

PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

Journal of the APPA

Volume 13 Number 2 July 2018

Editor

Lou Marinoff

Reviews Editor

Leslie Miller

Associate Editor

Dena Hurst

Technical Consultant

Greg Goode

Legal Consultant

Thomas Griffith

Articles

Nancy J. Matchett

What's Philosophical About Moral Distress?

Mark Walker

*Don't Fear the Reaper:
Towards an Epicurean Grief Therapy*

Kate Mehuron

*Dementia: Displacing the Philosophical and
Neurocognitive Deficit Model*

Weiguo Xia

Taoist Cognitive Therapy in Mainland China

Book Reviews

*Aging Thoughtfully: Conversations about Retirement,
Romance, Wrinkles, and Regret*

reviewed by Peter Vernezze

Memory and the Self: Phenomenology, Science and Autobiography

reviewed by Catherine Monnet

Understanding the Other and Oneself

reviewed by Albert Hoffmann

Biographies of Contributors

Book Review

Detlef Staude and Eckart Rushmann, eds., *Understanding the Other and Oneself*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-5275-0548-3. 214 pages.

REVIEWED BY ALBERT HOFFMANN

ZÜRICH/ZÜRCHER INSTITUT FÜR PHILOSOPHISCHE PRAXIS (ZIPPPRA)

Philosophical practice has become an important movement all over the world. One of the oldest institutions of this movement is the International Conference on Philosophical Practice (ICPP), where philosophical practitioners meet and reflect on their professional activities.

Understanding the Other and Oneself is a fruit of the 14th International Conference on Philosophical Practice, which took place in Bern two years ago. The best conference papers constitute the content of this book and give a good overview of the variety of theories, approaches, and experiences in the field of philosophical practice today. It is impossible to write an abstract of the many views and ways which enter into a dialogue in the mind of the reader. Nonetheless, I would like to give a very short and sketchy picture of the different contributions, a sort of panoramic view of the theoretic landscape, because only by doing so does the richness of this collection become palpable, seducing one to actually step in and scrutinize this landscape more closely.

In a good dialectic manner, the last chapter of the book may serve as a perfect introduction, because by its amazing scope it encompasses and integrates many of the perspectives of the previous texts. Guro Hansen Helskog presents the DIALOGOS approach, which was developed by her in the years 2004-2009 to create paths towards wisdom for juveniles and young adults. This approach uses methods as conceptual and critical thinking (a reference in this field is Oscar Brenifier), phenomenological and hermeneutical awareness (as developed and practiced for example by Gerd Achenbach or Detlef Staude) and also spiritual exercises to elevate the soul (exemplified by Ran Lahav's groundbreaking concept of philosophical companionship). DIALOGOS uses all these approaches not exclusively, but as steps in a process towards wisdom. Helskog stresses that DIALOGOS was specifically designed for people living in a multicultural environment. The inherent plurality of the world we live in finds its expression in many other chapters of this book.

Jörn Kroll radically questions the Western model of an autonomous ego, which for him is both the main barrier between people and also the primary obstacle to a happy, fulfilled life. Young E. Rhee sketches a way to deal with pain by slowly realizing its illusory character. Both philosophers are deeply influenced by Buddhist traditions.

Eckart Ruschmann, one of the editors of the book, points out in his essay that understanding is far from being something easy and unproblematic. He links a highly structured approach to the many facets of understanding with not only a radical openness to all forms of experience, but also to experiences of transcendence, which, in turn, challenge the conventional wisdom of a naturalistic worldview.

Cornelia Bruell, on the other hand, shows how the so-called postmodern or poststructuralist theories—which often are considered to be difficult, obscure and too complicated for people outside academia—can have a big value as a sort of medicine against the modern epidemic of identification, objectification and quantification. We see how these global trends, which are not just sociological concepts, are actually powerful sources of real suffering in everyday life.

Detlef Staude, the other editor of this book, directs our attention to an important tension inherent in the very concept of philosophical practice. As philosophical, it must be conceptual, reflexive, and detached from immediate perceptions and reactions. As practice it should be rooted in the concrete situation of a human being, with all its intuitive, emotional and bodily understanding, and it should also affect the whole person as a psychosomatic unity.

Michael Noah Weiss points out another, but similar polar tension, the tension between theoretical knowledge and our particular everyday problems. Philosophical practice should be able to take place inside this tension by showing a path towards *phronesis*—practical wisdom—a virtue which, as virtues in general, can be learned, but cannot be taught. The only way to learn *phronesis* is to engage in a journey of self-reflection and self-knowledge. If philosophical practice manages to facilitate such a process, it “swims against the stream” of modern education, which mostly focuses on providing tools to succeed, an approach closer to the old foes of philosophy, the sophists.

