THE PHILOSOPHY OF COGNITIVE–BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT)

Stoic Philosophy as Rational and Cognitive Psychotherapy

Donald Robertson

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I would like to thank Socrates for being such a wise old sport and my wife Mandy for being so very un-Xanthippe-like in most respects, and for her love and support. Some credit is also due to Daisy Robertson, our cat, for agreeing to stay off my laptop long enough to avoid new Greek words being invented by the ritual movements involved in her making a cosy nest on the keyboard.

I am a world authority, let me be clear, on *neither* cognitive therapy *nor* classical philosophy, but I *am* in the fairly unusual position of knowing a decent amount about both. So I beg the indulgence of prospective critics, who might take offence at my having presumed to know it all, in an impossibly big subject. I hope it is not necessary, though, to extend the defence given by Epictetus: that you obviously do not know what you are talking about or you would have spotted all my other mistakes as well. I do need to thank Socrates, and the Stoics, though, for conceding their fallibility sufficiently to legitimize my own presumption in writing about virtues that I do not actually possess to any notable extent, except humility, of course, and possibly wisdom and courage, etc.

The publisher's house referencing style has been used for most texts except the Stoic classics of Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus. In

order to facilitate cross-referencing against the original texts and translations these have been referenced by citing the passages in question, rather than page numbers from translations, for example, as "(*Discourses*, 1.2.3)". All quotations from Epictetus' *Discourses*, *Handbook*, and *Fragments* are taken from Robin Hard's translation unless otherwise specified (Epictetus, 1995). All quotations from Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* are taken from Gregory Hays' translation unless otherwise specified (Marcus Aurelius, 2003). Likewise, all quotations from Plato are taken from John M. Cooper's edited *Complete Works* unless otherwise specified (Plato, 1997). Where necessary, certain translations have been quoted from other sources, as indicated in the text.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Donald Robertson is a psychotherapist and trainer who specializes in the treatment of anxiety and the use of cognitive–behavioural approaches and clinical hypnotherapy. He is the author of a number of articles on philosophy and psychotherapy in various therapy journals and magazines, and the editor of the book, *The Discovery of Hypnosis*, the complete writings of James Braid, the founder of hypnotherapy (2009). Donald has a degree in Mental Philosophy from Aberdeen University and a Masters in Psychoanalytic Studies from Sheffield University's Centre for Psychotherapeutic Studies; he is a UKCP registered psychotherapist.

Donald's background in academic philosophy has led him to appreciate the relationship between modern psychotherapy and ancient philosophy, a subject that he has frequently written about and lectured upon in training courses and professional conferences over the years. He originates from Ayr, on the west coast of Scotland, *wham ne'er a toon surpasses for honest men and bonnie lasses*, allegedly. He lives, however, in England—almost as good. He is kept company by his cat and his wife, called Daisy and Mandy, respectively.

FOREWORD

Prof. Stephen Palmer

Cognitive behavioural therapies are at the cutting edge of modern psychological therapeutic interventions. They are evidence based and, therefore, are underpinned by much research. In The United Kingdom (UK) the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has recommended cognitive behavioural therapy for depression and anxiety-related disorders such as panic attacks, obsessive–compulsive behaviour, body dysmorphic disorder, and post traumatic stress disorder (e.g., NICE, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009). It is no surprise that this interests stakeholders wishing to provide cost-effective psychological therapies to their customers, that is, the public, in order to improve well-being and reduce financial expenditure. In the UK, the government has taken the next logical step and funded cognitive–behavioural therapy training as part of the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme. Stressed, depressed, and anxious citizens cost countries billions of pounds, according to the research data, and, understandably, reducing absenteeism from work due to psychological illness is an attractive target to focus on. An effective IAPT programme can benefit both the country and the individual.

Cognitive–behavioural therapy has become one of the main approaches for dealing effectively with a wide range of psychological disorders, and this has led to a large increase in the training of health professionals in this approach, especially within the UK. Key handbooks available to trainees, based on Dr Aaron Temkin Beck's cognitive therapy (Beck, 1976), or Dr Albert Ellis's rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT) (Ellis, 1958), only briefly, if at all, cover the historical roots of these therapies. Ellis, in his publications, is often more explicit about the early origins of REBT in comparison to the books on cognitive and cognitive–behavioural therapy.

Yet, for many of us, something is missing from most of the literature. What has been needed is a book that covers the underlying philosophy of the cognitive–behavioural therapies in much greater depth. This book, on the *Philosophy of Cognitive–Behavioural Therapy*, by Donald Robertson provides us with the missing link between the theory and the philosophy. This book takes us on a historical journey through millennia, and highlights the relevant philosophies and the ideas of the individual philosophers that can inform modern cognitive–behavioural therapies. This book also includes some therapeutic techniques that seem to be modern, yet were developed and written about many years ago. It is a fascinating read. The *Philosophy of Cognitive–Behavioural Therapy* could be considered as either a prequel or a sequel to the standard textbook read by a trainee or experienced cognitive–behavioural or rational emotive practitioner who wants to understand these approaches to therapy within a historical framework.

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July 2010

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Introduction: philosophy and psychotherapy

> "Philosophy does not promise to secure anything external for man . . . the subject-matter of *the art of living* is each person's own life"
>
> (Epictetus, *Discourses*, 1.15.2, my italics)

Why should modern psychotherapists be interested in philosophy, especially *ancient* philosophy? Why should *philosophers* be interested in psychotherapy? There exists a kind of mutual attraction between what are today two thoroughly distinct disciplines. Indeed, it was perhaps not always the case that they *were* distinct. Ancient philosophy was frequently concerned with what the French philosopher Michel Foucault has called a *technê tou biou*, or an "art of living" (see Foucault, 1986). According to Sellars, Foucault's Greek term does not seem to be a direct quotation from the classics but rather a paraphrase, drawing mainly upon the Stoics (Sellars, 2003, p. 5). As the Stoic philosopher, Seneca, writes,

> Philosophy teaches us to act, not to speak; it exacts of every man that he should live according to his own standards, that his life

> should not be out of harmony with his words, and that, further, his inner life should be of one hue and not out of harmony with all his activities. This, I say, is the highest duty and the highest proof of wisdom—that deed and word should be in accord, that a man should be equal to himself under all conditions, and always the same. [Seneca, 1917–1925, p. 133]

Philosophy, to a large extent, has always been about transforming the life of the philosopher, in a manner broadly resembling modern psychotherapy or self-help. As far back as Socrates, portrayed in Plato's *Gorgias*, philosophy has been compared to the art of medicine for the mind or soul, that is, what we now call "psychotherapy". The behavioural psychologist B. F. Skinner once complained,

> Greek physics and biology are now of historical interest only (no modern physicist would turn to Aristotle for help), but the dialogues of Plato are still assigned to students and cited as if they threw light on human behavior. Aristotle could not have understood a page of modern physics or biology, but Socrates and his friends would have little trouble in following most current discussions of human affairs. [Skinner, 1971, pp. 5–6]

However, arguably, the relevance of ancient Socratic philosophy to modern psychotherapy is not simply an embarrassing sign of slow progress in the field of scientific psychology but, rather, an indication that many concepts and strategies effective in helping people manage their emotions are fairly simple, and even perennial. (I would wager, incidentally, that a time-travelling Aristotle, or Socrates, would have been able to make his way through most of Skinner's own books fairly easily and to have more than held his own in a pretty interesting debate with him.) In any case, as Joseph Wolpe and Arnold Lazarus, two of the founders of behaviour therapy, wrote,

> While the modern behavior therapist deliberately applies principles of learning to this therapeutic operations, empirical behavior therapy is probably as old as civilization—if we consider civilization as having begun when man first did things to further the well-being of other men. From the time that this became a feature of human life there must have been occasions when a man complained of his

ills to another who advised or persuaded him of a course of action. In a broad sense, this could be called behavior therapy whenever the behavior itself was conceived as the therapeutic agent. Ancient writings contain innumerable behavioral prescriptions that accord with this broad conception of behavior therapy. [Wolpe & Lazarus, 1966, pp. 1–2]

Indeed, ancient literature can be seen as prescribing both *behavioural* and *cognitive* remedies, which bear a striking resemblance to some of those found in modern cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT). (Throughout this book, I will subsume cognitive and behavioural therapies in general under the heading of psychotherapy, although there are those who have preferred not to use this terminology.)

By reconsidering the received wisdom concerning the history of these closely related subjects, we can learn a great deal about both philosophy and psychotherapy, under whose broad heading I also include potentially *solitary* pursuits such as "self-help" and "personal development".

- *Philosophers* can gain insight into how modern evidence-based psychotherapy might provide ideas for the practical application of familiar philosophical wisdom.
- Psychotherapists are likely to discover new practical techniques, strategies, and concepts, which may come as a surprise, as they are often consistent with modern therapy models, but relatively neglected by them.
- Moreover, both therapists and philosophers may also discover the possibility of fitting the existing theory and practice of their profession into the framework of a larger philosophical vision of the universe and man's place within it, and even find a whole *way of life* consistent with their professional activities.

It (almost) goes without saying that ancient philosophical therapy techniques are *not* based upon randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and lack any direct empirical support of this kind. That may sit uncomfortably with modern proponents of evidence-based practice in psychotherapy. I should emphasize that I am not about to propose that empirically-supported treatments, or principles, should be abandoned in favour of a therapy that predates the Book

of Revelations. However, as we shall see, modern psychotherapy is already indebted to certain aspects of classical philosophy, and this common ground may provide inspiration for deriving other concepts and techniques from ancient literature, which may themselves be put to the test empirically in due course.

