

Restless Anger: Applying Logic-Based Therapy to the Case of Zhou

Ying-Fen Su

Abstract: In this paper, I discuss how, as part of the Logic-Based Therapy (LBT) Primary Certificate Program offered in Taiwan, I applied LBT to the case of Zhou, a fourth-year graduate school student in the Department of Guidance & Counseling.

THE CASE OF ZHOU

After finishing the internship for his program, Zhou is now preparing for national examinations. From the very first, Zhou was inclined to anger easily and this disturbed him a lot. Zhou mentioned that a recent emergence of anger occurred at the HuaiJen Center for Human Becoming flea market. Auntie, who worked at the counter on that day, was a member of a group in which Zhou is also one of the participants. She is kind, soft-hearted, and disposed to feel guilty. On that day, Zhou happened to see an unscrupulous customer who wanted to buy a decoration set at a price of NT300. But the customer hoped to beat down the price and asked Auntie to sell it for NT50. Zhou hinted to Auntie that she shouldn't cut down the price because things sold in the flea market were donated by caring people in order to help those who couldn't afford the counseling fee. And Zhou further argued that good deeds are inconsistent with bargaining. Auntie at first insisted that she would not cut down the price, but later, at the time when she was busy settling accounts, the unscrupulous customer came by again and kept pestering her to cut down the price. Finally, Auntie gave in and offered it to the customer for NT150, refusing to negotiate the price any further. Although the case was closed, Zhou still continued to be angry. He thought it was unfair to let the customer have his way. Moreover, Zhou mentioned that watching news on TV could also make him angry, and that he became overwhelmed with anger while watching it. His friends could not understand his behavior and they thought there was no reason for his anger. However, their attitudes toward him only provoked Zhou further to anger, almost driving him crazy.

ZHOU'S EMOTIONAL REASONING AND ITS LBT ANALYSIS

Zhou's Emotional Reasoning Supporting Anger

Zhou's anger is directed at both persons and actions. His emotional reasoning condemning Zhou *himself* is as follows:

Zhou's primary emotional object (O) is "The customer tried to bargain down the price"; his rating (R) is of the agent of this action, the customer, whom he rates as a "horrible person." In LBT primary emotional reasoning takes the form:

If O then R
O/ Therefore R

Accordingly, Zhou's primary emotional reasoning damning the customer is as follows:

EM 1

Rule 1: If the customer tries to bargain down the price (O), then he is a horrible person (R).

Report: The customer tried to bargain down the price (O)

Conclusion: Therefore, the customer is a horrible person (R)

His primary emotional reasoning directed at Auntie's behavior is as follows:

EM 2

Rule: If Auntie reduced the price for the bad customer, she did something awful.

Report: Auntie did reduce the price for the bad customer.

Conclusion: Therefore she did something awful.

ZHOU'S FALLACIES

In EM 1, Zhou's fallacy is Damnation of Others; In EM 2 his fallacy is Awfulizing. However, these fallacies follow from a more basic fallacy, namely Zhou's *Demand for Perfection*, which is evident in the following multi-tiered emotional reasoning chains, which were generated from our counseling session:

EM 1*

Rule 2: People *must* never care only about money

Bridging Premise: If people must not care only about money, then if the customer tries to bargain down the price (and hence only cares about money) then he is a horrible person.

Conclusion/Rule 1: Therefore If tries to bargain down the price (O), then he is a horrible person (R).

Report: The customer did try to bargain down the price (O) Conclusion: Therefore, the customer is a horrible person (R)

EM 2*

Rule 2: Only good deeds *must* be rewarded.

Bridging Premise: If only good deeds must be rewarded then if Auntie reduced the price for the bad customer, then Auntie did something awful.

Rule 1: If Auntie reduced the price for the bad customer, she did something awful.

Report: Auntie did reduce the price for the bad customer. Conclusion: Therefore she did something awful.

AN LBT ANALYSIS OF ZHOU'S CASE

Notice that Rule 2 in EM1* as well as in EM2* contain “musts” and make demands for perfection. Indeed, there are, as a matter of fact, people who care only (for primarily) about money, so it is false to fact that people *must* (as a necessary feature of reality) not do this. Similarly, it is false to fact that only good deeds are rewarded, which means that it is not the case that this *must* be true. As such, the Guiding Virtue of such unrealistic musts is to become more realistic. This means becoming more comfortable about the imperfections of reality. Logic-Based Therapy refers to this virtue as Metaphysical Security. Thus, Zhou needed to become more metaphysically secure about reality in order to overcome his anger problem. This required Zhou to look differently at people. Instead of seeing them as worthless when they were imperfect he could adopt Immanuel Kant’s idea of treating people as “ends in themselves,” that is, as having unconditional value. This would also enable Zhou to gain greater Respect for others, which is a further Guiding Virtue of LBT.

Next, according to LBT, Zhou needed to establish a behavioral plan in order to practice his new virtues and to strengthen his willpower to overcome cognitive dissonance between his new rational thinking (based Kant) and his former irrational thinking (the above irrational syllogisms). So, we talked about what he might do the next time he sees someone trying to do something that was arguably unethical. For example, would you now help Auntie to solve her difficulties with the customer instead of remaining on the sidelines? Would you explain to the customer the rationale for not haggling down the price, thus treating him with respect?

CONCLUSION

This case of Zhou involved discussing with him how he could better avoid becoming consumed with anger. Philosophical counseling assisted Zhou in knowing the source of his own anger, that is his emotional objects and their ratings. Armed with new insights into the basis of his anger—a demand for perfection from which he deduces Awfuling and Damnation of Others—and an uplifting Kantian philosophy to help him attain greater metaphysical security as well as a plan of action to put this plan into practice, Zhou now hopes to maintain a harmonious mood and is prepared to allow people to be less than perfect.

Ying-Fen Su obtained her PhD degree from the Philosophy Department of Fu-Jen University in 2006. She was editor of the Chinese Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Her doctoral dissertation was on “Philosophical Counseling Applied to Relationship Between Men and Women,” which was the first dissertation on “Philosophical Counseling” in Taiwan. Although her master’s dissertation is in Chinese Philosophy, especially studies of Hsün Tzu’s Theory in Confucian, she is also interested in Chinese Culture, so she has also studied in the Chinese Department. Currently, Ying-Fen Su is an assistant research fellow at Fu Jen Academia Catholica and an adjunct assistant professor in the Department of Philosophy, Fu Jen Catholic University, Taiwan. Her publications include ‘A Study on “Mistake” from the Viewpoint of Confucius’; ‘Bi-Dimensional System of the Pre-Qin Confucian Humanistic Healing’; ‘Liberty and Bondage for a Woman in Family: The Role of Mother in Yan Shi Jia Xun’; ‘Wisdom and Sincerity: Two dimensions of Pre-Confucian Humanistic Healing’; ‘Clarification on the Problems of the Paternal Role in the Family Education in Yan Shi Jia Xun’; ‘Rest and Presence: The Humanistic Therapeutic Dimension of the Pre-Qin Confucians’ Concept of “Worship”’; ‘The Nation of Teaching Children of Gentleman from Confucius-Mencius’; ‘The Confucian Philosophical Counseling Progress of “Keh-Sheng-Shou-Sheh”’; ‘“Philosophy of Life” in Holistic Education: Enjoyment, Knowledge, and Humanity’; ‘An Introduction to Raabe’s Methodology of Philosophical Counseling’. Her e-mail address is 059794@mail.fju.edu.tw.