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Meaning of life and addictions: Philosophical reflections

Abstract:

In this paper, we are talking about the meaning of life as a philosophical notion and its relation to addiction. The paper is divided into three parts. In the first part of it "The theoretical framework," we are laying the foundations of our research by referring to some philosophers and their ideas on the meaning of life (Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and others), as well as to Austrian psychologists Victor Frankl. The second part is an analysis of some empirical research concerning the relationship between the meaning of life and substance abuse. And finally, in the "Conclusion" we will draw some final philosophical implications to see if philosophy can offer some solution to this problem. More precisely we will see how a relatively new philosophical discipline Philosophical therapy, can be beneficial for substance abuse prevention correlating it with the notion of the meaning of life.

Keywords: meaning of life, abusive substance, addictions, philosophical therapy

Meaning of life and addictions: Philosophical reflections

Introduction

The meaning of life is a perennial philosophical problem. Since the beginning of philosophy, it has been one of the main philosophical issues. Together with the problem of Being it is one of the two main philosophical problems. Because, it might be said, that in essence there are only two main philosophical problems: the first one is the problem of the world, the problem of the Being, and the second one is the existential problem of the meaning of our existence. The first problem poses the main ontological question – why is there something rather than nothing – and the second one is the anthropological question – is there a meaning? But, in its deepest core, these two questions are reduced to one, because the ontological question – „why is there anything at all? “ – as a fundamental metaphysical question is also a question of the meaning of the existence of the whole world, of the existence in general. Namely, it is a question about the **reason** for basic existence, it is posed totally and comprehensively rather than concerning reasoning for the existence of anything specific, such as the universe, God, laws...etc. It is just a basic and open metaphysical question, rather than a search for an exact answer. So in this way, philosophy in its essence is a „science“ for meaning. And it is the only science that is in a quest for meaning.

In this presentation, we will try to utilize this essential trait of philosophy in thinking about addictions. In the first part of it, we will refer to the ideas of some of the most influential philosophers concerning this topic of the meaning of life, such as Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Albert Camus, and Nietzsche, as well as the psychologist Viktor Frankl and his profound insights into the psychology of the problem of the meaning of life. Second, we will try to argue the relationship between the notion of the meaning of life and the addiction problem, mostly relying on Frankl's ideas. In addition, we will analyze one concrete empirical research on this relationship conducted in 2019, and we will interpret those results. In conclusion, we will try to refer to a contemporary philosophical discipline philosophical counseling (philosophical consultancy, philosophical practice, or clinical philosophy), as a possible way of thinking about problems of addictions.

The idea is to shed some new light on addictions, not as merely a psychological or medical problem, but rather as a philosophical one. Namely, drug use and addiction have been treated solely as social phenomena, studied by psychologists, social workers, and medical professionals. Neither, however, has thoroughly examined this phenomenon as an existential one. The idea is that addictions can and in some cases must be seen as a symptom of a much deeper problem – the problem of meaninglessness. Of course, addictions are complex and multifactorial, but one of the essential aspects of it is this

metaphysical aspect, and philosophical counseling can offer some answers. Especially in the modern age, after the „death of God“, when the notion of the meaning of life was almost banished from our everyday lives and thus became a sort of modern taboo. Especially after the dominance of the analytic philosophy tradition which reduced meaning to strictly semantic activity, researchers like has lost their interest in empirical research of this idea.

Nevertheless, we claim that addictions can be seen as problematic responses to the meaninglessness consequent of the absurd. The presentation aims to analyze drug use vis-à-vis the notion of meaning, so that we may gain insight into why some people begin and continue to use drugs, which is one of the essentials for understanding addiction. In this case, we situate drug use within the context of the absurd, highlighting how the use of psychoactive substances is, either consciously or unconsciously, an attempt to escape the absurdity of existence, and how philosophy can help us in this case by providing meaningfulness of our lives.

Philosophers and the meaning of life

The question of the meaning of life underpins any attempt to find a proper understanding of our personal lives and the lives of the community. Since the beginning of philosophy, this was a central philosophical problem. In ancient philosophy almost every philosopher reflected on this issue, trying to provide an answer to the question of what, if anything, makes life meaningful; although they typically have not put it in these terms, since the term „meaning of life“, was not in use then. But their quest for the highest good, entelechy, eudaimonia... and other concepts are just different conceptualizations of the identical problem of the meaning of life.

