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With a Foreword by ALBERT ELLIS

the *New* Rational Therapy

*Thinking Your Way to
Serenity, Success, and Profound Happiness*

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Introduction

THE NEW RATIONAL THERAPY

Depression can envelop your life in darkness, swallowing up your hope, crushing your spirit, thwarting talents and creativity, and leaving you in a state of destitution as seemingly real as a forest wilted and depleted by some alien canker. Guilt can gnaw at your psyche, hovering over you like a dark cloud, belittling your dignity, and drowning out sound judgment amidst a moralistic, inner voice. Anxiety can drape your present in ruminations about your future, turning your existence into a dark tunnel in which you perceive ominous danger lurking at every life juncture. Anger can swell up and consume your spirit like a tornado sweeping aimlessly through a peaceful city, leaving devastation in its path, lamented after the storm subsides, only to blow up again when the conditions seem right.

Saying you *can't*—when you really just *won't*—can *can't*stipate your creative potential. Perceiving through stereotypes can stifle your ability to resonate with others. Blind conformity to social injunctions having neither rhyme nor reason can gobble up your individuality until you no longer recognize yourself. Patriot fervor fired up by demagoguery and deception can defeat your resolute devotion to freedom and democracy. Resorting to threats and deceit to get what you want can deliver much less than what you've bargained for. Seeing things only from *your* perspective can leave you shipwrecked in your own subjective universe. Perceiving a duty to woefully ruminate, overrating or underrating the probabilities, wishfully thinking, fatalistically giving in and up—these common tendencies can leave you feeling flat and dead.

Let me be blunt right from the start. I'm speaking here about *human* tendencies, yours *and* mine. It won't do to say, "No flies on me! These are the other guy's foibles and not mine." Of course, your issues and vulnerabilities may not be mine, and mine may not be yours. You might be struggling

with something unfortunate that happened in your life. I might be anxious about confronting an unsung future. Your Achilles' heel might be my strength and vice versa. But neither you nor I are immune from what is distinctively human.

There are many *psychological* approaches that try to help us humans deal meaningfully with our emotional and behavioral problems. For example, some therapies view intense and destructive emotions as bodily states requiring medication. Some attempt to provide a warm, caring, nonjudgmental environment as the primary vehicle of constructive change. Others bid us to become our emotions in attempting to take responsibility for them. Others apply systems analysis to address interpersonal dysfunctions. Others try to uncover self-destructive unconscious motivations. Others stress free will in confronting the human condition. Others stress living in concert with practical realities of life. Others focus primarily on helping you to modify self-destructive behavior, while others also try to help change irrational thinking. Variations of these and sundry combinations provide the vast secular landscape of contemporary counseling and psychotherapy, not to mention approaches that attempt to provide spiritual guidance from a theological perspective.

The breadth of psychological approaches from which to choose can leave you in a tizzy about which is right for you. The truth is that all these approaches have focused on something of value in promoting emotional growth and adjustment. But at the same time, each has embedded itself within a *narrow philosophical perspective*. For example, some perceive human beings as essentially biological machines so that medication becomes the preferred treatment, and some perceive human beings as essentially subjective entities so that "talk" therapy becomes the treatment of choice.

All these approaches have grown out of a much broader philosophical tradition. The study of the mind was originally the province of *philosophy*, well before psychology became a separate branch of human inquiry. In becoming grounded in empirical research, psychology managed to amass a useful body of practical scientific knowledge. Through trial and error, clinicians and researchers have discovered many techniques to help people overcome their behavioral and emotional problems. But at the same time, when the study of the human mind took to the laboratories and clinics, it also left behind the lion's share of its rich philosophical heritage.

Intrinsically, many problems of everyday life are philosophical. They stem from lack of clarity and insight into a wide range of abstract subjects ordinarily broached by philosophers. For example, as you will see, some are rooted in questions about the nature of morality and about good and evil;

some are about human dignity, autonomy, freedom, and democracy; some are about the nature of knowledge; some about beauty; others are about the nature of reality itself; still others are about the existence of God and of miracles; and still others are about what counts as justified belief. In short, so much of what we humans stress and distress over belongs to the province of philosophy.

Human beings, said Aristotle, are "social animals." They live in families, cities, states, nations, and the world. The psychological health of an individual cannot therefore be divorced from its broader social context. Thus, a nation that stifled its citizens' free speech and expression would likely take its toll on individual happiness. Such is the turf of social and political philosophy, and the psychological problems growing out of this soil are also grist for the philosophical mill.

In the past twenty years or so, a new movement has been growing primarily among philosophers to use philosophy in helping ordinary folks address their behavioral and emotional problems. This movement is also beginning to gain support from some psychologists working on the cutting edge of their discipline. The word is out that there is much more that can be gained from a systematic investigation into the ways philosophy can help people live happier, more productive lives. Unfortunately, most therapists who work in the trenches are still relying largely on traditional psychological approaches in treating their clients.

This book is part of this new philosophical venture in counseling and psychotherapy. Much of what I have to say you won't hear from the average clinician. Why? Not because she is trying to keep a secret from you, nor is it necessarily because she considers it to be irrelevant or just not useful. Rather, much of what I have to tell you falls outside the traditional venue of most clinicians.

My philosophical approach began to take shape in the mid-1980s when I realized that we philosophers could effect a psychological revolution by helping to reunite psychology with its philosophical roots. These were the early days when very few of my colleagues were thinking about getting into the trenches to help fellow humans grapple with problems of ordinary life. My philosophical approach did not originate in a psychological vacuum, however. No one has done more to influence the course of its development than my mentor, psychologist Albert Ellis, the founder of the school of psychology known as Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT).

But can turning to philosophy in the midst of a life crisis bear fruit? Can philosophy, a subject that has long been considered by many to be an obscure and esoteric study, *really* help soothe the psyches of average folks?

