# Review of: "Philosophy as a Way of Life as a Pathway to Recovery for Addicted Individuals"

Andrew Dell'Olio[1]

1 Hope College

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The application of philosophy, specifically the notion of philosophy as a way of life, to the treatment of addiction recovery, is an important and welcome initiative. This paper by Guy Du Plessis is, therefore, a significant contribution to this effort and also highlights the potential of the field of philosophical counseling in general as a therapeutic modality. Du Plessis makes particular use of Logic-Based Therapy (LBT) as developed by Elliot Cohen, a pioneer in the field of philosophical counseling. There is much to be said for this approach as it is largely a refinement of a major form of the very successful and pervasive Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), namely, Albert Ellis's Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). Essentially, LBT translates the faulty thinking that REBT states is the cause of an individual's negative emotions into logical syllogisms in order to identify and refute the irrational premises at work in the faulty emotional reasoning. It then proposes alternative ways of thinking, including congenial but more positive philosophical perspectives, as well as behavioral dispositions or virtues that should lead to greater self-growth and life satisfaction. Du Plessis employs the structured method of LBT to addictive recovery in this article by attempting to show how it could help overcome the self-deception and related skewed motivation that often afflicts addicted individuals. To the extent that LBT as a form of philosophical counseling aids in confronting addicted individuals' self-deception and increases their motivation towards recovery, Du Plessis maintains that philosophy as a way of life is useful, and ought to be employed, in the treatment of addiction recovery.

I applaud Du Plessis's effort and I agree with him that LBT—and philosophical counseling in general—can be very useful in the treatment of addiction recovery as well as other areas of mental health treatment. I do have some concerns, however, about the precise way in which Du Plessis makes use of the practical application of philosophy, or philosophy as a way of life, in his case study. For one, while LBT might in fact be a very useful way of employing philosophical counseling addiction recovery or any other such issue, philosophical counseling as a field offers many more resources than simply LBT. Acknowledging that Du Plessis purposely restricts himself to LBT in his article and case study, it is still worth noting that other philosophical approaches might be equally successful in the treatment of addiction. Secondly, even within the confines of Du Plessis's LBT approach, issues arise as to the application of this approach for the case study that is the focus of the article. It is that application that is the focus of this review.

The client in the case study in question, "Jurie," a 25-year-old male musician, suffers from "a substance abuse disorder" with "a pattern of relapse after experiencing disappoints when his expectations are violated" (4). We are told that a recent

relapse occurred after the client did not get a performance booking he expected to get. After his band's first performance, the club manager booked a different band instead, and, upon hearing this news, the client "had a drink which progressed to a three-day crack-cocaine binge" (5). According to Du Plessis, in the session with the client, "it become clear that he has a pattern of relapsing after experiencing a disappointment" (5). He then concludes: "It became apparent that he had a tendency for *existential perfectionism*" (5). As defined by Cohen, Existential perfectionism is a species of faulty thinking flagged by LBT which "involves demanding that bad thinks *must* not happen and when the world fails to live to one's idealized image of it one perceives the world to be all bad" (5).

There is no doubt that existential perfectionism or something like it occurs in cases of faulty thinking, and it is certainly possible that this client exhibits it. What is not clear from what Du Plessis writes is that Jurie exhibits it. To the reader, it appears to be a hasty leap from "a pattern of relapsing after experiencing a disappointment" to a general tendency of existential perfectionism. What does the client *say* that leads to this conclusion? Du Plessis does not share this. But without hearing how the client understands the world in terms of his articulated beliefs, it is not at all apparent that existential perfectionism is at work in his thinking. We learn later that the client "experienced frustration, resentment, and anger when events did not live up to his expectations" (5). Well, many of us do. But having these feelings does not imply a belief that the world is all bad. Similarly, there is simply no evidence to suggest that following syllogism Du Plessis constructs to reflect the client's supposed thinking is, in fact, what the client is thinking:

Bad things must not happen. Therefore, if bad things happen, then the world itself is bad. A bad thing happened. Therefore, the world is bad. (6)

It is, of course, possible that the client speaks, and thinks, this way. But without some account of what he actually says, we are left to wonder whether a particular LBT fallacy has been imposed on the client by the counselor.

Moving on to the next steps in the LBT approach, Du Plessis "checks for fallacies" by simply reiterating that the client is "demanding perfection" due to the logical fallacy of existential perfectionism without offering any supporting evidence. We are then told that the fallacy of demanding perfection "can often lead to what Nietzsche referred to as *ressentiment*" (6). Yes, a frustrated expectation can lead to resentment, but it is not clear how Nietzsche's special notion of *ressentiment*—a feeling of lingering vengefulness arising out the inability to react, which in turn gives rise to a life-negating value system, etc.—sheds light on the very ordinary sense of resentment that might arise when things in everyday life do not go as one expects or hopes.

