

The Six Steps of LBT and Antidotes for Aurora's Anxiety

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Abstract: This paper shows how LBT can be useful in treating problems that emerged during a short session of philosophical practice with a client.

Logic-Based Therapy (LBT) is a philosophical counselling approach founded by Dr. Elliot D. Cohen aimed at helping clients address their emotional and behavioural problems. This is accomplished by identifying and evaluating the reasoning behind our beliefs and feelings: Checking for self-defeating premises, refuting them and replacing them with some guiding virtues, correcting the client's faulty thinking and helping the client replace bad habits with good and healthier ones, so that the client can find a more balanced and happier life.

The purpose of this essay is to show how LBT can be useful in treating problems that emerged during a short session of philosophical practice with a client that I will refer to here as Aurora¹. In the session, I followed and applied the six steps of LBT, which are: (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 a *philosophy* for the Guiding Virtue, and (6) *Apply* the philosophy. During the session, I moved gradually, following each step in order, to improve the well-being of the client. At the end I will explain what I have learnt from this practical experience, what I would have done differently, and how the counselee improved from this learning experience.

STEP ONE: IDENTIFY THE EMOTIONAL REASONING

In the emotional reasoning, an emotion (E) is defined by its rating (R) and its object (O), thus obtaining the following formula:

$$E = (O + R)^2$$

During my dialogues with Aurora, a set of chronic worries emerged with regard to future events and towards people she cared for. Aurora believes that her constant worrying can have a protecting function against things she is afraid of, and this I inferred from some statements that came out during the dialogue with Aurora:

“If I worry about the worst (a future event that might happen), I will be prepared when I have to deal with it,” and “If I stop worrying about things and something bad happens, I would be responsible for it.”

The emotion that I identified during the conversation with Aurora was anxiety.

The standard form of emotional reasoning held in LBT is that of a deductive inference (modus ponens), which can be stated in terms of the intentional object (O) and rating (R) of the emotion:

(Rule) If O then R

(Report) O

(Conclusion) Therefore R

In the case of Aurora, the intentional object is what she is anxious about (not being able to find solutions to future events that are perceived to happen and to be bad). The rating is how the intentional object is evaluated by Aurora (being responsible in case she fails to prevent bad things from happening). Thus:

(Rule) If bad things happen, then I will be responsible which will make me a bad person.

(Report) If I do not keep worrying about future events and people I care for, then bad things will happen.

(Conclusion) If I do not keep worrying about future events and people I care for, then I will be responsible for bad things happening, which will make me a bad person.

(Rule) If I do not keep worrying about future events and people I care for, bad things will happen, then if bad things happen I will be responsible, which makes me a bad person.

(Report) I am not able to prevent bad things from happening.

(Conclusion) Therefore, I am a bad person.

This leads Aurora to worry constantly until she finds solutions to bad things that might happen. Further on in the conversation, an higher order rule emerged from another statement Aurora made: *“Worrying helps me keep under control the situation.”* The main fallacy I identified here was that of *Demanding perfection* (from her demand to control everything).³ Then we can add this higher premise to the practical syllogism we constructed before:

(Rule 2) I must control all things so that bad things never happen to the people I care for and myself.

(Bridging Premise) If I must control all things so that bad things never happen to the people I care for and myself then if bad things happen, then I will be responsible which will make me a bad person.

(Rule 1 / Conclusion) If bad things happen, then I will be responsible which will make me a bad person.

(Report) If I do not keep worrying about future events and people I care for, then bad things will happen.

(Conclusion) If I do not keep worrying about future events and people I care for, then I will be responsible for bad things happening, which will make me a bad person.

The bad things that would probably happen (in how she sees future events) are also perceived by Aurora as the worse things ever, therefore, terrible, horrible, and awful.