The idea of the examined life as the life truly worth living is a simple-seeming one, but it is exceedingly deep and consequential. Socrates insisted that life not examined is not worth living and he devoted himself to examining his life and the lives of his fellow Athenians.

Plato also had many thoughts about this matter, connecting it with his broader philosophical system. The goals and purposes of human existence, for Plato, were rooted in the broader teleological structure of the being itself. To live a virtuous and hence meaningful life, one must first know what virtue is, and that`s why he embarked on a quest for basic virtues. In one of his early dialogues *Protagoras*, he lists the five most essential virtues: knowledge, justice, courage, temperance, and piety.

Cynics like Diogenes Laertius, also extensively discussed and searched for the true way of living. Diogenes' self-sufficiency is the model for a meaningful existence, where four

principles are important for his and the Cynics' conceptualization of their lifestyle: rejecting inherited custom, living according to nature, cultivating self-sufficiency, and speaking with uncompromising honesty.

Aristotle is the first philosopher on record to subject the meaning of life to systematic philosophical examination. Besides Plato, he was the first systematic philosopher in ancient philosophy, and thus, he approaches the issue of meaning from logical, psychological, biological, and anthropological perspectives. In his naturalistic view, all living things, including plants, animals, human beings, and even gods, can be ranked according to their functions, which are determined by a consideration of the generic features of their form of life and specific features of their way of life. By his idea of entelechy, Aristotle sees the soul as the entelechy (or first entelechy) of the living organism. Accordingly, rational activity is what makes human beings human and distinguishes them from other animals. Thus, Aristotle thought eudaimonia ("happiness" or "well-being") is the goal of human existence. For Aristotle, a good life facilitates becoming a virtuous person so that you can fulfill your potential as a human being and live with integrity. Aristotle regarded happiness as the ultimate good. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, he says: „Happiness [*Eudaimonia*] is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim, and end of human existence“ [*Nicomachean Ethics (1098a13)*]. But he explains that eudaimonia is not just a pleasant life but a good one filled with virtue and, thus, his position is not mere hedonism.

Epicureanism is the natural and moral philosophy taught by the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus and by his Roman follower Titus Carus Lucretius. A central claim of the Epicurean philosophy is that the universe and all that exists within it were not created by God or the gods for any purpose or according to any model. And this „atheistic“ position of Epicureanism, implied specific „secular“ ethics in which avoidance of pain was the central notion.

In the period of the Roman Empire and throughout the Middle Ages, the quest for the meaning of life didn't end. On the contrary, the new social context brought new ideas. Stoic philosophy was novel and inspiring even for Christianity which involved some of their ideas in its doctrine. Sextus Empiricus was a late second-century Pyrrhonist, a radical skeptic, who claimed no knowledge. He claimed no beliefs either. So, he would therefore not assert anything about the meaning of life, or whether there is one. Medieval philosophers were trying to align their philosophy with the dominant religious worldview. Many important philosophers from different religious traditions - like Moses Maimonides the most famous of medieval Jewish philosophers, or Thomas Aquinas, a renowned Christian thinker - were trying to offer a solution to the mystery of the meaning of life, in this case by their religious beliefs.

In the period of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment new thinking on life's meaning occurred. The deistic visions merged with the scientific enthusiasm of Michel de Montaigne, and René Descartes brought a new spirit to European intellectual culture. For Benedict Spinoza, the good life centers on understanding ourselves as integral parts of the totality of being. As Immanuel Kant puts it, the meaning of life is the pursuit of the highest good.

We don't intend to give a full and comprehensive insight into the ideas of every philosopher dealing with this issue, but just to illustrate that the search for the meaning of life was not only present but rather central throughout the history of philosophy. In the following pages, we will focus on the ideas of three modern philosophers and a psychologist: Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard, as well as the psychologist Viktor Frankl. Their insights into the topic are important and in our case, even a kind of theoretical framework for our analysis of addictions in their relationship with meaningfulness.

Arthur Schopenhauer approaches the question of life's meaning by asking whether life is worth living given the objective worth of reality itself. According to him, ultimate reality or, following Immanuel Kant's terminology, the "thing-in-itself", is nothing more than an aimless, meaningless impulse, and by implication, so is life. Schopenhauer adds that Will as a thing-in-itself is "one" beyond the distinction between one and many, that it is beyond the subject-object distinction, and that it is beyond space and time. In Schopenhauer's case, what reality, or Will, comes to know about itself is not that it is developing into a perfectly rational, moral, systematically integrated being. It realizes instead that it is a horrible, morally repugnant being. Schopenhauer also regards the typical motivations for suicide as implicit affirmations of Will, rather than suppressions or denials of it, having in mind cases where people feel hopeless, or where suffering is so severe that death is the only reasonable alternative. So, in a way, Schopenhauer ended up saying that the meaning of life is to deny it.

