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Complex Moral Narratives in Philosophical Counseling: Insights from Henry James

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Abstract

As philosophers with many theoretical books at our fingertips, we can find additional illustrations of human life as lived on a deeper, moral level. Henry James, a master at describing the internal states of mind and social dynamics of his characters, along with their moral dilemmas, is one very good place to start. Throughout his short stories and novels, he illustrates how, even though we might wish to make it otherwise, life is not an illusion. We wake up to it every day. We can forget or deny it, or we can welcome our experiences as they come and give them what they demand. His works are passionate pleas for the fullest possible human development, one unimpered by reckless and barbarous stupidity and informed by enlightened morality, enable us to envision better what life fully lived might look like, and to see the sense of striving for it ourselves.

After introducing the audience to the life, works, and philosophy of Henry James, I will present instances in which my work with clients was informed and enhanced by them. Three cases will be interwoven with stories of the ways in which his works and thoughts enriched my thinking and improved my ability to reflect upon some of the moral dilemmas involved.

Keywords: *Henry James, fiction, literature, moral dilemmas, philosophical counseling, philosophy*

Introduction

Something is continuously at stake for us and our clients in our daily lives, something we often don't realize or think about. Mundane occurrences often drown out the deeper realities of our experiences having to do with intersubjective social transactions contained within our individual moral worlds. This is problematic not only because basic human conundrums like the preservation of life, our aspirations, our longings for prestige and love, are often ignored, but also because, when they are addressed, they are frequently contested by others and can appear indeterminate, making it difficult to wrap our minds around them.

I demonstrate here that the works of Henry James (1843-1916) (brother of seminal psychologist William James), are very well suited for the job. For James, an American who spent most of his life in England, moral knowledge was not just an intellectual grasp of theories. Rather, he believed that it was important to illustrate what responsible action in nuanced situations looked and felt like. He shows us the moral significance of the vigilant attention and intense regard his characters display toward their unique but universal situations.

James understood that the writer's task is a moral one. He addresses questions about justice, well-being, moral realism and relativism, the concept of the person, emotions, and desires—to name only a few—from many sides. While philosophers tend to write about morality in terms of propositions, a writer like Henry James brought his imagination and feeling to moral issues in eloquent and perceptive ways, making his works useful adjuncts to philosophical counseling.

This article provides the reader with a brief introduction to the life, works, and philosophy of Henry James. It discusses the ways in which philosophy and literature share similar concerns and how the study of one can augment the other. Cases in which my work with clients was informed and enhanced by reading and discussing novels and short stories written by James will be interwoven with descriptions of the ways in which his works and thought enriched my thinking and improved my ability to reflect upon some of the moral dilemmas involved.

Henry James: A Brief Introduction

Many consider James to be one of the greatest novelists in the English language. His novels deal with conundrums that occur in social interactions between the Old World and the New. Some of his best-known works include *The Portrait of a Lady*, *Wings of a Dove*, *The Golden Bowl*, and *The Beast in the Jungle*. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature three times. (Kaplan, F., 1992)

James was an avid proponent of the literary Realist tradition, which claimed that a text must principally represent experiences as they occur in real life and life in a way recognizable to the reader. James accomplished this through his characters and the situations they faced, which, like reality, are frequently ambiguous and over-laid with contradictory motives and impressions. (Powers, L., 1971)

James made a rather unfamiliar use of the term “moral” in that he was not principally concerned with a code of ethics. For him, to be moral was to take life seriously. His morality was concerned with a serious involvement with life, with the attitude that life matters.

For James, moral knowledge was not simply an intellectual grasp of propositions. In the world, with its complex, concrete reality, morality meant responding to it in a highly lucid and sensitive way, taking in whatever is in front of oneself with imagination and feeling. The character’s vigilance, silent attention, the intensity of regard, were put before us as moral acts.

Having grown up during a time when Puritanism pushing up against the Naturalist movement, James, in his consideration about how to achieve the highest good, often set the demands of duty and stern literal judgments in opposition to the need for a clear-eyed consciousness and honest self-knowledge. These forces often contended for the domination of his hero’s and heroine’s souls. (Anderson, Q., 1957)

James narrated experiences of people who are committed to value. His characters charted their course through situations which bewilder and unsettle them. He richly conveyed their bewilderment and their indefiniteness. It is here where their essential moral choices took place: choices which demanded a sacrifice, choices with which we can identify and admire. (Nussbaum, M., 1990)

James’s characters were responsible to standing obligations. Will respect for human integrity be honored? Will the natural development of an individual character be permitted and encouraged? Will emotional cruelty or human connection win out? The moral dilemmas James’s characters faced were not softened or averted. His heroes and heroines did not indict society or blame God. Rather, they regarded such predicaments as universal and inevitable, accepting them as conditions of life. (Pippin, R., 2021)

How to achieve the *summum bonum*, or the highest good in life, was a recognizable Aristotelian concern James shared. To respond at the right time towards the right people in the right way was as characteristic of excellence for James's characters as it was for Aristotle. This is another way that James's novels can be seen as a paradigm of moral activity.