Can the contributions of philosophers like Aristotle, Plato, Epicurus, Aquinas, Spinoza, Kant, and a host of others bring serenity to the unsettled mind racked with emotional pain? Can it help you become more prudent and successful in your life pursuits? Can it take you from being depressed, anxious, guilt ridden, and angry to a state of profound happiness?

Paradoxically, it may be precisely because so many of us do not heed the wisdom of great minds that we persist in irrational emotions and self-destructive behavior in the first place. It is the mission of this book to help you, the reader, attain a deep and enduring happiness through the use of philosophy, its methods and theories, in overcoming the destructive force of the most irrational, unphilosophical ideas endemic to humankind.

What is evident about our most destructive emotions is that *they tend to be sustained by faulty reasoning*. The bleak shroud of depression is typically sustained by thinking that unrealistically conceives the world in all-or-nothing, black-or-white terms; that globally damns the *entire* universe on the basis of singular events; and that exaggerates an unfortunate turn of events, elevating it to gloom and doom. Debilitating guilt often berates the self, classifying it as *totally* worthless for a perceived (but not necessarily real) moral transgression. Self-stultifying anxiety tends to magnify risks, proceeding down a mental slippery slope that dead-ends in catastrophic predictions not backed by empirical evidence. Anger catapulted to the level of rage commonly sustains by demanding perfection of fallible human beings in an imperfect universe.

From interpersonal relations sullied by bullying and deceit to the waging of unjust wars by nations, faulty reasoning has managed to promote a tidal wave of destructive and regrettable patterns of behavior. The history of humankind attests to abundant pain, anguish, and bloodshed directly traceable to bad logic.

HOW FAULTY THINKING CAN WRECK YOUR LIFE

Philosophers, from antiquity, have warned against relying on irrational patterns of thought in conducting the affairs of your life. The ancient Greek philosophers were among the first to perceive a clear connection between faulty reasoning—so-called fallacies—and destructive emotions. It was, in fact, Aristotle who explicitly pointed out the connection. Said this sage,

Outbursts of anger and sexual appetites and some other such passions, it is evident, actually alter our bodily condition, and in some men even

produce fits of madness. . . . It turns out that a man behaves incontinently [has such outbursts of emotion] under the influence (in a sense) of a rule and an opinion.¹

Aristotle here made use of a form of reasoning he called “practical syllogism.” This reasoning has two premises and one conclusion.² One of these premises is a “rule” and the other an “opinion.” The *rule* includes (or implies) an “ought,” “should,” or “must” and accordingly tells a person what to do or how to feel, whereas the opinion is a statement of particular fact, a *report*, that is filed under the rule.³ What’s so special about this kind of reasoning is that its conclusion is not just another statement but instead an action or an outpouring of emotion.

Take these premises, for example:

Emotional Rule: If a person does something that you strongly dislike, then this person is totally worthless and should be damned.

Report: Jack did something I detest—he lied to me!

What do you think would happen if you accepted these two premises? You guessed it. Ordinarily, you would “deduce” anger, even rage.⁴ This emotion would be the practical conclusion of your reasoning, and it would include not *just* other thoughts—like, “Jack should be damned”—but also bodily changes associated with anger, like increased adrenal activity, respiration, and heart rate.⁵

In addition, changes in your overt behavior would also accompany these cognitive and internal visceral changes. This is because rules piggy-back on other rules, and some of these rules also prescribe *actions*. For example, these action-yielding premises ride on the prior ones:

Behavioral Rule: If someone is totally worthless, then he should be put in his place.

Report: Jack is totally worthless.

Just how you’d put Jack in his place would also depend on other *behavioral rules* you accept. For example, these additional rules could prescribe putting people in their place by calling them names, threatening them, harming them, or even killing them. Did you ever think about what it takes for a soldier to learn how to kill another human being? Indoctrinate him to perceive “the enemy” as less than human, and the rest is history.

THE ELEVEN CARDINAL FALLACIES

I hope you are beginning to see that your personal and interpersonal happiness—as well as that of your significant others, friends, coworkers, and associates—depends largely on the *premises* behind your emotions and behavior. This is the first big way in which philosophy comes home to roost in psychological practice. Philosophers look at things in terms of *reasoning from premises to conclusions*. They look at your premises to see if your reasoning is sound.

In contrast, traditional psychology tends to see things in terms of *cause and effect*. For example, a therapist might tell you that what caused you to get angry at Jack was some *event*—for example, that he lied to you—together with what you thought about it. Just as, under certain conditions, striking a match can cause a flame, many psychologists also think we can discover the scientific laws that cause people to lose their tempers and act in certain destructive ways.

Instead of looking for causal laws, a philosophical approach attempts to identify and catalog the various types of *fallacious premises* in destructive patterns of reasoning. For this reason, I have referred to my philosophical approach as *Logic-Based Therapy* (LBT). This changes the mission of psychology. Instead of looking for the causes of our self-destructive behavior and emotions, LBT examines our reasoning for dangerous premises.⁶

On the basis of clinical observations and studies over the past two decades,⁷ I have identified eleven of the most common and virulent offenders, the eleven cardinal fallacies. Unchecked, each of these fallacies has the potential to substantially impair your personal and interpersonal happiness. Here's the hit list:

Fallacies of Behavioral and Emotional Rules

1. Demanding perfection: Perfect-a-holic addiction to what you can't have in an imperfect universe.
2. Awfulizing: Reasoning from bad to *worst*.
3. Damnation: Shit-ification of self, others, and the universe.
4. Jumping on the bandwagon: Blind, inauthentic, antidemocratic and parrot-like conformity.
5. *Can't*stipation: Obstructing your creative potential by holding in and refusing to excrete an emotional, behavioral, or volitional *can't*.
6. Thou shalt upset yourself: Dutifully and obsessively disturbing yourself and significant others.

7. Manipulation: Bullying, bullshitting, or well poisoning to get what you want.
8. The world-revolves-around-me thinking: Setting yourself up as the reality guru.

