



## PHILOSOPHY & PHILOSOPHICAL COUNSELING/LBT ~ NAVIGATING GRIEF, LOSS & HEARTBREAK ~

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*"The paradox of loss is that without love the wakes (of loss) are never as treacherous nor the undercurrents as strong; yet only with love is the swim worth taking in the end."*

### PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy is a thinking activity, a way of life & an art.

As a thinking activity, philosophy requires that you follow reason where reason guides. This means that you approach whatever it is that you're investigating in a way that honors critical, creative thinking and embrace (in this process) several methods commonly associated with philosophy, such as argument, refutation, systematic doubt, logic, justification of belief, and so on.

As a way of life, philosophy means that you approach whatever it is that you're investigating & your experiences in life with certain dispositions like open-mindedness, a sense of wonder, imagination, and epistemic humility.

Together, as a thinking activity & a way of life, philosophy is an art.

Philosophy has been cited by many as being one of the most valuable ventures we can embark upon. In fact, it has even been equated to life & death. For example, according to Socrates, philosophy is (in its most distilled & robust form): "learning how to live well so that we can die well." This ultimately means that philosophy can help us improve the quality of our lives, can make us become better people & flourish, and can contribute to life's fullness.

So how does philosophy do this?

Metaphorically speaking, philosophy helps us achieve good living by arming us with a set of oars & a looking glass and a means by which to approach, recognize & better (more successfully) navigate the vicissitudes inherent in life. It is, thus, a valuable compass & navigational tool.

More literally, philosophy helps us achieve good living by providing us with a means by which to narrow our focus and broaden our views (as well as navigate the spaces in between). It does this by helping us clarify & answer matters of thought (ideas, concepts, emotions, feelings, etc.) & matters of action (behavior, the things that we do, ought to do, and ought not to and the particulars therein).

In other words, philosophy can help us understand what we think & why and, further, whether or not our thoughts are philosophically justified. It can also help us translate these (conceptual) activities into practical terms so that we can structure our lives in ways that help to promote health, happiness & meaning (for ourselves & others) and, ideally, allow us to reach our fullest potential.

### **PHILOSOPHICAL COUNSELING**

Philosophical Counseling has a deep-rooted history. While it emerged as a professional field of practice in (roughly) the 1980's (at least here in the U.S. . . . it emerged in Europe much earlier), its *actual* origins date back to ancient philosophy. Philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Epicurus – one the most well-known Stoics – championed the belief that philosophy could be used to help people think through their problems and live happier, more meaningful lives.

Loosely speaking, here in the U.S. (and even Europe) philosophical counseling is a movement that consists of several organizations & individuals who share a love of philosophy & a common goal of using philosophy as a means to improve the day-to-day lives of individuals.

### **HOW PHILOSOPHICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING DIFFER**

While philosophical counseling & psychological counseling overlap in a variety of areas, they do differ.

**In terms of similarities**, both have therapeutic aims, encourage self-examination & utilize many of the same techniques. In addition, philosophical activity in general *is* a psychological activity. That is, in order to think philosophically, psychological operations such as attention, concentration, & memory (among other things) come into play. Both forms of therapy can (and should) inform one another (i.e., the insights of philosophy and its techniques can benefit psychology and vice-versa).

**But they *do* differ.** According to the [National Philosophical Counseling Association](#), some of the most important differences are:

- **The Explanation of mental processes & behaviors**
  - Philosophical practitioners examine & explain mental processes & behaviors in terms of *epistemic justification* (i.e., how/what do you feel/believe & is what you feel/believe justified?).
  - Psychological counselors examine & explain mental process & behaviors in *causal terms* (i.e., how/what do you feel/believe & what is the cause of your feelings/beliefs).
- **Different diagnostic criteria**
  - Psychologists refer primarily to the [APA Diagnostic & Statistical Manual](#) (the most recent version is the *DSM-V*) for their assessment of cognitive-behavioral disorders.
  - Philosophical practitioners use a variety of assessment criteria as well, but all such criteria are related to the assessment of reasoning (e.g., are there false assumptions or fallacies present in an individual's thinking that might be contributing to her angst, depression, fear, anxiety, etc.?).
- **Different Disciplinary Families.** *This means that each form of therapeutic practice stems from/proceeds from and offers a different perspective.*
  - Philosophical practice is a humanities-based discipline
    - Philosophical practitioners focus on the epistemic justification of an individual's beliefs (i.e., a Socratic dialogic investigation).
  - Psychological counseling is a social-science based discipline
    - Psychological counselors focus on the causal relationships of a person's mental processes (i.e., a scientific investigation)

