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Of the relatively few books on philosophical counseling currently available, Peter Raabe has written one of the best: namely, *Philosophical Counseling: Theory and Practice* (reviewed in *Metapsychology* October 2001). The present volume is a follow-up addressed to practicing or would-be philosophical counselors which combines a number of previously published essays and delivered talks with new chapters. It offers practical advice and encouragement and useful discussions of a number of quandaries that might arise in such a practice. There are chapters that seek to define philosophical counseling, to distinguish it from academic philosophy, and to describe such counseling as worldly, experimental, and engaged philosophy. There is advice relating to how women and men differ as clients and as counselors. There is a critique of the inappropriate use of medication for those suffering from non-physical ailments. There are wise discussions of ageing, religion, suicide, humor, and of why the meaning of life is so often sought. There is no step-by-step description of the counseling process (for that, one would need to consult the earlier book), but there is practical advice on how to set up a practice and how to protect oneself against the pressures it might bring.

In all of these discussions (and especially in his examples of e-mail advice - a practice which Raabe does not recommend) Raabe shows himself to be insightful, intelligent, and wise. While he can be a little too dismissive of academic philosophy (he should take note of Aristotle’s insistence that contemplation or...
the pure pursuit of truth is an enrichment of life important for the attainment of fulfillment.), he has a clear grasp of the possibilities and limitations of philosophical counseling. He acknowledges that while there will be many clients who need psychotherapy or psychiatry, there are many more that can be helped by this relatively new form of helping practice. The central assumption upon which philosophical counseling rests is that clients are autonomous agents able, with assistance where necessary, to understand their own situation and to change their own life for the better. While much psychologically based practice (illustrated in this volume by theories of dream interpretation) assumes that clients are subject to internal psychological forces over which they have no control, the philosophical counselor accords full respect to the autonomy of the client. (Of course, whether the assumptions on both sides of this debate are justified is a matter which is open to debate and this is another reason why, in my view, there continues to be an important role for academic philosophy.) While rejecting the usefulness of the psychodynamic notion of the unconscious, however, Raabe does acknowledge the need for a hermeneutic approach to what clients say and do. It is often necessary to help clients to see the hidden motivations and intentions for their actions, emotions, and dreams.

The best example in the book of the rational method used by philosophical counselors is the discussion of the reasons that have been proposed for condemning homosexuality. While Raabe is a little too willing to use the label of ‘fallacy’ to refute these arguments rather than focusing on their content, his critique is devastating and would certainly provide a reassuring armory to any clients who felt themselves victimized by prejudice in this area.

Raabe is also more aware than many therapists of the need to discuss the morality of what clients do or envisage doing. His discussion of suicide, for example, addresses not just the psychological issues that are involved but also its morality.

Although there is not much discussion of cases in this book, one does gain the impression of a typical client as one who shares the same broad world-view as the counselor. In this way, even though Raabe’s method eschews offering advice in a directive manner, the reader does gain an impression of the counselor as an avuncular figure equipped with bon mots and rational suggestions for solving life’s problems which clients can be expected to take up because their basic outlook on life and thinking skills...
are already akin to that of the counselor. There is no suggestion that clients might be intractable. There is no suggestion either (though there is in the earlier book) that the client might be taught to do philosophy for themselves so as to be enabled to engage with the world in their own (possibly idiosyncratic) way. Perhaps Raabe's impatience with academic philosophy leads him to stress the practical over the theoretical to the extent that it prevents him from seeing the importance of engaging with the world-view of the client if one is doing philosophy. (Raabe thinks that counselors should not challenge the religious beliefs of clients.) But this is a muted criticism (from an academic philosopher) of an admirable and useful book.

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