after death. And the once popular accounts of 'near-death experiences' that at one time offered some comfort have mostly died out due to their non-verifiable assertions. From the earliest accounts, almost every explanation of what we may expect in 'the after-life' has suffered from contradictory theological interpretations of the many self-referential 'inspired' writings, and the egregious logical flaws of hopeful hypothesizers.

Illogic

Socrates spoke of the relationship between philosophy and dying. He believed that the physical body held a *psyche* (in Greek ψυχή, translated variously in English as soul, spirit, mind, or consciousness) a disembodied entity that exists before birth, and separates from a lifeless body to be reborn into a newly embodied self. But his reference to the relationship between death and philosophy can be misunderstood. He's often paraphrased—sometimes in a paraphrase of a paraphrase—as saying something like 'all of philosophy is a preparation for dying,' or 'philosophy is itself a kind of cultivation of dying,' and so on (Yourgrau, p. 137). These sort of vague paraphrases have often puzzled me. So I decided to research the source.

In *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* Socrates is quoted in *Phaedo* as saying quite clearly that "a true lover of wisdom (referring to a philosopher or student of philosophy) will never attain the wisdom worthy of the name elsewhere than in the next world..." Then he asks the rhetorical questions, "Will he [the philosopher] be grieved at dying?" implying a 'no' answer. And then he asks, "Will he be glad to make that journey?" Here he implies a 'yes' answer. He concludes, "So if you see anyone distressed at the prospect of dying, it will be proof enough that he is a lover not of wisdom but of the body." (p. 68b-c). Socrates says nothing about philosophy being 'the cultivation of dying,' nor that the study of philosophy is intended as 'a preparation for dying.'

What he means is that philosophers who are working to attain ultimate wisdom in life don't realize that they will never be able to actually reach what they desire until after their deaths. The reason is because only the philosopher's immortal, immaterial soul or consciousness, relieved of the incumbrances of the tedious body, is able to attain what he perceives to be the ultimate wisdom: experience of the 'after-life' without a break in the continuity of consciousness or the loss of selfhood. And

if this holds true, he argued, then philosophers ought to look forward to death. Understandably, today Socrates's metaphysical perspective is considered problematic, but it was his way of finding solace just prior to his state-ordered execution and suicide.

To me philosophy has always been about life not death. It's about figuring out how to organize the way we live with and among others so that we'll all find life worth living. It's about feeding a hungry curiosity within ourselves about ourselves and the world we live in. Archaeology has revealed that from the earliest times in human history people have been trying to understand the mysteries of their own existence in relation to the stars, the natural world surrounding us, and our mortality. In many early cultures death was believed to be a transition from the earthly plane to some other, unknown world. The evidence for this is the fact that warriors were interred with their weapons and sometimes their horses; venerated community leaders were buried with various eating utensils and fancy clothing; and children were laid to rest with their favorite toys and pets.

Belief in the continued human-like existence after death withered substantially with the advance of scientific thinking. It was argued that, without evidence, belief in an 'afterlife' can't be maintained. (This is technically incorrect, since any belief can be maintained, even if it's false). And it was also seen as an inconsistent use of the word 'life.' Correctly stated, the question isn't, "What can we expect after death?" but rather, "What can we expect after life?" The vernacular usage of the term 'after-life' doesn't refer to any meaningful state. It's a contradiction to its common understanding to say that 'life' is a description of what comes after death. It's a paradox, and an empty referent to an imaginary state that holds no properties.

Most of us don't realistically believe we could actually live a fantasy life, so why believe in a fantasy 'after-life'? We might gain some consolation from such a belief, but in no way does it make that belief a reality. Nevertheless, many contemporary religions continue to promote the *a priori hypothetical* doctrine of an 'after-life' where the virtuous are well-rewarded and the sinful are painfully punished. This threat of Divine retribution is today still responsible for the most salient fear among believers. For centuries religions have presented life after death as a dark time of mysterious judgments, administered by supernatural beings who demand worship, love, and fear. No wonder so many people are afraid of death. Even the promise of eternal existence in a spiritual realm brings little comfort when the eventual monotony, boredom, and pointlessness of eternal existence are envisioned.

In most religions the belief in an 'after-life' is predicated on faith in a paranormal being without substance. But what sort of 'existence' would such a being have without material eyes and ears, a brain, a heart, and so on, without the cohesion of interacting parts required to constitute a functioning individual? Within what sort of structure does the consciousness of such a being reside? A hypothetical being that is conceptually articulated but is lacking substantiality—an autogenic (self-produced) being "that founded its own nothingness" (Sartre p. 176)—would be as bizarre as water without H₂O.

Some of my students argued that perhaps a life after death means simply existing as 'a free-floating consciousness integrated within the Divine,' or as it's often stated, 'being part of God.' But this posits an existence like a transparent fog where the vaporous 'being' is missing the necessary boundaries that differentiate people (and objects) from one another. Or they would be like an indistinguishable

water droplet in the Pacific ocean. Such an homogenized ‘after-life’ is quite unappealing to me. I don’t want to live forever as an emulsified molecule blended into some other being, be it a god or otherwise. A quote from the English moral philosopher Bernard Williams seems appropriate here: “It should be me who lives forever” (Williams 88).

Neither contemporary theology nor modern science can give us a definitive answer about what to expect after life. Both have nothing more to offer than possibilities and speculations. And, regrettably, no matter how much science and technology have advanced our knowledge and understanding of life, they haven’t yet been able to present any concrete facts about what, if anything, comes after life ends. No expert or authority is able to say with certainty what may be confidently expected.

When the remains of life just prior to death are very unpleasant, acceptance of death brings the hope of relief to those whose bodies are barbed-wired with numerous aches and pains. So, given the belief in the three standard options of either total nothingness, eternal existence in pleasure or pain, and somewhat random rebirths are all unpleasant, perhaps the best way to proceed is with an unconventional but much less troubling fourth option.

The Fourth

I propose going with my original fourth option, a non-conventional approach to death that I find quite comforting. After all, there are no experts whose insights into death give them the exclusive right to dictate to us what we will experience in ‘the after-life.’

