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THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY: STOICISM, BUDDHISM, TAOISM, AND EXISTENTIALISM

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Abstract
In this study, we examine the philosophical bases of one of the leading clinical psychological methods of therapy for anxiety, anger, and depression, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). We trace this method back to its philosophical roots in the Stoic, Buddhist, Taoist, and Existentialist philosophical traditions. We start by discussing the tenets of CBT, and then we expand on the philosophical traditions that ground this approach. Given that CBT has had a clinically measured positive effect on the psychological well-being of individuals, it becomes important to study the philosophical foundations on which this therapy is based.

Keywords: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, philosophy, mental health, happiness.

In this study, we examine the philosophical bases of one of the leading clinical psychological methods of therapy for anxiety, anger, and depression, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). Although the broad philosophical bases of CBT include the philosophies of Heraclitus, Stoicism, Epicureanism, Hedonism, Buddhism, Taoism, Existentialism, yogic philosophy, Baruch Spinoza, and Immanuel Kant (Ellis, 1997 p.5), our intent is to trace this method back to its philosophical roots in the Stoic, Buddhist, Taoist, and Existentialist philosophical traditions. We focus on these four schools of thought given that Ellis references Epictetus as the primary influence for his development of CBT. Taoism and Buddhism both are helpful to explain the process metaphysics that underlies the problems with categorizations that often lead us to become emotionally disturbed.

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Existentialism emphasizes choice and responsibility as possibilities for living an authentic life.

We begin by discussing the tenets of CBT, and then we expand on the philosophical traditions that ground this approach. Given that CBT has had a clinically measured positive effect on the psychological well-being of individuals (Antonuccio, Danton and DeNelsky 1995; Dobson 1989; Robinson, Berman and Neimeyer 1990) it becomes important to study the philosophical foundations on which this therapy is based.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Extensive research supports CBT as an effective non-pharmaceutical treatment for mood disorders, and we focus on the works of key scholars in CBT, Albert Ellis (1956; 1958; [1988]1990; 2007), and David Burns ([1980] 1999; 2009). Ellis, an originator of what has come to be known as CBT, ultimately named his particular approach, Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT). He proposed an "ABC" model of cognitive behavioral disturbance (e.g., Ellis, [1988] 1990:52-7) marked by dysfunctional moods that diminished life satisfaction and happiness. In his theoretical model, the letter "A" stands for an activating event, "B" refers to a belief system, and "C" stands for the consequences of A through B. Although activating events cannot be changed, a change in the perception of A causes a change of B, and this, in turn, results in a change in consequences, that is, of C. The moods of individuals, then, the C's in the ABC model, can be transformed from dysfunctional affects such as depression, to functional ones such as moderate sadness, through a change in how activating events are perceived. A schema of Ellis' ABC theory of cognitive disturbance is as follows:

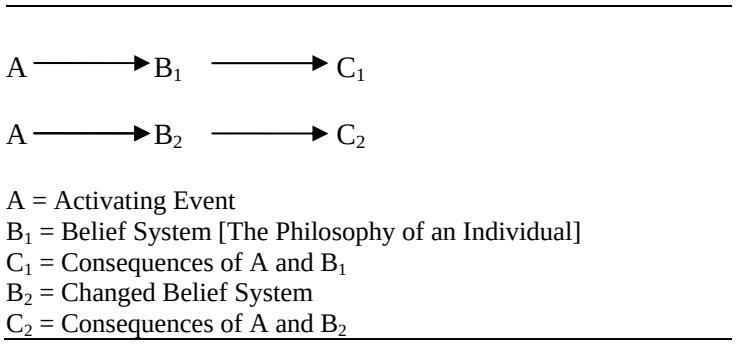

Figure 1. Ellis' ABC Theory of Cognitive Disturbance

Individuals' beliefs concerning the events they experience, the "B" in the model, can be considered their philosophical approach to life conditions. Ellis (1997; 2007) attributed his ABC model primarily to Stoic philosophy and to the

Stoics, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius in particular, although as we indicate in this study, there are other philosophical schools of thought that influenced CBT as well. According to Epictetus ([125 C.E.] 1991), it is not what happens to individuals, but rather how individuals *perceive* what happens to them, that determines their affect. Epictetus states, "Men are disturbed not by the things which happen, but by their opinions about the things."