Fallacies of Reporting

9. Oversimplifying reality: Pigeonholing reality or prejudging and stereotyping individuals.
10. Distorting probabilities: Making generalizations and predictions about the future that are not probable relative to the evidence at hand.
11. Blind conjecture: Advancing explanations, causal judgments and contrary-to-fact claims about the world based on fear, guilt, superstition, magical thinking, fanaticism, or other anti-scientific grounds.

Each of these fallacies will be addressed in a separate chapter.⁸ The first eight usually occur as rules in the premises of people's emotional reasoning (fallacies of behavioral and emotional rules). This kind of rule *prescribes* destructive behavior and emotions. For example, demanding perfection tells you that the world *must* be perfect or near perfect and that, therefore, you must never settle for anything less. In subscribing to this rule, you become a *perfect-a-holic*, craving perfection, going through the DTs (demandingness tremens) when you inevitably come up short. Under the influence of this unrealistic intoxicant—the demand for perfection—you can deduce debilitating emotional stress ranging from severe depression to extreme anger.

In contrast, the last three fallacies I've listed—oversimplifying reality, distorting probabilities, and blind conjecture—usually occur in the reports you file under your emotional rules (fallacies of reporting). These tend to give false and misleading *descriptions* of reality. For example, one popular way of jumping to conclusions is to fatalistically insist that things *must* go wrong in the future because they've gone wrong in the past. Such a fatalistic description of reality typically leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy. You simply give up on trying and remain in the same negative situation.⁹

I have elsewhere defined a fallacy as a "way of thinking or reasoning that has a proven track record of frustrating personal and interpersonal happiness."¹⁰ This definition captures the practical significance of calling something a *fallacy* in the first place. Why else should you be on guard against certain ways of thinking other than that they present dangerous roadblocks to your personal and interpersonal happiness?

It's safe to say that, on any philosophical theory of human happiness with which I'm familiar, every one of the fallacies on the previous list have been implicated in the destruction of human happiness. If you agree with Epicurus¹¹ that happiness means maximizing your pleasure, these fallacies are likely to defeat your goal, at least in the long run. If, like Aristotle,¹² you think happiness is living virtuously; like Jean-Paul Sartre,¹³ autonomously; like Augustine,¹⁴ according to God; like Buddha, in overcoming "dukka";¹⁵ or, like Kant,¹⁶ according to the dictates of "pure reason," then you are not likely to live happily if you also live according to these fallacies.

As you'll see, a common strand of all eleven of these cardinal fallacies is that they involve *extreme* thinking, for example, overrating, underrating, absolutizing, pigeonholing, overdoing, and underdoing. As Aristotle stressed, rational solutions to life problems typically lie somewhere in the middle between such extremes.¹⁷ For example, things needn't be perfect to be worthwhile. You needn't have certainty to have reasonable odds. You don't have to worry about everything in order to make reasonable efforts to deal with your problems. You don't have to be a blind conformist to have social cooperation. Things aren't always black or white—there are also shades of gray. An unfortunate turn of events doesn't *have* to be catastrophic.

Fallacies hide rational alternates to problems behind a cloud of false or unrealistic absolutes. As you'll also see, once you clear the air of these fallacies—identify and refute them—at your disposal is an abundant, diversified stock of philosophical wisdom for helping you define and attain your own profound sense of human happiness.

YOU SUPPRESS FALLACIES, YOU DON'T REPRESS THEM

So, where do you look to find these destructive bugs?

When you make practical decisions, the rules you apply are not usually clearly articulated. In fact, they are not usually articulated at all. Instead, they are *assumed*. These rules are not repressed, hidden somewhere in the unconsciousness pit. Nor are they forgotten.

People assume premises whenever they fail to state what is needed to "validate" their reasoning. Take, for example, this incomplete reasoning:

Report: I screwed up at work today.

Conclusion: I'm a screw-up.

Clearly, my reasoning assumes the rule of damnation, which goes something like this:

Rule: If I screw up at something, then I'm *myself* a screw-up.¹⁸

Without the rule of damnation, your conclusion would not "follow" from your premises. In such cases, we philosophers say the rule in question is a *suppressed premise*, not a repressed belief. The fallacious rules in practical reasoning are ordinarily suppressed, not repressed.

The suppressed rule is not buried in your unconscious. It's simply unstated or unexpressed even though accepted. It is *implicit* in what you say or think, even though you are not (explicitly) saying or thinking it to yourself when you apply it. Nevertheless, you would agree if someone were to say, "So you think that if you screw up at something, then that makes you a screw-up."

The often-cited mark of a *repressed* thought is that you would be inclined to *reject* it, if called to your attention, and may even feel uncomfortable at its suggestion. Since a repressed thought is one you are supposed to be trying to hide from yourself—tucking it away in your unconscious—you would be unwilling to admit it on a conscious level.

In contrast, people tend to *stubbornly insist* on their *suppressed* rules when these are called to their attention. Indeed, people generally respond as though these rules were "self-evident," sensing no need whatsoever to prove them. "Of course, screwing up at something makes that person a screw-up! Isn't that obvious?" Beware the obvious.

This is what can be so insidious about these cardinal fallacies. You can be assuming them in your reasoning, not think to question them, make yourself miserable as a result, and not even have a clue as to what's wrong.

REFUTING YOUR FAULTY PREMISES

This gives good sense to Socrates' old saw that "the unexamined life is not worth living." In this context, it means that, unless you *question, question, and question* your premises, instead of just assuming them, you're likely to saddle yourself with destructive premises and not even know it. For example, instead of just assuming that screwing up *automatically* makes you a screw-up, you can ask yourself what grounds you have for thinking *this*.

Once you question a premise, you're in a position to try to *refute* it. If it's unreasonable and you think it through carefully, then you are likely to uncover its flaw. In fact, as you'll see, all the fallacies on my list can be refuted.

Are you assuming that what's true of the part is always true of the whole? Refutation: that would mean that a complex machine with simple

parts is itself simple, which is self-contradictory. Likewise, do the logic: a bad deed doesn't make an *entire* human existence bad.