The origins of philosophical therapy

Many modern psychotherapists appear to think that Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, was effectively the *first* psychotherapist. Those who look a little further into the history of the subject will realize that Freud not only had contemporary rivals, such as Pierre Janet and Paul Dubois, but had himself trained, albeit briefly, in hypnotic psychotherapy. Freud visited the two leading centres of his day, attending the Salpétrière lectures of Charcot and the "Nancy school" of Bernheim. Modern psychotherapy first began to coalesce toward the end of the nineteenth century, around the dominant schools of hypnotherapy. Hypnotic psychotherapy itself originated over half a century prior to psychoanalysis, in 1841, when the Scottish surgeon James Braid first attempted to take the therapeutic practices of Mesmerism and reinterpret them in the light of Scottish realist ("common sense") philosophy of mind, substituting the psychological laws of association, habit, sympathy and suggestion, etc., for the supernatural theory of "animal magnetism". That is, broadly speaking, how I conceive of the origins of modern psychotherapy as a branch of scientific medicine (Robertson, 2009).

Of course, there may also be a vague recognition that psychotherapeutic practices resemble in some way the much older *religious* theological notions of pastoral religious counselling and confession. However, many *non*-Christians are likely to perceive Christian theology as doctrinaire in a way that somewhat restricts the value of any analogy with modern psychotherapy. Some therapists are aware that ancient Oriental practices such as chanting or meditation may serve a kind of therapeutic purpose, but these are often shrouded in exotic symbolism, and religious ideas alien, and often inscrutable, to our culture. There may even be a sense that throughout European history various authors may have hinted at obscure self-help techniques or contemplative exercises, fragmentary and

fleeting, which they appear to have stumbled across in seeking a balm for their own troubled minds. In the literature of theology, secular self-help, philosophy, biography, fiction, and poetry, nuggets of therapeutic advice, concepts, and even psychological exercises can be found. For instance, in the *Remedies for Love* of Ovid, the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius of Loyola, the *Consolations* of Boethius, in Montaigne and Bacon's *Essays*, Spinoza's *Ethica*, Bertrand Russell's *The Conquest of Happiness*, and Tom Wolfe's novel *A Man in Full*, to pick just a handful of the most pertinent examples.

However, there is an important sense in which psychotherapy, even as we know it today, can trace its roots much farther back, perhaps all the way back into prehistory, before such ideas were committed to writing. Modern psychotherapy, especially in the form of cognitive–behavioural therapy (CBT), the most "modern" of our contemporary schools, can also be viewed as part of an ancient therapeutic tradition derived from the informal philosophical circle surrounding Socrates (470–399 bc), and, therefore, stretching back to Athens in the fifth century bc. Of the various schools of Socratic philosophy, the one that bears the strongest therapeutic orientation is undoubtedly Stoicism, especially that of the later Roman schools. According to Galen, physician to the Stoic Emperor Marcus Aurelius, Chrysippus, one of the founders of Stoicism, emphasized the role of philosopher as that of "physician of the soul", someone whom we would now refer to as a *psychotherapist*. (Chrysippus as reported by Galen, quoted in Sellars, 2003, p. 68.)

Out of the various contemporary schools of psychotherapy, Socratic philosophy in general and the Stoic school in particular definitely bear the strongest similarity to cognitive–behavioural therapy (CBT). Most forms of cognitive–behavioural therapy are indebted to Aaron Beck's cognitive therapy approach, which styles its method itself on the Socratic method, loosely construed. "Cognitive therapy uses primarily the Socratic method" (Beck, Emery, & Greenberg, 2005, p. 167). Narrowing our focus even further, the Stoicism of Epictetus and the rational–emotive behaviour therapy (REBT) of Albert Ellis, a major precursor of CBT, are perhaps the two schools of thought through which the ancient and modern traditions of psychotherapy may come closest to meeting, and between them a bridge may perhaps be built which can allow a commerce of ideas to flow between ancient and modern traditions.

To return to the questions with which we began: *why*, then, should philosophers and psychotherapists be concerned with one another? First of all, the difference between what the ancients did and what modern therapy does lies largely, but not exclusively, in its *scope*. Philosophy answers a craving for something more expansive; it embraces the *totality* of things through their *essence*. It has the capacity to raise the head of modern psychotherapy and tilt its gaze upwards toward the vastness around us, perhaps even the whole of time and space, as Socrates and the Stoics, literally, recommended.

It is precisely this "bigger" philosophical picture that, I think, the psychotherapist-*qua*-psychotherapist must wrestle with at some point in his or her career. When the therapist goes home from work, leaving his clients behind, when he lies in bed at night, he must wonder about certain things. He must ask himself what therapy *means*. What role it plays in *life*. Whether its truths must stay locked up in the consulting room when the lights are switched off, and the doors locked shut overnight, or whether they spread and grow, touching other areas of life, colouring things as a whole. How does a therapist relate to God? How does he relate to the *absence* of God? What does he *make* of life itself? What happens when, in quiet contemplation, he puts *himself* on the treatment couch, or when he attempts to think of his relationship with the universe itself, in its totality, using the intellectual tools of his trade? What is the *point* of doing psychotherapy? These are the philosophical questions that must surely stir in the minds of many professional psychotherapists, and which philosophy can at least strive to answer.

Recent decades have seen growing interest in movement called "philosophical practice" (Marinoff, 2002) and other attempts to promote philosophy outside of the academic institutions as something that "ordinary people" do in cafés, or apply to their own life problems in the form of individual counselling or group sessions with a quasi-therapeutic style. Even many academic philosophers appear to crave, quite understandably, a return to the days when philosophical discourse was meant to be rooted in corresponding behavioural and emotional transformation and not *merely* an "academic" pursuit abstracted from any practical application. The ancients conceived of the ideal philosopher as a veritable *warrior* of the mind, a spiritual hero akin to Hercules himself, but since the demise of the

Hellenistic schools, the philosopher has become something more bookish, not a warrior, but a mere *librarian* of the mind.

James Bond Stockdale

According to Jim Stockdale, the English philosopher Alfred North Whitehead once said that if Plato were to return to life today, he would first ask to be introduced not to an academic, but to a *boxing* champion (Stockdale, 1995, p. 17). If the Stoic philosopher Epictetus had lived in modern times, the person he would have wanted to be introduced to would probably be *Stockdale* himself, whose story deserves to be mentioned here as a striking example of ancient Stoicism in the face of modern adversity.

> On September 9, 1965, I flew at 500 knots right into a flak trap, at tree-top level, in a little A-4 airplane—the cockpit walls not even three feet apart—which I couldn't steer after it was on fire, its control system shot out. After ejection I had about thirty seconds to make my last statement in freedom before I landed in the main street of a little [North Vietnamese] village right ahead. And so help me, I whispered to myself: "Five years down there [in captivity], at least. I'm leaving the world of technology and entering the world of Epictetus." [Stockdale, 1995, p. 189]

At the outbreak of the USA's involvement in the Vietnam War, James Stockdale (1923–2005) was captured by a mob of fifteen villagers who beat him to within an inch of his life, snapping his leg, and leaving him permanently crippled. The irony, not lost on Stockdale, was that he had lost the use of his left leg, just like the crippled slave, Epictetus, whose ancient *Handbook* (*Enchiridion*) of Stoic philosophy he had previously devoured after studying philosophy as a Masters student at Stanford University.

Stockdale was taken prisoner by the North Vietnamese and incarcerated in Hanoi where, as the highest-ranking US naval officer, the only wing commander to survive an ejection over enemy territory, he assumed charge of a community of captured soldiers, which, at its largest, numbered in excess of 400 men. Stockdale said he never actually saw a Vietnamese POW camp as portrayed in the movies. He was imprisoned in an old French colonial "dungeon"

which formed part of a large communist prison called *Hao Lo*, or the "Hanoi Hilton", described as part psychiatric clinic, part reform school. The Americans, kept alongside Vietnamese criminals, were subjected to a constant programme of attempted psychological reprogramming by professional torturers and prison officers. During that time, as a prisoner of war, for *seven and a half years*, Stockdale spent four years in isolation, two years in leg irons, and was tortured fifteen times, in a manner ("taking the ropes") not unlike crucifixion.

> And if I were asked, "What are the benefits of a Stoic life?" I would probably say, "It is an ancient and honorable package of advice on how to stay out of the clutches of those who are trying to get you on the hook, trying to give you a feeling of obligation, trying to get moral leverage on you, to force you to bend to their will." Because I first reaped its benefits in an extortionist prison of torture, I could go on and say, "It's a formula for maintaining self-respect and dignity in defiance of those who would break your spirit for their own end." [Stockdale, 1995, p. 177]

Stockdale's experience obviously bears comparison with the better-known story of Victor Frankl, a Jewish psychiatrist who was incarcerated in Auschwitz concentration camp during the Second World War, and published his bestselling self-help book *Man's Search for Meaning*, after his release (Frankl, 1959). However, although both men arrived at similar conclusions regarding their plight, Stockdale was already aware of Stoic philosophy before being captured, and, therefore, made explicit use of it in coping with his extreme circumstances.

Throughout his time in captivity, Stockdale drew upon the Stoic philosophy he had studied, which suddenly appeared to him to be of more value than anything else he could imagine. He called the many portions of Epictetus's *Handbook* that he had learnt by heart and memorized his "consolation" and "secret weapon" during captivity.

> I'm not the only prisoner who discovered that so-called practical academic exercises on "how to do things" were useless in that fix. The classics have a way of saving you the trouble of prolonged experiences. You don't have to go out and buy pop psychology

> self-help books. When you read the classics in the humanities, you become aware that the big ideas have been around a long time, despite the fact that they are often served up today in modern psychological "explanations" of human action as novel and "scientific". [Stockdale, 1995, p. 24]

On his release, Stockdale became a well-known military hero, even campaigning as a vice-presidential candidate, supporting the independent Ross Perot, in a US election. He was one of the most highly-decorated officers in the USA's naval history, and spent his later years lecturing on the relevance of Stoic philosophy to modern military life. A collection of his talks and essays was published in his book, *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot* (1995). It is surprising that more frequent reference is not made to Stockdale's story by cognitive–behavioural therapists, who claim to derive their inspiration from the same philosophical source, ancient Stoicism. I hope this short digression helps to illustrate how Stoic philosophy, like Frankl's existential psychotherapy, has been applied even to the most extraordinary psychological challenges imaginable in the modern world.