Again, most people are prone to committing a common cognitive error: they seem to accept that there are only three possibilities for what may happen to a person after life has run out: (1) blinking off to nothingness; (2) receiving everlasting rewards or punishments in a supernatural ‘after-life’; or (3) having to endure an unpredictable reincarnation from which all personal memories are expunged. I see the fear of death as resulting from the assumption that these three are the exclusive choices available to us, most likely because, having been inculcated in us so thoroughly and for so long, we simply take them for granted. All of these have been offered by very intelligent people as metaphysical *possibilities*, but no one, as far as I’m aware, has ventured so far as to suggest which one is the most logical *probability*. This is because there’s no experiential precedent for comparison, correlation, or calculation. And it seems to have been forgotten or ignored that these three options are not based on fact; there is no robust scientific data, no solid medical verification, nor any computerized algorithms that have established these three options as the only cogent possibilities. There have been many anecdotal testimonials presented as evidence of an ‘after-life’ on which people have built their faith (see, for example Wilshire pp. 135-148). But such tales of personal ‘experiences’ can’t be reliably extrapolated to a universal metaphysic. Surely this isn’t the best humanity is able to come up with!?

There’s no logical reason why we should meekly follow the command: “You may only choose from these three possibilities of what might come after death.” After all, they’re each simply the hopeful figments of someone’s anxious imagination. All three are merely invented scenarios based on fear: (1) fear of the annihilation of the subjective ‘self’; (2) fear of the boredom of eternal rewards or punishments; and (3) fear of a capricious rebirth. This makes the fear of death a fear of nothing more than futile hopes, imaginings, and assumptions. And they can’t be presented as ‘revelations from

god(s)' as long as convincing empirical evidence for the existence of god(s) continues to elude us. So why don't we come up with more tenable options to believe in—ones that don't generate misery and fear?

There is literally an unlimited number of hypothetical possibilities. For example, we could believe that 'the after-life' consists of having the freedom to choose and control absolutely anything we wish to experience after death. This could be living among the clouds in some celestial paradise; or being reborn into any family of choice, on any planet in the universe; or as any creature we choose. And it doesn't have to be a predetermined "the after-life." It can in fact be *her* after-life, or *his* after-life, or *my* after-life, or *our* shared after-life. The point is we could believe in the freedom of total control over our after-life existence, even so far as being able to choose total nothingness (perhaps set on an automatic 'return-to-existence' timer).

An active imagination and an open mind about the adventures that await us after life ends isn't an ontological statement of facts about 'the after-life.' It requires no evidence to defend it, as called for by the other three hypotheses, because in this fourth option no metaphysical assertions have been made about the objective nature of its being. But it can do wonders in reducing the fear people have been dying with for centuries. This personal approach to 'after-life' is no less plausible, just as logically feasible, and much more reassuring than the three disturbing universal myths that have existed for so long. There's no reason why we can't all invent our own hypotheses, equivalent *a priori possibilities* that are less problematic than those advocated by religious and secular dogmatists. Our own positive conceptions of 'after-life,' whatever they might be, would no doubt prove much more effective in reducing our anxiety about the future.

Approaching death in an authentically optimistic anticipation of the unknown—not just in the hope of an end to pain, but with simple, child-like wondering—can replace the vulgarity of common dread. It can also ease the grief that friends and relatives feel on behalf of the dead and the ostensibly doomed. Why let others dictate what we're to believe? Why not adopt the freedom of existentialism, abandon the standard worst-case scenarios, and think of the time and place after death as merely unexplored country? No one can say with certainty what "the unknown unknown" holds (Wilshire 127), and what our attitudes toward it ought to be. But if 'first philosophy' begins in wondering about conventional metaphysical beliefs (Descartes *passim*) then it should include wondering whether the three main beliefs about what is to be expected after death are all we're allowed, or all there can be.

Professor of Philosophy Ivan Soll points out that a number of respected thinkers, such as Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, essayist Albert Camus, cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker, existentialist philosophers Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre view death, "...as uniquely catastrophic... whose constant threat is intolerable...an omnipresent and ineluctable shadow that darkens our existence," (Soll p. 22). But death is only a shadow on our existence if our attention is focused on its illusory negative possibilities, such as absolute non-existence or eternal damnation. Death does not necessarily have to be seen as a negative experience. We're free to envision it as the possible exploration of a wonderful 'after-life.'

Of course, the problem is that, like the traditional three beliefs, such a positive view of 'after-life' is also only a hope or a wish, a fanciful expectation without any guarantees. In her book *At the*

Existentialist Café Sarah Bakewell observes, “If I’m about to die, I can’t choose whether to die or not; but I can choose how to face it” (p. 157). We may not know how to ‘manage’ dying or how to avoid it, but we can at least ‘manage’ our own thinking about it so that associated fears are reduced and emotional suffering is eliminated (Roy p. 17). As Epictetus insisted, it is not events that disturb people, it is their judgements concerning them.

Open-mindedness about the approaching unknown adventure of dying is a much more agreeable subject for consideration than any of the terrifying futures predicted by the three traditional approaches. While the belief in complete annihilation is abhorrent to most people, the standard belief in some enchanted Disneyland for ‘the good ones’—where there’s no need to care or think for oneself because everything is miraculously provided—is just as distasteful to others. And being reincarnated as a random organism is even less appealing. Open-mindedness about what to expect after life ends doesn’t eliminate all concern over what might occur, but it can certainly eliminate the fear of nothingness, the fear of eternal either/or states, and the fear of a disagreeable reincarnation. Ideally, the key is to remain neutral, to make an effort not to bias the outcome with any expectations, whether feared or wished-for.

Accepting the process of dying with a neutral attitude, or with positive excitement as when approaching an unknown adventure, may seem like an overly simplistic solution to a centuries old problem. But it’s more than that. It’s “an act of hope that keeps us from falling apart when every empirical datum indicates one’s impending biological disintegration and social disappearance” (Roy p. 21). I believe it’s the most rational approach to this thorny metaphysical issue. As the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer pointed out early in the nineteenth century, “Truth goes through three steps: first, it’s ridiculed, then it’s violently opposed, and finally it’s accepted as obvious.” Open-mindedness is obviously a reasonable (dare I say logical) approach in the face of the unstoppable process of physical decline. I hesitated to use the word ‘logical’ because logic has gained the reputation of coldness whenever difficult emotional issues are under consideration. But especially in this situation, when the alternatives only present naked terror, bottomless grief, and fairy-tale absurdities, the reasonable logic of this fourth option can bring cooling comfort.

The modern approach of “We have a pill to fix that” doesn’t apply when it comes to mortality. This new fourth option I’m proposing will require the individual to develop a certain attitude, one which sets the mind to do a job, and then works to get it done. My best advice on how to improve the self-discipline required to take this open-minded approach is to practice it in discussions with others. Naturally, practice itself requires self-discipline, but if effort is put into open-mindedness—a truly philosophical endeavour—it will require much less effort than when having to deal with the anguish and fear generated by the conventional beliefs.