Are you demanding that the world or some part of it be *perfect*? Refutation: there's simply no evidence to show that the world is a perfect place but abundant evidence to show how imperfect it truly is. Have you ever met the perfect—or even the almost perfect—person? Only in your dreams.¹⁹

This is how philosophers think—carefully. If you tend to accept things unquestioningly, cultivating a philosophical habit of looking carefully at your own premises before acting on them can be a royal route to your salvation.

FINDING PHILOSOPHICAL ANTIDOTES TO THE ELEVEN CARDINAL FALLACIES

In order to repair something, you need to know what's broken. The refutation of a premise shows you what's wrong with it. Refutation sets the stage for finding a correction because it provides a functional analysis of what needs to be corrected.

For example, consider again the damnation rule: "If you screw up, then you are, *yourself*, a screw-up." You have already seen a simple refutation of this rule. But there can be alternative lines of refutation of an irrational rule. So, in the refutation stage, you can be creative. For example, the damnation rule can also be refuted because it turns *all* humans into worthless screw-ups. This is because all of us, yes *all* of us, inevitably screw up. Since the rule in question has the absurd consequence of rendering all of us worthless, it should be rejected. Doing something worthless doesn't make *you* worthless! As human beings we are all imperfect. Making mistakes is part of the human scene, but so too is learning from them. An *antidote* to the damnation rule might accordingly be an instruction such as the following one:

You should accept responsibility for your mistake, learn from it, construct a new plan of action, and try to achieve it.

This new rule can provide a rational "should" to counter the irrational "should." It argues *against* the irrational rule. On the one hand, *self*-damnation prescribes self-contempt.²⁰ On the other hand, its antidote

counters self-contempt with *constructive, forward-moving* action. Here is an example of these two rules in conflict:

Fallacious Reasoning

Self-Damnation: If I screw up, then I'm a screw-up

Report: I screwed up at work today—I forgot to show up for that important meeting.

Antidotal Reasoning

Antidote to Self-Damnation: You should accept responsibility for your mistake, learn from it, construct a new plan of action, and try to achieve it.

Report: I screwed up at work today—I forgot to show up for that important meeting.

Notice that the conclusion you deduce will depend on whether you file your report under self-damnation or under its antidote. If the former, you'll deduce self-contempt. If the latter, you may experience dissatisfaction with your conduct but avoid self-denigrating emotion. The difference between these two states can be far-reaching from the perspective of human adaptation and happiness. Since totally worthless persons cannot have prosperous futures, the first tends toward depression and self-destructive stagnation. On the other hand, since you can change your behavior, the latter gives you the opportunity to make constructive changes and to do better in the future.

Now this antidote can be strengthened by examining its more profound, *philosophical* significance. For example, the idea that a human being is without future recourse runs counter to the philosophy known as *existentialism*. According to the French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre, human beings are never without a choice. They are "condemned to be free."²¹ People who give up on their futures have freely sealed their own fate by not accepting responsibility for it—they have freely chosen to define themselves negatively "as a disappointed dream, as miscarried hopes, as vain expectations."²² In calling yourself worthless, you have made a conscious choice not to try to learn from past mistakes and not to try to do better. According to Sartre, in hiding this freedom from yourself, you behave cowardly, whereas to live responsibly means to accept your freedom.

Sartre's philosophical view of human freedom and responsibility is useful here because it provides antidotal insight into a self-destructive rule. As you will see, the wisdom of the ages can, in this way, contain many useful antidotes for overcoming the eleven cardinal fallacies.

EXERCISING WILLPOWER

The state of tension that exists between a fallacious rule and an antidote is known as "cognitive dissonance." In such a state, you are filing your report under two conflicting rules.²³ For example, a state of cognitive dissonance exists if you are filing the above report under *both* of the above rules.²⁴

Cognitive dissonance is an important sign of progress because it means that you are beginning to resist a fallacious premise with an antidote. But *overcoming* such a premise often takes a special effort. Knowing an antidote doesn't mean you will *act* on it. You may still need to overcome the physical desire to behave irrationally. Anyone who has stopped herself from reaching for that additional slice of chocolate cake (or another nacho chip or whatever your favor) knows what I mean. This can take considerable willpower.

Aristotle asked, "How can a man fail in self-restraint when believing correctly that what he does is wrong?" He answered that it was due to a kind of *weakness of will*. Under the influence of strong bodily "desire," you might be led to resolve your cognitive dissonance by acting on an irrational rule instead of a rational one so as to deduce self-destructive emotions and behavior.²⁵

The self-restrained person is able to withstand the opposing bodily influences and to act according to the rational rule. So, what does the self-restrained person have that the unrestrained person lacks?

The answer is cultivation of *willpower*—"cultivation" since such rational constraint is not an innate biological capacity that arises full blown. As Aristotle made clear, it is a product of practice and effort.²⁶

In fact, the idea of willpower can usefully be conceived on the analogy of a *muscle* that requires development through practice before it can carry the weight of rationally resolving cognitive dissonance.²⁷ Inasmuch as muscle building proceeds carefully and incrementally, so too does the cultivation of willpower. You would not expect a beginning bodybuilder to lift the same amount that an experienced bodybuilder lifts. While there will undoubtedly be varying capacities among different people, it is necessary to work up to it. In like manner, it would not be reasonable to expect a person to possess great willpower without having worked up to it. For example, a person who is easily agitated by small inconveniences is not likely to tolerate greater ones without first having learned to manage the smaller ones.²⁸

From this practical perspective, human freedom is the human's ability to harness this internal muscle to overcome irrational premises backed by

bodily inclinations. You can perceive this freedom as an internal *feeling* of power that arises when you make decisions, especially when you are in a state of cognitive dissonance.

Some philosophical antidotes will require greater willpower and present a greater challenge than others. Once you successfully "swallow" one antidote, however, you may find yourself ready for a more challenging one. I hope you will build up your willpower and accept the challenge.