Summary

Critics might say it is actually a healthy sign that so little attention has been given to the historical and philosophical origins of CBT, because it is inherently a forward-looking, scientific approach to psychotherapy. Just because ideas are very old, it does not *necessarily* mean that they are particularly valid or useful today. However, there a number of legitimate reasons for exploring this matter in more detail. As Stockdale wrote,

> Most of what Epictetus has to say to me is "right on" for modern times. Will Durant [an American philosopher] says that human nature changes, if at all, with "geological leisureliness". According to me, not much has happened to it since the days of Homer. Epictetus lived a tough life: born a slave, crippled by a cruel master, went from boy to man in the murderous violence of the household of a totally indulgent Emperor Nero. And he read human nature across a spectrum like this, and by the standards of my spectrum it rings with authenticity. [*ibid.*, p. 180]

Indeed, a handful of cognitive–behavioural therapists have already attempted to make some headway in the direction of increasing dialogue concerning the relationship between Hellenistic philosophy and REBT or CBT (Brookshire, 2007; Herbert, 2004; McGlinchey, 2004; Montgomery, 1993; Reiss, 2003; Robertson, 2005; Still & Dryden, 1999).

Moreover, there are still therapeutic concepts and techniques to be found in classical literature that have good "face validity", appear consistent with CBT, and may well deserve empirical investigation in their own right. Nevertheless, in his recent article, Herbert, while defending the notion that comparisons between ancient philosophy and modern psychotherapy are interesting and valuable in their own right, has called into question the extent to which correlation between their respective ideas can be taken as evidence of causation, that is, of a historical influence (Herbert, 2004). While I agree that the question of influence is a complex one, and perhaps something of a *diversion* from the bigger issues, in the following chapters I will discuss the extent to which the founders of both REBT and cognitive therapy have explicitly stated, in some of their principal texts, that Stoicism and other ancient philosophical traditions were regarded by them as providing the "philosophical origins" of their approach. For example, "The philosophical origins of cognitive therapy can be traced back to the Stoic philosophers" (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979, p. 8).

Hence, some of the key points of the following text might be summarized as follows, for the benefit of readers requiring an overview of what may seem a complex and somewhat interdisciplinary subject matter,

- The origins of modern cognitive–behavioural therapy can be traced, through early twentieth century rational psychotherapists, back to the ancient therapeutic practices of Socratic philosophy, especially Roman Stoicism.
- The notion of Stoicism as a kind of "intellectualism", opposed to emotion, is a popular *misconception*. Stoicism has traditionally attempted to accommodate emotion, especially the primary philosophical emotion of rational love toward existence as a whole.

- Ancient philosophy offers a clear analogy with modern CBT and provides many concepts, strategies, and techniques of practical value in self-help and psychotherapy.
- The contemplation of universal determinism, of the transience or impermanence of things, including our own mortality, and the meditative vision of the world seen from above, or the cosmos conceived of as a whole, constitute specific meditative and visualization practices within the field of ancient Hellenistic psychotherapy.
- Contemplation of the good qualities ("virtues") found in those we admire and in our ideal conception of philosophical enlightenment and moral strength (the "Sage") provides us with a means of modelling excellence and deriving precepts or maxims to help guide our own actions.
- The rehearsal, memorization, and recall of short verbal formulae, precepts, dogmas, sayings, or maxims resembles the modern practice of autosuggestion, affirmation, or the use of verbal coping statements in CBT.
- The objective analysis of our experience into its value-free components, by suspending emotive judgements and rhetoric, constitutes a means of cognitive restructuring involving the disputation of faulty thinking, or cognitive distortion. By sticking to the facts, we counter the emotional disturbance caused by our own "internal rhetoric".
- Mindfulness of our own faculty of judgement, and internal dialogue, in the "here and now", can be seen as analogous to the use of mindfulness meditation imported into modern CBT from Buddhist meditation practices, but has the advantage of being native to Stoicism, the philosophical precursor of CBT, and to European culture and language.
- The enormous literary value, the sheer *beauty*, of many of the classics with which we are concerned marks them out as being of special interest to many therapists and clients, just as it has marked them out for many thousands of previous readers throughout the intervening centuries.
- Socratic philosophy has a broader scope than modern psychotherapy, it looks at the bigger picture, and allows us the opportunity to place such therapy within the context of an overall "art of living", or philosophy of life.

The modern *industrialization* of psychotherapy, the division of the therapist's labour, has compartmentalized it in a manner that is bound to cause certain contradictions. What was once a lifestyle and calling, a vocation in the true sense of the word, has now largely been degraded into a mere "job". By nature, however, we do *not* merely study the cure of human suffering in order to alleviate it, but also to understand and transform *ourselves* and our relationship with life itself. Perhaps, as the ancients seemed to believe, the philosopher–therapist must first transform his *own* way of life, making it a living example of his views, in order to be able to help others. By contrast, if the goal of the "rational" or "philosophical" therapist is merely to do his job and leave it all behind him at the weekend, to treat what we call "psychotherapy" as just another profession, then perhaps that is not a very *rational* or *philosophical* goal.

Philosophers and psychotherapists have a great deal to talk about, and a better common ground is required on which the two traditions can meet each other and exchange ideas. I hope that this study of the philosophical precursors of modern cognitive–behavioural therapy will help to clarify and strengthen the basis for further dialogue between philosophers and therapists in the future.

Contented with little

Contented with little and joyous with more,
Whenever I meet with Sorrow and Care,
I gave them a slap, as they're creeping along,
With a cup o' good ale and an auld Scottish song.

I oft' scratch the elbow o' troublesome Thought;
But Man is a soldier, and Life must be fought.
My mirth and good humour are coin in my pouch,
And my Freedom's my Lairdship no monarch dare touch.

A twelve-month o' trouble, should my fortune fall,
A night o' good fellowship fixes it all:
When at the blithe end of our journey at last,
Who the Hell ever thinks o' the road he has passed?

Blind Chance, let her stumble and stagger on her way,
Be it to me, or from me, even, let the slut stray!
Come Ease, or come Travail, come Pleasure or Pain,
My worst words are:–"Welcome, and welcome again!"

[Robert Burns, 1794]

(My translation into Standard English. Burns' poem illustrates the influence of Stoic and Epicurean themes in the poetry, even, of the late eighteenth century.)

O God, give us
serenity to accept what cannot be changed
courage to change what should be changed
and wisdom to distinguish one from the other.
[Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Serenity Prayer*,
in Pietsch, 1990, p. 9].

They say that Socrates bumped into the Greek general Xenophon in a narrow lane and put his stick across it, and prevented him from passing by, asking him whereabouts all kinds of essential "goods" were sold. And once Xenophon had answered him, he asked him further where *men* were made good and became morally accomplished. And as Xenophon did not know the answer, he said, "Follow me, then, and learn." And from this time forth, Xenophon became a follower of Socrates. [Laertius, 1853, p. 75, retranslated for this edition, based on Yonge's translation].

> The time will come when, in order to perfect ourselves morally and rationally, we will prefer to have recourse to Xenophon's *Memorabilia* [of Socrates] rather than the Bible, and we will use Montaigne and Horace as guides along the path which leads to the understanding of the sage, and of Socrates, the most imperishable of them all. [Nietzsche, 1996]

PART I

PHILOSOPHY AND COGNITIVE–BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT)

CHAPTER ONE

The "philosophical origins" of CBT

Cognitive–behavioural therapy (CBT) is the predominant school of modern evidence-based psychological therapy. As the name implies, it employs both cognitive and behavioural interventions. Unfortunately, this name belies the fact that CBT is concerned with helping clients to deal with irrational or disturbing *emotions*, and to cultivate rational, healthy, and proportionate ones in their stead. The terms "cognitive" and "rational" also suggest to some people's minds that CBT must be a form of *rationalization*, or that it neglects emotion, intuition, or practical experience. However, in this sense of the word, CBT is probably *anti*-rationalist, in its emphasis upon the value of behavioural experiments and empirical observation. In other words, CBT emphasizes that, in so far as it is reasonable to do so, beliefs should be tested out in practice, in the laboratory of our personal experience.

Professor Keith Dobson, one of the leading authorities in the field of CBT, offers the following account of its "philosophical bases", that is, the common assumptions shared by variations of cognitive–behavioural therapy.

1. Cognitive activity affects behavior.
2. Cognitive activity may be monitored and altered.
3. Desired behavior change may be affected through cognitive change. (Dobson & Dozois, 2001, p. 4)

Moreover,

> A number of current approaches to therapy fall within the scope of cognitive–behavioral therapy as it is defined above. These approaches all share a theoretical perspective assuming that internal covert processes called "thinking" or "cognition" occur, and that cognitive events may mediate behavior change. [*ibid*., p. 6]

If we accept this definition, there are several different forms of therapy that potentially fall within the "broad church" of CBT. The two most influential and commonly cited ones are the rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT) of Albert Ellis and the cognitive therapy of Aaron Beck. Dobson includes a number of other approaches that combine cognitive interventions, which modify the clients' thinking or internal dialogue, with elements of earlier behaviour therapy. Moreover, this "philosophical basis", as Dobson puts it, is common to several schools of Hellenistic philosophy, Stoicism in particular, which almost certainly meet the criteria cited above for classification as species of cognitive–behavioural therapy.