Friedrich Nietzsche stakes his faith in the union of robust will to power and a maximally affirmative attitude toward life. After advancing and defending interpretations of robust, moderate, and attenuated wills to power, and connecting these versions to prospects for constructing meaning in human life, both the insights and shortcomings of Nietzsche's account blossom. As recognition of "the death of God" gains currency, Nietzsche anticipates that human beings will acknowledge that the cosmos is inherently meaningless. Nietzsche is concerned with the links between culture and a tragic view of life. This chapter describes various levels of will to power in terms of the intensity of their desire to overcome serious resistance that directly affects the possibilities for self-overcoming, the pursuit of excellence, and experiencing feelings of power. Nietzsche insists that all human beings embody will to power to some extent. Although Nietzsche

often excoriates romanticism as an intellectual movement, his own work exudes much of the same impulses.

Soren Kierkegaard lived in golden age Denmark, at the eventide of the early modern period. According to Kierkegaard, meaning in life resides in accepting oneself as the task; Man is something to become, and that's why he speaks about three stages on life's way, or three spheres of existence are distinguished: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. These are not developmental stages in a biological or psychological sense – a natural and all-but-automatic unfolding according to some DNA of the spirit. It is all too possible to live one's life below the ethical and religious levels. But there is a directionality in the sense that the earlier stages have the later ones as their telos, or goal, while the later stages both presuppose and include the earlier ones as important but subordinate moments.

The aesthetic stage has two preoccupations, the arts and the erotic. In a way, it is correct to see the aesthete as a hedonist. What the various goals of aesthetic existence have in common is that they have nothing to do with right and wrong. The criteria by which the good life is defined are premoral, unconcerned with good and evil. A stage or sphere of existence, then, is a fundamental project, a form of life, a mode of being-in-the-world that defines success in life by its own distinctive criteria.

What might motivate an aesthete to choose the ethical? Aesthete is trying to become something. Marriage, work, and success are becoming something that helps in the confirmation of a person's identity. In the ethical, the aesthetic is not abolished but ennobled. In *Fear and Trembling* this ethical stage is teleologically suspended in the religious, which means not that it is abolished but that it is reduced to relative validity in relation to something absolute, which is its proper goal.

Finally, it is obvious, that one can only secure meaning through a proper relation to God. Kierkegaard rightly noted that this reduction destroys the need for personal, individual faith, and cheapens the struggle he saw as implicit to being a Christian. The objective truth of Christianity does not produce meaning, and may in fact pose a problem. Kierkegaardian despair is a rejection of the task of becoming oneself, a failure to become what one wants to be, and an unwillingness to hope in God as the source of meaning for one's life. The concept of despair at work is not of a condition resulting from the loss of a good which is necessary for happiness, but instead is a pervasive existential nihilism – a despair over oneself. Accepting oneself as the task is central to Kierkegaard's understanding of life's meaning. But accepting oneself as a task also means accepting oneself as a paradox. Kierkegaard claims that **the only way to make life worthwhile is to embrace faith in God**, and that faith necessarily involves embracing the absurd. One has faith in God, but one cannot believe in God. We believe in things that we can prove, but we can only have faith in things that are beyond our understanding.

Empirical finding

Here I want to point out two pieces of empirical evidence related to substance abuse in relation to the notion of meaning of life. The first one is a personal case of a student named *Shane Cooney* and his experience both with drug abuse and philosophy, and the second one is a study conducted by Csabonyi, M., & Phillips, L. J. in 2017 tried to find empirical evidence between the meaning of life and addictions, based on Frankl's ideas.

Shane Cooney struggled with addictions for a long time until he met philosophy. He was continuously dropping off school until he enrolled in a philosophy course taught by Caroline Lundquist, who now teaches at the Clark Honors College, which sparked a turnaround. "Philosophy speaks to everything that I'm about," he says. "It was the first time I really found my place." He started school anyway, and after a stint in rehab, finished the term with straight A's. He went on to earn two undergraduate degrees over the next three years. "I'm so glad I stayed," he says. "If I had left behind philosophy, I would probably still be using it today." Cooney even wrote his philosophy honors thesis, "Overwhelmed and Undermined: The Use of Psychoactive Substances and the Problem of Meaninglessness," on how a lack of meaning in life can help explain addiction. "The thesis was a long, drawn-out therapy session between me and these other thinkers," he says. "It involved a lot of self-reflection and thinking about the reason for my actions."