## **WHAT LOGIC-BASED THERAPY IS**

Logic-Based Therapy (LBT) is a leading modality (or method) of philosophical counseling. It is a philosophical variant of Albert Ellis' Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), which was the pioneering form of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) – a form of psychotherapy that still ranks among the most well-recognized & effective forms of therapy to date. **REBT (and LBT) essentially maintain:**

- Many (though not all) behavioral & emotional challenges (*from a prolonged or suffering perspective*) are rooted in irrational thinking
- A belief in the positive correlation of rational thought & health, happiness & meaning
- A strong alliance with empirical science
- A three-pronged conception of 'emotion,' consisting of cognitive, physiological, *and* behavioral components
  - ***IMPORTANT NOTE:*** While this conception of 'emotion' may sound a bit sterile & reductive, it is not meant to be. According to LBT, emotions (and behaviors) are like a musical composition, which can be broken into melody, harmony or rhythm etc., but the composition is not the same as the addition of these elements (i.e., emotions are more than the sum of their parts). Nevertheless, the trained listener can tune into any of these elements as they proceed. The trained LBT practitioner is a trained listener who can tune into the cognitive component of the client's emotions and help him/her to improve this aspect. When that happens, a new composition emerges, hopefully one that has less sour notes and more consonant rhythms.

**LBT differs from REBT in terms of:**

- **Its *explanation* of emotions & behaviors**
  - REBT offers a *causal-based explanation* of emotions.
    - According to REBT there are three 'psychological points' of an emotion (and/or behavior): (a) activating event, (b) belief system, and (c) emotional and behavioral consequence. Here, it is not point A or point B alone that causes C, but the combination thereof, i.e.,  $A + B = C$
  - LBT offers a *justification-based explanation* of emotions. It recasts REBT's 'psychological points' into logical terms—not as steps in a chain of causality but rather as elements of a process of reasoning. It uses the practical syllogism to convert REBT's 'ABC Theory' to a mode of inference from premises to conclusions.
- **The magnitude of fallacies with which LBT works (versus REBT)**
  - A fallacy is essentially *an error in reasoning*...something that occurs at one or more levels of our thinking process and for one or more reasons.

- LBT has a rich database of fallacies to refer to (pulled from the same fallacies of thought we use in logic).
- **The types of solutions that LBT offers (versus REBT)**
  - LBT offers what it refers to as ‘guiding virtues’ aimed at helping individuals overcome fallacious reasoning.

## STEPS OF LOGIC-BASED THERAPY

There are six basic steps of Logic-Based Therapy (LBT). These include:

1. **Identifying our emotional reasoning** – *Most of us can do identify the emotion we’re feeling fairly well if we set our minds to it. We know when we’re feeling angry, sad, happy, enraged, all of the above...and, if we dig deep enough, we often know what sorts of things are contributing to those feelings. Mapping out our emotional reasoning can be much harder though. But, by doing so, we put ourselves in a better position to evaluate our reasoning.*
2. **Checking for fallacies in our premises** – *This is where it can get particularly hard. Even individuals who are trained to look for these (like philosophers) can have blind spots.*
3. **Refuting any fallacies present** – *This is also difficult, esp. if identifying fallacies that are present is a challenge.*
4. **Identifying guiding virtues (or “directionals”) for each fallacy** – *This can also be challenging because in order to identify the appropriate virtues (things/thoughts/actions by which to aspire) you have to be in tune with all of the aforementioned steps.*
5. **Finding a philosophy for our guiding virtues** – *The same can be said here. The appropriate guiding philosophy is predicated on identifying the appropriate guiding virtue and so forth. Some guidance can be helpful here so that you know where & how to look.*
6. **Applying the philosophy** – *No matter what philosophy is being applied, it can be helpful to have some guidance relative to how to apply philosophy & its lessons to your specific life scenario(s).*