Moreover, as Beck's approach is probably the most influential one in the current field of cognitive–behavioural therapy, it may be helpful to delineate the components which his seminal cognitive therapy of depression comprises (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979, p. 4). The client is helped by the cognitive therapist to do the following:

1. To monitor his negative automatic thoughts, or cognitions;
2. To evaluate the relationship between his thoughts, feelings, and actions;
3. To carefully evaluate the evidence for and against his distorted or maladaptive cognitions;
4. To generate alternative cognitions and to substitute them for the negative ones;
5. To identify and modify underlying dysfunctional assumptions and beliefs which predispose him to negative automatic thoughts.

These and other components of established cognitive therapy can be identified easily in the practices of various schools of classical philosophy, as we shall see, especially Roman Stoicism.

Stoicism as the philosophy of REBT and CBT

Throughout this book, I shall draw attention to the relationship between CBT and Stoic philosophical therapy. It is important to emphasize that both Aaron Beck and Albert Ellis, often regarded as the main pioneers of CBT, have stressed the role of Stoicism as a philosophical precursor of their respective approaches. There is only a relatively vague appreciation of this fact among many therapists, however, so it is worth drawing attention to the key passages in their writings.

Ellis has clearly stated that "much of the theory of REBT was derived from philosophy rather than psychology" (Ellis & MacLaren, 2005, p. 16). His first major publication on rational therapy, *Reason & Emotion in Psychotherapy* (1962), describes the philosophical basis of the approach as the principle that a person is rarely affected emotionally by outside things but, rather, "he is affected by his perceptions, attitudes, or internalized sentences *about* outside things and events" (Ellis, 1962, p. 54).

> This principle, which I have inducted from many psychotherapeutic sessions with scores of patients during the last several years, was originally discovered and stated by the ancient Stoic philosophers, especially Zeno of Citium (the founder of the school), Chrysippus (his most influential disciple), Panaetius of Rhodes (who introduced Stoicism into Rome), Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius. The truths of Stoicism were perhaps best set forth by Epictetus, who, in the first century AD wrote in the *Enchiridion*: "Men are disturbed not by things, but by the views which they take of them". Shakespeare, many centuries later, rephrased this thought in *Hamlet*: "There's nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so". [*ibid*.]

As it happens, this well-known quotation from *Hamlet* may stem from Shakespeare's own reading of the Stoics, particularly Seneca. Moreover, earlier in the same book, Ellis states,

> Many of the principles incorporated in the theory of rational–emotive psychotherapy are not new; some of them, in fact, were originally stated several thousand years ago, especially by the Greek and Roman Stoic philosophers (such as Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius) and by some of the ancient Taoist and Buddhist thinkers. What probably is new is the application to psychotherapy of viewpoints [such as these] that were first propounded in radically different contexts. [*ibid.*, p. 35]

In a later article specifically examining the relationship between REBT and Stoicism, Still and Dryden comment that the saying of Epictetus quoted above has become a "hallmark" of REBT and is "even given to clients during the early sessions, as a succinct way of capturing the starting point" (Still & Dryden, 1999, p. 146). They go on to say that although the specific therapeutic remedies found in REBT and Stoicism may differ in some respects, they both emphasize the role of responsibility, rationality, and self-disciplined observation of one's mind as a means of modifying irrational emotions and achieving psychological well-being (*ibid.*, p. 149). Hence, in his popular self-help book, *A Guide to Rational Living*, co-authored with Robert A. Harper, Ellis advised his lay readers of the relevance of Stoic philosophers for REBT,

> History gives us several outstanding instances of people who changed themselves and helped change others by hardheaded thinking: Zeno of Citium, for example, who flourished in the third century B.C., and founded the Greek Stoic school of philosophy; the Greek philosopher Epicurus; the Phrygian Epictetus; the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius; and the Dutch Jew Baruch Spinoza. These and other outstanding rational thinkers, after reading about the teaching of still earlier thinkers (Heraclitus and Democritus among others), and after doing some deep thinking of their own, enthusiastically adopted philosophies radically different from their original beliefs. More to the point for the purposes of our present discussion, they actually began to *live* these philosophies and to *act* in accordance with them. [Ellis & Harper, 1997, p. 5]

As we shall see, the Dutch philosopher Spinoza, though, strictly speaking, not a Stoic himself, may be viewed as a kind of "neo-stoic", and appears to draw heavily upon the therapeutic concepts found in Stoicism and other Hellenistic philosophies.

Moreover, following Ellis, at the beginning of *Cognitive Therapy of Depression* (1979), Aaron Beck and his colleagues explicitly claimed that the "philosophical origins" of their approach lay in the ancient Stoic tradition.

> The philosophical origins of cognitive therapy can be traced back to the Stoic philosophers, particularly Zeno of Citium (fourth century BC), Chrysippus, Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius. Epictetus wrote in *The Enchiridion*, "Men are disturbed not by things but by the views which they take of them". Like Stoicism, Eastern philosophies such as Taoism and Buddhism have emphasized that human emotions are based on ideas. Control of most intense feelings may be achieved by changing one's ideas. [Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979, p. 8]

There are obvious similarities between these key passages from Beck and Ellis. Both happen to employ the same passage (and translation) from Epictetus, though, as will soon become apparent, they could have chosen from an enormous wealth of similar passages written by Epictetus, or, indeed, the other Stoic authors.

These quotations from Ellis and Beck are typical of the somewhat cursory manner in which Stoicism is acknowledged by proponents of CBT as the major philosophical precursor of their approach. Nevertheless, what seems clear is that Ellis, and subsequently Beck, attributed the philosophical bases of REBT and CBT primarily to the ancient Stoics and, to a lesser extent, to similar themes in Oriental literature. Little more can be drawn from these brief remarks except that Stoicism is very relevant to CBT and that this importance stems from the shared emphasis upon cognition (ideas, judgements, opinions, etc.) as both the cause and cure of emotional disturbance. There are, however, a handful of other references made by important figures in the field of cognitive–behavioural therapy regarding ancient philosophies that may help to further illustrate the nature of the historical relationship in question.

Stoic philosophy in Beck's cognitive therapy

According to Aaron Beck and his colleagues, Ellis and REBT "provided a major impetus" to the historical development of cognitive–

behavioural therapies in general (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979, p. 10). Moreover, as we have seen, they clearly state that cognitive therapy shares identical philosophical origins with Ellis's REBT. In addition, Beck had opened his earlier book, *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders* (1976), with the claim that,

> These assumptions converge on a relatively new approach to emotional disorders. Nevertheless, the philosophical underpinnings go back thousands of years, certainly to the time of the Stoics, who considered man's conceptions (or misconceptions) of events rather than the events themselves as the key to his emotional upsets. [Beck, 1976, p. 3]

Although Beck does not seem to engage any further with the Stoics' philosophical views, he scattered additional quotations from Stoic and Stoic-influenced authors throughout this book. Beck used the famous quotation from Epictetus mentioned above as the epigraph of his chapter on *Meaning and Emotions*. He likewise quoted the Stoic emperor Marcus Aurelius, saying, "If thou are pained by any external thing, it is not the thing that disturbs thee, but thine own judgement about it. And it is in thy power to wipe out this judgement now" (Marcus Aurelius, quoted in Beck, 1976, p. 263).

Beck introduced his chapter on phobias in the same book with the following quotation from the seventeenth century metaphysician Spinoza, one of the most Stoic-influenced philosophers since the time of the ancients, "I saw that all the things I feared, and which feared me had nothing good or bad in them save insofar as the mind was affected by them" (Spinoza, quoted in Beck, 1976, p. 156.).

However, apart from these few references, Beck does not appear to have had much more to say regarding the "philosophical origins", as he puts it, of cognitive therapy.

This is more surprising than it might seem at first. The Stoics do not merely present abstract philosophical theories loosely related to the clinical applications of cognitive therapy. They were the most practical and therapeutic in orientation of all the ancient philosophical schools. Their writings contain many specific psychological techniques or exercises, most of which are consistent with modern CBT, and some of which have been forgotten or neglected by modern psychotherapists, though still relevant today. Indeed, A. A. Long, a leading scholar of Stoic philosophy, writes,

> Epictetus scarcely needs updating as an analyst of the psyche's strengths or weaknesses, and as a spokesman for human dignity, autonomy, and integrity. His principal project is to assure his listeners that nothing lies completely in their power except their judgements and desires and goals. Even our bodily frame and its movements are not entirely ours or up to us. The corollary is that nothing outside the mind or volition can, of its own nature, constrain or frustrate us unless we choose to let it do so. Happiness and a praiseworthy life require us to monitor our mental selves at every waking moment, making them and nothing external or material responsible for all the goodness or badness we experience. In the final analysis, everything that affects us for good or ill depends on our own judgements and on how we respond to the circumstances that befall us. [Long, 2002, p. 1]

Professor Long is undoubtedly correct. What he and other classical scholars find in Epictetus is, self-evidently, a therapeutic system very similar in its assumptions to modern CBT, and certainly one that meets the criteria quoted at the start of this section. Both Stoicism and CBT place central emphasis upon the role of cognition in determining the cause and cure of emotional disturbance, as the quotations above amply illustrate. However, although this is one of the most fundamental principles of Stoicism, there are others that logically precede it. Moreover, the philosophical core of Stoicism is also consistent with the theory and practice of CBT, as we shall now see.

The Serenity Prayer and Stoicism

The most fundamental principle of Stoic psychotherapy can be found in the very first sentence of the famous *Enchiridion* or Stoic "handbook" of Epictetus: "Some things are up to us and others are not" (Epictetus, 1995, p. 287). The importance of this maxim and the wider implications of absorbing its meaning and implications are explored in detail throughout the ancient Stoic literature.

The *Enchiridion* is a condensed guidebook to Stoic life that draws upon the more lengthy *Discourses* of Epictetus, which claim to record discussions held between the Stoic teacher and groups of students. Just like the *Enchiridion*, however, the *Discourses* begin

with a chapter dedicated to the theme "On what is in our power, and what is not". Epictetus begins by explaining the Stoic view that our judgements and opinions are pre-eminently within our power to control, whereas external events, especially sources of wealth and reputation, are ultimately in the hands of Fortune. Hence, the Stoic should always strive to cope with adversity by having ready "at hand" precepts that remind him "what is mine, and what is not mine, what is within my power, and what is not" (*Discourses*, 1.1.21). Indeed, Epictetus goes as far as to define Stoicism itself as the study of this distinction. "And to become educated [in Stoic philosophy] means just this, to learn what things are our own, and what are not" (*Discourses*, 4.5.7).