Conclusion

It’s impossible for anyone to know accurately what awaits us following death. And yet some people who confidently claim intellectual and/or spiritual authority insist they have it all figured out. Most people, including many philosophers, believe there are only three possibilities: (1) eternal nothingness (the loss of ‘self’); (2) eternal rewards or punishments (with eventual boredom); or (3) an unpredictable karmic rebirth (into some memoryless physical life form).

There are certainly good reasons to find these three hypotheticals undesirable, even frightening. Therefore I suggest the best approach is a fourth alternative: exercising the freedom we have to keep an open mind. By this I mean avoiding all the traditional beliefs, and maintaining a truly philosophically questioning attitude which says, "I wonder what happens next." This logical fourth choice doesn't leave one adrift within the Socratic ether-or dichotomy: either an impending nothingness or a mythical 'after-life.' And it avoids the fear of a disagreeable rebirth. But it does leave one important question remaining to be answered: Can this be done? After we've all been thoroughly indoctrinated into fearing death, are we able to actuate the freedom we have to change our minds about it?

To begin with, we need to consider what scares us about death. It turns out that it's mostly our assumptions; it's our own thoughts and beliefs that stir up our fears. It's got to be those because there aren't any *facts* about what to expect after death that can disturb us; there are only all the unverifiable cautionary tales we've absorbed during our lifetime. Discussions with others, and especially with a counsellor educated in the areas of metaphysics and epistemology, about this fourth way of looking at 'after-life' can be of great help in changing distressing thinking habits.

Counselling is achieved through the practice of collaborative autonomy between the counsellor and the client. Both are independent thinkers, but also interdependent thinkers. They work in partnership, generally listening to each other telling stories, asking questions, and making suggestions. The relationship in counselling is somewhat one-sided because the counsellor is the expert in the technical aspects of applied philosophy, while the client is the expert on her or his own emotions, assumptions, fears and so on. It is an enigmatic partnership, consisting of individual thoughts created by two people for the benefit of both. It leads to mutual self-discovery. And the thoughts they create can be in line with the fourth approach, as described above: neutralizing expectations by keeping an open mind about the possible continuity of 'life' after life. This will transcend traditional anxiety-inducing thoughts about that unknown land. To live a life worth living, without constantly submitting to the fear of the end of life, is what philosophers have been trying to achieve for centuries. Wondering about all the marvelous adventures we may possibly experience after death can free us from the burden of that heavy boulder of fear many of us have been pushing uphill for so long.

(*Addendum*: I dedicate this essay to my brother-in-law Dick who, on April 4, 2023, travelled on to explore that unknown land.)

Notes

1. I use variations of the word 'hypothesis' throughout this essay rather than 'theory' because a hypothesis is based on the shaky ground of untested assumptions or beliefs, while a theory is much more solidly established with evidential data, and a general consensus of experts in the field.

References

- Bakewell, Sarah, ed. *At the Existentialist Café: Freedom, being, and apricot cocktails*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2016.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *A Very Easy Death*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.
- Canetti, Elia. *The Human Province*. J. Neugroschel, trans. New York: Seabury Press, 1978.

- Chodorow, Nancy J. *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1989.
- Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Laurence J. Lafleur trans. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960 ed.
- Doka, Kenneth J. "The Awareness of Mortality in Midlife: Implications for Later Life." In Kauffman, 111-120.
- Epictetus. *Discourse and Selected Writings*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2008.
- Edwards, Paul. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. New York: Macmillan & Free Press, 1967.
- Feinberg, Joel. "Harm to Others." In Fischer, 169-190.
- Fernandez, Anthony Vincent and Allan Køester. "On the Subject Matter of Phenomenological Psychopathology." In Stanghellini et al, 192-204.
- Fischer, John Martin, ed. *The Metaphysics of Death*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993.
- Flowers, Betty. "Death: the Bald Scenario." In Malpas, 50-56.
- Hamilton, Edith and Huntington Cairns eds. *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989 ed.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Joan Stambaugh trans. New York: University of New York, 1996.
- Horwitz, Tem. "My Death: Reflection on my journey into non-being." In Malpas, 5-15.
- Kauffmann, Jeffrey, ed. *Awareness of Mortality*. New York: Baywood, 1995.
- Kaufmann, Walter. *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. New York: Modern Library, 1968.
- Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth. *On Death and Dying*. New York: Scribner, 1969.
- Leviton, Daniel. "Horrendous Death: Linking Thanatology and Public Health." In Kauffman, 185-214.
- Loptson, Peter. "The Antinomy of Death." In Malpas, 135-151.
- Luper-Froy, Steven. "Annihilation." In Fischer, 267-290.
- Malpas, Jeff and Robert C. Solomon, eds. *Death and Philosophy*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Marano, Hara Estroff. "A Return to Childhood." In *Psychology Today*. February, 2023. 40-45.
- Mathur, Aruna. "Death And Beyond: A Hindu's Perspective." In Kauffman, 215-224.
- Morgan, John. "Immortality" In Kauffman, 29-38.
- Murphy, Jeffrie G. "Rationality and the Fear of Death." In Fischer, 41-58.
- Plato. "Phaedo" In Hamilton, 40-98.
- Pletcher, Galen K. "Meaning and Awareness of Death." In Kauffman, 63-73.
- Roy, David J, "Dying and Death—Late in the Twentieth Century." In Kauffmann, 17-26.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. Washington Square Press, 2018 ed.
- Soll, Ivan. "On the Purported Insignificance of Death: Whistling Before the Dark?" In Malpas, 22-38.
- Stanghellini, Giovanni, and Matthew R. Broome, Anthony Vincent Fernandez, Paolo Fusar-Poli, Adrea Raballo, and René Rosfort. *The Oxford Handbook of Phenomenological Psychopathology*. Oxford: Oxford UP. 2019.
- Warren, Bill. "The Idea of the 'Glorious Dead': The Conversion of a Uniquely Personal Experience." In Kauffman, 39-50.
- Williams, Bernard. "The Makropulos Case." In Fischer, 71-92.
- Wilshire, Bruce. *Fashionable Nihilism*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2002.
- Yourgrau, Palle. "The Dead." In Fischer, 135-156.

