

Systemic Impact of a Virtuous Logic-Based Therapy Practitioner

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Abstract: Using a combination of phenomenology, process-relational ontology, Buddhist philosophy, and systems science the following article aims to provide a framework for the practice of LBT wherein it is understood that individual positive causal networks established through the practitioner/client dyad are implicitly influencing the establishment of further positive causal networks in the social networks in which the practitioner and client are enmeshed.

“When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.”

-John Muir

Logic-Based Therapy (LBT) is similar to cognitive behavioral therapy in that it helps patients identify faulty patterns of thought, understand why they are detrimental to one’s well-being, and then establish an action plan that aids the client in overcoming the behaviors. As Elliot D. Cohen, inventor of LBT, explains, “By taking control of your life through the power of your own native reason, you can overcome self-destructive, happiness-defeating ideas, emotions, and actions.”¹ In his 2015 book, *The Good Life: Unifying the Philosophy and Psychology of Well-Being*, Michael Bishop demonstrates that when individuals feel that life is going well for them, they tend to have more positive experiences in daily life and relationships. More importantly, the belief that life is going well combined with a positive perception of daily experiences result in a causal network that increases the likelihood that such experiences will continue to be had thereby sustaining the individual’s sense that things are going well. Using a combination of phenomenology, process-relational ontology, Buddhist philosophy, and systems science the following article aims to provide a framework for the practice of LBT wherein it is understood that individual positive causal networks established through the practitioner/client

dyad are implicitly influencing the establishment of further positive causal networks in the social networks in which the practitioner and client are enmeshed.

1. *Happiness is not enough*

In order to take up the mantle of a therapeutic practitioner of any sort, it is of utmost importance to have an understanding of the well-lived life. Although each client is an individual and unique case, it is helpful to have a clear picture of wellness that guides the therapeutic practice. Many people insist that they want to be happy, but philosophies like Buddhism and Stoicism teach that happiness like all other emotions is transient and that clinging to it will only lead to disappointment and further suffering. The suffering that co-arises with a happy sensation is often the product of attachment to that very sensation. In the case of my toddling daughter, great pleasure was found in eating the rich frosting of her birthday cake last weekend. After her first taste, she turned to me as a wide grin spread across her tiny face, and when I urged her on she returned her hand to the cake for another taste, then another, and another. We are lucky though because after the fourth or fifth frosting covered finger, she began to lose interest and wanted to do something more social. Like a toddler with birthday cake, adults too get lost in the pursuit of pleasure under the false belief that happiness is the purpose of life. Yet, once we achieve or acquire the desired happiness producing experience or product, the pleasure it brings will inevitably begin its slow fade. Happiness is an unstable ground to build a life upon and therefore it is not a reasonable quantifier of a well lived life.

2. *Positive Causal Networks*

A better suited option for establishing the quality of one's life can be found both in the work of Michael Bishop² and Martha Lang³ which provides a scientific theory of well-being⁴. For Bishop well-being includes: positive emotional states (internal), positive mental states (external), positive behaviors and "successful interactions with the world".⁵ These four qualities map well onto the model of the Virtuous LBT practitioner presented in *Logic-Based Therapy and Everyday Emotions*⁶ as each would

seem to be a natural result of practicing LBT's virtues. Bishop indicates that when an individual finds themselves experiencing positive outcomes in these four areas, they will create a positive causal network (PSN), or "homeostatically clustered set of feelings, emotions, attitudes, behaviors, traits, and interactions".⁷ A PSN acts as a feedback loop in the life of the individual by increasing the likelihood of further experiences in the future. Of course, the same is to be said of an individual who has negative experiences in these areas.

Lang's research takes Bishop's model of well-being an important step further by adding three more necessary traits consisting of authenticity, morality, and objective information.⁸ Lang gathers these three items together under the label of *holistic authenticity* and insists that the addition of these items to Bishop's model is necessary for the establishment of a holistically authentic positive causal network. Without these three further categories, Lang argues that a PCN can become something purely hedonistic and possibly destructive. For instance, if an individual is given an opiate pain killer after dental work and finds that the pills lend him positive emotional states (internal), positive mental states (external), positive behaviors and "successful interactions with the world"⁹ a PCN has been formed, but it is unlikely that this PCN will contribute to the individual's overall wellbeing in the long run. Lang remarks that in such a case, the individual must have either lacked the relevant information about the addictive nature of opiates, or that the individual had the information and failed to act upon it. She goes on to say that "If we fail to act in accordance with our values or with pertinent information, then we are not being authentic in those situations. If we consistently fail to act in accordance with our values or with pertinent information, then we are consistently inauthentic".¹⁰ Lang asserts that "in order for well-being to be present, we need more than just a positive causal network and...subjective authenticity is not sufficient. Well-being requires *holistic authenticity*".¹¹ Lang lays out a concise definition of holistic authenticity as follows:

S is holistically authentic if and only if:

a) the value commitments relevant to S's central life projects are not blatantly immoral; and

b) under full/fuller information, S would endorse S's actions and central life projects as maximally coherent with S's value commitments.