Ellis (2007) summarized his findings by stating that there are three fundamental sources of cognitive disturbance which he labeled "IB's" or "irrational beliefs," beliefs that caused individuals to react in dysfunctional ways to events in their lives. These three are: 1) "I **must** be successful," 2) "Others **must** treat me well" and 3) "Conditions under which I live **must** be agreeable to me." The "musts" are emphasized here because Ellis believed that simple concern does not lead to dysfunctionality among individuals. A "must" belief, on the other hand, does lead to psychological disturbance.

It follows then, that according to Ellis, one of the main, if not the main, cause of human misery is *grandiosity*, that is, our taking ourselves too seriously. We can see that individuals have grandiose tendencies when they believe themselves to be the center of the universe, when they believe that they must be successful in all activities, and when they believe that others must be accommodating to them. Conditions around them, they believe, also must be to their satisfaction. It follows that the ultimate grandiosity for individuals, then, is the belief, stated or unstated, that everything is about them, that they are the only ones who matter, and everything that they do and everything that happens to them must go their way.

We realize, of course, that this cannot be the case. Often, our activities are not successful, others do not treat us well, and the conditions under which we live are not agreeable. The way to combat grandiosity, according to Ellis, is to change the *"must"* in the three fundamental irrational beliefs to *"I would prefer."* Once the three statements are changed by substituting preference for absolute must, life becomes significantly more tolerable when things do not go our way, as sometimes they do not. It is evident that changing "I must be successful" to "I would prefer to be successful" will dissipate extreme disappointment or anger should one fail to succeed.

Concerning how one is treated by others, if one makes being treated well by others a preference rather than a rigid demand, then should mistreatment occur, the mistreated individual would not necessarily spiral into depression, anxiety, or anger. Finally, concerning the third irrational belief, that of insisting that the conditions under which one lives must be agreeable, if one were to change this belief to "I would prefer that the conditions under which I live be agreeable but if they are not, I will still be all right," this change would neutralize potential anxiety, anger, or depression. We notice that with Ellis' three statements, "I must be successful," "Others must treat me well," and "Conditions under which I live must be agreeable," he covers the perceived well-being of

individuals from the point of view of self, of others, and of the circumstances surrounding one's life. The coverage, then, is complete.

David Burns ([1980] 2009; 999), a student of Aaron T. Beck (1963; 1967; 1976), also considered a founder of CBT, is the second cognitive behavioral theorist whose work is studied here. Burns' book *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy (*[1980] 2009) is among the most read books in CBT, having sold over four million copies in the US since first being published. There is significant agreement between Ellis and Burns in their approach to mental disturbance, both relying on the bedrock of Stoic philosophy. Both refer back to the basic Stoic concept that it is not what happens to individuals but rather how they view what happens to them that determines their emotional reaction to events. Of interest here, though, is the difference between Burns' and Ellis' views of the causes of cognitive disturbance. For Ellis, as mentioned, the key element causing humans not to have life satisfaction and happiness is grandiosity. The key element for Burns is not grandiosity, but rather the human tendency to overgeneralize.

Table 1. Burns' Ten Basic Cognitive Distortions

TERMS	**DEFINITIONS**
1. All or Nothing Thinking	Seeing persons, events, and conditions as all negative
2. Overgeneralization	Negative exaggeration of the importance of self, events and conditions
3. Mental Filter	Not considering positive aspects of one's situation
4. Disqualifying the Positive	Not considering positive aspects of one's circumstances
5. Jumping to Conclusions a. Mind Reading b. The Fortune Teller Error	Believing that one knows what others are thinking, particularly when one believes that they are thinking negative thoughts
6. Magnification (Catastrophizing) or Minimization	Exaggerating a negative comment or situation Minimizing a positive comment or situation
7. Emotional Reasoning	Believing that one's emotions are fundamental as to how one sees events rather than believing that how one views (judges) an event is fundamental to how one feels about an event
8. Should Statements	Belief that one should do well, that others should treat one well, and that conditions should be positive and pleasant
9. Labeling and Mislabeling	A negative exaggeration of a person, event, or condition
10. Personalization	Exaggerated belief that one is sole the cause of negative outcomes

Our ability to generalize, that is, to reason inductively, is obviously of great benefit to us. Were we not able to generalize, every time that we saw an object such as an orange, for example, it would be as if we were seeing it for the

first time. We would never be able to derive the probable characteristics of the orange that we are currently holding from other oranges previously encountered. Consequently, we would be burdened with perceiving a world where everything sensed would always be new and unknown.