This distinction forms the premise for two closely-related principles. First, that the Stoic should cultivate continual self-awareness, mindful of his thoughts and judgements, as these lie at the centre of his sphere of control. Second, that he should adopt a "philosophical attitude to life", as we now say, meaning that one should Stoically accept those things that are none of our concern or outside of our power to control. Epictetus attempts to sum up these notions in a laconic maxim of the kind that the Stoics meant to be easy to memorise and constantly "ready to hand": "What, then, is to be done? To make the best of what is in our power, and take the rest as it naturally happens" (*Discourses*, 1.1.17).

Modern therapists will probably recognize this as the basis of the "Serenity Prayer", used by members of Alcoholics Anonymous and other therapeutic and self-help approaches, which usually takes the following form,

> God grant me serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
> Courage to change the things I can,
> And wisdom to know the difference.

It derives, allegedly, from a similar prayer written by the Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr in the 1940s (Pietsch, 1990, p. 9). However, the resemblance to both Stoic doctrine and terminology is unmistakable to anyone familiar with the literature of the subject. As it happens, courage and wisdom are two of the four cardinal virtues of classical Greek philosophy, along with self-control and justice.

The basic Stoic precepts

Likewise, though it may have taken a lifetime to study the subtle implications of Stoic philosophy, its basic tenets were intended to be summed up in a few words, as Epictetus emphasizes (*Discourses*, 1.20.13–14): to follow nature and make good use of our impressions was the doctrine of Zeno, the founder of Stoicism (*Discourses*, 1.20.14–15). "Following nature", or "following the gods", in the Stoic sense, amounts to the same thing, and primarily requires serene acceptance of things that lie outside of our direct control. Correct use of impressions primarily requires questioning whether they represent things genuinely within our control, such as value judgements, or whether they represent external things ultimately outside of our direct control, matters of "fortune" or the "facts of our situation", such as our material wealth and reputation.

To some people, the Serenity Prayer and these Stoic precepts appear counter-intuitive at first, but this was not the philosophers' intention. Beck emphasized that cognitive therapy could be seen primarily as an extension of our common sense assumptions (Beck, 1976, pp. 6–23). Likewise, the Stoics considered their teaching to be grounded in "natural preconceptions". According to this view, we all possess certain deep-seated, intuitive, natural, and common sense assumptions, but fail to apply them consistently or think their logical implications through.

> What, then, is it to be properly educated [as a philosopher]? To learn how to apply natural preconceptions [i.e., common sense] to particular cases, in accordance with nature; and, for the future, to distinguish that some things are in our own power, others are not. In our own power are choice, and all actions dependent on choice; not in our power, children, country, and, in short, [the actions of] all with whom we associate. Where, then, shall we place the good? To what class of things shall we apply it? To that of things that are in our own power. [*Discourses*, 1.22.9–11]

The wisdom of the enlightened Stoic sage consists primarily in his unwavering mindfulness, moment-to-moment attention to acts of his will and to his faculty of judgement. Emotional disturbance is the result of mindlessly becoming absorbed in external events, being overly attached to sensory pleasure, wealth, and the praise of others, and overly anxious about pain, poverty, and criticism.

> If we had acted thus, and trained ourselves in this manner from morning till night, then, by the gods, something would have been achieved. Whereas now, we are caught half asleep by every impression, and if we ever do wake up, it is only for a little in the lecture-hall. And then we go out, and if we see anyone in distress, we say, "He is done for"; if a consul, "Happy man!"; if an exile, "What misery!"; if a poor man, "How wretched for him; he has nothing to buy a meal with!"
>
> These harmful ideas must be eradicated; and to this our whole strength must be applied. For what is weeping and groaning? A judgement. What is misfortune? A judgement. What is sedition, discord, complaint, accusation, impiety, foolish talk? All these are judgements, and nothing more; and judgements concerning things outside the sphere of choice, taking them to be good or evil. Let anyone transfer these judgements to things within the sphere of choice, and I will guarantee that he will preserve his constancy, whatever be the state of things about him. [*Discourses*, 3.3.16–19, modified]

Of course, modern cognitive therapist would call these "cognitions", or irrational thoughts and beliefs, and Beck describes the process of distinguishing between internal *thoughts* and the external *facts* they claim to represent as "distancing" (Beck, 1976, pp. 242–243). This process of learning to monitor our spontaneous judgements and automatic thoughts (cognitions), such as "How wretched for him!", and reminding ourselves that they represent subjective attitudes rather than objective facts, is essential to both Stoicism and CBT.

Moreover, Epictetus's examples are essentially *value* judgements that express our own attitudes rather than objective features of the external world. In so far as they arouse desire, anxiety, pity, or other emotions, these are self-inflicted disturbances, and not primarily the result of external events, which merely serve as the occasion, or vehicle, for them. Epictetus compares the mind to a bottle of water with a ray of light shining through it, representing our perception of external events. If the water is shaken, the light is refracted and disturbed. Likewise, when our mind, judgements, and perceptions are internally disturbed, external events look disturbing to us. We project our feelings on to external events. The sage sees everything in the same light because his mind is constant and he refuses to

attach undue importance to anything outside his control. As Epictetus says above, the values attributed to external events should, arguably, be transferred on to the judgements that make them appear that way. For example, a depressed patient may think "life is awful and depressing", blaming their feelings upon the world. However, it might be better, and more accurate, for them to "blame" their depressed mood on their own way of looking at the world, their own judgements and automatic thoughts. While there is little we can do to change the face of the world itself, we can take *responsibility* for our own thoughts and attitudes, and, with some effort, learn to change them.

Hence, for the Stoics, the fundamental rule of their ethic can be viewed simply as the requirement for personal authenticity, or integrity. To Stoic students demanding therapeutic "rules" to live by, Epictetus replied,

> What am I to prescribe to you? Hasn't Zeus [i.e., nature] already done that? Has he not given you things that are *yours*, free from impediment and hindrance, and things that are *not yours*, which are subject to impediment and hindrance? What guidance did you have from him when you were born, what kind of rule?
>
> "Cherish completely what is your own, and don't seek after things that don't belong to you."
>
> Your integrity is your own; who can take it from you? Who but yourself will prevent you from using it? But how do you prevent it? When you are eager for what is not your own, you lose that very thing. [*Discourses*, 1.25.3–5, in Long, 2002, p. 187]

As he puts it elsewhere, "This law has god ordained, who says, 'If you want anything good, get it from yourself'" (*Discourses*, 1.29.4), by which he means that the highest value should be placed by man not upon wealth or reputation, but upon the attainment of self-awareness and self-control, that is, the Greek virtue of "wisdom".

By attending to our judgements, we can change the way we think about life, review the value we attribute to things, and gain control over our emotions. As Epictetus puts it, when we attach value to external things, and treat them as if they had inherent worth, we run the risk of becoming forgetful of our freedom to choose, we enslave ourselves to external events (*Discourses*, 4.4.23).

Life is what we make of it: "The materials of action are indifferent; but the use that we make of them is not indifferent" (*Discourses*, 2.5.1). "Likewise, life is indifferent; but the use of it is not indifferent" (*Discourses*, 2.6.1). We shall return to this theme, which Epictetus expresses so well when he says that our judgements upset us rather than things themselves, and which CBT practitioners sometimes refer to as the principle of "cognitive mediation". As we have seen, it is central to Hellenistic philosophy and therapeutics, to the Serenity Prayer, and to modern cognitive–behavioural therapy.

Hans Eysenck and behaviour therapy

In the quotations mentioned earlier, Ellis, and subsequently Beck, both mistakenly list Cicero as a Stoic. Although he did engage with Stoic ideas, Cicero was actually a Platonist and not a Stoic, as he clearly attests in his own writings; he was merely *influenced* by Stoicism. We have considered the influence of Hellenistic philosophy upon REBT and CBT and, as we have seen, in the Preface, the founders of "behaviour therapy" also saw major precursors of that approach in ancient literature (Wolpe & Lazarus, 1966, pp. 1–2).

Along with Wolpe and Lazarus, Hans Eysenck was one of the pioneers of behaviour therapy in the 1960s. He has repeatedly drawn attention to the fact that some of the basic principles of behaviour therapy resemble "common sense" observations and were, therefore, anticipated in previous centuries, for example, in the writings of the German author Goethe (Eysenck, 1990, p. 137). He also explicitly states that long before Freud developed psychoanalysis, often erroneously considered the beginning of psychotherapy, "there existed already the rudiments of the theory which was later to account for neurotic fears and anxieties in a much more economical and scientific fashion" (Eysenck, 1977, p. 42).

> These ancient theories were Greek in origin, but were voiced in their most convincing form by Marcus Tullius Cicero, in his *Tuscularum Disputationum*. In the first place, he points out that "*Ab earum rerum est absentium metus, quarum est aegretudo*": in neurotic disorders, anxiety is felt of things not present, the presence of which causes grief, or distress. This suggests immediately a learning process by

means of which the distress properly associated with the "thing present" (the unconditioned stimulus, in modern parlance) is evoked when the "thing" is not present; that is, through a conditioned stimulus. Now, if we can remove the distress reaction, then the neurotic anxiety also will be taken away: "*Sublata igitur aegritudine, eadem impendentes et venientes timemus*". This, of course, suggests a method of extinction, whether through "desensitization", or "flooding", or "modelling". [Eysenck, 1977, pp. 42–43]

Eysenck also finds in Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* a precursor of his own theory of trait "neuroticism", an innate emotional instability and vulnerability to disturbance, which Eysenck considered to be largely genetically determined.

