

Philosophy as a Way of Life for Addiction Recovery: A Logic-Based Therapy Case Study

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ABSTRACT: In this essay I explore the notion of philosophy as a way of life as a recovery pathway for individuals in addiction recovery. My hypothesis is that philosophy as a way of life can be a compelling, and legitimate recovery pathway for individuals in addiction recovery, as one of many recovery pathways. I will focus on logic-based therapy (LBT) applied in the context of addiction recovery. The aim of presenting a case study is to show how a client receiving LBT is provided with techniques and a worldview that can contribute to a philosophically oriented recovery program. In the case study the client was advised to apply the moral philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche as an uplifting philosophical framework to counteract his unproductive worldview and fallacious thinking. Considering that there is an ostensibly low efficacy rate for the treatment of addiction, articulating the value of philosophy as a way of life as a recovery pathway provides a conceptual and methodological framework for the development of novel philosophically-based addiction treatment and recovery-oriented programs—thus expanding the treatment and recovery options available for those seeking recovery from addiction.

In ancient Greece, “philosophy was a mode of existing-in-the-world, which had to be practiced at each instant and the goal of which was to transform the whole of the individual’s life.”¹ In the ancient world philosophy was “a method of spiritual progress which demanded a radical conversion and transformation of the individual’s way of being.”² Philosophy was more than merely an intellectual pursuit it was as a way of life.

In addition to philosophy being a practice of “transformation of the individual’s way of being,” a philosophical therapy was also practiced in the Graeco-Roman period. The philosophical therapy of emotions, as a distinct genre of writings, became well-established in Graeco-Roman culture during the Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic periods, and underlying these writing was a well-developed body of social practice, i.e., a philosophical therapy that treated mental health disorders.

Since the time of the ancient Greeks, philosophy has transformed from a “mode of existing-in-the-world” into an abstract-theoretical activity. However, more recently philosophers like Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault, have contributed to a resurgence of interest in the Hellenistic philosophies as arts of living

and of *philosophy as a way of life* and transformational practice.³ Moreover, both Hadot and Foucault, “have suggested that historians of philosophy have failed to recognize the extent to which the Greco-Roman therapeutic model of philosophy has shaped important strands of modern European philosophy.”⁴

In this essay I explore the notion of philosophy as a way of life as a recovery pathway for individuals in addiction recovery. My hypothesis is that philosophy as a way of life can be a compelling, and legitimate recovery pathway for individuals in addiction recovery, as one of many recovery pathways.

Considering that there is an ostensibly low efficacy rate for the treatment of addiction, articulating the value of philosophy as a way of life as a recovery pathway provides a conceptual and methodological framework for the development of novel philosophically-based addiction treatment and recovery-oriented programs—thus expanding the treatment and recovery options available for those seeking recovery from addiction.

There are few books that promotes the value of philosophy in addiction recovery,⁵ and that fosters a conversation between philosophy and Twelve-step spirituality,⁶ and there has been recent interest in philosophies like Stoicism as recovery approaches. Moreover, philosophical metatheories like integral metatheory have been applied as conceptual frameworks in developing recovery programs.⁷ But to the best of my knowledge, there are no books or research published that specifically argues for philosophy as a way of life (as articulated by the Hellenistic philosophers, Hadot and Foucault) as a legitimate addiction recovery pathway.⁸

In this essay, I will focus on logic-based therapy (LBT), a philosophical counseling method developed by Elliot Cohen,⁹ applied in the context of addiction recovery.¹⁰ I will explore how the techniques and virtues in LBT can contribute to a philosophically oriented recovery pathway for individuals in addiction recovery.

In the next section I provide a brief overview of LBT and then discuss a LBT case study with a client suffering from a substance use disorder. In the case study the client is advised to apply the moral philosophy of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche as an uplifting philosophy and philosophical antidote to counteract his counterproductive worldview and fallacious thinking. The aim of presenting a case study is to show how a client receiving LBT is provided with techniques and a worldview that can contribute to a philosophically oriented recovery program. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive discussion, and for the sake of brevity only one aspect of the client’s worldview and thinking is addressed.

OVERVIEW OF LOGIC-BASED THERAPY

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. . .”¹¹

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 (2016) these “six steps provide a rational framework for confronting problems of living” (xix).