APPLYING PHILOSOPHICAL ANTIDOTES

Philosophy alone will not change your life unless you make the necessary effort to *apply* it to your life. Here, then, is an important proviso to whatever wisdom you carry off from this book. Don't just nod your head in agreement with the great philosophers discussed here. Put your willpower muscle to work to overcome your fallacious premises, put your actions where your philosophy is, and treat yourself to a greater, more profound happiness.

In applying philosophical antidotes, don't feel obliged to buy *wholesale* a philosopher's view. In fact, don't expect to find here a thorough treatment of *all* aspects of a philosopher's thinking. This would take many volumes and is well beyond the practical purposes of this book. Instead, I have used key aspects that seem most useful in addressing the fallacies at hand. For example, I have emphasized important contributions of determinist philosophers, such as Epictetus and Spinoza, in addressing the *demand for perfection* without assuming the truth of determinism.

The "philosophic counsel" presented here is more systematic and structured than any previously undertaken insofar as it is developed within a consistent therapeutic framework in the construction of specific antidotes for specific fallacies. No other systematic amalgamation of philosophy and therapy of this nature has been developed before. Nevertheless, this treatment is not intended as exhaustive of the wide range of possibilities in extracting antidotes from philosophical literature. You should therefore feel free to explore other useful implications of the philosophical views discussed as well as others that may not have been broached in this book.

Under each fallacy, I discuss several different antidotes that are relevant to the fallacy in question. By *relevant*, I mean that each of them has the potential to help you overcome the irrational thinking it addresses. To be relevant, each must at least repair the "hole" in the thinking it was intended to fix, but just *how far* a certain antidote takes you in "overcoming" a fallacy

is a matter of degree. This is because an antidote can be more or less potent.

THE POTENCY OF AN ANTIDOTE

A *potent* antidote will have potential to guide you in constructive directions and to help you not only feel and do all right but also feel and do excellent. The measure of an antidote's potency is therefore a measure of how constructive it can be in helping you to prosper. For example, instead of simply helping you to cope, an antidote that helped you perceive an unfortunate situation as an opportunity for growth and advancement would be more potent.

Don't confuse potency with being positive. Some psychologists have stressed "positive thinking" as though it meant the same as "constructive thinking." In one sense, positive thinking means optimistic thinking. However, some fallacies, such as wishful thinking and terrifying,²⁹ are *overoptimistic* and can lead to self-destructive actions and emotions. An antidote that told you to smile and whistle a happy tune instead of getting out of the way of a Mack truck would be positively stupid. On the other hand, as you will see, it can sometimes be quite realistic to be *pessimistic* about a future outcome. You should therefore take care not to confuse being positive with being realistic. Sometimes being positive (in the sense of being *overoptimistic*) may be unrealistic and self-defeating.

Just *how* constructive (and potent) an antidote is can depend on how *ambitious* it is. Philosophers sometimes distinguish between the *morality of duty* and the *morality of aspiration*.³⁰ The former makes *minimum* demands on a person. For example, you have a duty not to kill or steal. If you do neither of these things, you have satisfied this type of morality.

In contrast, the morality of aspiration is a morality of striving for excellence. It is the type of morality discussed in detail by ancient Greek thinkers like Plato and Aristotle. This morality speaks in the language of virtues and not in terms of requirement. This sort of morality doesn't rest on meeting minimum standards. For example, you are not *required* to be courageous. In contrast to killing or stealing, no one puts you in jail simply for failing to be courageous. Nevertheless, you are to be congratulated for being courageous.

Similarly, philosophical antidotes have the potential for helping you attain your higher human aspirations. Philosophy, by its nature, can lead you up the ladder of achievement. It is visionary and creative and encourages

striving. It is this idealism that gives it great potency when harnessed as antidotes.

Philosophical antidotes are recipes for *virtue*. The philosophical antidotes presented here do not merely help you overcome irrational thinking. They aim at helping you *transcend* it. This means they aim at helping you live up to your *higher* human potentials.

These higher human potentials are defined by a set of eleven *transcendent virtues*. These virtues are metaphysical security, courage, respect, authenticity, temperance, moral creativity, empowerment, empathy, good judgment, foresightedness, and the ability to think scientifically (scientificity). These virtues paint a robust picture of what LBT means by *happiness*.³¹ According to the theory of LBT, the royal route to such happiness is philosophy. It is what ultimately makes it *profound*. Philosophy nourishes your rational soul. It gives you insight. However, which specific philosophical antidotes you take help define and personalize the profundity of your happiness and give your personal happiness its own unique character. According to LBT, attainment of the eleven transcendent virtues is essential for human happiness or flourishing,³² but the philosophical antidotes (the rules of happiness) you take largely define these virtues.³³ For example, your idea of self-respect will be different if you take a theological perspective like that of St. Thomas than if you take a humanistic one like that of Nietzsche. But, regardless of what approach you take, your happiness will depend on having self-respect.

The first eight of the transcendent virtues can properly be called *behavioral and emotional virtues* because they redress and transcend fallacious behavioral and emotional rules. Part 1 of this book will show you how to cultivate these eight virtues.

The last three of the eleven virtues—having good judgment in practical matters, foresight in assessing probabilities, and the ability to apply the scientific method to solve problems of living—can properly be called *cognitive virtues* because they redress and transcend cognitive errors made in reporting on reality. As Aristotle would tell you, these three virtues are themselves fundamental ingredients of the more general virtue known as *practical wisdom* (or prudence). A person with this "crowning" cognitive virtue possesses the cognitive skills requisite to filing rational reports under rational behavioral and emotional rules. Part 2 of this book will help you cultivate these skills.