In the paper, Cooney describes how he was first drawn to German philosopher Immanuel Kant's "categorical imperative," hoping he could stay off drugs if he adhered to a supreme principle of morality. "But I found that it doesn't work," he says. "Human life is way too nuanced to have one formulation that can encompass human or moral life in general."

After a thorough reading of Camus, he writes, he realized that his drug use was an attempt to address a fundamental lack of meaning in life. "I began to see my story as one of the individual struggling with the absurd," he says. "At times the recognition of the absurd can be felt very viscerally, but sometimes it is more of a constant humming that we feel or hear that we can't put a finger on. Every person experiences it differently."

Cooney goes on to discuss the limitations of Camus' viewpoint, but he finds hope and inspiration in the work of Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl. Viktor Frankl theorized that an absence of meaning in one's life can result in boredom and apathy – the "existential vacuum" – and attempts to avoid or "escape" the vacuum can include short-acting distracting behaviors. Recently a lot of social sciences started

empirically to investigate this phenomenon and to try to understand how it relates to numerous positive mental and even physical health outcomes. So, Viktor Frankl is the focus of the second empirical case of studying the relationship between addiction and meaning of life.

Namely, in a study three years ago Csabonyi, M., & Phillips, L. J. (2017) tried to find empirical evidence between the meaning of life and addictions, based on Frankl's ideas. The concept of Meaning in Life (ML) stems in part from a proposition by Viktor Frankl (1985) that people without an identified life purpose can experience an existential crisis which leads to attempts to cope in maladaptive ways, including engaging in addictive behaviors. Viktor Frankl said that the human will to meaning comes before either our will to pleasure or will to power (Frankl 2006: 99).

Frankl's (1984) work alluded to two dimensions of life meaning: the **experience of having meaning**, and the **search to find meaning**. More recently, these two dimensions are referred to as "**presence of meaning**" (PM) and "**search for meaning**" (SM), respectively ([Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009](#)).

In their study, they investigated whether **presence of meaning** (PM) or **search for meaning** are associated with alcohol, drug, and cigarette use by young adults, and whether boredom mediates those relationships. Hundred and seventy-six young adults completed the Meaning in Life Questionnaire, the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test, and provided information about cigarette and illicit drug use over the preceding year. The results partly support Frankl's model: higher PM was associated with lower alcohol/other drug use and boredom mediated those relationships, but PM was not related to cigarette smoking. Contrary to Frankl's model, no relationship was found between **search for meaning** and alcohol, drug, or cigarette use. This suggests that psychological interventions that assist individuals who use drugs or alcohol to identify meaning or purpose in their lives might reduce levels of drug and alcohol use. The process of searching for meaning may not have substantial direct impact on levels of substance use, but once some meaning was established there may be decreased impetus to continue using drugs and alcohol.

They have tested following four hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: PM will predict level of substance use, where high PM predicts low levels of substance use, and low PM predicts high levels of use.

Hypothesis 2: SM will predict level of substance use, where high SM predicts higher levels of use.

Hypothesis 3: Level of boredom will mediate between levels of PM and substance use.

Hypothesis 4: Level of boredom will mediate between SM and substance use.

The results of this study partially support [Frankl's \(1984\)](#) theory that a lack of ML leads to boredom (i.e., the existential vacuum) which in turn leads to problematic behavior. They also found that low PM was predictive of higher alcohol and drug use. This is consistent with the majority of previous studies that have explored these relationships ([Laudet et al., 2006](#); [Palfai et al., 2011](#); [Palfai & Weaver, 2006](#)) and suggests that low PM may lead a person to feel that they have nothing to fill their life with, leading to the experience of boredom. The experience of boredom may then lead people to participate in alcohol or drug use in order to decrease, distract, or avoid boredom ([Frankl, 1984](#); [Nicholson et al., 1994](#)).

