

Molly and the Three Cardinal Fallacies: A Successful Case in Logic-Based Therapy

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Logic-Based Therapy (LBT) is an approach of philosophical counseling developed by Professor Elliot D. Cohen that seeks to help clients solve life problems. This is accomplished by identifying emotional reasoning, refuting self-defeating premises, and replacing these harmful deductions with guiding virtues in order to not only fix the problems the client is concerned with, but also helping the client to become more self-actualized by promoting good habits. The goal of this paper is to show one instance in which LBT has been successful despite my short amount of time working with my client, whom I will refer to as Molly.

I will describe my applications of the six steps of LBT. These steps are in the following order: (1) identifying the emotional reasoning, (2) checking for fallacies in the premises of this reasoning, (3) refuting these fallacies, (4) identifying guiding virtues to replace these fallacies, (5) utilizing appropriate philosophies the client can appreciate for these virtues, and (6) helping the client apply these philosophies. During this process, I will overview the importance of these steps for the interest of the client's well-being. To conclude this paper, I will briefly explain my learning experience with using LBT, address things I would do differently with LBT in the future, and provide results on the counselee's learning experience.

Step One: Identifying Emotional Reasoning

I will begin with the first step of LBT, which is to identify the emotional reasoning. What is emotional reasoning, though? Elliot D. Cohen describes emotional reasoning with the following formula: $E = O + R$.¹ That is, the emotion that the client is experiencing is a result of an "object," or target of the client's emotions in addition to how the client "rates" this object.

Through my dialogue with Molly, She felt that because her co-workers were not going out of their way to talk to her, she wasn't worth their time. This led her to feel badly about herself. The object of Molly's emotion is the state of co-workers not giving her the time of day. This is "rated" negatively and as a result, Molly had begun to perceive herself as being worthless. This shows that Molly is experiencing depression.

The argument for this would be as follows:

¹ Elliot D. Cohen, *Critical Thinking Unleashed* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), p. 260.

1. If my co-workers do not want to interact with me, then I must be worthless.
(major premise rule)
2. My co-workers do not want to interact with me. (report)
3. *Therefore*, I must be worthless.

Notice the first half of the conditional in premise one: this is the object (O) of the emotion. The second half of the conditional is Molly's rating (R) of herself based on the O. Together, this argument forms Cohen's conditions for depression.

Step Two: Checking for Fallacies in the Client's Reasoning

In order to begin a complete check for fallacies, Molly and I needed to dig deeper into her reasoning. Molly confessed that she thinks the reason for her co-workers not wanting to talk to her is caused by her sensitivity. Molly then reported that she *had* to change her sensitivity. However, changing habits is difficult. Molly admits this while following with her proposing that she *can't* change. From failing to accomplish what Molly perceives to be impossible, Molly then concluded that she is incompetent, stupid, and worthless.

Molly's first fallacious move is moving from what really is a *preference* to a *demand*. "I *must* not be too sensitive! I *must* change the way I am!" This fallacy is called "demanding perfection."

Following this, Molly does admit great difficulty in changing this undesirable character trait of hers. With this information, she deduces that she *can't* change at all, and therefore, she shouldn't even try! This is, by definition, "volitional can'tstipation."

Lastly, because Molly *can't* achieve the goal she *demand*s of herself, she concludes that she's stupid and worthless – Molly is committing the fallacy of "self-damnation."

Step Three: Refuting the Fallacies

Now that the fallacies are identified, I will demonstrate how I showed Molly how these lines of reasoning were problematic.

From Molly's preference for a change, she concludes that she *must* change her ways. Through talking with Molly, I used an example external from Molly's problems to show a different perspective for her. I told her that I wanted to change the color of my hair; then I asked if I had any grounds to conclude that my hair *must* be dyed, or if there was anything connecting my preferences to my demands. This analogy appeared to work well for Molly. In this discussion, Molly was able to conclude for herself that there simply were not the right grounds to say that she *has* to change.

I proceeded to focus with Molly on her belief that she was *unable* to change. When I asked why she thought this was true, she replied that she felt it was too difficult for her to accomplish. After confirming that she was, in fact, saying it was impossible based on the difficulty of the task, I provided an analogy: learning to drive a car, or pass high school, are certainly difficult tasks at first. Are they impossible? Does this mean we shouldn't try? Of course not! I legally drove to the location at which Molly and I were talking. This was a counterexample against "difficult" tasks being "impossible."