Each philosophical antidote given in this book helps define or flesh out at least one of the eleven transcendent virtues. These antidotes can help you go from doom and gloom to sanguinity and inner peace. They can help you

Table 1.1. The Eleven Transcendent Virtues

Cardinal Fallacy	Transcendent Virtue
Demanding perfection	Metaphysical security (security about reality)
Awfulizing	Courage (in the face of evil)
Damnation (of self, others, and the universe)	Respect (for self, others, and the universe)
Jumping on the bandwagon	Authenticity (being your own person)
Can'tstipation	Temperance (self-control)
Thou shalt upset yourself	Moral creativity
Manipulation	Empowerment
The world revolves around me	Empathy (connecting with others)
Oversimplifying reality	Good judgment
Distorting probabilities	Foresightedness (in assessing probabilities)
Blind conjecture	Scientificity (in providing explanations)

Note: Unshaded area = behavioral and emotional fallacies/virtues; shaded area = cognitive fallacies/virtues.

move from an existence marred by continual despair over perceived moral dilemmas to a healthy, life-affirming outlook on life. Yes, philosophy can be *that* potent.

In calling these virtues "transcendent," I mean that each transcends (takes you above and beyond) a particular cardinal fallacy. For each of the eleven cardinal fallacies, there's a virtue that transcends it. Table 1.1 shows you which virtue transcends which fallacy.

SNAPSHOTS OF THE ELEVEN TRANSCENDENT VIRTUES

Aristotle said that "moral virtues" arise as a result of habit and that habits are themselves formed through practice.³⁴ This is also the sense in which each of the eleven transcendent virtues can be called a "virtue." For example, a few good judgments won't make you a *person* of good judgment, but the more you succeed at making such judgments, the more it becomes a habit or disposition of character. So, the way to attain these virtues is to practice them. This means overcoming your cognitive dissonance by realizing your fallacies, refuting them, and exercising sufficient willpower in applying an appropriate philosophical antidote. Of course, you'll never be perfect. There's always going to be room for improvement, and backsliding is always possible. Practicing virtue is therefore a lifelong commitment.

Here is a brief description of the primary ingredients of each of these virtues:

1. *Metaphysical security* refers to the ability to accept imperfections in reality.³⁵ The metaphysically secure person accepts his *human* fallibility and limitations as well as those of others and does not expect the world to be perfect. He remains hopeful about realistic possibilities, is humble in the face of the uncertainty of the universe, and has a strong desire for knowledge but is not frustrated by his inability to know all. Such a person does not attempt to control what is beyond his ability to control but stays focused on excelling in what he *can* control.
2. *Courage* means confronting adversity without under- or overestimating the danger. It means fearing things to the extent that it is reasonable to fear them and, in the face of danger, acting according to the merits of the situation. The courageous person perceives evil as a *relative* concept according to which things could always be worse and are never *absolutely* bad (the worst thing in the world). Such a person tends to learn from and derive positive value from his misfortunes and is willing to take reasonable risks in order to live well.
3. *Respect* transcends the tendency to rate reality, including human reality, as utterly worthless or totally shitty and instead looks for goodness and dignity. Global respect avoids rating the whole according to the part and looks favorably on the larger cosmic picture. Self-respect involves unconditional self-acceptance based on a deep philosophical understanding of human worth and dignity. Respect for others consistently extends this profound respect for unconditional human worth and dignity to other human beings.
4. *Authenticity* is being your own person. This means autonomously and freely living according to your own creative lights as opposed to losing yourself on a bandwagon of social conformity. An authentic person is no cog in a social establishment. She values her individuality, cherishes a democratic life style and its inherent personal freedoms, and does not hide her responsibility for life choices behind deterministic excuses.
5. *Temperance* (self-control) involves *rational* control over your actions, emotions, and will. By telling yourself you *can't* do otherwise, you can defeat your own prospects for happiness. For example, you easily lose your temper, cave to pressure, eat or drink to excess, and keep yourself from advancing by refusing to try. In contrast, in becoming temperate, you can take control of your life (body, mind, and spirit) by cognitively and behaviorally overcoming such self-stultifying *can'ts*.

6. *Moral creativity* transcends the self-defeating idea that you have a moral duty to obsess over perceived problems and to drag your significant others along with you. It involves a philosophical grasp of morality and moral standards; tolerance for the ambiguity and uncertainty of moral choices; an ability to frame life in constructive, unproblematic ways; a willingness to try out novel ways of resolving concerns; and a consideration for the welfare, interests, and needs of others.
7. *Empowerment* means treating others as rational, self-determining agents in contrast to trying to get what you want through power plays, intimidation, and deceit. This means advising rather than goading, using rational argument to convince rather than making threats, recognizing the right of others to informed consent, and respecting the right to just treatment, even when serious conflicts arise.
8. *Empathy* amounts to transcending your own ego-centered universe by connecting (cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually) with the subjectivity of others. It means giving up the self-defeating idea that only your values, interests, preferences, and beliefs carry import and validity. It is a condition of such other virtues as beneficence, friendship, and gratitude.
9. *Good judgment* is the ability to make objective unbiased discernments in practical matters. In cases of judging other human beings, it means equitable and sympathetic judgment in contrast to stereotypical and prejudicial judgment. A person with good judgment is realistic, perceptive, open-minded, creative, and constructive.
10. *Foresightedness* (in assessing probabilities) is the ability to make generalizations about the material world and predictions about the future that are probable relative to the facts as known. A person who has this virtue is able to use it successfully in making life decisions. Such a person is able to cope effectively in this material universe, where there are degrees of probability, not certainty.
11. *Scientificity* (in providing explanations) is the ability to apply a critical, scientific method in accounting for the whys and wherefores of existence. A scientific person recognizes that scientific and religious explanations can be compatible but is disinclined toward superstition, magical thinking, religious fanaticism, and other antiscientific ways of accounting for reality. Such a person tends to rely on confirmatory evidence rather than on personal emotional reactions (like fear and guilt).