STEP TWO: CHECK FOR FALLACIES IN THE PREMISES

During the conversation with Aurora, some fallacies in her reasoning emerged. The first cardinal fallacy I identified, from Aurora's need to control events and people that are near her, is that everything has to be according to her view of how the world should be. This is because she thinks that something bad will happen if she does not have such control, triggering a vicious circle that only goes to aggravate the symptoms and difficulties of everyday life, that inevitably affects negatively the mood of Aurora. The fallacy in question is *demanding perfection*⁴. The second fallacy is that of *awfulizing*⁵, as if she fails to control everything it will be a disaster, and something terrible, horrible and awful will happen. Thus, if Aurora has not planned the days ahead everything will go wrong. In Aurora's case, one cardinal fallacy piggybacks on the other and a third fallacy emerges, which is *self-damnation* (that she would be a bad person if she fails to prevent catastrophic events)⁶. A further fallacy identified during the session is that of *dutiful worrying*⁷. If Aurora does not continue to worry about events and the people she cares for, something bad could (and will) happen, therefore, she needs to worry about perceived negative possible events until she is certain (or near certain) that she can find a solution.

STEP THREE: REFUTE ANY FALLACY

Demanding perfection that bad things never happen is an irrational way of reasoning that leads to catastrophic reasoning (*awfulizing*). For Aurora a negative event, remote and far-fetched is perceived as highly probable, in other words, the possibility of a bad event happening is confused with its probability. Any bad event is possible, but in spite of the possibility, Aurora should ask herself what is the actual probability of this bad event becoming true.

In Aurora's demand for perfection, there is also the demand to control future events. The refutation is based on the fact itself that there are things in the external world that are not within the control of human beings, therefore it is unreasonable trying to control them.

I told Aurora that she should replace her 'it must' with 'I prefer'; for example, instead of saying: 'bad things must not happen,' say, 'I prefer that bad things don't happen.' Furthermore, to demand that reality be in accordance with Aurora's hopes and desires is an error, as the world is not perfect, so the request is unrealistic. I explained to Aurora that her demands are absolutistic and unconditional, therefore contradictory. In this instance too, I recommended that Aurora stick with preferences instead of inferring, must, ought, and should from her preferences.

Aurora's demands that bad things must not happen as a consequence triggers in herself the necessity to control everything, prompting in her a duty to worry, and to ruminate on possible perceived events that could happen. In the real world to have certainty that an event will not happen is not possible as certainty is not of this world. Therefore, I recommended Aurora try to settle for a probabilistic world, because, whether you like it or not, nothing in the material world is certain.

STEP FOUR: IDENTIFY THE GUIDING VIRTUE FOR EACH FALLACY

In step four of the LBT process, for each cardinal fallacy one needs to identify a guiding virtue. For *demanding perfection* the corresponding guiding virtue is *meta-physical security*⁸, which is 'the ability to accept imperfections in reality'. This includes accepting fallibility and limitations as a human being without expecting the world to be perfect. In the case of Aurora, this meant that she needed to stop trying to control the world and instead focus on what is in her reach, and to concentrate on what she can actually control.

For *awfulizing*, the guiding virtue is *courage*,⁹ which means to fear things within reason and when facing danger to act according to the situation. In the eyes of the courageous person, things could always be worse and are never absolutely bad. The courageous person tends to learn from and derive positive value from mistakes, and he/she is willing to take reasonable risks in order to live well.

For self-damnation, the guiding virtue is *respect*.¹⁰ This involves accepting oneself as a centre of intrinsic worth and dignity even if one makes mistakes or fails to be perfect.

The guiding virtue for *dutiful worrying* is *moral creativity (prudence)*.¹¹ This means to be prudent in addressing moral problems. This virtue tells one to transcend the self-defeating idea that one has a moral duty to keep obsessing about perceived potential problems, and, in the process, defeat the happiness of one's loved ones as well that of oneself. This includes learning to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty of moral choices.

STEP FIVE: FIND A PHILOSOPHY FOR THE GUIDING VIRTUE

In step five we can lay out some philosophies in accordance with the guiding virtues identified in order to refute the fallacies. These philosophies are antidotes in the form of teachings from philosophers that we can use to help Aurora reframe her reasoning and help her to live a better and happier life.

For *metaphysical security*, as an antidote I selected Epictetus¹², who tells us not to create needless stress and anxiety over things we cannot control directly; instead, he says, we need to direct all our efforts on what we can actually control. This antidote is directly applicable to Auroras' problem by focusing on the fact that the world is not perfect, and that human beings are not infallible; and by learning to change her musts to preferences.