## A NOTE ABOUT GRIEF

The nature of grief has been conceived of in numerous ways. In addition, we all grieve in different ways. Grief as an “active and choice-filled response” is one such example. Thomas Attig talks about this when he says:

“When we are bereaved, we normally grieve. . . . On the one hand, grieving is our emotional reaction when we experience the death of another [or any other sort of

change for that matter] as a loss. . . . In this sense, grief is a reactive agony, that happens to us after bereavement happens to us. . . . On the other hand, grieving by another definition is our active response to loss. When we grieve in this second sense of the term, we don't simply react passively or automatically to death and bereavement. We engage with the loss, come to terms with our reactions to it, reshape our daily life patterns, and redirect our life stories in the light of what has happened. . . . [G]rieving in [this] sense of the term . . . is pervaded with choice. [It] is not ... [a] matter of what happens to us but rather a matter of what we do with what happens to us."

He also says that:

Grieving is a relearning of sorts that involves "problem-solving, addressing definable tasks, [and] life-long projects of adjustment in the most fundamental dimensions of our being." And it should be thought of in ways that respect the individuality of the bereaved and appreciate (but do not) reinforce feelings of helplessness. In this way...grieving is like "grief work." It is a process of "responding to identifiable challenges" and coming to terms with this takes time and effort & involves choice.

### **APPLYING LOGIC-BASED THERAPY TO GRIEF**

In the workshop, I shared a dedication reading about my father. I will take a couple of excerpts from this as a launching pad of sorts:

#### **EXCERPT TWO**

"I'm not perfect, kid," he would say. "Yeah, yeah, I know," I would reply, all the while thinking that "perfect" is exactly what he was . . . The truth is, my dad was perfect for me even if he wasn't "perfect" in an absolute sense. He was exactly the father that I needed and, without hesitation, exactly the kind of friend I needed, too. And he came into my life at precisely the right time; though, I must admit that I struggle still with being able to say definitively that he left with the same sort of exactitude in which he arrived. Of course, death is just a part of life; I know this . . . For my questioning his time of departure is not a reflection of his judgment or even of the fairness of life; it is, rather, really only a testament to my missing him so terribly and wishing, furthermore, that he was still here.

## **EXCERPT TWO**

Brian Andreas writes in his book, *Some Kind of Ride*: “They left me with your shadow saying things like ‘Life is not fair’ and I believed them for a long time. But today, I remembered the way you laughed and the heat of your hand in mine and I knew that life is more fair than we can ever imagine if we are there to live it.” While I certainly do agree with Andreas’ message, I must confess that the way in which my father was inevitably forced to spend his twilight years was anything but “fair.” . . . And he was a *great man* until the day he died, despite perhaps what he might have thought about this, given the debilitating effects of Parkinson’s on his body and mind.

**Here’s how we might apply the six steps of LBT to my particular dealings with grief:**

### **STEP ONE: Identify my emotional reasoning**

Technically, this involves two phases: *(a) identifying my emotion, and (b) identifying my emotional reasoning.*

