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National Philosophical Counseling Association

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Standards of Ethical Practice

Preamble

A philosophical practitioner is a trained professional in the ancient calling of philosophy. As a philosopher, a philosophical practitioner helps clients to clarify, articulate, explore and comprehend philosophical aspects of their belief systems or "world views." These include epistemological, metaphysical, axiological, and logical issues. Clients may consult philosophical practitioners for help in exploring philosophical problems related to such matters as mid-life crises, career changes, stress, emotions, assertiveness, physical illness, death and dying, aging, meaning of life, and morality. In addition to individuals, clients may also include hospitals, businesses, and other institutions that seek the guidance of a philosopher.

The practice of providing philosophical assistance to others is at least as ancient as Socrates who, in the Fifth Century B.C., made such a practice of philosophy. While individual philosophical practitioners may differ in method and theoretical orientation, for example, analytic or existential-phenomenological, they facilitate such activities as:

- (1) the examination of clients' arguments and justifications;
- (2) the clarification, analysis, and definition of important terms and concepts;
- (3) the exposure and examination of underlying assumptions and logical implications;
- (4) the exposure of conflicts and inconsistencies;
- (5) the exploration of traditional philosophical theories and their significance for client issues; and
- (6) all other related activities that have historically been identified as philosophical.

Although several other helping professions have also incorporated some of the aforementioned ancient, philosophical activities into their therapeutic practices, they should not thereby be confused with the private practice of philosophy as defined by the performance of distinctively philosophical activities for which philosophical practitioners have uniquely been educated and trained.

As the ethical code of the National Philosophical Counseling Association, the Standards of Ethical Practice establish principles of ethical conduct that are binding upon all member practitioners and which shall accordingly serve as the basis for addressing ethical complaints against member practitioners.

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Ethical Standards

1. In providing professional services, the philosophical practitioner should maintain utmost respect for client welfare, integrity, dignity, and autonomy.
2. Philosophical practitioners should facilitate maximum client participation in philosophical explorations. They should avoid dictating "correct" answers to client queries and issues, but should actively encourage the client's own engagement of reflective powers and rational determinations. In cases in which a client is seeking assistance for purposes of resolving a specific problem such as an ethical problem or other practical matter, philosophical practitioners may, in light of philosophical exploration of the matter, suggest possible courses of action. However, they should make clear to the client that the final decision rests with the client.
3. Philosophical practitioners should be sensitive to alternative "world views" and philosophical perspectives including those based upon cultural or gender distinctions among diverse client populations.
4. Philosophical practitioners should not engage in any form of unjust discriminatory activity. While a philosophical practitioner is not required to accept as clients all those who seek services, the refusal to render such services should be based solely upon the perceived inability to provide beneficial services, or upon other relevant issues of practice.
5. Philosophical practitioners should avoid creating dependency relations in clients and seek wherever possible to instruct clients in the methods and theories of philosophy so that clients may continue to apply these methods and theories without the assistance of the philosopher.
6. Philosophical practitioners should avoid scheduling unnecessary meetings or sessions. The services of the practitioner should be terminated when, to the client's satisfaction, the purposes for which they were sought have been fulfilled or when no further benefits are likely to accrue from their continuation.
7. The philosophical practitioner should refrain from manipulating or coercing the client, as well as any form of fraud or deceit.

NPCA

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8. Philosophical practitioners should be scrupulously accurate about their credentials and qualifications. They should not mislead the client about their credentials and should not hold themselves out (either implicitly or explicitly) as mental health counselors, psychologists, or authorities in any other field for which they are not otherwise qualified. No member should hold himself or herself out (either implicitly or explicitly) as a philosophical practitioner without having duly satisfied all training and degree requirements for certification as provided for by the NPCA.

9. Philosophical practitioners should not employ techniques or methods not associated with training in philosophy (for example, hypnosis or other psychiatric/psychological interventions) for which they are not otherwise qualified.

10. On or prior to the first meeting, the philosophical practitioner should provide the client with clear, accurate, honest, and complete information regarding the nature of services he or she is qualified to render, and should not make any unwarranted claims about the utility or effectiveness of such services.

11. When a client's problem or reason for seeking philosophical services falls outside the purview of the practitioner's qualifications or areas of competence, then the practitioner should provide the client with an appropriate referral.

12. At all junctures in the process of providing philosophical services, the philosophical practitioner should seek to maintain the freely given and informed consent of the client.

13. The philosophical practitioner should inform the client of his or her fees prior to the commencement of services.

14. The philosophical practitioner should safeguard a client's right to privacy by treating as confidential all information obtained from the client, except where disclosure is required by law or is justified in order to prevent imminent, substantial harm to the client or to others. In all such exceptional cases, disclosure may be made provided that it is made to the appropriate party or authority and no more information than necessary is disclosed. The philosophical practitioner should inform the client of the pertinent limits to confidentiality upon initiating services.

15. The philosophical practitioner who confidentially receives information establishing that his or her client has a contagious, life-threatening disease is justified in disclosing

NPCA

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<http://npcassoc.org/>

(necessary) information to an identifiable third party who, by his or her relation to the client, is at high risk of contracting the disease. The philosophical practitioner should, however, first confirm that neither the client nor any other party has already disclosed the information nor intends to make the disclosure in the immediate future. Prior to disclosing the information, the practitioner should inform the client of his or her intention to disclose. In proceeding with disclosure, the practitioner should act mindfully of the welfare, integrity, dignity, and autonomy of both client and third party.

16. The philosophical practitioner should secure and treat as confidential all records and written documents obtained or produced in the course of providing services. Such documents, or the content thereof, may not be shared with other professionals without the freely given and informed consent of the client.

17. For purposes of research, training, or publication, the philosophical practitioner may use data obtained in the course of counseling provided that all identifying references are deleted or fictionalized in order to ensure client privacy and confidentiality. Prior to initiating services, practitioners should inform their clients of such possible use of acquired data.

18. Philosophical practitioners should avoid sexual intimacy with clients or any other form of dual role relation which might compromise the integrity of the professional relationship.

19. Philosophical practitioners should not use their affiliations with colleges, universities, or other institutions or agencies as means of recruiting clients for their private practices. They may, however, use such affiliations as documentation of relevant background and/or training.

20. A philosophical practitioner who is aware of violations or intended violations of the Standards of Ethical Practice by another member practitioner should take appropriate measures to prevent the misconduct. Generally, if the misconduct can be prevented or rectified by calling the violation to the attention of the offending practitioner, then this is the preferred course of action. If such efforts fail or are not feasible, the violation should be called to the attention of the NPCA's Ethics Committee.

21. Philosophical practitioners should exemplify those moral qualities of character that are associated with being philosophical (for example, being open-minded, honest,

NPCA

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rational, consistent, fair, and impartial).

22. Philosophical practitioners should keep informed about current statutes, legal precedents, social issues, etc. that are relevant to their practice and which might affect the quality of services they render. Similarly, those practicing as consultants in a specialized field, such as medical ethics, should keep informed of changes in health law and policies that may affect the quality of their services.

23. Consistent with the Standards of Ethical Practice, the philosophical practitioner should comply with existing local, state or provincial, and federal laws relevant to the private practice of philosophy and should work for change of existing laws where such laws prevent or obstruct its ethical practice.

24. Philosophical practitioners should seek to promote mutual understanding, cooperation, and respect between philosophy and other helping professions including teaching, mental health, social work, medicine, and psychology.

25. Philosophical practitioners should contribute to the advancement of the private practice of philosophy by promoting public understanding of its nature and value through such activities as research, publication, teaching, lecturing, and competent, ethical practice.