What is important in this study? Previous research has failed to explore the relationship between SM and addictive behaviors. That the predictive relationships hypothesized in the current study were not found for any of the variables suggests that people who SM are neither drawn to nor repelled from engaging in addictive behaviors. Perhaps people who SM are open to experiences, but not *all* experiences—they may search more narrowly. It may be that it is obvious to people with high levels of SM that alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes will not provide PM and that those behaviors therefore have nothing to do with their search.

Philosophical therapy

So, why is this research important from the philosophical point of view, or how philosophy can be beneficial, bearing in mind these empirical findings? Because of the following three conclusions:

1. That the Meaning of life is a valid presupposition in every human's life, as Frankl rightly claimed.
2. That Presence of meaning is correlated with substance abuse where high PM predicts low levels of substance use, and low PM predicts high levels of use.
3. And finally, that Search of meaning doesn't mean that people will necessarily engage in addictive behavior.

What can we conclude from this? That Meaning of life plays important role in this relation with addictions, and that those with high Presence of meaning have low substance abuse, and especially that helping people in their Search for meaning can save them for eventual use of addictive substances. And this is exactly where philosophy comes to the rescue.

I suppose you are all familiar with Philosophical counseling or Philosophical consultancy, also sometimes called philosophical practice or philosophical counseling, or clinical philosophy. It is a contemporary movement in practical philosophy, started to develop in the 1950's. Philosophical counselors ordinarily have a doctorate or minimally

a master's degree in philosophy and offer their philosophical counseling or consultation services to clients who look for a philosophical understanding of their lives, social problems, or even mental problems. In the last case, philosophical counseling might be in lieu of, or in conjunction with, psychotherapy. The movement has often been said to be rooted in the Socratic tradition, which viewed philosophy as a search for the Good, and good life. A life without philosophy was not worth living for Socrates.

Philosophical practice has continued to expand and is attractive as an alternative to counseling and psychotherapy for those who prefer to avoid medicalization of life problems. Numerous philosophical consultants have emerged and there is a strong international interest and a bi-annual international conference.

So, how philosophical practice can be employed in the case of addictions? philosophy as philosophical practice or philosophical counseling can be a compelling, and legitimate recovery pathway for individuals in addiction recovery, as one of many recovery pathways. Here I will offer **LBT** (Logic-Based Therapy), as a philosophical response to the addictions. **Logic-based therapy (LBT)** is a proposed modality of philosophical counseling developed by philosopher Elliot D. Cohen in the mid-1980s. It is a philosophical variant of **Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT)**, which was developed by psychologist Albert Ellis.

According to the theory of LBT, people decide to make themselves upset emotionally and behaviorally by deducing self-defeating emotional and behavioral conclusions from irrational premises. LBT retains the theoretical base of the cognitive-behavioral psychotherapies, insofar as it contends emotional and behavioral problems to be rooted in malignant and maladaptive thought processes and patterns. LBT considers itself not only a type of philosophical counseling, but a form of cognitive-behavioral therapy. At the same time, LBT remains firmly planted in philosophy by way of the use of formal logic, informal logic, phenomenology (the idea of intentionality), and philosophical antidotes in conceptualizing and treating mental disorders and psychosocial difficulties.

According to classical REBT, there are three psychological points:

- Point A (Activating event)
- Point B (Belief system)
- Point C (behavioral and emotional Consequence)

Ellis argued that the Activating event itself (A) does not cause people to be upset (C); they require also a set of Beliefs that, in conjunction with the event, can contribute to a self-defeating behavioral and emotional Consequence. For example, it is not only the divorce (A) that causes depression (C), but also the belief that this event is awful and the worst thing that could have happened (B). Thus, according to Ellis, by finding the particular

Activating event and Belief, one can find out what is causing one's depression (C). Clients can then work on changing their Belief system and their behavior to overcome the depression (C).

LBT recasts REBT's ABC-model of psychological disturbance into syllogistic logic. (Point A) According to LBT, one becomes depressed by deducing a conclusion from a set of premises.

For example, one may become depressed by setting up this syllogism:

1. If I was divorced, then what happened to me is so terrible that I might as well be dead.
2. I was divorced.
3. So, what happened to me is so terrible that I might as well be dead.