- A. ***Identifying my emotion (Grief)***: In excerpt one, I seem to acknowledge and be comfortable with my father’s imperfections (e.g., “The truth is, my dad was perfect for me even if he wasn’t “perfect” in an absolute sense”) but show discomfort with the timing of his departure. I seem also to struggle with the fairness of it all and want for him to still be alive. In excerpt two, I waffle back and forth between “being o.k.” with things being out of balance and “not being o.k.” with such “injustices.” I also seem to struggle with what my poppa might have been feeling about himself prior to his death. In the cases of both excerpts, two basic undercurrents obtain—*perfection* and *fairness*. For the purposes of streamlining our discussion, I shall deal with these two aspects simultaneously.
- B. ***Mapping out my emotional reasoning***: In LBT, an emotion can be identified in terms of its *rating* (how I am evaluating the object or some aspect of the object of my emotion) and *intentional object* (the object of my emotion). By doing so, we’re able to construct the standard form of our emotional reasoning & analyze it (like we might analyze an argument in philosophy). Essentially, we put our feelings/emotions into premise-

conclusion format known as a practical syllogism (If A, then B. B, therefore C). In order to do this, I do the following: (1) identify my intentional object, (2) identify my rating, and (3) construct my emotional reasoning in standard form. Most people do *not* map out their emotional reasoning in standard form. I am no exception; so I have to work backwards to fill in the premises of my reasoning (my deduced conclusion of 'grief'). I ask: "What about the timing of my father's death am I struggling with? Would a later departure have been different?" I respond: "In just a few more months we would have been in Montana . . . where he wanted to be. Instead, we were in California." And, as it regards my poppa's "general hand" I ask: "What is it about his situation that is troubling me?" I respond: "Well, that Parkinson's was even a factor at all . . . and that he had to even deal with its challenges in general is troubling . . . but . . . my father was so bright and so active and so proud. He was more amazing than anyone I know . . . and Parkinson's made him feel otherwise so often." With this in mind, how do I construct my emotional reasoning (of grief) here in standard form? Here is an example:

1. *If* we were in Montana like my poppa wanted to be when he passed, then I wouldn't struggle (as much) with the timing of his departure; *and, if* Parkinson's had not been a factor at all (perhaps) my father would not have felt like he was less than he really was or (obviously) have had to deal with the challenges he was forced to deal with relative to general course of the disease, *then* I wouldn't struggle (as much) with the timing of my father's departure and the general hand he was dealt. [Major premise]
2. We weren't in Montana (where he wanted to be when he passed), my father had Parkinson's and had to deal with the general challenges it posed, including the fact that it made him feel like he was less than he really was. [Minor premise]
3. Therefore, I struggle with the timing of my father's departure and the general hand he was dealt. [*Grief*] [Conclusion]

### **STEP TWO: Checking for fallacies in my premises**

One way to check for fallacies in our thinking (and in particular the premises of our emotional reasoning), is to ask: Am I missing anything needed to "validate" my reasoning? Often times to find this out we need to look "beneath" our premises...at rules that guide or direct our ways of thinking. These can be thought of as *suppressed premises* or *suppressed reasoning*. For me, I



need to look at the deeper elements of my grief....rules that seem to be dictating my reasoning in the background.

***Fairness, perfection*** - At its core, my struggle with my poppa not being in Montana when he passed and that he had to deal with Parkinson's at all has much to do with the fact that I feel he *should* have been in Montana and he *should not* have had to deal with Parkinson's. That is, if life were the way it should be (fair, just in some way), then he should have had what he wanted *and* further should not have had to deal with Parkinson's. Ultimately, although grossly simplified here, what seems to be driving much of the pain I am experiencing is a suppressed rule that I am adhering to which demands life to conform to what "should be" and, further, maintains that if it doesn't conform to some ideal state then things are terrible, painful, heartbreaking. While *wanting* life to be ideal, perfect, fair and just is understandable, the *demand* that it be so is irrational. We could go on to try and expose further suppressed premises (perhaps in the minor premise), but in logic if any premise is shown to be irrational or fallacious, the argument itself will be unsound and the belief/deduced emotion will be irrational. As a result, my grief (my deduced emotion) is irrational.

Technically, once irrational premises have been identified, I should re-map my emotional reasoning so that my underlying reasoning is revealed. Here is an example of what that might look like.

1. *If* life is not fair or just, then things are terrible, my heart hurts, I struggle. [Suppressed reasoning]
2. Life is not fair or just. [Suppressed reasoning]
3. *Therefore*, things are terrible, my heart hurts, I struggle.