“Central life projects” here refers to the orienting factors toward which an individual’s life is aimed including ones’ work, relationships, and hobbies.

3. The Process-Relational Causal Network

As Alfred North Whitehead states, “The true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation; it makes a flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization; and it again lands for renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation”.¹² So now that the runway has been prepared, let us make a further observation and board the flight of imaginative generalization.

On its face, it seems that as a practitioner of any type of therapy, aiding a client in establishing positive causal networks that reverberate throughout their life is an elemental part of the process. When LBT is used to establish a holistically authentic PCN the network will act to reinforce critical thinking and deepen virtue-oriented behaviors. It is the author’s view that the benefit of establishing these networks is not limited to the lone individual because that individual is also part of a *process-relational causal network* (PRCN)! The existence of the PRCN is a philosophical conclusion drawn from the philosophies of Whitehead, Merleau-Ponty and the Buddhist concept of *pratitya-samutpada*, or “dependent co-arising”.

Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty understood that the human condition is not one of separation. Instead he saw that “[0]ne's own body is in the world just as the heart is in the organism: it continuously breathes life into the visible spectacle, animates it and nourishes it from within, and forms a system with it”.¹³ The lived experience is not one of being an object randomly placed among other objects whose boundaries end at their circumferences. Instead, we experience our subjective experience as “a project of the world, or a worldly project. This is to

define subjectivity not as a thing or as a private sphere, but as a field within the world and open to the world".¹⁴ For Merleau-Ponty there is no real separation between self and other because the perceptual line between the "I" and the "you" is an ever shifting blur:

Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of ambiguity declares that the self is not an entity that maintains identity completely separate from others; instead, self and others are simultaneously and mutually interdependent. Hence, the concept of self, like that of others, cannot have a clear demarcation but relies on others; both self and others come to be and cease together. The nature of one's self cannot exist in separation from one's reaction to that which has been inscribed in oneself latently by others with whom one is acquainted. Though it is called "self," it is impossible to know how much of the identity of "self" genuinely belongs to the self. Because the self is a product of its relationship with others, the identity of the self is always preconditioned by the existence of others.¹⁵

Merleau-Ponty's philosophy holds that the cause of a given phenomenon is never singular in nature because it is always mixed with other causes and phenomena that are distinct from the given.¹⁶ In the logic of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, "the traditionally emphasized idea of a truth that contains a clear identity and division cannot be sustained."¹⁷ This notion is further supported by the ontology of Alfred North Whitehead.

Whitehead's process-relational philosophy is an ontological vision of an interconnected and active universe of which we as individual events are a part. Despite our sense of physical separateness from each other and our environment, process philosophy indicates that this perception is incorrect because all of reality is in process together. In Whitehead's vision, each human life is an "actual entity" or "actual occasion" defined as "drops of experience, complex and

interdependent".¹⁸ It is the interrelationship between events that make up Whitehead's process universe. As Whitehead scholar, Robert Mesle eloquently states, "Our growing awareness of ourselves as inescapably woven into the ecological web of life and of our power to damage that delicate web demands that we stop thinking of ourselves and the world in terms of isolated atoms and "self-made men" and begin thinking in terms of relationships and processes".¹⁹

Even before philosophers like Merleau-Ponty, and Whitehead began to argue for our interconnection with the world, Buddhism taught in a logical fashion that all things are "dependently co-arising". This concept of *pratitya-samutpada* can be understood as follows:

Dependent co-arising at its bottom is a theory of causation, but it negates a mechanical causal theory in which causes and effects are clearly separable and identifiable. Dependent co-arising is a theory of conditioned causality. The theory of dependent co-arising demonstrates the nonidentity of identity in the sense that an entity is at all times already a matrix of diverse causes and conditions that contribute to the existence of a current event. The seemingly same cause on a surface will produce diverse results based on the conditions under which an action takes place. Multilayered elements involved in the generation of a current event will, in their turn, make contributions to the occurrence of future events. The designation of past, present, and future in this sense has significance only provisionally and in linguistic and commonsense convention. That is so because when an event is understood as an occurrence in the nexus of multilayered causes, none of which has an independent identity, the temporal separation of past, present, and future is not tenable.²⁰

If we follow Mesle's strongly stated advice and find ourselves in agreement with the theory of dependent co-arising, then we must ask ourselves how the general idea that we are vitally enmeshed in the world around us changes that very world and us as its contents. What are

the implications of being enmeshed with the universe and with other individuals? And what has this metaphysical foray added to the practice of LBT?