Because we have become adept at generalizing, however, we tend carelessly to overgeneralize and, for Burns, this predisposition is a key source of human misery and unhappiness. Of Burns' ten basic cognitive distortions ([1980] 2009:42-3) that lead to unhappiness, presented in Table 1, seven of them, namely, "all or nothing thinking," "overgeneralization" (here, he uses the term itself as one of the seven), "mental filter," "disqualifying the positive," "jumping to conclusions," "magnification or minimization," and "labeling," relate to overgeneralizing. Two others, "should statements" and "personalization," relate to grandiosity, and Burns' final cognitive distortion, "emotional reasoning," simply relates to the link between thoughts and emotions. What gives emotional reasoning a malignant cast, though, are the more basic elements of grandiosity and overgeneralization, which lead to dysfunctionality.

Philosophical origins of Ellis' REBT

To engage the philosophy behind CBT, we trace the ideas that influenced Ellis in his development of Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy, then we move to the ideas that informed Burns' Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. As mentioned, these sources include Stoicism (c. 300 B.C.E. - 529 C.E.), Buddhism (c. 500 B.C.E.), Taoism (c. 600-400 B.C.E.) and Existentialism (19th and 20th century).

Aristotle and the Stoics

Ellis develops two central Stoic ideas. The first is that it is our *belief* about our situation that is responsible for our psychological state. The second concerns *agency*, namely, that we do what we can, but if the situation is beyond our control, then it is best to let it go. If nothing else, our *belief* about our situation remains within our control. We can, at the very least, *choose* how to see our situation.

The ancient Greeks described individuals who lived well and flourished throughout their lives as enjoying *eudaimonia*. To better understand the Stoics, it is best to contextualize their philosophy as responding to Aristotle's claim in the *Nicomachean Ethics* ([350 B.C.E.] 1999) that eudaimonia (happiness, the good life) is not accessible to everyone. According to Aristotle, eudaimonia is contingent on factors beyond our control, and it is for this reason that eudaimonia is not accessible to all. Aristotle believed that individuals who are poor or who have bad luck, for instance, may be unable to develop some of the traits that characterize an eudaimon person. Very poor people lack the wherewithal to help their friends, and Aristotle argues that because of their poverty, they may be unable to fully develop the trait of generosity. Others may have enjoyed a long

period of well-being and flourishing only to be struck by bad luck towards the end of their lives. Aristotle's account of eudaimonia is contingent on factors beyond the control of individuals. However, the Stoics and later, Ellis, reject Aristotle's claim.

When considering what a good life entails, the Stoics, like Aristotle before them, believed that the place to start is by asking ourselves what the distinguishing feature of human beings happens to be. Both the Stoics and Aristotle believed that this feature is our ability to reason. Because humans are a part of nature, we are subject to the same transformations that the universe as a whole undergoes. The idea that human beings and the universe constitute the same rational nature is a central Stoic insight. Human nature and nature itself are one and the same because both are guided by reason (*logos*). The Stoics trust that everything that takes place is for the overall good. Just as every organ in our body naturally seeks that which is beneficial to it, humans, in the same manner, along with all living organisms and ecosystems that constitute the universe, seek what is optimal for them.

The Stoics disregard the external goods (luck, money, good looks, for instance) that endangered the achievement of eudaimonia for Aristotle. In this sense, the Stoics, unlike Aristotle, believed that everyone is capable of enjoying eudaimonia. The Stoics acknowledged that external goods were beyond human control, and called them "unnecessaries". External goods were not necessary for eudaimonia since reason is sufficient for a good life. Given that everyone has the capacity to act according to their human nature (reason), eudaimonia may be enjoyed by all who make choices that reflect their rational nature, not on whether they obtain the things desired.