A very clear ethic in James's works was "suffering is essential to growth." It is the means to knowledge and wisdom. The more insight one derives from it, the more growth there is. Because knowledge and wisdom were the goals of all of James's major characters, situations in which suffering occurred were ultimately affirmed. Through them, James showed the reader that pain is not the deepest thing. There is something deeper, an idea that is also expressed in many philosophical traditions starting with the Stoics.

In sum, for James, morality started with the individual who is both "finely aware and richly responsible." (James, 1934) In order to be moral, the person must be clear and lend their utmost intelligence to the situation they are in. S/he must respond to it with sympathy and an active imagination. If there are conflicts, one should face them squarely and keenly. If life is a tragedy, see that never for a moment should you close your eyes or dull your feelings.

In the next sections I present three instances in which my work with clients was informed and enhanced by the works of Henry James. Cases involving a depressed twenty-something woman, a marriage in trouble, and a young man set on denying his humanity will be interwoven with the ways in which Henry James's works and thoughts enriched my thinking and improved my ability to reflect on the moral dilemmas involved.

Ann: A Portrait of a Young American Woman

In Henry James's writing nothing was more significant than the situation of women and girls. He had a lifelong draw towards strong, intelligent women and wrote about them with remarkable insight. Because they were not his personal main attraction, James was able to look at them in the way that other women do. It seems ironic that a man was one of the great fictionalizers of women's experience. For that reason alone, Henry James is worth reading for both women and men. (Miz-ruchi, S., 2021)

James wrote about women who learn to live for themselves. Each of his heroines is a bold creation who provoked a quandary related to female development. By making complexly imagined young women the engines of his stories, James's narratives showed how riveting are the questions of what a young woman will do, and why.

My work with 20-year-old Ann (not her real name), represents the story of a fragile, struggling young woman selfishly manipulated by her parents to be subservient to them, and how she came to matter to herself. It illustrates how Henry James's literary works informed the process and aided in its successful advancement. In this case, I utilized three of his works which contain portraits of young women in their various stages of individuation to help my client better understand her situation and to take steps towards becoming the Subject of her life.

In addition to raising Ann in a strict Baptist home and home schooling her, both of which were developmentally limiting, her parents had done almost nothing to further her individuation. Ann's

mother, in her desire to keep Ann dependent on her, unwittingly treated her as an object. Ann was allowed to do only what her mother approved of.

To make matters worse, in disagreements between mother and daughter, Ann's father would side with her mother. This milieu left her with almost no support for her developing self. In addition, Ann's temperament was generally shy, unassertive, and unassuming, making it easier for her parents and others to manipulate her.

Ann's parents were somewhat consciously training her to be a submissive and self-denying child. They made her feel guilty for wanting or having anything for herself. Ann still remembers a nightmare she had when she was seven of someone breaking into and entering her room. Some part of her realized it was she herself who was being broken into. Any feeling of existing for herself, for her own vision, was lost even then. We agreed that our work consisted in restoring that vision.

In the beginning stages of our work, Ann would often excuse or defend her parents' abusive behavior. Like many of James's female characters, Ann, despite her desire to act and to be free, was not able to understand what her parents, her church, and society in general had done to her. I hoped that by giving her James's short story *Europe* (James, H., 1899) to read, she would find a reflection of her perverse situation, one that would motivate her to comprehend the narrative of her life more deeply and clearly, with the aim of becoming the Subject of it.

In this story, a parable which warned of the dangers of cloying mothers, Mrs. Rimmle, a widow with three grown daughters still living at home, tempted them for years with the possibility of a trip to Europe. Finally, after many delays, the trip was planned, and they were ready to go. However, just before they were to leave, the mother had a seizure which prevented the trip from taking place. She never recovered enough for the girls to feel comfortable leaving her. The eldest daughter eventually managed to make the break to Europe and never came back. This made her already demented mother more demented. The second daughter died, having given up on the prospect of freedom entirely. Looking haggard and aged, the third daughter stayed to care of her wretched, dying mother, whom James called "the old witch."