Peter B. Raabe (born in 1949) received his Ph.D. from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada for his research in Philosophical Counseling. He is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy from the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) in Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada. For twenty-five years he taught a variety of courses including philosophy of mind, reasoning,

metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. He developed and taught a specialized course in the use of philosophy in counseling and psychotherapy. He facilitated a public philosophy café in North Vancouver for eight years, and established three mental health discussion groups. He is the author of many peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, international conference presentations, and workshops on the theme of philosophy's role in mental healthcare, and is on the editorial boards of several international publications. He is the author of three books: *Philosophy's Role in Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Jason Aronson); *Issues in Philosophical Counseling* (Praeger); and *Philosophical Counseling: Theory and Practice*, (Praeger). He is co-editor of *Women in Philosophical Counseling* (Lexington). He is also a contributing author and editor of *Philosophical Counseling and the Unconscious* (Trivium Press). He is a certified philosophical counselor, and lives in North Vancouver where he had a private practice. Web site: <http://www.peterraabe.ca>

Correspondence: peter.raabe@ufv.ca



Book Review

Lodovico Berra, *La regola della vita: Il morire e l'angoscia di morte*.
Torino: ISFiPP Edizioni, 2021. EAN: 9788890356780. 276 pages.

REVIEWED BY ANNA SORDINI

ISTITUTO SUPERIORE DI FILOSOFIA, PSICOLOGIA E PSICHIATRIA, TURIN, ITALY

Epicurus said that we should not fear death, because it does not really touch us: “while we exist death is not present, and when death is present, we no longer exist”. This much quoted reasoning has probably done little to help mankind to really overcome the dread of death, but it certainly legitimizes a widespread cultural attitude—even among psychologists—according to which it is pointless to devote intellectual and emotional energies to the problem of death, while the primary task is to improve life, that is everything that lies on this side of that impassable border. Lodovico Berra—philosopher, university professor of neuroscience in Turin, psychiatrist and psychotherapist—argues in his book that this perspective should be overturned. Precisely those who aspire to a wise and happy life, those who want to strengthen their psychological resources cannot avoid a confrontation “without veils or subterfuge” with death (142). This is because death is “the rule of life,” both in the sense that it is naturally woven into the biological cycle, in the incessant cellular transformation of bodies, in the daily psychic experiences of loss and mourning, and because the awareness and acceptance of the ever-impending possibility of death is able to give form and fulfillment to our human existence.

Berra’s ideas may sound familiar to a reader of the book by Irvin Yalom, *Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Terror of Death* (2008), which is very popular among philosophical practitioners and care professionals. Berra and Yalom are both existential psychiatrists, and they share some theoretical assumptions. They think that death anxiety is not a “mask” of something else—for example, of separation anxiety—but it is the original fear, always lurking in some ravine of our mind and disguised by other symptoms (such as phobias, obsessions, panic, hypochondria). They firmly believe that becoming aware of our finite and transient natures can initiate major life changes and promote a more authentic way of being. However, the two authors develop the topic of death differently. Yalom’s aim is to suggest to readers some strategies to mitigate the fear of death, for example the thoughts of great philosophers as Epicurus and Nietzsche, or the concept of “rippling,” which means leaving behind something good that spreads “in circles” for generations, like a stone in a pond. It is also Yalom’s strong conviction that human connectedness, namely sharing our most intimate fears and thoughts with others, can to some extent dress the wound of our mortality. Since the focus of the book is on these coping strategies, death itself is mentioned, evoked, looked at out of the corner of Yalom’s eye, but never really shown in its harshness and inexorability. Berra’s purpose is likewise to help the reader to overcome death anxiety, but he openly refuses every workaround to soften the hard law of dying, which must be borne by each individual, in the painful separateness of his or her “here and now.” To the inevitability of this law is linked the phenomenon of death anxiety, which, if not coped with, can give rise to psychological disorders, counterproductive mental habits, and existential risks. Therefore it is necessary, according to Berra, to gradually develop “familiarity and confidence” with death, as the “simplest and most natural event of our being-in-the-world” (117). And this can be done only by getting to know its multiple dimensions, which Berra illustrates in a 360-degree survey: from the main philosophical positions on death, to its description as a biologi-

cal process, from the development of the idea of death thanks to the particular conformation of the human brain, to the emergence of the darkest aspects of death anxiety in psychopathologies, from the interpretation of illness (the “reminder” of death) as a permanent condition, always potentially present in the fragile balance of our homeostatic processes, to the various facets of the experience of other people’s death, and finally to the description of the different ways of dying and preparing for death.

A main thesis underlies this material, presented in clear and comprehensible language that makes the book a pleasant read, even for non-Italian speakers who, however, are able to read even fairly elementary Italian. Death must be given the right amount of significance—neither too much nor too little—in the context of psychic life. This entails an emotional detachment from the fact, which cannot be experienced, of one’s own passing (a common and trivial event, a “quick and imperceptible instant, of which there will be no memory” [151]), and at the same time a good use of that idea of death—death as foreseen, imagined, feared—which in death anxiety presents itself as a nightmare, but if properly understood can have a fundamental therapeutic function. Yalom also highlights this function, but Berra focuses more on its benefits for mental health. Death, says Berra (quoting Heidegger), is the final, certain and yet indeterminate “*possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all*” (22). Keeping this original limit in the background of the ebb and flow of our lives can be a powerful means of personality integration, since it avoids wasting precious time in meaningless activities that are not authentically chosen, but mostly dictated by the world of “gregarious uniformity” (155). It can encourage self-realization, insofar as it corrects our bad habits of postponing important choices to a future that we unconsciously live as if it were infinite, when “it might never be” (113). It avoids the depressing consequences of an abstract, dichotomous way of thinking: if we realize that death is not ontologically different from life, but rather gives it form and texture, it is easier to look at life itself as an inextricable weave of gift and doom, joy and suffering, achievement and failure. We learn to appreciate everything, much more, as an expression of this total experience: “every moment is the whole of life” writes Berra, and the very precariousness of living can give even the most ordinary objects and situations a poignant beauty (160).

Yalom’s and Berra’s are both courageous books, written in a jargon-free manner and meant not only to improve psychotherapeutic practice, but to help everybody. They are essential reading for philosophical practitioners and therapists: how can these professionals be helpful to clients, if they don’t work directly with death anxiety, which Yalom and Berra persuasively show to be the root of all existential issues? And how can professionals inquire deeply into death anxiety if they are reluctant to face their own? As a reader, however, I must say that the two books are not equally effective. Yalom’s work is most useful for a first approach to such an uncomfortable topic, it entertains us with personal memories and a great many stories of patients whose death anxiety is treated in close relation to a variety of difficult life situations, but its influence remains, in my experience, confined to an intellectual level. Berra’s book is strictly committed to the theme of death and leads gradually the reader to accept death emotionally, to see his or her own life from above, with a slight detachment (the author calls it “transcendent thinking” [154-157]), and to understand that preparing for death without waiting for it to come up from behind does not mean spreading a gloomy veil over existence but mastering it. Like a good course of therapy, *La regola della vita* plants a seed in our minds that lingers and can actually change the way we deal with our own daily lives.