For the Stoics, reason plays a fundamental role in our well-being as humans. Because human nature is characterized by our ability to reason, if the choices we make reflect our rational ability, then we are functioning optimally as human beings. It is through our rational ability that we can make sense of our environment and act accordingly. Our ability to reason allows us to "turn every hindrance in material for itself" (Marcus Aurelius [180 C.E.] 1997), to grow from our experiences, and turn our challenges into opportunities for learning and growth. Central to Stoic doctrine is the idea that living well as humans entails living in agreement with nature, and thus allowing reason to guide us.

Because of their emphasis on reason, the Stoics believed that moderating our emotions was of utmost importance. Only through a balanced temperament can we correct erroneous judgments that result from our emotions. If we are disturbed by a situation, we have to ask ourselves if there is anything we can do about it. What is within our control is the power of our will. If we can do something to make our situation better, then we should act on it. However, if the situation is beyond the power of our will, then it is best for us not to be disturbed by it, given that there is nothing we can do about it. Epictetus ([101 C.E.] 2006) advises us to realize that there are many things beyond our control, such as the

sorrow that may come because of our loss of a person or an object of our affection. In these cases, it makes no sense to continue crying out, wishing things were otherwise (Epictetus [101 C.E.] 2006).

Marcus Aurelius ([180 C.E.] 1997) tells us that only a madman wants a fig during winter. The colloquial saying, "It is what it is" reflects the Stoic insight that we frustrate ourselves unnecessarily by disagreeing with nature and resisting the flow of experience, rather than surrendering to it. Epictetus ([101 C.E.] 2006) admonishes his readers that we would be no better than bratty children if we did not understand this fact about life. Stoic philosophy may be described as an approach to life that "use[s] the setback to reflect another virtue." It understands the problems we encounter in life as opportunities for character development.

Ellis developed the Stoic idea that it is how we think about our situation that shapes our state of being. If, for instance, a close friend were to let us down, we could think about this situation in various ways. We could wish this had never happened and feel angry, betrayed, and miserable. Or we could come to terms with the fact that our friend indeed has let us down, and we could ask ourselves if there is anything we can do to make our situation better. If there is something we can do, then we act accordingly. If there is nothing we can do, then we can accept our loss. This Stoic insight is developed further by Ellis (2007) when he explains that many of us feel angry, resentful, or anxious because we want things to go our way and sometimes they do not. In other words, we tend to insist that the following be true, namely that other people must always treat us well and that our surrounding environment must always be acceptable to us. Ellis (1997) reminds us that unlike the law of gravity, or the first law of thermodynamics, there is no universal law of nature which stipulates that everyone must treat us well and that our environment must always be agreeable to us. We would be justified in holding on to our "musts" only if there was such a law of nature. Given that there is no such law, it sometimes happens that others do not treat us as royalty, nor do we live in palaces. Ellis, then, recommends that we change the way we think about our situation. Instead of demanding that the universe cater to us, we could instead think that it would be *preferable* if others treated us well and our living conditions were agreeable to us, rather than demanding favorable treatment by others and demanding optimal living conditions.

The second Stoic idea that Ellis develops concerns the power and limits of human agency, and this is related to our section on existentialism below. We do what we can, but if the situation is beyond our control, then it is best to accept it for what it is. Most importantly, how we perceive our situation is still within our control.

The Taoists

Ellis developed several Taoist tenets in his formulation of REBT; among these are the Taoist distrust of categorizations, the Taoist understanding of the

process of living as an activity that can be improved with practice, and the Taoist idea of feeling at one with the universe.

Ellis (1997; 2007) credits the Taoist anti-categorization belief as having influenced his development of REBT. Tao is often translated as "path" or "way"; however, trying to define Tao entails a paradox because a tenet of Taoism is that Tao is not something that can be defined. The first verse of *Tao Te Ching* ([c. 600-400 B.C.E.] 1989) states "The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao; the name that can be named is not the eternal name." Central to Taoism is an anti-categorization impetus that rejects definitions and categorizations as ossified misrepresentations of what is vitally changing. For the Taoist, we and the universe are in a constant process of transformation that prevents us from coming to conclusions about the nature of things.