CONSTRUCTING PHILOSOPHICAL ANTIDOTES

In the following chapters, I provide you with a stock of antidotes that can be quite potent in promoting the eleven transcendent virtues. Some may suit your circumstances better than others. If you are confronting a midlife crisis, then Epicurus can help you gain a fresh, life-affirming perspective instead of stewing fruitlessly in your mortality. If you have come to see the world as depraved, evil, or destitute of value, then Buddha can help you transcend your own narrow, ego-centered perspective by having compassion for others in similar situations.

Some antidotes may fit your worldview better than others. If you believe in God and in objective standards of goodness and beauty, then a theological philosophical perspective like that of St. Augustine might bode well for you. Alternatively, if you think beauty is subjective, "merely in the eyes of the beholder," then David Hume's theory might work better for you.

Which philosophical route you take is up to you. You can set sail aboard the good ship Hume, St. Thomas, and so many other sundry and diverse seaworthy vessels docked in this book. Each can take you far on your voyage to profound happiness, but each may take a different route to get you there. If you want to find dignity in self or others as a way of turning your gloom and doom into profound happiness, then Kant or Buber can take you there. If you want to find meaning through God, then you best not get aboard the good ship Nietzsche, but the St. Thomas might be a welcome choice. In the end, all these philosophical views can make potent contributions to the transcendent virtues and therefore to your profound happiness. But which philosophical ship you choose to board is at your discretion.

Philosophical antidotes are not necessarily consistent with *each other*. This is because the great philosophers of antiquity have *rationally* agreed to disagree about the most basic questions of human existence, from the existence of God to the nature of the material world. Each is rational because each is *internally* consistent; clearly and carefully conceived, developed, and justified; and in tune with empirical reality. In addition, each is rational because it provides a useful tool for correcting, overcoming, and transcending one or more of the eleven cardinal fallacies addressed in this book.

This means that LBT is at bottom a *practical* therapy. It rests its case on how *effective* philosophical antidotes can be in helping you go from emotional and behavioral discord to profound happiness. It is therefore *constructive* in the sense that it can help you transcend your unhappiness.

LBT is also constructivist in the distinct sense of approving alternative constructions of reality. The postmodernist philosopher Michael Foucault spoke of “games of truth,” by which he meant alternative ways of constructing reality.³⁶ As in the case of other games, the rules of such games do not merely describe reality. Rather, they prescribe valid moves within the confines of the given game. Following Foucault’s usage, you could say (if you want) that the philosophical antidotes given in this book define some highly therapeutic games of truth. These rules can be said to prescribe the valid moves—*oughts* and *shoulds*—for constructing reality within the contexts of diverse philosophical theories. But don’t allow this use of the word *game* to distract you from the fact that these moves, unlike most “games,” are moves made *in vivo*. They can have profound implications for the quality of your everyday life.

In drawing a comparison between the rules of language and those of game playing, philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein added, “Is there not also the case where we play and—make up the rules as we go along? And there is even one where we alter them—as we go along.”³⁷ It is in this sense that philosophical antidotes can be considered rules of games. You are not bound by everything in a philosophy, and, as you proceed, you can “alter” the rules or “make them up” by bringing in rules from a related philosophical theory. Here, then, is another sense in which LBT is constructive. It gives you a measure of autonomy by allowing you to be *creative*. As you’ll see, in constructing philosophical antidotes from philosophical theories, I have myself exercised such creative license by eclectically combining views from several philosophers. I have also added some of my own insights. This should give you a useful model to emulate in being creative. And I encourage you to be creative.

Each of the antidotes I have provided is presented in the form of a rule given under the fallacy it addresses. After the rule, I have parenthetically listed the names of the philosophers I used in building the rule. Each rule is then followed by a discussion. You should not read the rule apart from the discussion. The discussion fleshes out and gives substance to the formulation. But once you have grasped this meaning and substance, you should be good to go. Onward to serenity, success, and profound happiness!

NOTES

1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), bk. 7, chap. 3, 1041.

2. Whenever a person makes a decision, he or she draws a conclusion from a set of premises. This process of drawing an inference is known as *reasoning*. You make an inference when you try to justify one statement in terms of another. The set of statements you give as reasons for a further statement is known as your premises. In all reasoning, there must be at least one premise. As you will see, there is usually more than one. The further statement that you justify with your premises is known as your *conclusion*. All reasoning has *one* conclusion. If you have more than one conclusion, then you have made more than one inference. If I tell you that I hate Jane because she is stuck up, I am attempting to justify my dislike for her in terms of my contention that she is stuck up. My premise is that she is stuck up, and the conclusion I draw from this is that I dislike her.

3. The most common, basic layout of practical reasoning has this pattern:

Rule: If X happens, then you should (ought, must) respond in way Y.

Report: X happened.

Conclusion: You respond in way Y.

This pattern can be combined with other layers of rules and reports to form a complex network of premises in which rules are derived from further, more general rules and reports are derived from further, more general reports. Sometimes these more intricate patterns form syndromes of fallacies. I will talk later about these.

4. I say “ready to deduce” and not simply “deduce” because, as Aristotle informed us, there can be things that happen that prevent the deduction from going through. As you will see, one way to stop the deduction is to oppose it with a further set of premises that directs you to think, feel, or act differently.

Some logicians would not consider practical syllogisms to be deductive inferences because they think that only statements, not emotions or actions, can be deduced. Nevertheless, I will retain the terminology of deductive logic. Even if there are some features of practical inferences that don’t square with deduction strictly so called, as you will see, there are practical advantages of applying the techniques and concepts of deductive logic to psychotherapy.

5. Some psychological theories (such as REBT) hold that such physiological aspects of emotion are *caused* by beliefs rather than *logically deduced* from premises. A more precise account of this position would be that these bodily changes are caused by what is deduced from premises. Thus, from premises A and B, I might deduce C, which, in turn, *causes* visceral changes in me. Notice, however, that even on this understanding, these changes depend on my inference from premises and is therefore an effect of my reasoning. And this is precisely the main contention of a logic-based approach.

