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

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Guy du Plessis's article "Philosophy as a Way of Life as a Pathway to Recovery for Addicted Individuals" is the first of its kind (known to this reviewer) to bring the last decades' research on the idea of philosophy as a way of life (hereafter PWL) stemming primarily from Pierre Hadot into this therapeutic field [1]. There is a growing amount of work being done by some psychologists, led by Tim le Bon and Donald Robertson, to use Stoic philosophy in conjunction with contemporary forms of practice.[2] This is one of the more exciting interdisciplinary possibilities opened up by Hadot's key idea, since pursued by a host of others [3]: that philosophy, as a search for wisdom, for a long time took its primary task to be the transformation of individuals' ways of living, including in the face of adversities and life challenges. But the possible application of PWL techniques and ideas specifically to addiction therapy is something which I believe du Plessis's article is pioneering. It is an especially telling contribution, given the author's clear experience as a philosophical or philosophically-informed existential therapist, able to draw upon case experience to show what PWL might look like in a clinical setting.

The essay begins by giving brief, fit for purpose, explanations firstly of the idea of PWL, and then an overview of Du Plessis' principal therapeutic approach, the logic-based therapy (LBT). As he cites Elliot Cohen explaining, this therapy's approach to human psychology and motivation is post-Socratic, suggesting already the link with the PWL lineage which Socrates inaugurated:

> *The keynote of the theory is that counselees disturb themselves emotionally and behaviorally by deducing self-defeating, unrealistic conclusions from irrational premises in their practical reasoning. LBT accordingly provides the critical thinking tools for constructing counselees' faulty reasoning; identifying and refuting its irrational premises; and constructing philosophically enlightened antidotes to these premises, guided by a corresponding set of "transcendent virtues …" (at p. 4/15)*

The core of the essay is then structured around the six stages of a logic-based therapy case-study (p. 4-12/15). The therapist, in dialogue with the counselee, should seek first to identify the form of emotional reasoning governing some destructive course of behavior: in the case study, addictive drug use, faced with existential disappointments. (The young man discussed is a musician, who acts out after a booking for his band was cancelled).

Secondly, the therapist should check for fallacies in the premises or interlinked beliefs underlying the client's negative behaviors.

Thirdly, together, they should challenge and refute these faulty ideas: in the operative case study, the subject's idea that the world should be structured in such a way that we would never have to experience disappointment at the hands of fortune or other people, from whence it follows that fleeing negative emotions in response to such events is appropriate.

Fourth comes the task of identifying some optative guiding counter-virtue for the counselee's differing symptomatic behaviors, whose pursuits would allow the client to respond differently, faced with future, potentially triggering challenges.

Step five is to find a guiding philosophy which would inform and motivate the guiding virtue, an idea I'll return to in due course in which some readers might expect PWL to feature most prominently.

Step six then involves applying the philosophy. This involves once again dialogically identifying the faulty forms of reasoning informing the turn to addictive substances (in these cases), then building and implementing a new action plan, including behavioral recommendations (up to and including of further philosophical texts).

Speaking from a perspective within PWL research over the last decade, this article's interest lies especially in the way that logic-based therapy (LBT), which is clearly explained, operationalizes a form of post-Socratic dialogue with a view to effecting change in individuals.

Socrates himself was generally concerned with "what is X?" questions, about general subjects like virtues (courage in the *Laches*, for example). But the Socratic idea that questioning a person about their beliefs, and showing where they may not hold together consistently (or whether one or more premise is false, partial, distorted, biased, etc.), is something which can be applied to the analysis of emotional beliefs, or the kinds of pro-addictive responses to disappointment of Du Plessis's case study.

Indeed, the Stoics in particular within antiquity developed a post-Socratic conception of the emotions as based in descriptive and evaluative beliefs: about what is true and salient ("I have been harmed, the world sucks") and what is right or appropriate to do in response ("So, why shouldn't I indulge again in substances that make me feel better right now?") [4].

A second remark from a PWL-informed perspective is that, as the kind of research Du Plessis is doing is carried forwards, there will be great benefits in considering more closely the different ancient traditions of PWL which understood their task as including what we might term psychotherapy. This includes Stoicism, arguably pre-eminently, and as its contemporary global resurgence underlines, but Epicureanism also. There is a good deal of overlap, and there may be possible influence, between Stoic therapeutic philosophy and LBT (as there is directly with today's CBT) [5].

A third comment in this line would concern steps 4-6 of the LBT process modelled by Du Plessis, from a PWL-informed perspective. The notion of choosing a virtue, a strength of character, which can assist clients in counteracting negative behaviors and their forms of cognition is very classical, or post-Socratic. But perhaps the key stress of Hadot's own work, which is of course continually controversial, is the idea that PWL involves prescribing and practicing spiritual exercises to assist individuals in the difficult, ongoing, work of cultivating new habits shaped by philosophical beliefs [6].

The Stoics and Epicureans would agree that, at step four, we need to take seriously how "Even though a counselee on an intellectual level can see the fallacies in his emotional reasoning this does not mean that he may still not be prone to acting out the deeply ingrained irrational arguments" (p. 7/15).