Though admittedly, the human ability to categorize allows us to get along in life better than otherwise, it has its drawbacks. Because of our ability to categorize, we have the tendency to allow our categorizations to trump our experience so that we attempt to fit our experience into our preconceived notions of how things are "supposed" to be. Ellis (1997; 2007) as well as Burns (1999), point out that this is the source of much of our anxiety. Taoism warns us that to name something is to fix it in time, and to fix that which is inherently changing (human beings, our relationships, and our experiences) is sure to bring us trouble. Ellis warns us against making categorical judgments such as "I am a loser," or "He is a jerk," because no one is a complete failure, nor is anyone a complete jerk. Statements such as "I'm supposed to make more money," and "she should be more patient," are examples of how we try to fit ourselves, other people and our experience into preconceived categories. Besides being misguided, categorical judgments can be dehumanizing when we demand that we and others behave according to rigid categories.

Another aspect of Taoism that influenced Ellis is the idea that life is itself an activity at which we fail at times, but at which we can continue to work until the activity becomes effortless and we become one with the activity. We can think of living as something that can be improved with practice. Doing this creates the possibility for us to move away from struggling our way through life toward enjoying the process of living.

The Book of Chuang Tzu ([c.350-300 B.C.E.] 2006) relates the story of Cook Ting, who exemplifies the Taoist notion of *wu wei*. *Wu wei* may be interpreted as the skill of effortless doing, paying attention to the little details so as to nip problems in the bud before they become insurmountable. Cook Ting cut with such effortless skill that he never had to sharpen his knife; he knew exactly where to cut so that his knife never met any resistance. Similarly, it is possible for us, through practice, to move outside of ourselves in the activity of living. This state of enjoyment and well-being has been described as "flow," characteristic of the pleasure we experience from engaged focused concentration and complete immersion in an activity such as dancing, gardening, or playing a sport

(Csikszentmihalyi 1997). This flow is also described as being similar to the playing of children (Dewey 1934). These are moments when we are one with, and become lost in, our activity. Ellis tells us that there is no simple formula for happiness. The best that we can do is to continue practicing and developing the skill of making ourselves less disturbable.

Buddhism

Another important influence on REBT was Buddhism. According to the Dhammapada ([5 C.E.] 1973) a traditional Buddhist scripture from the Theravada school, "the ultimate cause of desire and suffering is a mistaken view of the self." Like the Taoists, Buddhists believe that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence, and ignorance of this fact is what causes our suffering. Buddhism explains that the problem with believing that there is a permanent self is that it results in our taking ourselves far too seriously. When we take our individual selves to be of ultimate importance, we sink into egoism, which, according to Buddhist teachings, leads us to develop strong feelings of desire and aversion. Ignorance of the inherent impermanence of phenomena leads us to exaggerate the identity of those whom we love or despise, forgetting that with the passage of time, our most beloved friends may become our enemies, and those who have wronged us in the past might turn out to be of help to us. Over-concern for the self often leads us to try to control other people or situations that ultimately are out of our control. We feel an unhealthy amount of anxiety wishing for everything to go our way, or we become preoccupied with the concern that all our needs and wants must be satisfied.

The "I" with which we identify is inherently impermanent and has come to be because of other events and people (Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho, Dalai Lama XIV 1995). For example, the pages in a book that we read seem to be solid and independent substances. However, they are inherently impermanent, and came into being through a series of causes and conditions. They were first trees that were cut down and carried to a mill where they were made into paper, which then was shaped into book page format on which words were printed, and these words came from the author of the book that we are reading. Many people were involved in the process of making the pages of the book. Similarly, although as individual people we may seem as though we are independent and permanent beings, we are in fact the product of many experiences.

The sense of a permanent self is felt strongest when we either strongly are attracted to, or repulsed by, someone else, as when we feel that "She loves me!," or "How dare he say that to me?" Instead of automatically reacting with either strong desire or aversion, Buddhism encourages us to feel equanimity and compassion for all beings and to understand that they are, in part, the product of a series of causes and conditions that have led them to behave the way they do. Mindfulness based approaches such as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy, and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction have been successfully combined with

REBT during the last twenty years in large part due to the parallels between the Buddhist and REBT's view of the self (David, Lynn & Das, 2013).