4. Social Contagion Theory

As it happens a team of systems science researchers has published several papers indicating “human social networks may exhibit a 'three degrees of influence' property”²¹ meaning that the behaviors of individuals are affected by others within their social networks by up to three persons removed. Their research suggests that your friend’s best friend’s cousin could potentially be increasing the likelihood of your being depressed, obese, or a chronic smoker.²² As disturbing as that is, it is also important to consider that happiness and that sense of well-being is also spread along the chaotic and complex webs of social networks. In Fowler and Christakis’ 20 yearlong Framingham heart study they observed 4739 individuals in a longitudinal social network analysis and concluded that happiness is a collective phenomenon. The researchers anticipate the possibility that this social happiness phenomenon could simply be a result of similar individuals clustering with those of like mind stating that, “Longitudinal statistical models suggest that clusters of happiness result from the spread of happiness and not just a tendency for people to associate with similar individuals”.²³ The conclusions of their research suggest that “People who are surrounded by many happy people and those who are central in the network are more likely to become happy in the future”²⁴ and that “People's happiness depends on the happiness of others with whom they are connected”.²⁵

5. Implications for the Practice of LBT

These findings are of import to the LBT practitioner—or anyone interested in cultivating development within themselves and others—because they indicate that the positive well-being of one as it can be arrived at through the practice of LBT seems to somehow impact the many.

Applying LBT with a lens that accepts the social contagion theory espoused by Fowler and Christakis, the *Process-Relational Causal Network* outlined above offers the practitioner an even more important role as therapeutic consultant. In addition to helping “individuals overcome debilitating or destructive emotions” LBT seeks to encourage individuals to “aspire toward virtuous living”.²⁶ As the longitudinal studies of Fowler and Christakis seem to indicate, there is reason to believe that helping any one individual achieve these modes of being for themselves may encourage others to do the same. If one takes a leap of faith into believing that this is factually true despite the researchers’ lack of understanding regarding a mechanism of action, then the LBT practitioner and each of their clients becomes a node of positive change within the larger *Process-Relational Causal Network*.

¹ Elliot D. Cohen. *What Would Aristotle Do? Self-Control Through the Power of Reason* (Kindle Locations 65-66). Kindle Edition. (2003)

² Bishop, Michael. “The Network Theory of Well-Being: An Introduction.” (2012).

³ Lang, Martha. “Philosophical Counseling and the Network Theory of Well-Being, Revamped”, *International Journal of Philosophical Practice*, vol. 4 no. 4 (2017)

⁴ Ibid, 4.

⁵ Bishop, “The Network Theory”, 2.

⁶ Cohen, Elliot. *Logic-Based Therapy and Everyday Emotions*. 171 (2016)

“LBT practitioners who practice in a manner consistent with LBT’s tenets are therefore likely to be open-minded and socially liberal. As empathetic people, they have the ability to key into the suffering of others. As authentic people, they are willing to openly and honestly represent their own perspectives instead of blindly conforming to the dictates of others. As empowering people, they seek to inspire others rather than to manipulate and use them for their own devices. As metaphysically secure people, they are willing to accept their own limitations as well as those of others, and do not set unrealistic goals, either for themselves or for others. As respectful individuals, they do not damn people (neither themselves nor others) even though they may disagree with what they are saying or doing. As temperate individuals, they are passionate but not prone to outbursts, tirades, and other similar manner of emotional response. As foresighted people, they do not magnify risks about future endeavors. As objective people, they tend to judge others fairly, without preconceptions or stereotypes; and, as scientific individuals, they base their factual claims on adequate empirical evidence and avoid magical thinking, “coulda-woulda shoulda thinking,” and other manners of being unscientific.”

⁷ Bishop, Michael. “The Network Theory of Well-Being: An Introduction.” (2012). p. 7

⁸ Lang, “Philosophical Counseling”, 1

⁹ Bishop, Michael. “The Network Theory of Well-Being: An Introduction.” (2012). “1. positive feelings, moods, emotions (e.g., joy, contentment), 2. positive attitudes (e.g., optimism, hope, openness to new experiences), 3.

positive traits (e.g., friendliness, curiosity, perseverance), and 4. successful interactions with the world (e.g., strong relationships, professional accomplishment, fulfilling hobbies or projects).

¹⁰ Lang, "Philosophical Counseling", 6

¹¹ Lang "Philosophical Counselling" 6

¹² Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality* (Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of Edinburgh During the Session 1927-28) (p. 5). Free Press. Kindle Edition.

¹³ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. 209 (2012)

¹⁴ Landes, Donald. *The Merleau-Ponty Dictionary*. 189 (2013)

¹⁵ Jin Y. Park; Gereon Kopf. *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism* (Kindle Locations 260-264). Kindle Edition.

¹⁶ Ibid location 285

¹⁷ Ibid location 286

¹⁸ Whitehead, Alfred. *Process and Reality*. 18 (2010)

¹⁹ Mesle, C. Robert. *Process-Relational Philosophy: An Introduction to Alfred North Whitehead* 11. Templeton Press. Kindle Edition.

²⁰ Jin Y. Park; Gereon Kopf. *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism* (Kindle Locations 76-77). Kindle Edition.

²¹ Christakis, Nicholas A. and James H. Fowler. "Social Contagion Theory: Examining Dynamic Social Networks and Human Behavior." *Statistics in medicine* 32 4 (2013): 556-77.

²² Fowler, James H. and Nicholas A. Christakis. "Dynamic spread of happiness in a large social network: longitudinal analysis over 20 years in the Framingham Heart Study." *BMJ : British Medical Journal* 337 (2008): n. pag.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Cohen, Elliot D.. *Logic-Based Therapy and Everyday Emotions: A Case-Based Approach*. Lexington Books. Kindle Edition.