Philosophical practitioners and care professionals might make good use of the communicative style of Berra, which is never soothing, in fact does not offer any easy comfort, but at the same time

is sympathetic and transmits to the reader the feeling of being linked to the author by a common fate. This balance between intellectual honesty and human closeness is difficult to achieve, but it should be the rule of any authentic relationship between a therapist or a practitioner and her or his client. Practitioners could also find it useful to consider how Berra discusses not only death itself, but suicide, euthanasia and terminal illness. He does not express moral judgements and maintains a purely descriptive approach, but does not hesitate to mention courage, stoicism, and dignity in the face of life's difficulties, such as a hopeless diagnosis or serious suffering (137-138, 192). With regard to such questions, each reader is obviously called upon to develop a personal opinion according to her or his ethical position. Nevertheless, the author's reference to the traditional vocabulary of virtues, which are rarely heard in both the care and education professions, is worth noting and appreciating. The systematic substitution of the language of ethics—which calls into question the personal responsibility of the individual—with that of psychology and psychotherapy is a widespread phenomenon in our culture. The multi-disciplinary vision of Berra, who is indeed a therapist but also a philosopher, helps to overcome this limited perspective.

References

Berra, Lodovico (2021). *La regola della vita: Il morire e l'angoscia di morte*. Torino: ISFiPP Edizioni.
Yalom, Irvin D. (2008). *Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Terror of Death*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Anna Sordini: PhD in Philosophy (Universities of Milan and Pisa). Former teacher and coordinator of the Department of Philosophy and Non-confessional Ethics in the European School of Varese. Since 2020 external expert for Philosophy in the European Baccalaureate. Since 2019 certified Philosophical Counselor. I live and work in Milan.

Correspondence: anna.sordini@alice.it



Book Review

John Kaag, *Sick Souls, Healthy Minds: How William James Can Save Your Life*.
Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020. 978-0691192161. 224 pages.

REVIEWED BY PETER VERNEZZE
WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY (EMERITUS)/OGDEN, UTAH

At the end of a lecture “Create Dangerously,” Camus invokes the image of Nietzsche after his break with Lou Salome, crushed and uplifted by the work he had to carry on alone, lighting bonfires in his walks through the mountains overlooking the Gulf of Genoa. Camus states that he sometimes judges certain men and ideas by how they would appear in front of those flames. I have my own standard when it comes to reviewing books for this journal: how would they appear to the philosophical practitioner seated not in front of a raging inferno but a troubled client. Will the tome assist in the work of uplifting the spirit, reducing the despair, calming the anxiety, lessening the trauma, or easing the grief? With such a standard, you might understand how a book with a subtitle “How William James can Save your Life” is bound to get my attention. But does the content live up to what’s on the cover?

The book combines a more or less chronological account of the events of James’ life and explication of some central philosophical ideas with Kaag’s personal observations of how these ideas have impacted his life and might help save yours (or mine). The first chapter, “Determinism and Despair,” interspaces an account of the young James’ despair in the 1860s with a description of the problem of determinism. Louis Menand viewed the Civil War as fundamental in shaping the philosophy of pragmatism, speculating that the extreme certainty evidenced by both sides in that conflict implanted in James a suspicion towards epistemological absolutism. Kaag speculates the Civil War played a different role in James’ thought, introducing him to the problem of determinism: “this was James’s first intimation that he, along with the rest of the universe, was not free but rather fated” (20). James’ despair culminates in 1867 where we read of his contemplating suicide in a letter to his father. Kaag sees determinism at the core of James’ despair: If everything is fated and we are actors in an effectively already written script, what is the point of carrying on the farce?

Chapter 2, “Freedom and Life,” describes James’ escape from the prison of determinism, an accomplishment which Kaag credits to his reading an essay by Renouvier “On Freedom of the Will” in 1870. James seems to have had a “eureka” moment, declaring that “my first act of free will shall be to believe in free will” (49). Of course, we can well imagine the determinist’s reply. Nonetheless James seems to have been undeterred by the response that must have occurred to him that this belief was itself fated. “With these words,” Kaag tells us, “James was reborn and his life gradually—in fits and starts—transformed” (49).

By placing the issue of freedom and determinism at the forefront, Kaag has performed a service for philosophical practitioners, forcing their hand on a fundamental issue. As a working therapist in conversation with other therapists, I can report freedom of the will is not a matter most therapists have thought very deeply or even consistently about. When pressed, however, most are willing to concede that the addict who relapses did so because of inevitable causal factors—their past, their parents, their genetics. Likewise, they are more than likely to believe a client’s depression is the

result of elements beyond her control, such as a chemical imbalance. As Kaag makes clear, such a deterministic worldview was anathema to James, and I would argue that therapists need to examine whether such an outlook is consistent with the dignity of their client. The philosophical practitioner, I would hope, is much more likely to side with James and Victor Frankl, Holocaust survivor and the founder of logotherapy, who famously put it, “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

Chapter 3 commences in 1879 with the mature James ensconced at Harvard. It is at this point that the promise of the book begins to pay off in terms of techniques and strategies that can be useful to a working philosophical practitioner or therapist. In my experience, most who seek the help of a therapist or philosophical practitioner do so for one of two reasons: they either want to act differently than they do (e.g., quit drinking, be more productive, or argue less) or they want to feel differently (less depressed, anxious, or angry). James provides guidance in both cases.

Insofar as behavior goes, most of the ways of acting that people wish to alter are the result of habit. This may seem to contradict the aforementioned emphasis on freedom of the will. As St. Augustine put it, “Habit, if not resisted, soon becomes necessity.” James, however, was much more hopeful on this point. For James, “the point of life was to recognize the power of habit, but then to guide and overcome it” (79). He provides the example of Norwegian women. Previously known for their domestic nature, they had recently, James learned, taken up snow shoeing, thus becoming as active and athletic as they once were passive and stationary. The message is that the work of behavior change is hard but possible through utilizing the same force that put the behavior there in the first place. This timeless message bears repeating today in light of the insurance industry’s (and our own client’s) desire for short-term therapy and quick fixes, reminding us that the work of meaningful change, like all things worthwhile, requires effort.