Markus Riedenauer sees the ability of philosophical practice to overcome a general, abstract anthropology, and instead approach the particular existential situation of the individual person. While he uses detailed charts, they are not meant to classify clients, but to give them a tool of self-knowledge that enables them, by a sort of Socratic midwifery, to overcome alienation and become themselves; that is, to develop their own vision of a good life.

In a work which is dedicated to the understanding of the other and oneself, dialogue must be a central topic:

Kristof Van Rossem provides in his paper a captivating insight into the specific method of SOCRATIC DIALOGUE (SD), depicting a real situation from his practice to explain the procedures he is using. He stresses some important features of SD, such as the neutrality of the facilitator as far as the content of the discussion is concerned, and concludes that SD is not a method, but a craft, which only can be learned by long years of practice.

Willem Van Katwijk shows how in the context of Dutch society, which was split into rather closed confessional and ideological milieus, a humanistic movement arose, which is now sending counselors and humanistic chaplains to the army, to hospitals and to prisons. Philosophical practice in prisons has been very successful in the Netherlands. The inmates welcome it as a form of empowerment. They appreciate that the philosophical practitioner is not a part of the prison bureaucracy. They experience the ethical reflections during a session not only as immediately gratifying but as a good preparation for their life after prison.

Hannah Marije Altorf and Ora Gruengard finally criticize, each in different ways, the solitary model of reflection, so dominant in Western academic philosophy:

Altorf considers philosophical practice as a serious challenge to the routine of theoretical philosophy at universities. Philosophy as an academic discipline, notwithstanding all its importance, sometimes runs the risk of losing contact with common sense. Our common sense, says Altorf, also referring to Hannah Arendt, is fundamental for a common world and thus for a good life. A Socratic philosophical practice should value opinion—*doxa*—not as something to be eliminated, but as a necessary element of life in society. The purpose of philosophical practice is not to teach how to win (that would be the offer of a sophist), but how to construct a common world through the plurality of opinions.

Gruengard, in her paper, gets right to the core of the conference's topic as she stresses the priority of knowing the other over knowing oneself. This priority can be seen from different angles, for example with Wittgenstein and his concept of language as an intrinsically social art, or with Levy-Strauss and his theories about the deep structures of society, which may guide people without ever becoming an object of their reflexion or self-perception. Philosophical practice can break away from the old pattern of the philosopher as a lonely thinker and can question the millennial tradition that self-reflection and self-scrutiny are the royal way to wisdom, as noted by such philosophers as Augustine or Descartes.

Two very unusual chapters of this very diverse book shouldn't stay unmentioned:

Mike Roth writes about some new and innovative forms of philosophical practice, especially his own project, the so-called "PhiloDrama." He follows the old tradition of the *tableau vivant*, where people pose like statues to recreate a scene or a painting. The difference here is that in philoDrama, the living statues can and should talk to each other and to the public. Philosophy thus becomes a very intense experience, one which unites conceptual work and lofty discussions with bodily expression and aesthetic resonance. The "practice" in philosophical practice no longer refers only to the topic of reflection, but becomes performative as well, positively affecting one's body, heart, and soul.

Finally, there is a chapter with several contributions (from Lydia Amir, Anders Lindseth, Willi Fillinger, Gerald Rochelle and Vander Lemes) which all deal with a topic, not yet really explored: philosophical practice and sexuality. The different papers point out how important it is that philosophical practitioners don't avoid talking about sex, as it is one of the strongest sources of joy and fulfillment in human life, but also a field full of taboos, prejudices, and fears; moreover, it is an important aspect of human existence in which people must confront their own inherent vulnerability.

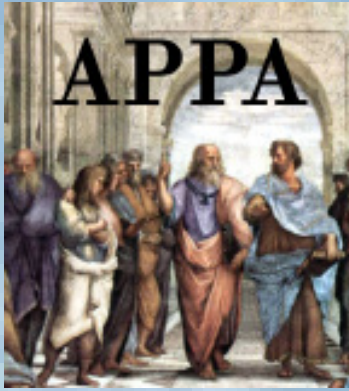
One point, which is not discussed and which I think would be relevant for further reflection (this, by the way, is not a critique of this excellent book, but just one more perspective added) is the question of whether philosophical practice is *itself* a sexual, or at least erotic activity, and if it can keep sexuality as an object at a distance or if it is invaded by it.

In any case, what this collection shows is that philosophical practice is an expansive activity. It follows many paths, always explores new ways and walks in the most diverse directions. But sometimes these different roads come together at a great junction and all the voices start to talk to each other. Just open the book, and you will hear them.

Albert Hoffmann was born 1967 in Prague (Czech Republic) and studied philosophy and Latin at the University of Zürich. He has been organizing public philosophical discussions (café-philos) for 12 years, and has had his own philosophical office (sophonautik.ch) for the last 5. He is a member of the IGPP and of philopraxis.ch.

Correspondence: info@sophonautik.ch





PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

Journal of the APPA

Volume 13 Number 2 July 2018

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 www.appa.edu.