> Cicero finally caps his account by appealing to individual differences: "At qui in quem cadit aegritudo, in eundem timor; quarum enim rerum praesentia sumus in aegritudine, eadem impendentes et venientes timemus". Translated freely, this states that the man who is easily distressed is also an easy prey to anxiety and fear. For, when stimuli cause distress by their presence, we are also afraid of the menace of their approach. In other words, people who have strong fear reactions to actual dangers and stressful situations also show strong learnt anxieties in the absence of these stimuli. We cannot follow Cicero into the details of his discussion, but the elements of our modern way of looking at neurosis are certainly contained in his account. [*ibid.*, p. 43]

These remarks occur in Cicero's discussion of Platonic and Stoic theories regarding the cause and cure of emotional suffering. Eysenck, therefore, makes it clear that he considers Cicero to be describing a theory and practice similar to his own and to those of modern behaviour therapists in general. Although Eysenck, as a behavioural psychologist, places much greater emphasis than cognitive theorists such as Beck and Ellis upon genetic predisposition and simple processes of emotional conditioning and de-conditioning, these concepts still have some influence in the field of modern CBT, especially in the treatment of anxiety through "exposure" therapy. In any case, the remarks of Eysenck, Ellis, and Beck combine to illustrate how a range of key figures in the fields of *behaviour* therapy and *cognitive* therapy have found the "philosophical origins", or, at least, the "rudiments", or basic "elements", of

their approach in Hellenistic philosophers such as Cicero and Epictetus.

Donald Meichenbaum and cognitive–behaviour modification

In concluding this section, it may be worthwhile mentioning some comments made by another influential cognitive–behavioural theorist, Donald Meichenbaum. His remarks are not notable because they tell us anything about the philosophical provenance of CBT, but because they illustrate the peculiar way in which therapists seem to keep stumbling across relevant philosophical passages but fail to engage further with the ancient therapeutic tradition from which they stem. In discussing the use of his "self-instruction training", as a cognitive approach to managing pain, Meichenbaum observes,

> Individuals have used cognitive strategies for as long as man has experienced pain. For example, the Stoic philosophers believed that man could get the better of pain by force of reason, by the "rational repudiation" of pain. Descartes and Spinoza recommended that pain should be overcome through the "permeation" of reason. [Meichenbaum, 1977, p. 17]

This is probably an over-simplification of the Stoic attitude toward controlling pain. However, it does lead to the discovery of an interesting and somewhat obscure philosophical text.

Meichenbaum (*ibid.*, p. 171) illustrates the use of cognitive distraction techniques by providing the following quotation from the great eighteenth century philosopher Immanuel Kant's impressively-entitled essay, "On the power of the human mind to master its morbid feelings merely by a firm resolution". Kant recommends the mental repetition of a word as a means of interrupting intrusive trains of thought that prevent sleep, and also as a method of dissociating from pain and thereby overcoming insomnia.

> To be unable to sleep at one's fixed and habitual time, or also unable to stay awake, is a kind of morbid feeling. But of these two, insomnia is the worse: to go to bed intending to sleep, and yet lie awake.—Doctors usually advise a patient to drive all *thoughts* from his head; but they return, or others come in their place, and keep

him awake. The only disciplinary advice is to turn away his attention as soon as he perceives or becomes conscious of any thought stirring (just as if, with his eyes closed, he turned them to a different place). This interruption of any thought that he is aware of gradually produces a confusion of ideas by which his awareness of his physical (external) situation is suspended; and then an altogether different order sets in, an involuntary play of imagination (which, in a state of health, is *dreaming*). . . . But it can happen to anyone, now and then, that when he lies down in bed ready to sleep he cannot fall asleep, even by diverting his thoughts in this way. [Kant, 1996, p. 319]

Kant experienced a painful condition that he assumed to be gout. Finding that the discomfort often prevented him from getting to sleep, he employed a coping method that he derived from the ancient Stoic philosophers.

> But, impatient at feeling my sleep interfered with, I soon had recourse to my Stoic remedy of fixing my thought forcibly on some neutral object that I chose at random (for example, the name Cicero, which contains many associated ideas), and so diverting my attention from that sensation. The result was that the sensation was dulled, even quickly so, and outweighed by drowsiness; and I can repeat this procedure with equally good results every time that attacks of this kind recur in the brief interruptions of my night's sleep. [*ibid.*, p. 320]

It would be tempting to view this as an example of the contemplation of a philosophical sage (Cicero?), a Stoic technique which we will examine in due course, but, in fact, Kant states that he chose the name at random, so we appear to be left merely with a kind of distraction technique. In fact, one of the first modern psychotherapeutic methods for overcoming insomnia, reported by the founder of hypnotherapy, James Braid, was the repetition of a banal phrase. Braid quotes from an earlier author to illustrate this method of inducing sleep,

> And again, M'Nish writes, "I have often coaxed myself to sleep by internally repeating half a dozen times any well known rhyme. Whilst doing so the ideas must be strictly directed to this particular theme, and prevented from wandering." He then adds, that the great secret is to compel the mind to depart from its favourite train

of thought, into which it has a tendency to run, "and address itself solely to the *verbal* repetition of what is substituted in its place"; and farther adds, "the more the mind is brought to turn upon a *single impression*, the more closely it is made to approach to the state of sleep, which is the total absence of all impressions". [Braid, 2009, p. 363]

Although Meichenbaum and Kant refer this technique to the Stoics, and it may have been practised by them, monotonous distraction seems like rather a blunt instrument by comparison with the full armamentarium of techniques and strategies that they had at their disposal.

In the second part of this book, I shall attempt to describe in detail many of the specific therapeutic *methods* employed in Stoicism, and show how they may be integrated within modern cognitive–behavioural therapy in a more sophisticated manner. All in all, Eysenck, Meichenbaum, and Beck say very little about the relationship between modern therapy and Stoicism, apart from a few tantalising remarks. Albert Ellis says somewhat more in this respect, as we shall see. Before elaborating on the Stoic therapy techniques, however, I hope to shed some more light on how the theory and practice of modern cognitive therapy in general relates to Stoicism by examining a kind of "missing link" in the history of the subject, the early history of "rational psychotherapy" in the first half of the twentieth century, beginning roughly fifty years prior to the work of either Beck or Ellis.

CHAPTER TWO

The beginning of modern cognitive therapy

The historical transition from philosophical therapy to modern CBT was not as abrupt as it might seem. Modern cognitive approaches to psychotherapy did not really evolve into a fully-fledged school of thought until the 1970s, when Ellis's REBT and subsequently Beck's cognitive therapy began to develop in popularity. However, there were several early twentieth century schools of psychotherapy that were influenced by Stoicism and other forms of classical philosophy in a manner that prefigures the work of Ellis and Beck.

Paul Dubois and rational psychotherapy

Albert Ellis explicitly recognized that in addition to their ancient precedent in Stoicism, modern schools of cognitive therapy, including REBT, had many precursors within the field of psychotherapy. Ellis claimed not to have read the writings of Swiss psychiatrist Paul Dubois (1848–1918) until a few years *after* he developed REBT, but acknowledged that, "Rational–emotive psychotherapy is by no means entirely new, since some of its main principles were

propounded by Dubois (1907) and by many pre-Freudian therapists" (Ellis, 1962, p. 105).

Indeed, at the First International Congress of Psychiatry and Neurology, in 1907, there was considerable opposition to Freudian psychoanalysis, the more conventional techniques of persuasion and suggestion being still considered central to psychotherapy. "Dubois told of his method of treating phobias. Emotions, he said, always follow ideas, so the treatment should go to the root, namely, the erroneous idea the patient has allowed to creep into his mind" (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 797).

Moreover, the "rational persuasion" school of psychotherapy founded by Dubois had many advocates and, for a time, competed with Freudian psychoanalysis, especially in the USA.

> Thanks to the influence of Dubois, during the opening years of the twentieth century, there was a notable output of books expounding, with more or less modification, these ideas of treatment by rational persuasion and moralisation. [Baudouin & Lestchinsky, 1924, p. 139]

Dubois was professor of neuropathology at the University of Berne and became world-renowned in his day as a highly successful psychotherapist. He treated several famous clients, reputedly including the novelist Marcel Proust. However, unlike Freud, he failed to organize his followers into a coherent professional body, and so despite being the first significant modern proponent of a "rational" or "cognitive" psychotherapy, which he described as the "education of the self", his work is scarcely known today. Nevertheless, like Ellis and Beck after him, Dubois also explicitly recognized Stoicism as the precursor to modern rational psychotherapy, although he had a little more to say on this subject.

Following the ancient pagan philosophers before him, Dubois uses the terms "ethics" and "morality" in a different sense from their current usage, to denote the practical recommendations for individual *well-being* derived from philosophy and psychotherapy. Dubois believed that "ethical" ideas, or, rather, underlying human values, were largely forced upon us by our experience and, therefore, changed little over the centuries. The strategies used by Epictetus to cope with hardship were bound to be similar to those

found helpful by James Stockdale in Vietnam, because they were ultimately based upon simple, common sense observations about human nature.

> If we eliminate from ancient writings a few allusions that gave them local colour, we shall find the ideas of Socrates, Epictetus, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius absolutely modern and applicable to our times. In this field of ethical thought men remain the same. [Dubois, 1909, pp. 108–109]

Dubois's central contention was that most neurotic or emotional disorders may be seen as the consequence of an ongoing process of unintentional *autosuggestion*, of an irrational and unhealthy nature. So-called "hysterical" or psychosomatic illness can result from negative autosuggestion, but even genuine physical ailments could be made worse by the negative thoughts that supervene upon them.

