

# Report on North American Conference on Philosophical Counselling, 2002

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The Faculty of Philosophy, in cooperation with The Canadian Society for Philosophical Practice, is pleased to report on the North American conference on philosophical counselling, held at St. Paul University in Ottawa from November 1-3. Attracting a wide range of scholars, practitioners, and researchers throughout North America and from Italy and Denmark, the conference focused on the theme of morals and ethics in philosophical counselling. The conference opened early Friday afternoon with a presentation by Scott Stewart entitled *Autonomy and Philosophical Counseling*. Another presentation by Pierre Grimes touched on the issue of methodology and two presentations made explicit reference to impressive mentors in the canon of western philosophy. Finn Hansen of the Danish University of Education explored Kierkegaard's notion of the humorist and the humorist's ethical passion for philosophising. Paolo Teresa Grassi of Milan, Italy, offered a Spinozistic overview of philosophical counselling.

Peter Raabe, author of numerous articles and two books on philosophical counselling gave the keynote address Friday evening. Raabe teaches philosophy, facilitates a philosophy café, and has a private philosophical counselling practice in North Vancouver. Raabe presented a paper entitled *Morals and Ethics in Philosophical Counseling: Sex, Suicide, and Mental Illness*. Relying on his experience as a philosophical counsellor, Raabe discussed some of the ethical parameters and obligations facing the philosophical counsellor when confronting issues involving sex, suicide, and mental illness.

Jon Borowicz began the Saturday presentations with a discussion of *The Professional as Phronimos*, arguing that philosophy must not be seen as providing technical knowledge and that philosophical counselling should resist professionalisation. The second presentation examined the difficulties of making philosophical counselling useful, and another presentation looked at the role of the counsellor as social justice advocate. A dynamic and well-received presentation was given by Vaughana Feary on the role of the expressive arts in philosophical practice. The afternoon was devoted to concurrent workshops given by Raabe, Grimes and Tarrell Portman,

and Jason Blahuta and Michael Picard rounded out the remaining presentations with their respective papers on accreditation and the need for a code of ethics in philosophical counselling. A panel discussion on accreditation was held at the end of the afternoon and it picked up on some of the discussions that emerged from Blahuta's presentation. The panel consisted of Picard, Raabe, Blahuta, Stephen Hare, Andrew Brook and Paul Rigby, and Charles LePage served as the panel leader. While the some of the key issues related to the topic of accreditation were contentious, the panel discussion did serve a useful purpose as a collegial forum for airing competing views on the direction for the accreditation of a master's program in philosophical counselling.

A superb and well-appreciated banquet was organised on Saturday evening, and the conference concluded Sunday morning with a philosophical café led by Raabe, followed by the Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Society for Philosophical Practice. As the purpose of the conference was to encourage and facilitate the communication of perspectives on research and practice in philosophical counselling among Canadian and international scholars, practitioners and researchers, as well as to promote philosophical counselling as a new and growing field, it would be fair and accurate to characterise this conference as a success.