Feelings can seem even more intractable than behavior. While clients in therapy generally accept the possibility that they could change their behavior, many believe themselves to be at the mercy of their feelings—a reality they perceive as unalterable as their genes. Their depressed feeling is something they are simply stuck with, as Seattle is with rain and clouds. Modern therapy suggests two techniques for accomplishing this task: psychopharmacology and cognitive behavioral therapy: the first attempts to alter your biochemistry, the second your thoughts. James (and the James-Lange theory of emotions) offers a stunningly different method. It is the state of our body, not our chemistry or our thoughts, that gives rise to our emotions. Striking, as he often does in the book, an autobiographical tone, Kaag summarizes the situation thusly:

For most of my life, I thought that when I was hopelessly antisocial, or wallowing around my messy house, or failing to get out of bed, it was because I was depressed. Nope. James suggests it is the other way around: I feel sad because I constantly look at my shoes while in public, because my house is dimly lit and cramped, because I fail to stand upright. In his words, “We don’t laugh because we’re happy, we’re happy because we laugh.” The action itself is enough to bring about a particular affective state (87).

Although controversial, the theory still has adherents today, as I will discuss later.

The fourth chapter covers the tragedies that befell James in his forties, beginning with the death of his father in 1882 and his son a few years later. The suggestion is that these tragedies led James “deeper into the mysteriousness of existence” (97). Among these mysteries is the notion of consciousness. James is one of the first explorers in the West of the stream of consciousness. As Kaag points out, whereas much of James’s work exhorts us to take an active role in our existence, the stream of consciousness, by contrast, presents us with a passive path, which we achieve by simply witnessing the flow of existence, standing back and observing what is happening. Kaag observes, “Sometimes simply witnessing how the world lives and moves might be reason enough to stay alive” (124).

The focus of chapter five is James’ most famous contribution to the history of philosophy, pragmatism. The challenge for Kaag is not how to say something new about that which so much has been written; rather, the challenge is how to connect an abstract theory of truth to the business of saving, or even living, a life. As Kaag points out, besides being a theory of truth “pragmatism is also an existential and normative stance regarding the relationship between truth and human meaning” (128).

The existential implications of pragmatism are seen most clearly in James’s essay “The Will to Believe,” where the flexible nature of the pragmatic theory of truth is on full display. Here, James argues that we are justified in believing certain types of propositions based not on the evidence we have for the proposition but on other criteria. In particular, James argues that if a proposition is live (it is possible for us to believe the proposition), forced (we must believe either the proposition or its alternative) and momentous (there is a great deal at stake for us in believing or not believing the proposition)—and the proposition cannot be decided on intellectual grounds—then our willing nature must decide whether to believe it. Among the types of propositions James claims ought to be decided according to this standard (James calls these “genuine options”) are moral and religious claims—claims with a very practical connection to the business of living.

One concrete application of this line of reasoning to a therapeutic setting involves the question of the meaning of life—a question the philosophical practitioner more so than the therapist or psychologist ought to have a ready response to. Indeed, if we cannot offer a satisfying answer this fundamental question, it is not at all clear we should be continuing in the occupation. James’ essay provides the basis for what seems to me one of the better responses. The criteria James has laid out for a genuine option clearly apply in this situation. The very fact that the client poses the question, I submit, reveals it as a live proposition for the client. It is also forced: either life does or does not have a meaning. Just as obvious is the momentous nature of the proposition. And I take it there is no intellectual grounds on which it can be settled (at least I have not encountered any up to this point). The response of the philosophical practitioner using this strategy, then, is similar to the one Victor Frankl, the creator of logotherapy, offered: “only we can decide the answer to that question: it is not we who are permitted to ask about the meaning of life—it is life that asks the questions—we are the ones who are questioned! We are the ones who must answer, must give answers to the constant, hourly questions of life. Living itself means nothing other than being questioned”. (Frankl 2020)

Chapter Six takes us into the last decade of James’ life and the 1901 Gifford Lectures that ultimately became *Varieties of Religious Experience*. Although James was not religious in any traditional sense of the term, he was certainly open to worldviews that expanded the realm of the possible beyond that which is perceptible: “I firmly disbelieve ... that human experience is the highest form of ex-

perience extent in the universe” (176). James’s own adventures in this realm leaned in the direction of the supernatural. A founding member of The American Society for Psychical Research, James spent decades attempting to communicate with deceased loved ones. Here again the relevance of a belief in the extra-physical to the project of human meaning is obvious. One of the greatest sources of meaning in people’s lives is their religious faith and any practitioner who would exclude himself from working with people of faith (and you cannot work with them without sympathizing with their position) would find himself with a greatly reduced pool of clients.

There are some missed opportunities to lend support to James’ relevance to contemporary therapeutic practice. James’ assertion of the positive benefits of simply “witnessing” is seconded by Kaag but left unexplained and undefended. Clearly a review of modern mindfulness movement, which has done so much to connect this practice to a whole array of psychological benefits, would have been helpful here. As well James’ theory of emotions is gaining a new following with the work of Stephen Porges in polyvagal theory. The motto of polyvagal theory—story follows state—derives its force from the Jamesian view that the state of our nervous system is responsible for our emotional outlook. Despite these obvious whiffs, there is more than enough material to recommend this book to the practitioner interested in integrating philosophical wisdom into the business of everyday living.

References

Frankl, Victor (2020). *Yes to Life In Spite of Everything*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Dr. Peter Vernezzze, an emeritus professor of philosophy (Weber State University), has a Masters in Social Work and currently works as a licensed therapist in Tucson, Arizona.

Correspondence: pvernezzze@yahoo.com



Book Review

William B Irvine, *You: A Natural History*.
New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. ISBN: 9780190869199. 233 pages.

REVIEWED BY MIRIAM VAN DER VALK
FILOPRAX GÖTEBORGS FILOSOFISKA PRAKTIK, SWEDEN

Beyond the Why-Questions

William B Irvine's *You: A Natural History* is a book by a philosopher about science, written with non-scientists in mind—"for readers not only to understand how, according to science, they and their world came to exist, but to take this science personally" (as he says in the introduction, page xiii.) And, indeed, all of the book's 20 chapters invite personal reflection—from "Your People" (Chapter 1), "The Neanderthal in Your Family Tree" (Chapter 6), through "You Are Complex" and "Your Ancestors Were Boring" (Chapters 9 and 10), "Pulling Yourself Together" (Chapter 16, from Part III, *The Atomic You*), to the last and most philosophical chapter, "Why Are You Here?" (Chapter 20).