With regard to *awfulizing*, as an antidote, I used again Epictetus¹³ philosophy, so that Aurora could put into perspective what seemed to her to be awful, in order to realize how much worse things could, in fact, have been. Are things she perceived to be terrible, horrible and awful really that terrible, horrible and awful? Then what about hurricane Matthew that has being in the news recently and caused more than a thousand deaths in Haiti alone, which is the same place that went through a magnitude 7 earthquake six years ago! Examples such as these should help Aurora reframe her thinking and vocabulary usage on what is really terrible, horrible and awful, by putting things into perspective.

Concerning *moral creativity*, I used Sartre's philosophy as an antidote, which says to be content with probability, not certainty, inasmuch as ruminating on things until you have certainty or near certainty about a solution is self-defeating. One needs to live according to possibilities and act on what seems likely and hope for the best. Moreover, as in the case of Aurora, if she fails, it does not mean that she is a bad person, but only human, just as are the rest of us. If we make a mistake, then we have only to learn from it.

STEP SIX: APPLY THE PHILOSOPHY.

In step six, we need to implement the new antidotes/philosophies so that the client can use the new wisdom to make behavioural and cognitive changes. I suggested to Aurora a number of strategies that could help her to reframe her way of thinking. Presently, she is in a state of cognitive dissonance, which is a state of conflict between her previous deductions from her irrational beliefs in contrast with the deductions drawn from her new uplifting philosophical antidotes:

When she feels worried about some future event, she should learn to put into perspective the actual situation. She should ask herself what are the actual probabilities of such an event happening (Sartre).

I suggested as a practical exercise, to speak or write down her worries, which can help her see better the degree of irrationality in her thinking. For example, when she uses sentences that contain 'must' and 'should', she can rephrase them with 'I prefer'.

Aurora should also ask herself if there are perfect solutions to her constant worries. If the answer is no, then she should just opt for the best and get on with life (Sartre).

Finally, Aurora should abandon her need for perfection; she can aim at excellence in what is under her control without expecting to achieve perfection, as perfection is not of this world (Epictetus).

Some bibliotherapy was also recommended, as this is a useful tool used in philosophical counselling. I suggested a book from Paramhansa Yogananda titled '*Where There is Light: Insight and Inspiration for Meeting Life's Challenges*'. This book of reflections is divided into subjects, which can provide Aurora with some philosophical insights in times of uncertainty and crises. Then I recommended Epictetus *Enchiridion* (manual), on how to apply philosophy in daily life, as I used his philosophy during the practicum session.

CONCLUSION AND FINAL REMARKS

During this session with Aurora I have learned how to put into practice the six step process of LBT. I learned that during the conversation with the client, the practitioner has to dig deep to find the actual intentional object and how it is rated, but once one has found this emotional object and its rating, as well as the fallacy inherent in the client's emotional reasoning, one has a good starting point from which to help the client reframe her way of thinking. In this session, I think I addressed too many cardinal fallacies, however. I think that if I concentrated only on two main fallacies such as demanding perfection and dutiful worrying, the session would have been more focused. This would have also helped in focusing on less philosophical antidotes, especially when it came to applying them. Through the session, I believe the client became more aware of her unrealistic reasoning, and of alternative approaches, such as ways to reframe one's thinking by following the guidance of some of the philosophers of antiquity; and how to change one's behaviour through practice. We also agreed to continue the sessions as both the client and I believe it will be very helpful.

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NOTES

1. The counselee's name was changed to a fictitious name for privacy reasons.
2. Elliot D. Cohen, *Critical Thinking Unleashed* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), p. 260.
3. Lecture 5 of LBT course, the demand for perfection includes the demand that bad things never happen, and the demand for control.
4. Elliot D. Cohen, *The New Rational Therapy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p. 6.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 6 (also called: *Thou shalt upset yourself*).
8. *Ibid.*, p.27.

9. Ibid., p.49.

10. Ibid., 73-74.

11. Ibid., p.137.

12. Ibid., p. 37.

13. Ibid., p.60.