Ann enjoyed reading this story and the process of learning from it. It gave her an imaginative portrait of a situation like hers. She might not have been able to see her blonde haired, blue eyed attractive mother as evil—as a kind of witch—but the parallels were clear. Through our dialogues, she was better able to grasp how damaging her mother's behavior had been and began to separate herself from it. In addition, she began making better choices about how and when she interacted with her parents, choices which continue to lead her closer to becoming the Subject of her life.

A part of the individuation process involves going against, but how does a woman go *towards*? How is she to go about freely choosing her vision? Is it "free to be me," however ill-thought out that is? Is it freedom to follow the path of consumerism, offered today as the sure way to happiness? Is freedom "free" sex? To complicate matters, the means of obtaining real freedom—the freedom of being the Subject of your own life—is often obscure.

Ann was home-schooled, which gave her the illusion of freedom, accompanied by the pain of exclusion. She gained liberty at the expense of company, and even identity. Thus, her freedom was

theoretical, meaningless because it was not accompanied by some understanding of what her available choices really involved and meant. It is no wonder, then, that faced with the pressure to make concrete choices, she recoiled. With no sense of her own importance, she lacked will-power to act on her own behalf. She had no agency to resist whatever evil influences came her way.

Because of James's understanding of the ways a woman becomes the Subject of her life, along with all the difficulties which make that task uncertain, and because Ann had gotten a lot out of reading *Europe*, I suggested we move on to reading and discussing another of Henry James's works, *Daisy Miller*. (James, H., 1878). I thought it would provide her with an understanding of some of the difficulties she faced.

Like Ann, Daisy was young, pretty, naïve, and innocent. Like Ann's parents, Daisy's parents had not prepared her for life in society. Like Ann, she was isolated and vulnerable. Due to each leaving home, they were both physically, albeit not psychologically, unconstrained by their parents. Neither had been given tools which would enable them to become the Subject of their lives. This precarious situation eventually led to Daisy's demise. I hoped Ann's reading of this narrative would frighten and illuminate her while helping her to avoid a similar fate.

Through Daisy's negative example, the imperative to develop into being the Subject of her life became clearer to Ann. I felt more certain that her situation could resolve in her favor than I would have otherwise. Through our discussions of *Daisy Miller*, Ann became better able to envision a path forward that would ultimately give her greater agency and to begin to construct it. Philosophically speaking, this is what adult deliberation is and should be.

At twenty, Ann was still mostly potential. She didn't yet have enough autonomy or clarity to signify anything clear-cut. Although we were making progress, I wanted her to grasp more fully the possible consequences of her having almost totally acquiesced to a life in servility to her parents. I wanted her to realize how her life, which deserved to be freely individuated, had been appropriated, leaving her with an empty notion of young womanhood.

Six months into our work, Ann was still struggling to break out of her chrysalis. On her own, she was still not able to think or feel much of anything. She needed ongoing encouragement and practice with relevant tools to help move from being passive and private to being active and social.

Since my other two reading suggestions had proven fruitful, I suggested to Ann one of Henry James's most important novels, *The Portrait of a Lady*. (James, H., 1881) I thought she would recognize herself in its heroine, Isabel Archer. They are similar in that both have some intentions of their own. Having left home, both had a feeling of being free. I hoped Ann, like Isabel, would come to realize the true meaning of freedom. *The Portrait of a Lady* provided us with just the platform we needed to help us address why such adult choices and commitments are necessary, how they are made, and how and why one must follow through on them. (Allen, E., 1984)

Understanding, consciousness, and a knowledge of how to make rational choices based on her preferences were what Ann needed and will continue to need to become the Subject of her life. As she learns to perceive, to see within and beyond images and appearance, I hope her feelings and understanding about these things will become active and live rather than theoretical or repressed.

I hope she will insist on being treated as the Subject in her life rather than the Object of others. I hope she will refuse to be appropriated. I hope that as she continues to grow, Ann will insist on a relationship with the world on her own terms.

As is the case for all people, the script for Ann's life was not written in advance. Like all of us, she will have to heroically improvise her role as she goes along. The wisdom she has accumulated through our exploration of these works of Henry James is already proving to be an invaluable resource to her.