About 15 years ago, as it happens, I had an administrative office job that permitted listening to audio books while I was working. One of the books I listened to was Bill Bryson's *A Short History of Nearly Everything* (2003,) read by Richard Matthews' matter-of-fact yet dryly humorous voice. As I'm reading *You*, I often hear Matthews' voice—especially through Irvine's more personal comments that pop up here and there between paragraphs and chapters. In response to the would-be irony if our descendants, hundreds of thousands of years from now, "were to dig up and analyze [our] bones ... they might conclude that we didn't really belong to a species—that we instead represented an intermediate stage between *Homo heidelbergensis* and the next ..." (62). Irvine leaves us with the exclamation, "Oh, the indignity!" Commentary like that makes for a swift, fun read. Irvine is also the author of *A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy* (2008)—I can feel how he's had fun writing the book, too.

All in all, this is a book that fits well alongside Bill Bryson's *A Short History of Nearly Everything* (2003), Yuval Noah Harari's *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (2011), and Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel* (1997). I browsed through Wikipedia to verify names and dates and such, and came across a quote by Harari. He reportedly cites *Guns, Germs and Steel* as one of his greatest inspirations, since it showed that it was 'possible to ask very big questions and answer them scientifically.' I see that same sparkle in Irvine's book. In the beginning of the last chapter (on page 185, Part IV, *Your Place in the Universe*, "Why Are You Here?"), he writes, "If I have done my job as scientific historian, you now have a much better understanding of how you came to exist, as well as how remarkably contingent your existence is." Quite. This contingency—this sense of awe and wonder about one's personal existence—is a convincing theme throughout the book and, of course, a superb topic for many philosophical practitioners in their work. I co-led a group of 10-12-year olds at the City Library at one point, and we had a lot of fun wondering whether someone else had been born instead of them or their siblings, etc. It can be quite fabulous to have one's mind blown, so to speak, and I love it when I get to utilize this our very human ability to ask hypothetical questions. To get to follow the question where it leads ... Forming 'communities of inquiry' and philosophical companionships, where we aren't trying to convince one another—instead, the ideas that form *in*

our dialogue, in our togetherness, are what really count. They're what we really seek to find. At least that's what I usually say when I try to explain what I mean by 'philosophical practice.' I might add something about Suspension of Disbelief. 'Let's suspend our impending disbelief on the hallway coat hooks,' I might say, 'and sit comfortably together, windows open. And then, let's do a thought experiment, a philosophical exercise. Let's propose for a few minutes or hours or a weekend (or a year) that we in fact are just an intermediate stage between *Homo heidelbergensis* and the next species. Now let's describe that next species. What do our findings imply for our ethics, identity, values, politics, or metaphysics?'

(I'd love to devote a half-day workshop to that!)

Another example: In Part I, *Your Deep Ancestry*, Chapter 8, "Your (Alien?) Roots," we play with the idea that life arose elsewhere in the universe and was somehow transported here. The universe, writes Irvine,

is, after all, huge. It has hundreds of billions of galaxies. Many of these galaxies in turn have hundreds of billions of stars, each of which probably has multiple planets—and probably moons as well—on which life can potentially arise. Therefore, even if there is a one-in-a-billion chance of life arising on a planet like Earth, there are likely trillions of places where it can arise, making it highly probable that life would arise on many of them (82).

Good start, right? And at the end of the chapter things get *really* interesting. Irvine concludes, "... alien life, even intelligent alien life, doubtless exists, but because of its intelligence, it can think of better things to do with its time and resources than visit Earth" (84). Right! Our next workshop will be about intelligent behavior. What would a super intelligent alien do with its time and resources? What do our responses say about how we conceptualize 'intelligence?'

There are a couple more places like that in *You*—inspirational places to pick up philosophical practice workshop material. Something about identity, for example; about the mosaic that is me: the atoms that were formed in the beginning of time, and the cells that are often no more than a few years old. Identity, subjectivity, meaning ... Core philosophical questions, so to speak. One part in particular has stuck with me since I finished reading, and it has to do with searching for meaning. On page 190 Irvine takes a hermeneutic look at a pencil. He writes:

Suppose someone came up to you, showed you a pencil, and asked what it means. In an attempt to clarify this rather strange question, you might inquire whether the person was asking what the word pencil means. Suppose he replied that, no, he was asking what *the pencil itself* means.

I'm at once full of delightful responses to what a pencil might mean. The pencil means writing—the 'writing animal'—message—relationality—time: to record, to remember, reflect, to *want to revise*. A pencil means desire for manifestation and evolution, etc. But Irvine continues,

My answer would be that the pencil itself has no meaning ... I would add that in asking this question, the questioner is committing what philosophers call a category mistake: he is asking whether something has a quality that only something of a different quality can have. If you ask me for the diameter of hope or the location of the number six, you are making a similar error: desires cannot have physical dimensions, and numbers are not located in

physical space ... although a pencil cannot have meaning, it can be used to do meaningful things ... (190).

Aha. I see what he means. And yet, suddenly, as I'm reading this final chapter of a fine book from which I learned a *lot*, I find myself longing for some, well, some quiet time in my own mind, where I can allow it to expand as much as the question asks me to, possibly believing at least six impossible things before breakfast, as Alice in Wonderland might. Irvine writes that why-questions generate more why-questions, and that there comes a point "at which asking why-questions, rather than adding to our understanding of the universe, becomes little more than a diversion from the pursuit of useful knowledge" (189). Hmm. 'Useful knowledge.' OK. So, science asks *How* and philosophy asks *Why* ... And a combination of the two—would that be What if ...? I'm thinking about radio waves. Heinrich Hertz, who discovered them, famously said he didn't think they'd have any practical application. But someone must have wondered what these waves could carry, like other waves carry ships and birds, and mark the edge of the world of whales and electric eels. Then, I'm thinking about the Higgs boson. I remember watching on TV—a reporter asked about potential use and I think the response was, 'I have no idea.' To me, this is a starting point for philosophical practice: make a Suspension of Disbelief Proposition and, well, run with it. Then stop running, and reflect philosophically. (That'll be Part I and II of our whole weekend workshops.)