6. Insofar as psychology has quested for the natural laws that determine human behavior, it has treated you (and me) as chunks of biological matter whose behavior and emotions are determined according to laws of nature. In contrast, LBT allows the possibility that human beings have *free will* in the sense of *not* being subject to such causal determination.

7. In compiling this list, I have also used artificial intelligence software known as Belief-Scan 4.1 for Windows. This program, which I have invented, scans people's thinking for fallacies, as expressed in personal essays. The program refines its search by rigorously asking the person Socratic questions designed to determine whether the fallacy in question has been committed. It then compiles a list of fallacies that have been confirmed.

8. Several fallacies listed represent *classes* of fallacies in that they include different types. For example, there are different types of manipulation, and there are different ways to distort probabilities.

9. Several fallacies listed are treated by classical rational psychotherapy and their dangerous implications for human happiness have been well documented in the annals of clinical research. For example, REBT emphasizes demanding perfection, awfulizing, and damnation, while cognitive-behavior therapy emphasizes certain types of fallacies of reports. However, a number of fallacies on the list are more often treated by philosophers who work in informal logic; these have therefore received scant attention by psychologists, for example, jumping on the bandwagon, thou shalt upset yourself, manipulation, and the world revolves around me. See Albert Ellis, *A New Guide to Rational Living* (Hollywood, Calif.: Wilshire Book Company, 1975), and Aaron Beck, *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders* (New York: Penguin, Books, 1979).

10. See, for example, Elliot D. Cohen, *Caution: Faulty Thinking Can Be Harmful to Your Happiness* (Mason, Ohio: Thomson Custom Publishing, 2003).

11. Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*, in *From Plato to Derrida*, 4th ed., ed. Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003), 250–53.

12. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.

13. Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism, in *Philosophers at Work: Issues and Practice of Philosophy*, ed. Elliot D. Cohen (Fort Worth, Tex.: Harcourt, 2000), 444–49.

14. St. Augustine, *City of God*, in Baird and Kaufmann, *From Plato to Derrida*, 305–15.

15. This term refers to unhappiness due to sickness, old age, and death. See E. A. Burt, ed., *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 28.

16. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (New York: HarperCollins, 1964).

17. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. 2, chap. 6.

18. You could be assuming a more specific rule such as, “If I screw up at something important, then I am a screw-up,” or one even more specific like, “If I screw up at work, then I am a screw-up.” In the first case, you would also be assuming, in your report, that your work is “something important.”

19. A refutation of each of the eleven cardinal fallacies is provided in the chapter in which it is discussed.

20. I take “self-contempt” to be a form of intense anger waged on oneself. Later, in chapter 3, I distinguish between self-damnation and damnation of others.

21. Sartre, *Existentialism*, 446.

22. Sartre, *Existentialism*, 447.

23. I do not claim that one is simultaneously filing a report under two conflicting rules since it appears to be impossible to (consciously) accept two inconsistent rules at once. I suspect that the truth is more that of vacillation between both rules rather than simultaneous acceptance.

24. The act of filing a report under a rule amounts to the agent's perception that the antecedent (“if” clause) of the rule is true. If the agent accepts the rule under which the report is filed, then the agent will also accept its consequent (“then” clause). In my use of the term “filing a report under a rule,” I am assuming that the rule in question is one that is accepted by the agent.

25. “In a practical syllogism, the major premise is an opinion, while the minor premise deals with particular things, which are the province of perception. Now when the two premises are combined, just as in theoretic reasoning the mind is compelled to affirm the resulting conclusion, so in the case of practical premises you are forced at once to do it. For example, given the premises ‘All sweet things ought to be tasted’ and ‘Yonder thing is sweet’—a particular instance of the general class—you are bound, if able and not prevented, immediately to taste the thing. When therefore there is present in the mind on the one hand a universal judgment forbidding you to taste and on the other hand a universal judgment saying ‘All sweet things are pleasant,’ and a minor premise, ‘Yonder thing is sweet’ (and it is this minor premise that is active), and when desire is present at the same time, then, though the former universal judgment says ‘Avoid that thing,’ the desire leads you to it (since desire can put the various parts of the body in motion). Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. 7, chap. 3, 1041.

26. “The virtues on the other hand we acquire by first having actually practised them, just as we do the arts.” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. 2, chap. 1, 952.

27. Aristotelis Santas, Willpower, *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* 42 (fall 1988): 9–16.

28. See Elliot D. Cohen, *What Would Aristotle Do? Self-Control through the Power of Reason* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2003).

29. See Cohen, *What Would Aristotle Do?*

30. See especially Lon L. Fuller, *The Morality of Law* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974), chap. 1.

31. This broad definition appears to be consistent with many theories of happiness, for example, those of Aristotle, Plato, Epicurus, Bentham, Mill, and Kant, among others.

32. I say “essential” rather than “sufficient.” However, in addressing the eleven cardinal fallacies, LBT addresses the most prevalent and stubborn roadblocks to human happiness. The transcendent virtues replace these deficits with virtues. It therefore seems reasonable that realization of these virtues is also *sufficient* for human happiness. However, the empirical evidence for this hypothesis is largely anecdotal. I suspect that future empirical studies will confirm this hypothesis.

33. This is sometimes called an “intrinsic theory of virtues.” See, for example, Elliot D. Cohen and Gale S. Cohen, *The Virtuous Therapist* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1999).

34. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. 2, chap. 1.

35. Paradoxically, demanding perfection is so prevalent among human beings, yet there is no English word to refer to its opposing virtue. The first step in striving to attain this virtue is to give it a name.

36. For an application of this idea to philosophical counseling, see James Tuedio, A Post Modern Basis for Narrative Realism in Philosophical Counseling, *International Journal of Philosophical Practice* 2, no. 1 (spring 2004), online at <http://www.aspcp.org/ijpp/Tuediov2n1.pdf>.

37. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 83.

I

HOW TO BUILD BEHAVIORAL AND EMOTIONAL VIRTUES