Charles: An Encounter with the Other in the House of Life

Charles (not his real name) was a polite, athletic, handsome forty-two-year-old – the kind to whom most women would be attracted, and they were. Herein lay the root of his problem. The lure of having affairs with alluring, vulnerable women was becoming greater than the desire to remain in his 15-year marriage which had produced a daughter, now twelve years old. He came to see me in hope I could help him figure out what to do—stay, or leave?

Henry James portrayed human beings as a set of relations between forces—those that pull us towards agape, or “brotherly love,” and those that pull us towards self-love. In our encounters with life, we become admirable or awful creatures by the use we make of those forces in our day-to-day experiences. In his mature works, James's major characters were often torn between such forces. Through them, he illustrated how one can remain moral and noble throughout complex situations, especially when one takes time and is thoughtful about doing so.

Almost immediately, I saw Charles's situation reflected in that of Prince Amerigo, one of the four main characters in what is James's greatest work, *The Golden Bowl*. Like Charles, Prince Amerigo was a handsome, empathetic male who found it easy to form his sense of self on his ability to subordinate women sexually. Like the Prince, most of Charles's manners were delicately and tastefully based on that power.

Neither man was fully conscious of the fact that they were greedily using women. Seducing women gave each a sense of identity that seemed easy and convenient. Although these veritable Don Juans did not want to admit it to themselves, the women who subordinated themselves to them were emblematic of greed that grew out of need and which, sooner or later, inconveniently showed up.

The similarities between the two men and their situations prompted me to suggest to Charles that reading *The Golden Bowl* could be helpful to him while he figured out what he wanted to do. For one thing, James used the limited viewpoints of his characters to make a banal situation like an extra-marital affair intriguing, which made his novels inherently good reads.

Also, if Charles recognized himself in Prince Amerigo, I hoped he would be led towards some of the same questions the Prince confronted. What is it to love within marriage? What are my values? Whom should I consider? Charles went into his affairs unabashed. Like so many people, his affairs didn't seem tawdry to those involved. The forbidden aspects only made his affairs more exciting. Perhaps seeing his situation once removed would enable him to gain a larger perspective on it.

The problem for both Charles and the Prince was their lack of a moral sensibility. This is a classic Jamesian situation—that of the person who, while attempting to foster love, encounters his other, selfish, self-centered Self in the House of Life. As the person advances through the circumstance, depending on what he decides to do, he ends up either liberated or defeated.

Throughout the duration of our work, Charles, like Prince Amerigo, would be determining the direction of his moral or immoral actions. Would he continue to flirt with passions that gave him an identity in his own eyes, or would he accept the heavy burden of creating an individuality that could hold the complexities of love while finding creative solutions for them?

For both Prince Amerigo and my client, a man's possibilities, crimes, and sorrows were being played out. Henry James made it clear that we are going to become admirable or awful creatures by the use of our experiences. Having read the novel, I knew which way the Prince had decided. In Charles's case, which would win—his conscience or his greed?

At the beginning of our work, Charles reported experiencing a heavy and deep discontent. He was having an affair – not his first. He felt defeated in his marriage, respected neither by his wife, Marilyn, nor their daughter, Annie. He said he would rather do almost anything than be with his wife. Everyone in the family was shut down. The thought of staying seemed horrifying to him. At the same time, the thought of leaving his family, along with the work it would take to rebuild his life was daunting. As so often happens in a marriage, the love Charles had started with became subject to his sexuality and his greed. He was not a “bad” man. Although he did not yet realize it, he was foolish to have reduced his identity to sex and selfishness.

If Charles were to do the right thing by himself, his wife, and his daughter, he would first need to be awakened to a moral perspective. He would need to know himself and his values better. He would need to find his moral compass. In addition, he would need to invert his feelings about women, including his wife. Instead of allowing them to define his relationship to himself, he would have to define it for himself, which at the beginning of our work was almost unthinkable.

As we worked together, Charles came to better understand himself. He also came to understand the importance of his wife and daughter in helping him fulfill his self-understanding. This, for me, was the great accomplishment of our work: Charles was able to examine the feelings, beliefs, and thoughts that he had come in with at the beginning. Through our dialogues and studies, he was able to undergo a change in his point of view, which became a moral rather than a selfish one. He moved from enduring defeat and depression to enjoying and appreciating love and acceptance. In doing so, he reported feeling more cultivated.

The Golden Bowl became a propitious vessel, helping both of us to hold a balance between his “good faith” and his immersion in his worldly dilemma. (James, 1904). Through the conduit of this novel with its illustrations of people becoming square with themselves, Charles was better able to trust that I would see his problem from a wise perspective and be able to help him with it.