AND,

4. *If* life were the way it should be (fair, just in some way), then my poppa should have had what he wanted and lived Parkinson's-free.. [Suppressed reasoning]
5. My poppa didn't get what he wanted and had to deal with Parkinson's
6. *Therefore*, life is not fair or just

Here's how what my original reasoning now looks like with these suppressed premises revealed:

7. *If we were in Montana like my poppa wanted to be when he passed; etc., then I wouldn't struggle (as much) with the timing of his departure and the general hand he was dealt (**because life would be fair and just in some way and it must be this way!**)*
8. We weren't in Montana (where he wanted to be when he passed), etc.
9. Therefore, I struggle with the timing of my father's departure and the general hand he was dealt (**because life is not fair or just in some way and it must be this way!**).  
[Grief]

[Original reasoning (truncated) with suppressed reasoning exposed]

### **STEP THREE: Refuting any fallacies present in my premises**

Now that I have identified fallacies present in my thinking and re-mapped my emotional reasoning, I am in a position to refute these (or show how and why my thinking is fallacious, irrational, and harmful). Ultimately, my reasoning fails because at the premise level I am adhering to a suppressed rational rule (something that guides or directs my thinking about a matter) about perfection and fairness. My thinking (at the premise level) is irrational because I make an inferential leap from "I prefer/I want" to "It must be this way."

### **STEP FOUR: Identifying guiding virtues (or direction) for my fallacy**

What kind of antidote might there be for my fallacious thinking? How can I replace my suppressed premise (led by an irrational rule) with a rational premise? One example might be for me to replace demanding perfection with the guiding virtue of metaphysical security. This approach involves the ability to accept imperfections in the world, optimism about realistic possibilities, and focusing on controlling only what's in my power to control. In "prescribing" such an antidote, I might say to myself: "I should try to change my absolutistic demands to preferences" or "I should give up the absurd concept of a perfect universe and instead focus on the many amazing things my father achieved and joys he felt." Then, in order to strengthen these "prescriptives," I might refer to or ponder similarly aimed philosophical insights from various thinkers...which leads us to step five.

### **STEP FIVE: Finding a philosophy for my guiding virtue(s)**

Where can I find a philosophy for the abovementioned virtue? One way to do this is by connecting with the works of various thinkers on this subject matter. Spinoza and Epictetus, for example, both speak about metaphysical security when they advise that we not sweat the things we can't control and instead expend our efforts on what we can control. There are numerous other sources that could be investigated, too; these are two among many philosophers and thinkers who have contributed to this dialogue and offer valuable insight. Lastly, in attempt to help the correctives "stick," I might assign myself various willpower exercises...which takes us to step six.

### **STEP SIX: Applying the philosophy**

To a certain extent, by participating in steps 1-5, I have already been applying philosophy to my emotional reasoning. Step six involves continuing this application to my personal dealings with grief with the goal of helping the above correctives "stick." Some particularly relevant examples might include focused bibliotherapy assignments accompanied by behavioral techniques (when grief seems to "rush in") such as meditation, controlled breathing, and/or imagery.

Finally, with all of the above in mind (and especially so given the deep bond that my father and I shared), I should remind myself that navigating the wakes of loss will likely not be a journey with an end nor an ocean without swells. Rather, it will be a sinking and emerging, a gasping for air and a riding the curl. It will, like all things worth a damn it seems, be a dance of sadness and joy. For the paradox of loss is that without love the wakes (of loss) are never as treacherous nor the undercurrents as strong; yet only with love is the swim worth taking in the end.

If you would like to read more about LBT & grief, please see the article titled "Navigating the Wakes of Loss: How Philosophy Can Help Us Grieve": [https://merlinccc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Navigating-the-Wakes-of-Loss-How-Philosophy-Can-Help-Us-Grieve\\_Diaz-Waian.pdf](https://merlinccc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Navigating-the-Wakes-of-Loss-How-Philosophy-Can-Help-Us-Grieve_Diaz-Waian.pdf)