A syllogism is a deductive form of reasoning having two premises and a conclusion. The idea that the reasoning behind our emotions and behavior can be so ordered in terms of a syllogism was in fact an insight of Aristotle, who called this kind of syllogism a "practical syllogism." The distinction is that the conclusion evaluates or rates the thing in question instead of merely describing it. For example, in concluding that something is terrible, a person is negatively rating it, and therefore will act or tend to act and feel negatively toward it. In fact, Aristotle went so far as to claim that the conclusion of a practical syllogism was always an action.[9]

According to LBT, by syllogizing one's behavioral and emotional reasoning in terms of the practical syllogism, one is in a better position to find one's irrational premises, refute them, and replace the unsound reasoning with sound "antidotal" reasoning. For example, the first premise in the above syllogism is irrational because one is exaggerating just how bad the divorce is (thinking of it as though it were on the level of a catastrophic disease or natural disaster).

LBT also accepts the phenomenological thesis that every mental state, including emotions, has a so-called "intentional object" or "object of the mind." That is, there is always an object to which a mental state refers or is about. Thus, if one is depressed, then one is depressed about something. This intentional object is represented in the descriptive minor premise of the emotional reasoning, for example, the premise "I was divorced" in the aforementioned syllogism. In addition, the syllogisms comprising emotional reasoning always rate the emotional object or some aspect of it. For example, in the aforementioned syllogism, one rates one's divorce as being "terrible". This rating element is represented in the consequent (then clause) of the major premise of the syllogism, as in the premise "If I was divorced, then what happened to me is so terrible that I might as well be dead."

In contrast to classical REBT, LBT identifies positive virtues that can guide a person in overcoming irrational beliefs. According to LBT, all basic irrational beliefs ("cardinal fallacies") identified by REBT theorists and philosophers are related to "transcendent virtues" that can overcome them. LBT thereby includes these transcendent values\ virtues in addition to the classical REBT emphasis on refuting irrational beliefs.

As a philosophical counseling approach, LBT also applies philosophical antidotes derived from the philosophies of antiquity to help clients strive toward their transcendent virtues. For example, the Kantian categorical imperative that says to "treat oneself and others as ends in themselves and not as mere means" can be used as an antidote to damnation of self or others, and thus as a sort of recipe to attaining the transcendent virtue of respect for self and others. Similarly, Friedrich Nietzsche's theory about human suffering, which says that suffering can make one stronger and nobler, can be used as an antidote to catastrophic thinking ("Awfulizing") about personal loss, thereby building courage in confronting the loss and using it to create new positive meanings and values in one's existence.

Cohen sums up LBT by explaining that

*The keynote of the theory is that counselees disturb themselves emotionally and behaviorally by deducing self-defeating, unrealistic conclusions from irrational premises in their practical reasoning. LBT accordingly provides the critical thinking tools for constructing counselees' faulty reasoning; identifying and refuting its irrational premises; and constructing philosophically enlightened antidotes to these premises, guided by a corresponding set of "transcendent virtues..." (Cohen, *Theory and Practice of Logic-Based Therapy*, 13)*

The methodology of LBT is defined in six steps:

- (1) identify the emotional reasoning;
- (2) check for fallacies in the premises;
- (3) refute any fallacy;
- (4) identify the guiding virtue for each fallacy;
- (5) find an uplifting philosophy that promotes the guiding virtue; and
- (6) apply the philosophy by implementing a plan of action for the client.

According to Cohen these "six steps provide a rational framework for confronting problems of living." [14]

1. Identify the emotional reasoning

The first step of LBT can generally be described as Socratic and phenomenological. It is Socratic in the sense that it is a dialogue consisting of open-ended questions, and phenomenological in the sense that it focusses on the experiences and interpretations of the counselee

This first step consists of two sub-steps: (1A) finding the elements of the counselee's emotional reasoning, and (2B) constructing the practical syllogism comprising the counselee's emotional reasoning:

(1A) Finding the elements of the counselee's emotional reasoning

Cohen identifies emotional reasoning as, an emotion (E) that is defined by its rating (R) and its intentional object (O), thus obtaining the following formula: $E = (O + R)$.

(2B) Constructing the practical syllogism comprising the counselee's emotional reasoning

According to LBT, the arguments that underlie our emotions and behaviors are *practical syllogisms*, which possess a major premise (rule), minor premise (report), and a conclusion, wherein the conclusion is a practical outcome (an emotion and/or behavior).

2. Check for Fallacies in the Premises

In this step, the counselor identifies the fallacies in the counselee's premises.

3. Refute any Fallacy

For this step some philosophical approach is applied in order to help the counselee to see why his premises are irrational.