Du Plessis then suggests to the client a refutation of the fallacy of existential perfectionism by noting, via existential philosophy and Buddhism, that suffering is inevitable, so any refusal to avoid the reality of suffering, as in the case of addiction, is unrealistic. "An important aspect of recovery," therefore, "is realizing the inevitability of suffering and learning how to cope with it in a healthy way" (7). Here we have a significant way in which a philosophical counseling approach can aid addiction recovery. The introduction of Buddhist philosophy seems particularly promising, especially with its analysis of

the cause of suffering in undisciplined desire or craving and its accompanying practice of mindful self-observation leading to self-control, non-attachment, and eventual serenity. One could imagine a philosophical counseling session, or set of sessions, that went in this direction would be enormously helpful in addiction recovery. Instead, adhering to the LBT methodology, Du Plessis offers a "guiding virtue" for the specific fallacy he has supposedly discovered at work in this client's thinking, namely, "unconditional life acceptance," that is, the ability to accept imperfections in daily life, and its accompanying attitude of "metaphysical security" (7).

Certainly, all the guiding virtues proposed by LBT would be aids to self-growth for any of us, regardless of the logical fallacies to which we are particularly prone. And it makes sense in a counseling setting to focus on those we have perceived a client to be lacking. But in the case of *this* client, it is not clear that the attitude of "unconditional life acceptance" alone is all that helpful. As the Stoics teach, it is always best to accept what one cannot control. Indeed, wisdom, as the very Stoic-inspired Serenity Prayer utilized by Alcoholics Anonymous states, is knowing the difference between what one can control and what one cannot. But *accepting* what one cannot control needs to be accompanied by *acting upon* what one can control. Unconditional life acceptance would be helpful disposition or virtue fine Jurie as long as it pertains to what he cannot control—sometimes, beyond our control, we don't get the gig. But what follows from this acceptance is equally important—the effort to do something about what can be controlled so that one is in a better position to get the gig next time. One can choose to persist the habit of grabbing a drink in the attempt at overcoming one's suffering, or one can learn a new set of songs or practice some more so that the band is tighter. By cultivating additional virtues, such as self-control (temperance) or inner strength (courage), enhanced by the practice of self-observation or mindfulness, Jurie learns not only to accept that disappointments occur, but that there is a more life-affirming response to such disappointments that is within his control. Old habits can be replaced by new ones; he has the inner freedom to achieve this.

It is therefore a disappointment that DuPlessis offers an LBT interpretation of Nietzsche's moral philosophy and the notion of *amor fati* as the philosophical perspective to promote the guiding virtue for this client. While the "love of one's fate" on its face might counteract existential perfectionism, the interpretation of the notion of *amor fati* simply in LBT terms as "unconditional life acceptance," is potentially self-defeating. There is just too much resignation tied into this notion for a client prone to avoiding taking positive action toward self-improvement by giving up and turning to substance abuse. Yes, the notion of *amor fati* is derived from Stoicism, but Stoicism is not, as it is sometimes portrayed, the philosophy that says one should simply put up with whatever life throws at you. It is about taking control of what one can control. For Nietzsche, not far removed from the Stoic conception, *amor fati* is about making choices that render one's life such that one would want to live it forever without changes since it is the best life one could imagine living. But that kind of life requires recognition of the *freedom* one has to act, to *control* what one can control, to *choose* one's thoughts and behaviors, so that one might be engaged in the ongoing activity of self-transformation, self-creation. Otherwise, this client learns that, when things are not going his way, he just needs to accept it and do nothing about it. In effect, he learns a kind of learned helplessness, a well-known cause of depression, and another excuse for a drink. This is a particularly unfortunate and surprising outcome given the important and insightful remarks Du Plessis makes regarding LBT's emphasis on willpower

and our ability to control and change our behavior in contrast with the overly “socially deterministic approaches to addition” currently gaining in popularity that risk denying human agency (12).

Du Plessis notes that final step in the LBT counseling approach is to offer behavioral recommendations to the client. Not unusual within philosophical counseling practice, Du Plessis offers “bibliotherapy,” that is, the suggestion of some books by Nietzsche or about Nietzsche’s philosophy of self-cultivation for Jurie to read. I might have recommended Epictetus or Marcus Aurelius or books on practical Buddhism. But, while I might not agree with every treatment choice Du Plessis makes in his case study, or that LBT is always the best philosophical counseling approach, in the end I strongly agree with him that “philosophy as a way of life can be a compelling, and legitimate recovery pathway for individuals in addiction recovery, as one of many recovery pathways” (12). His article does a service to the field of the treatment of addiction by bringing attention to the burgeoning practice of philosophical counseling and the promise of philosophically-based recovery options.