The Buddhist no-self view not only would change our approach as to how we live our lives and how we view our relationships, but also it would change our perception of time itself. When we feel anxiety for what the future might bring, or when we constantly look forward in time, we are, in fact, foregoing the present moment, wishing that we were in some future time when our desires presumably would be fulfilled. This makes for an existence that, according to Kupperman (2007), is "rather like the inner life of greyhounds chasing wooden rabbits around a track." We will never arrive at a point in our lives where we feel at peace if we are constantly striving. By living in this way, we forego the richness of the present, constantly wishing for success in the future.

Existentialism

REBT takes an existential approach to therapy and prescribes active work on the part of the client. Ellis believes that even if we have a history of being a certain type of person, we can choose to work to create deep and lasting changes in the way we think, act, and feel about others, our situation, and ourselves. One of the central existentialist tenets is that human beings are not substances with fixed properties. A person's identity is not defined by nature or culture, nor is there a predetermined essence given to individuals that they must fulfill. Instead, to exist means to create our identity as we live and make choices.

The identity of individuals is created only insofar as they act. For example, people may choose to smoke. Only insofar as they choose to smoke are they smokers. They can choose to act differently, that is, not to smoke rather than to smoke. Individuals are free to act in one way or another, given that humans are not essentially smokers nor non-smokers.

Central to existentialism is the concept of freedom. The projects in which we engage and that shape our lives, such as getting married or choosing a career, are examples of existential choices, choices that we continue to choose. According to existentialist philosophy, when choosing how to live our life, we first choose our values, and then we act based on these values. Although the emphasis in existentialism is on choice, certainly there are facts about us, that is, facticity, such as our context, our culture, and our personal history, that we cannot deny and that do narrow the choices available to us. Facticity acknowledges that although we are free to choose, we are still influenced by our environment. Although both Ellis and Burns believe that individuals are free to change the way they think, they both acknowledge that CBT may not be sufficient for people who suffer from severe mental disorders, so that a combination of psychotherapy along with other medically accepted approaches might be most effective.

An existentialist approach toward freedom and choice emphasizes that individuals need to realize that they do have choices. Ellis emphasizes that his clients can choose the ways in which they view situations that result in their being

anxious, angry, or depressed. Both existentialism and REBT work with the assumption that each one of us is free to choose to view our challenges in a different light, to react positively about what is within our control, not to be anxious or worried about what is beyond our control, and to work at changing the irrational beliefs that cause our suffering.

Philosophical Origins of Burns' CBT

Besides the philosophies (here we speak of philosophy in the broad sense of the word, as an approach to life) that influenced Ellis, philosophy was also helpful to the development of CBT as developed by Beck (1963; 1967; 1976), and Burns ([1980] 2009; 1999), who had their clients examine their patterns of irrational thinking. Much of the anxiety and depression we feel is, in fact, because we maintain irrational thoughts or conclusions.

The systematic analysis of reasoning began when Aristotle developed categorical logic and scrutinized arguments for validity (Smith 2007; Hurley 2008; Engel 1980). Aristotle identified thirteen informal fallacies and this list has continued to grow since his time. A fallacy is a mistaken way of reasoning; it may result from defects in arguments such as false premises, faulty patterns of arguing, or the creation of an illusion that makes mistaken arguments appear to be correct. Let us take the following argument, for example:

> Nothing is better than everlasting love.
> A bowl of salted peanuts is better than nothing.
> Therefore, a bowl of salted peanuts is better than everlasting love.

On the face of it, the argument above appears to have a logical structure, that is, the conclusion seems to follow from the premises. Some people will accept this argument, while others may not agree completely, although they may not know exactly why this argument seems odd. The above argument commits the fallacy of equivocation, namely, making use of the same word "nothing," but using it to denote two different meanings, the first being "nothing else that exists" and the second being "not having any other food". Informal fallacies are very common, and here we will analyze the two that stand out as sources of anxiety and depression.