Last, for Molly's self-damnation, we reviewed her reasoning: "If I can't change myself, then I'm stupid and worthless." Through conversation, I asked Molly to assume that this was true, for the sake of argument, and then to consider a world where no one could change who they were. I asked then, "Would that make everyone in the world stupid and worthless?" Molly agreed that this was an absurd consequence of her reasoning.

Step Four: Identifying Guiding Virtues for Each Fallacy

Even now that these self-defeating lines of reasoning have been refuted, we can't expect Molly to feel better immediately. Often, people can logically accept something without it changing how they feel. This is called *cognitive dissonance*. Something more needs to be put into place to help replace these bad habits of reasoning with good ones. This is where Cohen's guiding virtues come in. I'll now briefly explain the three virtues relevant to Molly.

The first of these is *metaphysical security*, which means that we should exercise accepting the imperfections of ourselves and the world. The second guiding virtue would be *temperance*. This tells us not to seal our own fate in what *seems* to be impossible to accomplish. The last of these is *self-respect*. Even though we make mistakes, we're still worthy of respect, from others and ourselves. We should not condemn the deed, but not the doer.

Step Five: Find A Philosophy for Each Guiding Virtue

With the antidotes laid out for Molly, we can now identify relevant teachings of philosophers in the names of the antidotes appropriate for Molly's well-being.

For *metaphysical security*, we can consult Spinoza, who (in a nutshell) told us to change our unrealistic expectations to preferences.² This is directly applicable to Molly's situation, as she has become aware of this preference of hers, but hadn't yet shaken off her *musts*.

With regard to *temperance*, Plato instructed us to resist becoming slaves to our passions.³ We should not let our feelings of impossibility rule our rational thinking. We are to be courageous with our rational thinking when our feelings weigh heavy on us. Molly's issues lie with her being ruled by her passions, so utilizing Plato's call for courage in the face of one's passions can be helpful.

To exercise *self-respect*, one can look to Kant for his teachings on persons. According to Kant, persons have unconditional value that is independent of our successes and failures.⁴ Molly's issue with damning herself, primarily, is the fact that she judges her worth on what she can achieve.

Step Six: Applying the Philosophies

Molly and I were quickly on the same page with regard to teachings and antidotes. Now what? We needed to *apply* the philosophies to Molly's life. When Molly is becoming upset about her friends not giving her the time of day, instead of taking it as an evaluation of her worth, she should consider our unconditional worth as persons. One's worth is not based on the approval of

² Elliot D. Cohen, *The New Rational Therapy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p. 36.

³ *Ibid* 132

⁴ *Ibid* 75

others. This is also applicable to Molly's view of herself as stupid or worthless when she cannot satisfy the demands she makes of herself. To apply temperance, Molly was encouraged to pause and rationally think about the difficulties she may face in changing herself. Molly should ask herself questions like "is accomplishing this *actually* impossible, or do I just *think* it is?" This can help Molly separate her ability to reason from her passions. Lastly, when Molly fails to gain validation or fails to accomplish her goals, she should focus on the fact that avoiding these situations are *preferences*, not *demands* of how her life, or the world, should be. It is *okay* to not succeed at everything one desires to accomplish.

Final Thoughts: Some Questions and Concluding Remarks

Through this dialogue, Molly and I shared a valuable learning experience. Molly had gained insight into her feelings and her views of the world, while I was able to understand the *fallacy syndromes* in LBT that can turn someone's life upside down so easily. It is easy to underestimate the importance of LBT's antidotes before trying to apply them; but, after this experience, I believe that LBT's antidotes are the most valuable part of the process of enhancing the client's well-being. Though at first, I was somewhat paternalistic in my role as a counselor, as the dialogue progressed, a relationship that emphasized teamwork and mutual understanding developed, which significantly improved the progress of our discussions. I believe these discussions have had a positive impact on Molly's self-esteem and her ability to cope. As a friend of Molly's, it's truly exciting to watch this happen as a result of Logic-Based Therapy.