"There will always remain an element of mystery," writes Irvine (190); we will never reach the end of the chain of why-question that we can ask about our existence. The most sensible psychological strategy is to embrace that mystery, he adds. Here, I want to have a long, fabulous conversation about the meaning of psychology and strategies, mystery and mysteriousness but, alas, there are no more pages.

When we were teenagers, I had a friend who suffered from an eating disorder. At the end of her treatment, she got to fill out a form from the clinic. One of the questions was something like, "I embrace life's mysteries," YES or NO. I remember how we smiled at that, smoking cigarettes in her dormitory window. She obviously had to write "yes"—imagine the follow-up questions she'd have to answer if she didn't—but it was such a funny way of putting things. What did they mean? That we might never understand why things happen, and that we accept that we can't always change them, either? Suppose so. But ... there's just so much more interesting stuff to unravel and talk about. About narratives, agency, the body and the mind, and *why we're here*. That's where I'm at, as I'm stowing *You* on the bookshelf, embedded, as it were, in the insight that my story began not with my birth but with the beginning of time, I'm standing by the door that Irvine's last chapter left slightly ajar. I feel like fearlessly pushing it wide open.

Why are we here, you ask?

What if ...

Miriam van der Valk has studied philosophy at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, and the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, as well as with APPA in New York. Based in Gothenburg, Sweden, she hosts public events, moderates panel talks, organizes courses and workshops, records podcasts, writes, lectures and coaches through her philosophical practice, Filoprax.

Correspondence: kontakt@filoprax.se



Biographies of Contributors

Dr. Martin Carmann, born 1969, has studied Theology and Philosophy. His doctoral thesis on Derrida and Kant was published in 1999. Since then, he has been working worldwide as a leadership and organization development coach. His philosophical background is Derrida, Luhmann, Kant, and Hegel.

Dr. Jeremy Gallegos, tenured professor of Philosophy and Ethics at Friends University. He earned his B.A. degree from Wichita State University and was awarded his M.A. and Ph.D. from Purdue University. He is currently the Division Chair of Theology and Humanities for the College of Business, Arts, Sciences, and Education. He publishes on truth telling, particularly in applied ethics settings such as entrepreneurial ethics and medical ethics. He also consults in his spare time facilitating strategic planning sessions for various organizations in Wichita and currently sits as Vice Chair on the Wesley Medical Center Ethics Committee and a board member for Legacy Ministries.

Massimo Pigliucci is an author, blogger, podcaster, as well as the K.D. Irani Professor of Philosophy at the City College of New York. His academic work is in evolutionary biology, philosophy of science, the nature of pseudoscience, and practical philosophy. Massimo publishes regular columns in *Skeptical Inquirer* and in *Philosophy Now*. His books include *How to Be a Stoic: Using Ancient Philosophy to Live a Modern Life* (Basic Books) and *Nonsense on Stilts: How to Tell Science from Bunk* (University of Chicago Press). Massimo's latest book is *The Quest for Character: What the Story of Socrates and Alcibiades Teaches Us about Our Search for Good Leaders* (Basic Books). More by Massimo at <https://massimopigliucci.org>.

Peter B. Raabe (born in 1949) received his Ph.D. from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada for his research in Philosophical Counseling. He is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy from the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) in Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada. For twenty-five years he taught a variety of courses including philosophy of mind, reasoning, metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. He developed and taught a specialized course in the use of philosophy in counseling and psychotherapy. He facilitated a public philosophy café in North Vancouver for eight years, and established three mental health discussion groups. He is the author of many peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, international conference presentations, and workshops on the theme of philosophy's role in mental healthcare, and is on the editorial boards of several international publications. He is the author of three books: *Philosophy's Role in Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Jason Aronson); *Issues in Philosophical Counseling* (Praeger); and *Philosophical Counseling: Theory and Practice*, (Praeger). He is co-editor of *Women in Philosophical Counseling* (Lexington). He is also a contributing author and editor of *Philosophical Counseling and the Unconscious* (Trivium Press). He is a certified philosophical counselor, and lives in North Vancouver where he had a private practice. Web site: <http://www.peterraabe.ca>

Anna Sordini: PhD in Philosophy (Universities of Milan and Pisa). Former teacher and coordinator of the Department of Philosophy and Non-confessional Ethics in the European School of Varese. Since 2020 external expert for Philosophy in the European Baccalaureate. Since 2019 certified Philosophical Counselor. I live and work in Milan.

Miriam van der Valk has studied philosophy at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, and the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, as well as with APPA in New York. Based in Gothenburg, Sweden, she hosts public events, moderates panel talks, organizes courses and workshops, records podcasts, writes, lectures and coaches through her philosophical practice, Filoprax.

Dr. Peter Vernezze, an emeritus professor of philosophy (Weber State University), has a Masters in Social Work and currently works as a licensed therapist in Tucson, Arizona.





PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

Journal of the APPA

Volume 18 Number 2 July 2023

Aims and Scope

Philosophical Practice is a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to the growing field of applied philosophy. The journal covers substantive issues in the areas of client counseling, group facilitation, and organizational consulting. It provides a forum for discussing professional, ethical, legal, sociological, and political aspects of philosophical practice, as well as juxtapositions of philosophical practice with other professions. Articles may address theories or methodologies of philosophical practice; present or critique case-studies; assess developmental frameworks or research programs; and offer commentary on previous publications. The journal also has an active book review and correspondence section.

APPA Mission

The American Philosophical Practitioners Association is a non-profit educational corporation that encourages philosophical awareness and advocates leading the examined life. Philosophy can be practiced through client counseling, group facilitation, organizational consulting or educational programs. APPA members apply philosophical systems, insights and methods to the management of human problems and the amelioration of human estates. The APPA is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.

APPA Membership

The American Philosophical Practitioners Association is a not-for-profit educational corporation. It admits Certified, Affiliate and Adjunct Members solely on the basis of their respective qualifications. It admits Auxiliary Members solely on the basis of their interest in and support of philosophical practice. The APPA does not discriminate with respect to members or clients on the basis of nationality, race, ethnicity, sex, gender, age, religious belief, political persuasion, or other professionally or philosophically irrelevant criteria.

Subscriptions, Advertisements, Submissions, Back Issues

For information on subscriptions, advertisements and submissions, please see the front pages of this document. For information on back issues, APPA Memberships and Programs, please visit <https://appa.edu>.

Editor

Lou Marinoff

Reviews Editor

Leslie Miller

Associate Editor

Carol S. Gould

Associate Editor

Johnson Cheung

Technical Consultant

Greg Goode

Legal Consultant

Thomas Griffith