But identifying countering virtues, moderation, courage, justice, or wisdom, is only one part of this work, as they see things —precisely insofar as people can know what they should do, but (echoing Saint Paul as much as Aristotle) continue not to do what they know is best, for a host of reasons, led by the inertial force of habits [7]. Future work on PWL and therapeutic practice could involve therapeutic practitioners' integrating the prescription of spiritual exercises, like forms of meditation or memorization and repetition of key aphorisms and ideas, carrying forward initiatives from Du Plessis's research.

This leads to the article's use of Friedrich Nietzsche and the idea of *amor fati* as a counter-philosophy to recommend to addiction sufferers, to counteract their narcissistic expectation that the world should never disappoint them, and they should never have to sit with pain, disappointment, sorrow, imperfection [8-9/15).

The issue of how to read Nietzsche's philosophy, and whether his notion of love of fate (bound to the idea of an eternal recurrence) is the best or only philosophical counterpoint to the wish for omnipotent control of circumstances, is beyond the scope of this paper to do more than scarcely raise. Its fatalistic tension is clear with Du Plessis' welcome stress on agency, as against determinism, when it comes to dealing with addiction issues (p. 12/15).

There are less totalising philosophical responses out there to the reality that external goods, other people, and "fortune" are beyond the scope of individual control. These stop a long way short of asking us to affirm all things, up to and including serial killers, death camps, wasted lives, and the other dark realities that Nietzsche asks us to affirm. (For it is *all things* that we must will to recur if we love fate). Then there are Nietzsche's affirmations, especially in the post-1883 works of the necessity of war, cruelty and rank order in nature, including forms of breeding or *Zuchtung*, amongst other position. These arguably cloud any attempt to use him as a more or less harmless ethicist or therapist, since no other philosopher as this "anti-christ" goes so far in openly affirming what is "beyond good and evil") [8].

One also wonders how, at step six, a client might respond to being asked to read *Genealogy of Morals*, and reaching the comments about "Jewish" "hatred" and "vengeance", and the "slave revolt" in morals in sections 7-8 of book 1, or

invocations of state-founding higher men in II, 17 who “are ignorant of the meaning of guilt, responsibility, consideration, … these born organisers; in them predominates that terrible artist-egoism, that gleams like brass, and that knows itself justified to all eternity, in its work”, and how these and many other passages speak to the narcissism of vulnerable young men [9]. Most people would like narcissists, in particular, to learn to become more aware of their responsibilities to others, and that their impulses and actings out cannot be sanctified by a sense of their being different, more creative, gifted, beautiful, strong, or worldly-wise than others etc.

There is in the essay under step five, in fact, something of a wider, almost political excursus in the article which readers might be inclined to take or leave. That ideologies of far Left or Right can surely furnish individuals with narcissistic injuries with external “psychic scaffolds” or even “psychic prostheses” (p. 10/15). That is a point that is well made: but we must Socratically add that philosophies can do this too, when they are become oscillated, consensual dogmas amongst subgroups. The direct relevance of this critique of ideologies to PWL, or the treatment of clients facing addiction seems less clear, and the point is not brought back to the focal case study.

A final comment then concerns PWL. At issue is the role Hadot stresses in philosophical transformation, played by the individual identifying with the larger whole (nature, also the social community) which the ancient philosophies asked practitioners to analyse and understand their small, passing role within. Hadot's stress on the importance of this dimension of philosophy is the key issue he has with Michel Foucault's more Nietzschean attempts to render PWL in the ancients as about “care of the self” [10]. The absence of this dimension in the ancients (Du Plessis seems very Nietzschean about the putative psychology of any attempts of individuals to identify with shared social projects (p. 10/15)) is perhaps one reason why Du Plessis goes to Nietzsche's *amor fati*. But one could argue that other options which could do the same philosophical-therapeutic work he wants from this technique could be explored in other pieces.

1. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life,* trans. Michael Chase (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995).
2. Donald Robertson, T*he Philosophy of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) Stoic Philosophy as Rational and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2019).
3. See eg Matthew Sharpe and Michael Ure, *Philosophy as a Way of LIfe: History, Dimensions, Directions* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), and James Ambury & Tushar Irani eds., *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Historical, Contemporary, and Pedagogical Perspectives* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020).
4. Margaret Graver, *Stoicism and Emotions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
5. Again, see Robertson, *The Philosophy of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy .*
6. See esp. Pierre Hadot, “Spiritual Exercises”, in Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 79-125. For a recent defence of Hadot, see Stehen Grimm and Caleb Cahoe, “What is Philosophy as a Way of LIfe? Why Philosophy as a Way of Life”, *European Journal of Philosophy* 2021: **29**: p. 236-251.
7. On habit, see Pierre Hadot, “Ancient Man and Nature", in Pierre Hadot, *Selected Writings: Philosophy as Practice*, trans. Matthew Sharpe and Federico Testa (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 171-172.

8. See Domenico Losurdo, *Friedrich Nietzsche:; Aristocratic Rebel*, trans. Gregor Benton (Leiden: Brill, 2019) for an example of more critical readings of Nietzsche as a philosopher of the 19th century, as against the later 20th or 21st.
9. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, translated by Carol Deathe (Cambridge: Cambridge University , 2006), I, 7-8, II, 17.
10. Pierre Hadot, “An Interrupted Dialogue with Michel Foucault: Convergences and Divergences”, in Hadot,*Selected Writings*, 227-234.