It is a sad truth that not only do we have to see our other, darker self in order to adopt love as our informing principle, but that that seeing only happens after a long train of greedy and self-righteous errors. For Charles, it was the love of his wife and daughter that would accomplish this. Up until

our work together, he had not accepted his moral responsibility to himself nor, correspondingly, to his family. He had not even known what to make these of things, since they seemed to preclude his being somebody—a possessor, a man who gains his self-esteem from women.

Through our work aided by the work of Henry James, it became possible for Charles to see the self-limiting character of a life lived under the aegis of worldly folly and selfishness. During our time together, he underwent a death of selfhood and was able to face his “other” self in the presence of saving love. Something went out of him so that something else could come in. Without much sense of loss Charles gave up his affair and returned home. For the first time, he stood in need of, and desired, what his family alone could give.

With dramatic precision, the work of Henry James helped me to be a better guide for Charles. Like Prince Amerigo, he portrayed a moral hero in the world, and I had the privilege of participating as the story unfolded. All the while, I was in awe of the process. Love and wisdom became allied with Charles’s moral hardiness and his courage to act. What he endured along the way was a death of himself along with the ensuing pain of forming a Self with a conscience. He endured what anyone who has traveled the hero’s journey knows – the pain of denying oneself.

During our work, Charles was forced to confront what Henry James called the “real thing” and to bow to it. Just as Rome wasn’t built in a day, so Charles is still learning how to enact his good character under situations that try him. His wife and his daughter, after all, are far from perfect. This means he must accept humanity, both his and theirs, in all its wickedness. To do so, he must, at times, deny his selfishness, which is hard, even for the best of us. We were fortunate to have Henry James to show us that this is at the heart of the task of anyone who seeks redemption.

Ken: A Real Nowhere Man

How do you help an intelligent, good looking 33-year-old man who presents himself as confused and unable to understand how he could have ended up so bitterly unhappy? How do you help him untangle the mystery of how he got to this place, with the aim of arriving at a more deeply satisfying one? By the end of our first session, I inferred from all he had said that Ken’s (not his real name) difficulty lay in his unwillingness to fully commit himself to both his work and his love lives. Although he wasn’t consciously aware of it, this was the unresolved dilemma in which I understood him to be.

After we met, I considered the highest good that we could accomplish in our work together. For me, if he could become conscious of this conceivably hazardous dilemma and motivate himself to change, a very good outcome would be achieved. That sounds well and good. However, this would potentially be tricky, given that he was prone to using flattery and pleasant talk to cover over the fact that he was unreliable because of his lack of willingness to bind himself to the tasks and people in front of him. How could I get past his façade?

Henry James thought deeply about the ways in which avoiding human connection impoverishes experience. People want to be free, he wrote, but the possibility of being unrestricted doesn’t exist in reality. Rather, freedom exists only in the making of specific choices and commitments.

Although Ken couldn't articulate his goals because he did not understand the root causes of his difficulty, upon reflection I thought if he could reject the stasis of his condition and become the Subject of his life by creating a world which would yield peace and satisfaction, this would be a good outcome. I chose Henry James, for his interest in the same kinds of circumstances Ken was facing, to provide the essential framework for helping him to obtain greater depth and clarity. *Beast in the Jungle*, one of James's best-known novellas and one which deals with these issues, was the work I assigned, in the hope it would help him to achieve this outcome (Henry J., 1903).

In this novella, John Marcher, the protagonist, accidentally runs into May Bartram, a woman he met ten years earlier. Although he only vaguely remembered meeting her, and then only after being reminded, she still remembered a secret he revealed to her then. He told her that for a long time he had held the belief that his life would be defined by some catastrophic or spectacular event lying in wait for him like a "beast in the jungle."

May decided that she would live her life alongside Marcher's—in part because she loves him, and in part because she is waiting to find out what fate has in store for him. Although Marcher admired May, he believed he was precluded from marrying anyone in order not to subject his imagined wife to his "spectacular fate," so he did not let her to get close to him.

Marcher allowed the best years of his life to pass. Eventually he learned that the long-awaited misfortune was the act of throwing his life away while ignoring the love of a good woman. Both tragedies were the result of his preposterous sense of foreboding.

When I assigned *Beast in the Jungle* to Ken, I hoped its major theme of life and love lost due to an unwillingness to commit to one's own reality would strike a resonant chord within him. I hoped it would help to make him more conscious of the possible fate that lay in store for him if he didn't strive for a higher good than behavior that involved unexplained withdrawals and belligerent responses.