> But we often suffer from functional troubles which are not caused by organic changes and in the development of which the mind plays an immense part. Even in the course of purely bodily illness there is often the mediation of psychical symptoms which depend above all on the condition of our spirit. Man, in short, suffers quite differently from the animals and he suffers more than they. He does not content himself, so to speak, with brute suffering which is adequate for the physical disorders; he increases them by imagination, aggravates them by fear, keeps them up by his pessimistic reflections. [Dubois & Gallatin, 1908, p. 20]

The work of the psychotherapist centres on motivating the client, educating him about the effect of mind upon body, and teaching him to adopt remedial "philosophical" attitudes. Dubois wrote, "by rational education of ourselves we modify our ideas and our sentiments and we make our temperament of a noble character" (*ibid.*, p. 57). Through self-monitoring of thoughts, the client learns to spot the beginning of harmful emotions, pause for reflection, and nip them in the bud.

> We should react briskly, act enthusiastically for good, obey the impulse of our better feelings. But however spontaneous this reaction may be, we must nevertheless leave time for calm reason to

> exercise a rapid control. Our reason is that which as an arbiter judges finally the value of the emotions of sensibility which make us act. If it is a sentiment of goodness, of pity, which carries us away, reason very quickly gives its approval. But when we are about to give way to a feeling of anger, envy, vexation, reason should intervene to correct the first impression and modify the final decision. [*ibid*., p. 56]

Dubois, therefore, often speaks of his rational psychotherapy as involving stoicism (albeit with a small "s"). Of students who wrote reporting the benefits experienced by following his advice, Dubois, comments,

> I congratulate them and I beg them to remember well that in insisting upon the power of mental representations I have never wished to accuse their sufferings of being imaginary. I know all the effort which this stoical education demands. [*ibid*., pp. 62–63]

Likewise, of the benefits of adopting a rational philosophy of life, he remarks, "Those whose reflections lead them to be freethinkers find in themselves, in a stoicism free from egotism, strength to resist all which life brings them" (*ibid*., p. 60).

Dubois on Seneca

However, referring more specifically to classical Stoic philosophy, Dubois recognized the fact that Seneca, among others, had proposed a similar account of the role of erroneous ideas (cognitions) in emotional disturbance. It is worth emphasizing the fact that although the word "autosuggestion" was not available to the ancients, Dubois uses it throughout his writings to describe the manner in which judgement penetrates into the emotions and affects our physical health. In other words, Dubois interpreted the Stoics as emphasizing the role of autosuggestion in the cause and cure of emotional disturbance. Hence, he finds in Seneca's philosophy a clear precursor to his own rational psychotherapy.

> I do not hesitate to persuade my patients to neglect the painful phenomena. The idea is not new; the stoics have pushed to the last degree this resistance to pain and misfortune. The following lines,

written by Seneca, seem to be drawn from a modern treatise on psychotherapy: "Beware of aggravating your troubles yourself and of making your position worse by your complaints. Grief is light when opinion does not exaggerate it; and if one encourages one's self by saying, 'This is nothing,' or, at least, 'This is slight; let us try to endure it, for it will end,' one makes one's grief slight by reason of believing it such." And, further: "One is only unfortunate in proportion as one believes one's self so."

> One could truly say concerning nervous pains that one only suffers when he thinks he does. I could quote numerous examples which show the possibility of suppressing more or less rapidly and often once for all such painful phenomena. [Dubois, 1904, pp. 394–395]

Dubois goes on to describe how he successfully treated a neurasthenic patient by a single motivating psychotherapy session, and having him study the literature of classical Stoicism. This patient wrote to Dubois, "When I feel my courage ebbing, I read the letters of Seneca to Lucilius!" (*ibid.*, p. 433)

Indeed, it is clear that Dubois admired these Stoic teachings in particular. He also quotes Seneca's letters to illustrate the role of patience and acceptance, as opposed to worry, in helping us to cope with and avoid exacerbating physical illness. "We must turn here to the ancients in order to recover the idea of patience towards disease, that stoical philosophy which not only helps to support us in evils, but diminishes or cures them" (Dubois, 1909, pp. 224–225).

As an example of the ancient philosophical recognition of cognition's effect upon psychosomatic illness, he quotes Seneca's letter, beginning,

> I am going to tell you how consoled I am after having always insisted that the [philosophical] principles upon which I leaned would act upon me like medicine. Honest consolation becomes in itself a remedy, and everything that lifts up the soul strengthens the body. My studies have saved me; I attribute my recovery, my return to health, to philosophy; I owe my life to it, but that is the least of my obligations. [Seneca, quoted in Dubois, 1909, p. 225]

He also refers to the Stoic principle that the fear of death is the underlying philosophical root of most other human fears. Bemoaning the confusing multitude of different remedies proposed by

ancient physicians, Seneca writes, "But I not only give you a remedy for this illness, but a remedy for all your life: despise death. Nothing distresses us when we have ceased to fear it" (Seneca, quoted in Dubois, 1909, p. 226).

"How far we are from this mentality!" exclaims Dubois, who was greatly concerned by the hypochondria among his patients, and their tendency to excessive neurotic worrying about death and illness. He saw this as a "second story" added to their suffering, adding another level to physical illness by escalating natural concern for one's health beyond its rational boundary, into anxious, pathological worrying. Dubois proceeds to give a homely illustration,

> A young man into whom I tried to instil a few principles of stoicism towards ailments stopped me at the first words, saying, "I understand, doctor; let me show you." And taking a pencil he drew a large black spot on a piece of paper. "This," said he, "is the disease, in its most general sense, the physical trouble—rheumatism, toothache, what you will—moral trouble, sadness, discouragement, melancholy. If I acknowledge it by fixing my attention upon it, I already trace a circle to the periphery of the black spot, and it has become larger. If I affirm it with acerbity the spot is increased by a new circle. There I am, busied with my pain, hunting for means to get rid of it, and the spot only becomes larger. If I preoccupy myself with it, if I fear the consequences, if I see the future gloomily, I have doubled or trebled the original spot." And, showing me the central point of the circle, the trouble reduced to its simplest expression, he said with a smile, "Should I not have done better to leave it as it was?"
>
> "One exaggerates, imagines, anticipates affliction," wrote Seneca. For a long time, I have told my discouraged patients and have repeated to myself, "Do not let us build a second story to our sorrow by being sorry for our sorrow." [Dubois, 1909, pp. 235–236]

He adds,

> We recognise here the example of concentric circles as showing increase in our physical and moral suffering. He who knows how to suffer suffers less. He accepts the trouble such as it is, without adding to it the terrors that preoccupation and apprehension produce. Like the animal, he reduces suffering to its simplest expression; he even goes further; he lessens the trouble by the thought, he succeeds in forgetting, in no longer feeling it.

What fine colour Seneca gave to this thought in his letter LXVIII to Lucilius: "Beware of aggravating your troubles yourself, and of making your position worse by your complaints. Grief is light when not exaggerated by the idea, and if we encourage ourselves, saying 'it is *nothing*,' or at least, 'it is of small moment; let us endure it, it is about to stop,' we render pain light by thinking it so." Yes; pain becomes light when we are able so to look at it, when we do not draw concentric circles around it, such as my patient ingeniously described; when we do not multiply it by fear. That fine stoicism does not reign to-day. [*ibid*., pp. 236–237]

We might illustrate Dubois' anecdote about the concentric circles with a diagram (Figure 1).

In clinical practice, Dubois rejected the use of hypnosis, during the height of its popularity, and resorted instead to vigorous psychological education and Socratic dialogue, of this kind, designed to instil hope of cure in his clients, build confidence, and directly undermine their irrational beliefs and negative philosophies of life.

Despite his emphasis upon cultivating a rational and stoical philosophy of life, Dubois has little more to say about specific