In the context of addiction recovery, the guiding virtues, and philosophical antidotes of LBT could also serve an underlying psychodynamic purpose for recovering addicts. Many addicts suffer from various degrees of pathological narcissism, which can be understood as the regression/fixation to the stage of the archaic, nuclear self.¹² The narcissistically regressed/fixated individual often has a need for omnipotent control, a characteristic of the grandiose self. In active addiction, such power is sought through fusion with an omnipotent selfobject (drug of choice) and manifests as impulsivity.¹³ Once in recovery, this need for control will initially manifest as the obsessive-compulsive personality traits of ritual and rigidity. Without some clear recovery structure (guiding virtues and philosophical antidotes can provide psychic structure) and the absence of the previously idealized selfobject (drug/s of choice), the narcissistically regressed individual will be subject to massive anxiety, stemming from fear of fragmentation of self and empty depression, which reflects the scantiness of psychic structure and good internal objects. The internalization of the guiding virtues taught in LBT (which share many similarities to the spiritual principles of Twelve-step programs) can help satisfy the need for ritual and rigidity in a healthy way and once this recovery structure is internalized, it will help build much needed psychic structure.¹⁴

A LOGIC-BASED THERAPY CASE STUDY

To provide an example of the usefulness of LBT for individuals in recovery in providing techniques and a worldview that can contribute to a philosophically oriented recovery program, I will provide a brief overview of a LBT session case study of a client suffering from a substance use disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The client, Jurie (not his real name), is a 25-year-old professional musician. One of Jurie’s main obstacles to sustained recovery is that he has a pattern of relapse after experiencing disappointments when his expectations are violated. The most recent incident was a relapse after he did not get a booking that he felt sure he would get. His expectation was that his band would be booked for several performances, but instead the manager of the club did not book his band again after their first performance and booked another band instead. Soon after being informed, he had a drink which progressed to a three-day crack-cocaine binge.

In our session after his relapse, he lamented about his inability to stay abstinent. After exploring the antecedents to his relapse, it became clear that he has a pattern of relapsing after experiencing a disappointment. It became apparent that he had a tendency for *existential perfectionism*. Cohen states that existential perfectionism involves demanding that bad things *must* not happen in the world

and when the world fails to live up to one's idealized image of it one perceives the world to be all bad.¹⁵

STEP ONE: 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. Cohen describes this step as one "in which the counselor attempts to get inside and resonate with the counselee's subjective world so that she is better able to help the counselee bring the relevant data to the fore. . . [it] gives the counselee an opportunity to describe, phenomenologically, how he is feeling."¹⁶

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

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: $E = (O + R)$.

During my dialogues with Jurie, his intentional object began to emerge. It became clear that he experienced frustration, resentment, and anger when events did not live up to his expectations. There are several more aspects to his reasoning, but for the sake of simplicity I will only focus on this one aspect of his emotional reasoning. The emotions that I identified during the conversation with Jurie were anger, frustration, as well as an attitude of resentment.

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).

In constructing the syllogism underlying Jurie's emotional reasoning I will apply the form of 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 Jurie's case the intentional object is what he is angry and resentful about — not getting the gig. The rating is how the intentional object is evaluated by Jurie. Thus:

(Rule 1) Bad things must not happen.

(Rule 2) Therefore, if bad things happen, then the world itself is bad.

(Report) A bad thing happened.

(Conclusion) Therefore, the world is bad.

STEP TWO: CHECK FOR FALLACIES IN THE PREMISES

In this step, the counselor identifies the fallacies in the counselee's premises. The cardinal fallacy I identified from my dialogue with Jurie is *demanding perfection* or more specifically *existential perfectionism*.

The fallacy of demanding perfection can often lead to what Nietzsche referred to as *ressentiment*. Men of *ressentiment* are, says Nietzsche, "cellar rats full of revenge and hatred" and conceal "a whole, vibrating realm of subterranean revenge."¹⁷ Brian Leiter describes the psychological state of *ressentiment* as one produced by "a state of affairs that is both unpleasant to the affected person and one which he is powerless to alter through physical action."¹⁸ In Leiter's definition we see here how a frustrated expectation is related to *ressentiment*. Nietzsche dealt with the notion of *ressentiment* in his book *The Genealogy of Morality* and his book can be considered therapeutic as it discusses this issue and points out how to combat it.

In the *Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous* it reads, "resentment [is] the number one offender, and that it destroys more alcoholics than anything else."¹⁹ When we look at the etymology of the word "resentment" it derives from "re-sentiment," with "re-indicating" something repeating itself and "sentiment" related to feeling. Resentment can thus be understood quite literally as "feeling again," especially in terms of a habitual recycling of perceived injustices towards us and those accompanying feelings. Simply put, resentment binds us in a kind of emotional enslavement to the offending person or event. The root word in Latin, *addictus*, means "slave," hence, addiction might best be understood as being bound, or enslaved by any substance, behavior, or attitude that is ultimately self-defeating in the long-term. Therefore, for recovering addictions the value of dealing with resentments and avoiding a state of *ressentiment* cannot be overstated.