The first fallacy commonly is known as a *false dichotomy*. This fallacy assumes that there are only two choices, that things can either be one way or another, when, in fact, there are more than the two assumed possibilities. In time of war, for example, the leader of a country may address the public with a message that says: "You are either with us or against us. Other countries are either our allies in this war or they are our enemies." Besides having detrimental social consequences, the false dichotomy fallacy easily can become a source of anxiety, anger, or depression in our personal lives. Burns (1999:42) calls this "all or

nothing thinking," and he describes it as the type of reasoning that makes people "see things in black-and-white categories," so that if, for example, individuals fall short of perfect performances, they spiral into depression and see themselves as complete failures. The false dichotomy fallacy mistakenly assumes the existence of two absolute categories. When we find that a co-worker whom we believed to be our friend actually was spreading rumors about us, we label him a bad person and declare him our enemy with no chance for redemption. False dichotomy reasoning assumes that people are either 100 per cent good or 100 per cent bad with nothing in between. Not only is this way of thinking illogical, but holding this irrational belief leads to unnecessary suffering.

A second logical fallacy that Burns (1999:42) emphasizes is "magnification or minimization," commonly known as the slippery slope fallacy. This fallacy takes place when the conclusion of an argument rests on an assumed chain reaction that presumably will take place. However, there are no concrete reasons to believe that the chain reaction must take place. The following quotation was taken from one of our student's assignments for his introduction to logic class: "A personal example of such a fallacy would be when my friend emotionally broke down after failing a test and said: "My life is over. I just failed my test, so now I have a bad grade in the class and will probably fail the class. It's going to be on my [transcript] forever and when I apply for medical school, not one school will take me. I'll end up working as a janitor in a prison and get stabbed."

This anguished student went from failing a test to getting stabbed. Burns explains that we commit the same reasoning mistake when we jump to negative conclusions about events or other people when there are no definite facts to support our conclusion.

By not questioning their irrational beliefs and conclusions, individuals suffer from anxiety, anger, or depression. Both Ellis and Burns encouraged their patients actively to dispute their assumptions and to question their conclusions. Both took philosophical insights and developed concrete techniques to help their patients overcome their neuroses. The following section examines some of these techniques.

Techniques Developed to Implement CBT

Burns ([1980] 2009:63) developed a simple and logical paper and pencil technique that he calls the "triple column technique" for individuals to dispute the negative assumptions that they hold. The first column in the figure holds the "automatic thoughts," or "AT," that come to the mind of the troubled individual. The second column, the "cognitive distortion" or "CD" column, refers to the 10 cognitive distortions given in Figure 1. The advantage of this technique is that individuals using the technique have to think about the incorrect assumptions they are making and why they are not accurate. They need to understand why they are distorted views of reality at column two, and then they need to correct these

distorted views of reality at column three, the "rational response or "RR" column. The relief of moving from a distorted view that threatens individuals to a more realistic view that does not threaten becomes evident to those using this technique.

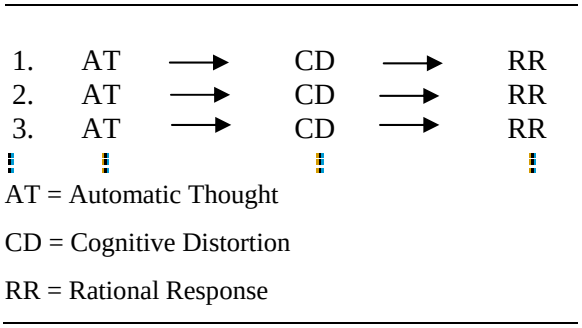

Figure 2. Burns' Triple Column Technique

Conclusion

In this study, we have examined the philosophical roots of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, an effective non-pharmaceutical treatment for the mood disorders of depression, anger, and anxiety that damage the life-satisfaction of very large numbers of individuals in the United States and worldwide. The bases of CBT are located in the Stoic, Buddhist, Taoist, and Existentialist philosophical traditions. Our focus has been on Albert Ellis and David Burns, whose writings in particular have been influential in the development of CBT. In our study of key writings of Ellis and Burns, we noticed that Ellis focused on grandiosity in particular as being an underlying factor in mood disorders, while Burns emphasized overgeneralization as being the underlying factor in mood disorders, although both do consider both factors in their extensive writings. The potential for the philosophically based insights of CBT, as well as the writings of the philosophers themselves to assist individuals to lead lives of greater life satisfaction and happiness remains extraordinarily large.

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