

A Case of Global Damnation:

Applying the Six Steps of Logic-Based Therapy

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Abstract: This paper will explain and implement Logic-Based Therapy's six-step philosophical practice to address and overcome the fallacy of Global Damnation. The premises and conclusions in the faulty thinking will be constructed, identified, and refuted, the guiding virtue will be identified, and philosophical antidotes will be constructed and applied.

Ancient Stoic philosopher, Epictetus, accurately observed, "It is not circumstances themselves that trouble people, but their judgments about those circumstances" (Baird 2011). This wisdom inspired American psychologist Albert Ellis to develop Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), a type of cognitive behavior therapy that differs in its approach by asserting that humans develop several basic philosophies with behavioral and emotional elements, which create and perpetuate dysfunction (Cohen 2007). These ideas were extended and built upon by philosopher, Dr. Elliot Cohen, who asserts that humans deduce self-defeating emotional and behavioral conclusions from irrational premises. He developed Logic-Based Therapy (LBT) as a modality of philosophical counseling. LBT suggests six logic-based steps in counseling those with behavioral and emotional issues (Cohen 2007).

The six steps are:

1. Formulate the emotional reasoning one is using to feel and act in self-defeating ways;

2. Identify faulty thinking errors (known as “Cardinal Fallacies”) in the premises, which adversely affect personal and/or interpersonal happiness;
3. Refute the fallacy identified by proving it irrational;
4. Identify a guiding virtue to use to overcome the fallacy and achieve greater happiness;
5. Adopt a philosophy that promotes the guiding virtue;
6. Construct a concrete plan of action to put the philosophy into practice (Cohen, 2013).

This paper will apply these six steps to the case of an individual who is caught in a fallacy of Global Damnation, that is, devaluation of the entire world based on what he perceives as fatal flaws in the universe. This individual will be referred to as “Andrew.”

The Case of Andrew

Andrew is an intelligent, hard-working, 40 year old architect, who struggles with depression and anxiety. Ten years ago, he was co-owner of a rapidly growing architectural firm and was happily married with two kids. In 2008, he and his business partner were in the process of selling their company for a sum that would allow them to comfortably retire, when the economy tanked, and the offer was withdrawn. The same week the deal fell through, his wife was diagnosed with an inoperable cancer that caused slow mental and physical deterioration over five difficult years. More intense personal tragedies followed over the next several years, and, though Andrew is able to continue to support his two children, he has become a high-functioning alcoholic who tells his counselor, “This world is so awful that I look forward to the non-existence of the afterlife. The best time in my life was before I was born, when I had not experienced living life in this terrible world.”

Step 1

The first step in addressing Andrew's problem is to formulate his emotional reasoning by asking the questions, "What is he upset about?" and, "How is he rating it?"; then a practical syllogism can be formed with two premises and a conclusion:

Major Premise Rule: If [emotional object] then [rating]

Minor Premise Report: [emotional object]

Conclusion: So, [rating]

Andrew is upset that there is suffering in the world. He rates it as awful and not worth living.

Applying the above template, the emotional reasoning he is using is therefore:

Major Premise Rule: If the world has suffering, then the world is awful and life is not worth living.

Minor Premise Rule: There is suffering in the world.

Conclusion: So, the world is awful and life is not worth living.

Step 2

The second step in LBT is to identify the Cardinal Fallacies in his premises. On the basis of clinical observations and studies, Cohen (2007) offers a list of eleven common Cardinal Fallacies. Although it could be argued that Andrew is using the fallacy of Awfulizing, which means inflating the severity of a situation from merely bad to the ultimate worst, or that he is Demanding Perfection, which Cohen (2007) defines as "Perfect-a-holic addiction to what you can't have in an imperfect universe," perhaps the thinking error that best applies to this situation is Global Damnation, which is the devaluation of the entire world based on what he perceives as

fatal flaws in the universe (Cohen, 2013; Cohen, 2007). Because suffering occurs in the world, Andrew rates the whole world as “awful.”

Step 3

The third step is to refute the fallacy. There may be more than one refutation for faulty reasoning. It is easy to show how Andrew’s line of reasoning does not make sense.

Refutation.

What is true of the part is not necessarily true of the whole. Like the Buddhist parable of the blind men who each touched a different part of a strange creature, each one erroneously assuming the creature was fully like the part he touched (a pillar to the one who touched a leg, a rope to the one who touched a tail, a snake to the one who felt a trunk, a fan to the one who touched an ear, a spear to the one who touched a sharp tusk, and a wall to the one who touched a massive side), so it is with assuming the world is awful because there are difficult things in the world (Tittha sutta, 2018). Suffering is only a part of a greater whole that includes the “Form of the Good” as Plato called it, and great joy, kindness, and truth.

Step 4

In LBT each guiding virtue or ideal points toward overcoming a particular fallacy and thus toward finding greater happiness in life. For Global Damnation, this opposing virtue is Respect. Instead of rating the world as worthless, Andrew should develop respect for the world,

which will cause him to attend to the inherent worth found in all living things and existence itself. Instead of rating the world according to its parts, respect looks at the larger picture, like the one wise blind man in the Buddhist parable, who listened to all other men tell their opposing views of what the strange creature was, but then ran his hands up one side of the creature and down the other, from front to back, and top to bottom (Tittha sutta, 2018). He was then able to respect not only what each other man saw, but to respect the elephant as a whole and share his knowledge with the others.

Step 5

Step five is one of the most unique and beautiful elements of LBT. It is to adopt a philosophy that promotes the guiding virtue. What makes this approach so unique is this idea of applying philosophy to help ordinary people overcome behavioral and emotional problems. Surprisingly, this simple idea is a relatively new movement and was considered radical in the 1980s when Cohen first began to apply his ideas (Cohen, 2013). Another reason this approach is so elegant, is the breadth of philosophy from which help can be drawn. For those who believe in a higher power, there are philosophers like St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine; for those who are atheistic, there are philosophers like Sartre and Nietzsche (Cohen, 2007).

In Andrew's case, he is questioning the existence of God, and/or feeling angry towards Him, so he may be more comfortable with a philosophy that is a more humanistic approach, such as William James'. James believed one should only concern himself with what he can have power over, that is, what one can claim as his own. He believed that one should embrace the goodness of the world as his own instead of dwelling on the misfortunes and shortcomings. This perspective would allow Andrew to share in the joys of others by identifying with them as part of his own world (Cohen 2007).

Step 6

The sixth and final step in LBT is to construct a concrete plan of action to put the chosen philosophy into practice. Since Andrew has chosen William James' philosophy as a framework to guide him, he will need to have some directives to help him to apply this philosophy to everyday life. To begin to lift his anxiety and depression that causes him to reach for alcohol, he could begin to tell himself that he is a part of all of the good in the world. Starting in his own home with his children, he can remind himself that they have a committed father who loves them and provides for them, and he can enjoy the feeling of warmth at the thought that he is a part of that world and is contributing to it. He may then direct his gaze outward to his community, seeing that though many others like him have been victims of a failed economy at one time, perhaps now they are succeeding as the economy improves, and he is a part of that success, too. He may take a broader view and look at the success of the human species, which is currently dominating the planet at the top of the food chain, and perhaps that will inspire him to look to make a difference as a dominant life-force on earth.

Conclusion

This paper used LBT's six step philosophical practice to address and overcome the adverse behavioral and emotional consequences of the fallacy of Global Damnation exhibited in the individual, Andrew. The premises and conclusions in his faulty thinking were constructed, identified, and refuted; the guiding virtue of Respect was identified; and a suitable philosophical antidote was constructed and applied using William James' philosophy.

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