STEP THREE: REFUTE ANY FALLACY

For this step I applied a Socratic approach to help Jurie see why his premises are irrational. I helped him see that his demand for existential perfection is unrealistic and fuels his addictive cycle.

We discussed that a common theme in existential philosophy and Buddhism. From a Buddhist perspective, suffering or *dukkha* is caused by our unwillingness to accept the world as it is and our insistence on trying to make it fit our expectations or fantasies. Addiction is, in essence, a refusal to accept things as they are and an attempt to avoid the reality of suffering. An important aspect of recovery is realizing the inevitability of suffering and learning how to cope with it in a healthy way. Philip Flores (1997) summed up this existential predicament of the alcoholic by stating;

Many existential writers believe that in such a confrontation between the realistic acceptance of the world as it is and the self-centered demands for unlimited gratification, reason would prevail and the individual would choose more realistically between the alternatives—continued unhappy struggles with old patterns of expectations or authentic existence with expanded freedom of choice and responsible expression of drives and wishes. With Socrates, we argue to ‘know thyself.’ In this fashion, AA members are taught to believe that the authentic existence advocated by the AA program holds the key to self-examination, self-knowledge, emancipation, cure, and eventual salvation.²⁰

STEP FOUR: 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 behaviour. LBT provides a guiding virtue for each of the cardinal fallacies that are designed to counteract it.

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.”²¹

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*.²² The metaphysically secure person accepts the imperfections of reality.

In certain cases, cognitive dissonance may be so great when fallacious thinking is refuted that it can threaten the stability of the self and could in extreme cases lead to fragmentation and annihilation of the self. Consequently, the value of replacing faulty beliefs with guiding virtues cannot be overstated. According to founder of self psychology Heinz Kohut unconscious impulses and fantasies were seen by him as merely a defense against a deeper fear of disintegration and fragmentation of the self.²³ He is of the opinion that selfobject functions provides the fortification against fragmentation. Although the original selfobjects are the organizing functions provided by the child’s caregivers, as adults we also tend to form organizations with a wide variety of linguistic, cultural, image-based and behavioral selfobjects. He implied that the threat of fragmentation (when deeply held beliefs are challenged) may be ever-present, even in relatively healthy personalities even after a cohesive self has been established. Furthermore, Kohut indicated that fragmentation anxiety may emerge at crucial moments of psychic change, when an existing maladaptive selfobject organization is about to be given up. Pathological structures or patterns of object-relating and systems of beliefs may be clung to, because change may threaten fragmentation of the self. Thus,

dysfunctional internal working models of relationships, as well as irrational systems of belief may be tenaciously retained because these structure the person's experience.

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

STEP FIVE: 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."²⁴

As a philosophical perspective for the guiding virtue of *unconditional life acceptance*, I selected aspects of Nietzsche's moral philosophy and his notion of *amor fati* as an uplifting philosophy to counteract existential perfectionism.²⁵ *Amor fati* is a Latin phrase that may be translated as "love of fate" or "love of one's fate." It is used to describe an attitude, similar to metaphysical security, in which one accepts everything that happens in one's life, including suffering and loss.

This refusal to regret and retouch the past is heralded as a virtue at many points in Nietzsche's work. In his book, *The Gay Science*, written during a period of great personal hardship for the philosopher, Nietzsche writes

I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who makes things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. Looking away shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer."²⁶

And, a few years later, in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche writes:

My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it. . . but love it."²⁷

I find Nietzsche's philosophy useful in the context of addiction recovery as his conceptualization of philosophy "as therapy," and as an ensemble of spiritual exercises and techniques of *askesis* (self-transformation), can be developed into a Nietzschean-based addiction recovery program and pathway. This is based on the premise that Nietzsche's philosophy "is a kind of eudaimonistic teaching that aims at a healing of individuals and the cultures they inhabit by way of self-perfection," and that he "believed that philosophy is something to be lived rather than to be stated and thought."²⁸ Horst Hutter (2006), who articulates Nietzsche's philosophy through the lens of Hadot's account of Hellenistic philosophies as arts of living in his book *Shaping the future: Nietzsche's new regime of the soul and its*

ascetic practices, argues that only by understanding Nietzsche's books as a means of self-transformation can we make sense of his philosophy, he remarks that

Nietzsche was steeped in ancient philosophy and that he derived his understanding of philosophy from the ancients. Thus, he never considered "doctrines" to be more than instruments of philosophy, and he thought writing to be subservient to speaking. His books hence do not contain his "philosophy" but point to a philosophy to be lived and experienced on the basis of specific ascetic practices.²⁹