4. Identify the Guiding Virtue for Each Fallacy

Even though a counselee on an intellectual level can see the fallacies in his emotional reasoning this does not mean that he may still not be prone to acting out the deeply ingrained irrational arguments. At this stage of the process the value of identifying a guiding virtue for each fallacy is to provide a counterpoint to achieve sustainable change in emotional reasoning and behavior. LBT provides a guiding virtue for each of the cardinal fallacies that are designed to counteract it.

The following chart displays each such irrational belief and its respective trumping virtue:

Cardinal fallacy	Transcendent virtue
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Demanding perfection	Metaphysical security (security about reality)
Awfulizing	Courage (in face of evil)
Damnation (of self, others, and the universe)	Respect (for self, others, and the universe)
Jumping on the bandwagon	Authenticity (self-determination)
Can'tstipation	Temperance (self-control)
Dutiful worrying	Moral creativity (in confronting and resolving problems)
Manipulation	Empowerment of others
The world revolves around me	Empathy (connecting with others)
Oversimplifying reality	Good judgment (in making objective, unbiased discernments in practical affairs)
Distorting probabilities	Foresightedness (in assessing probabilities)
Blind conjecture	Scientificity (in providing explanations)

These guiding virtues can help counselees slowly change maladaptive beliefs for more adaptive beliefs without significant threat to the stability of the self.

Cohen states that these "virtues are aspirational in character and therefore not duties that set down the barebones of requirement. They are rational "oughts" rather than "musts"; they challenge counselees to strive toward realization of what is excellent in human reality. They are ideals, however, and never fully actualizable. They are long-term, life aspirations, wherein there can be both progress and backsliding." [24]

For (existential) *demanding perfection*, the corresponding guiding virtue is *unconditional life acceptance*, which is the ability to accept imperfections in realities inherent everyday life. Practicing unconditional life acceptance can lead to an attitude, what Cohen refers to as, of *metaphysically security*.^[25] The metaphysically secure person accepts the imperfections of reality.

5. Find a Philosophy for the Guiding Virtue

Once guiding virtues have been identified it points the way for choosing philosophical perspectives which can provide antidotes to the fallacious beliefs, as well as a vehicle for promoting these guiding virtues. Cohen states that the “appropriateness of a given philosophy for a counselee will depend, in part, on whether it is *congenial*, that is, consistent with other beliefs in the counselee’s belief system. A congenial philosophy needs to align with the guiding virtue that is keyed to and counteracts a given fallacy.”^[27]

6. Apply the Philosophy

In the previous stages the counselee developed the philosophical and conceptual foundation to make positive changes in their behavioral and emotional responses. However, there is still very likely a cognitive dissonance present between the counselee's new rational way of thinking and previously established irrational beliefs. Cohen (1) explains that step six of LBT consists of three further sub-steps:

(6A) identifying the counselee's behavioral reasoning, (6B) building a plan of action, and (6C) implementing the plan of action.

(6A) Identifying the counselee's behavioral reasoning

Cohen (n.d.) explains that in this sub-step "the behavioral implications of the counselee's irrational beliefs need to be carefully unpacked and a behavioral plan of action based on the counselee's new antidotal wisdom needs to be created. In other words, there needs to be *behavioral* as well as cognitive changes."

(6B) Building a plan of action

As part of step six a plan of action will be agreed upon that is based on the philosophy that was chosen in the fifth step. That is, an opposing set of behavioral rules can be deduced from the philosophy.

(6C) Implementing the plan of action

This state of cognitive dissonance between the first two rational syllogisms and the third irrational one can be resolved by building and exercising willpower. Cohen's view on willpower shares similarities with existential philosophy and Twelve-step philosophy. He states that LBT

maintains that people have the capacity to exercise willpower in order to make constructive changes in their lives...This includes, within limits, the ability to overcome tendencies to overreact behaviorally and emotionally to external events; as well as the ability to suspend, or change primary emotional responses to situations that may be creating problems for clients (for example, traumatic events).[43]

It is important to note the emphasis that LBT places on willpower. LBT acknowledges the notion of irrational psychodynamic forces and behavioral patterns, as well as socio-political influences, on behaviour, and the fact that we have personal agency means that to a significant extent we can change our emotional and intellectual worlds and thereby have control over our behavior.

LBT emphasizes the client's use of deductive logic in their emotional reasoning, which places focus on the cognitive aspect of emotion. As such, it ignores the importance of physiological states and bodily sensations to emotional life, and might be an overly cognitive approach and a way to "control" emotions.

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