Ken had a commonly held desire, that is, to escape the limitations of conventional social norms and to exist outside recognized structures. He had not yet appreciated that that desire is opposed by the awareness that he exists within a social world. His sense of self could not be created in a vacuum. It is only created through being recognized by others and by his own recognition of others.

To this point, Ken had been unwilling to communicate his idiosyncratic sense of self and existence. Many people act thusly because they are afraid doing so will limit and define them. Tragically, what ends up happening is that they are simply not recognized. They become people without qualities, real "nowhere men."

The avoidance of making commitments created tension within Ken. Specifically, he vacillated between escape and rejection of existing social structures and attempting to change and control them. It would only be by forming a personal vision and acting upon it that Ken would become the Subject of his world. With the help of Henry James, we began to investigate this dilemma, with its many complex implications.

What we each know is individually acquired and understood, and it continually changes. This makes it hard for an individual to see and use his/her perceptions wisely. The perceptions of a sen-

sitive and intelligent person, such as Ken, can often be more pure or real than those of people who have a more conventional understanding of reality. This can be both a blessing and a curse. Such a mode of experiencing the world can threaten the individual with madness, a fear of being wrong, and with isolation. This was the state Ken was in when we began working together.

To be what he thought the world expected, he concealed his feelings and responses. By doing so, he isolated himself, while his recognition of himself as an impersonal object for others increased. As a result, he believed that the more you give of yourself, the less of you was left. “There are always people to snatch at you, and it would never occur to them that they are eating you up.”

Intelligence and sensibility can remain an excuse for isolation and a retreat from love and involvement. By the time I met him, Ken had determined not to be himself, which had depersonalized him further into an object of pity.

Among the ways Ken resembled Marcher was that he allowed anticipation to rule his life. Someday success would be his. In the meantime, nothing else was good enough, which ended up making him emotionally detached from the situations he was in, and from others. Like Marcher, Ken didn't want to involve a woman in his fate—both because a woman could get hurt and because, in his mind, his fate was meant to be a solitary adventure. Thus, Ken ended up hurting a very deserving woman he refused to let himself love.

Beast in the Jungle suggests that being in love means being vulnerable with and supporting the other person, things that Ken wasn't yet prepared to do. It raised issues about the nature of love, which I thought would be of value to discuss. He was still influenced by the temptation to be led into battles by his ego rather than putting his inferior emotions under the guide of more enlightened ones. He still needed to learn that if he was stubborn and unyielding, he would be harmed.

Hollywood and Madison Avenue have created phantasmagorical images of love. These days it takes much maturity to realize that love is neither earth-shattering nor dispassionate. The burden of caring for the other and of ultimate loss is mostly left out. Ken was not immune from imbibing these false images, making it more likely he was rejecting the real while waiting for an ideal that doesn't exist.

Not only in *Beast in the Jungle*, but also in many of his other works, James raised the issue of the nature of courage and cowardice in love. He made it clear that real courage means facing the unknown, including the unknown feelings a relationship can invoke. I hoped that by being referred to this novella, Ken would come to see that, although he was an intellectual giant of sorts, he was a coward when it came to love.

The wise person practices awareness. Being aware is the starting point for all we can do to improve ourselves. However, it takes space to feel and reflect. To be aware, we must pause and take time to possess ourselves—to square ourselves with ourselves, as Henry James was fond of saying. Without preaching, I wanted to reflect to Ken his mostly unconscious difficulties—in part because his opinions regarding commitments had no firm basis. He would need to learn that he must have firm reasons which were true, or his visions would be no more than dust in the wind.

Henry James painted a picture of a little situation – the figure of a man who hasn't lived, who doesn't feel his sensations—neither his impulses, his desires, nor his pleasures. In the end, he never really enjoyed life, and the reader is left with the sense of lost possibility. I hoped sharing this sad tale with Ken would help to guide him to a happier ending. Although we are still in the early stages of our work, it is easy to see that Henry James has deepened and clarified it and has left his impression upon Ken, stirring him to find another, better, more moral way.

Conclusion

Philosophical counseling needs literature. Abstract philosophical theories alone cannot convey the individual nature of moral decisions. They cannot articulate the varied tensions and discontinuities that are typical of the doubt, contradictions, and disjunctions people encounter in their struggles towards the good life. People relate to, are inspired by, and learn from stories. The world of literary texts, particularly when carefully chosen for an individual client, opens a wide horizon of possible experiences which can refigure his/her world.

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PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

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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.

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