Moreover, according to the Michael Ure Foucault claimed that Nietzsche was part of a group of nineteenth-century German philosophers whose goal was to revive the Greco-Roman model of philosophy as an "art of living" in contrast to an enduring effort to purge it from philosophy.³⁰ Ure, in his book *Nietzsche's therapy: Self-cultivation in the middle works*, succinctly articulates the Nietzschean view of philosophy's import, and states that it "is a way of transforming one's life, and so it is how one lives and dies that is the measure of the value of philosophy."³¹

STEP SIX: 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 still very likely a cognitive dissonance present between the counselee's new rational way of thinking and ingrained irrational beliefs. Cohen (1) explains that step six of LBT consist of three further sub-steps: (1) identifying the counselee's behavioral reasoning, (2) building a plan of action, and (3) implementing the plan of action.

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."³² In unpacking Jurie's behavioral reasoning, I helped him to see what he is deducing in the way of prescribed actions from his conclusion. This behavioral reasoning takes the form of a behavioral prescription (P) deduced from the justification (J) and a behavioral rule (If J then P):

If J then P

J

So, P

Thus:

(Behavioral Rule) When things do go my way, use substances to feel better.

(Justification) Things are not going my way.

(Behavioral Prescription) Use substances to feel better.

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.

In the above interchange I helped Jurie to draw out the implications of Nietzsche's philosophy in building a plan of action. In short, I helped Jurie to construct behavioral reasoning using Nietzsche's philosophy as major premises:

(Behavioral Rule) When things don't go my way, unconditionally accept my fate (i.e., unconditionally accept that bad things happen to me.

(Justification) Things are not going my way.

(Behavioral Prescription) So, unconditionally accept my fate.

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).³³

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.

Socially deterministic approaches to addiction have increasingly gained traction. I would ascribe this phenomenon to the rising influence of social justice perspectives in the human and social sciences. This view or rather ideology holds a radically deterministic view of addiction (and human nature), based on the premise that social pathologies are addiction's 'root cause.' The pitfall here is when social factors, which of course contribute to patterns of drug use, are considered determinate.³⁴

Nobody would deny that there are socio-economic factors that influence an individual's behavior. But when we adopt a deterministic view of human existence, we risk conceptualizing individuals as being without agency or without the resilience to overcome obstacles, and thus do injustice to human nature and the individuals we purport to help. A socially deterministic view of addiction implies that individuals have little or no free-will, are psychologically homogenous, and are at the mercy of their environment. Most crucially, by adopting a socially determined view the consequent solutions will be equally socially determined and at odds with many of our basic human rights.³⁵

BEHAVIORAL RECOMMENDATIONS.

As part of Jurie's LBT behavioral protocol in developing a Nietzschean-based recovery program, that will be incorporated into his existing recovery practices, I suggested bibliotherapy. I recommended two of Nietzsche's books for Jurie: (1) *On the genealogy of morality*,³⁶ and *Human, all too human: A book for free spirits*.³⁷ I will also suggest Ure's book *Nietzsche's therapy: Self-cultivation in the middle works*.³⁸ These readings can assist Jurie in reinforcing his behavioral prescription developed earlier in this step.

Considering that Jurie is part of a Twelve-step fellowship I pointed out that the notion of "Just for Today" propagated in Twelve-step meetings shares similarities with the guiding virtue of unconditional life acceptance.

CONCLUSION

In this essay I explored the notion of *philosophy as a way of life* as a recovery pathway for individuals in addiction recovery. My hypothesis was that philosophy as a way of life can be a compelling, and legitimate recovery pathway for individuals in addiction recovery, as one of many recovery pathways.

I focused on LBT applied in the context of addiction recovery. The aim of presenting a case study was to show how a client receiving LBT is provided with techniques and a worldview that can contribute to a philosophically oriented recovery program. In the case study the client was advised to apply the moral philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche as an uplifting philosophical framework to counteract his unproductive worldview and fallacious thinking.

Considering that there is an ostensibly low efficacy rate for the treatment of addiction articulating the value of philosophy as a way of life as a recovery pathway provides a conceptual and methodological framework for the development of novel philosophically-based addiction treatment and recovery-oriented programs—thus expanding the treatment and recovery options available for those seeking recovery from addiction.

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of *Harm Reduction* (Human Sciences Research Council Press), and has published academic articles and presented at national and international conferences in the fields of addiction treatment and studies, theoretical psychology and philosophy. He is currently working on a two-book contract for Cambridge University Press.

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