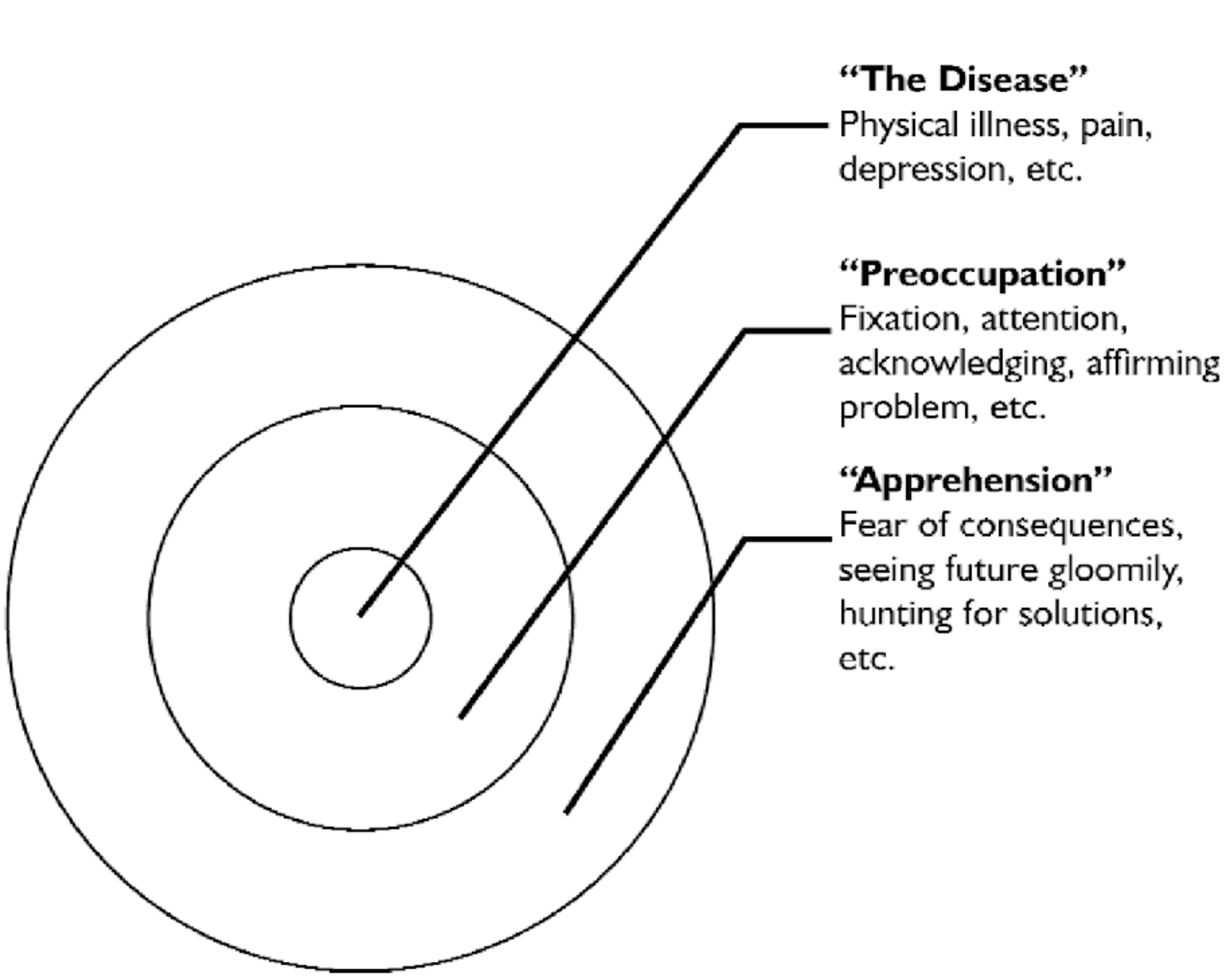

Figure 1. Dubois's concentric circles model.

philosophical texts or theories. There is one notable exception to this avoidance of academic debate, however, and that is Dubois's criticism of the metaphysical theory of free will. Like the Stoics, he argued in favour of determinism, both because he believed the theory to be true and because he also found its acceptance to be an important aid to psychotherapy in terms of its beneficial effect upon the emotions.

> . . . from the beginning of human thought, philosophers like Socrates have understood the idea of moral determinism; [nevertheless] man has continued to think and to do good or evil. He has thought worse for being ignorant of the mechanism of thought; the neglect of these [deterministic] principles of psychology renders him less indulgent to the faults of others, without making him severe enough towards himself. [*ibid.*, pp. 47–48]

Although Dubois did not use hypnosis himself, he accepted the theory of suggestion, and several influential proponents of hypnotherapy (for example, Bernheim, Baudouin, Morton Prince, and others), came to assimilate elements of Dubois' rational persuasion approach (*q.v.* Baudouin & Letschinsky, 1924). In their hands, hypnosis or self-hypnosis could serve as an additional means to reinforce the internalization of healthy, rational beliefs. Dubois himself, though not a hypnotist, seems grudgingly to accept the relevance of his observations on autosuggestion to the practice of hypnotism.

> We are easily made victims by these auto-suggestions, as they are called today, when we have some plausible reason to believe them. I have often felt heat radiating from a stove which I was passing. I had understood that it was heated; when touched it was cold. There are people who have felt the oil and smelled the odour of petroleum when lifting a new lamp which has never contained any.
>
> One can recall thousands of examples of these errors of the senses which show the influence of imagination, the incredible power of mental representations. The success of hypnotism abundantly demonstrates this influence. [Dubois & Gallatin, 1908, pp. 27–28]

To some extent, the influence of Dubois' method of disputing pre-existing negative autosuggestions can be seen in modern

cognitive–behavioural approaches to hypnotherapy, which are based upon the concept of "negative self-hypnosis" (NSH) introduced by Daniel Araoz (1981). Araoz and others effectively resurrected the old theory that holds that many forms of emotional disturbance, such as anxiety or depression, can be seen as partly due to the effects of negative autosuggestion or self-hypnosis. This notion was common in Victorian psychotherapy, and traces of it can even be found as far back as the 1840s in the writings of James Braid, the founder of hypnotherapy (Braid, 2009).

The notion of "negative self-hypnosis" was, of course, not available to the Stoics. If it *had* been, then they may have found it a useful analogy for their cognitive theory of emotional disturbance. Indeed, James Stockdale instinctively describes the Stoic concept of a "mental impression" (*phantasia*) as a form of autosuggestion.

> The Stoics gave that name to those bursts of suggestion that flash on the screen of your mind, usually when you're in tight straits, wooing you to believe that a crisis is imminent and that you should accede to the suggestion immediately and take counteraction. Stoics place great stock in man's obligation to exercise *stringent judgement* on whether to accept this suggestion at face value or use caution, play for time, and see if what you first believed you were being told was an exaggeration. Your response is both a judgemental and a moral act. [Stockdale, 1995, p. 235]

These "bursts of suggestion" (or, rather, "autosuggestion") are precisely what modern cognitive therapists mean by "automatic thoughts". As we have seen, Dubois himself did not combine the *techniques* of suggestion and autosuggestion with the *theory* of emotional disturbance as being due to autosuggestion. We can, however, find an example of an early twentieth century school of psychotherapy that not only saw autosuggestion as both the cause and cure of neuroses, but also attempted to assimilate the philosophical precepts of Stoicism to this view.

Émile Coué and the new Nancy school

When the French pharmacist Émile Coué (1857–1926) was twenty-eight years old, he met one of the pioneers of hypnotherapy, a

country doctor named Ambroise-Auguste Liébault (1823–1904), and assisted him for about two years in his hypnotic clinic at Nancy. However, by 1910, Coué had abandoned classical hypnotism in favour of his technique of "conscious autosuggestion", in which subjects are taught how to use suggestion and imagination for themselves, without the use of a formal hypnotic induction. At this point, Coué founded a movement he termed the "new Nancy school", in reference to the Nancy school of hypnosis founded by Liébault, who had passed away a few years earlier. Coué became one of the most influential "self-help" gurus of the twentieth century, touring America with his public seminars and attracting an international following during the period when Paul Dubois's theories were still popular among psychotherapists.

Strikingly, Coué wrote, "Pythagoras and Aristotle taught auto-suggestion" (Coué, 1923, p. 3). Though his justification for this conclusion seems somewhat unclear, he could probably have found more material to explain and support it.

> We know, indeed, that the whole human organism is governed by the nervous system, the centre of which is the brain—the seat of thought. In other words, the brain, or mind, controls every cell, every organ, every function of the body. That being so, is it not clear that by means of thought we are the absolute masters of our physical organism and that, as the Ancients showed centuries ago, thought—or suggestion—can and does produce disease or cure it? Pythagoras taught the principle of auto-suggestion to his disciples. He wrote: "God the Father, deliver them from their sufferings, and show them what supernatural power is at their call". [*ibid.*, pp. 3–4]

The practice of repeating aphorisms, short verbal "formulas", seems to have been associated with the ancient mystery religions and oracles, and the philosophical–therapeutic sect of Pythagoras which evolved from them.

> The Ancients well knew the power—often the terrible power—contained in the repetition of a phrase or formula. The secret of the undeniable influence they exercised through the old Oracles resided probably, nay, certainly, in the force of suggestion. [Coué, 1923, p. 27]

The most famous formulae associated with the Delphic Oracle of Apollo, the patron god of philosophy, were "Know thyself" and "Nothing in excess". The Pythagoreans compiled lists of such aphorisms, which acquired cryptic symbolic meanings, and were referred to as *akousmata*, the "things listened to", and *symbola*, the "symbols" or "watchwords". For example, according to Porphry, the precept "poke not the fire with a sword" was a reminder that one should not further provoke an angry person by attacking them with verbal criticisms; "eat not the heart", meant that one should not wallow in morbid emotions (Porphyry, 1988, p. 131). These Pythagorean sayings, and those derived from the Greek Oracles, may well be the precursors of the Stoic precepts (*dogmata*), which, as we shall see, appear to have performed a similar function.

Coué also makes insightful use of a passage from Aristotle that clearly outlines the same mechanism of mind–body interaction that he took to underlie autosuggestion.

> Even more definite is the doctrine of Aristotle, which taught that "a vivid imagination compels the body to obey it, for it is a natural principle of movement. Imagination, indeed, governs all of the forces of sensibility, while the latter, in its turn, controls the beating of the heart, and through it sets in motion all vital functions; thus the entire organism may be rapidly modified. Nevertheless, however vivid the imagination, it cannot change the form of a hand or foot or other member". [Coué, 1923, p. 4]

Coué explains that this passage corresponds to two key principles of his own theory of autosuggestion,

1. The dominating role of the imagination.
2. The results to be expected from the practice of auto-suggestion must necessarily be limited to those coming within the bounds of physical possibility. [*ibid.*]

According to Coué's theory, which is not unlike the philosopher Spinoza's in this respect, the imagination is bound to evoke physical and emotional reactions more powerfully than the intellect alone can muster. We must fight fire with fire, use *empowering* images to counteract *enfeebling* ones. Even the Stoics did not depend *solely* upon the abstract power of reason. The prevalence of vivid imagery and potent rhetoric throughout all the major Stoic writings

demonstrates their grasp of the extent to which the imagination, guided by reason, must be turned upon itself in order to effect real emotional change. As we shall see, a variety of mental exercises, including visualization techniques, were at the Stoic's disposal.

As an adolescent, Albert Ellis had studied Couéism, and he seems to have found it an attractive model of therapeutic self-help (Ellis, 2004, pp. 19–20). Ellis had claimed from the outset that the essence of rational–emotive behaviour therapy (REBT) was simply that it emphasized what he called "autosuggestive insight", that is, helping the client to understand the role of ongoing negative autosuggestions in their problem (Ellis, 1962, p. 276). He acknowledges that Bernheim and Coué had emphasized the benefits of positive autosuggestion, but argues that they had overlooked the role of *negative* autosuggestion in emotional disturbance. REBT, according to Ellis, was a novel approach because it encouraged clients to realize how negative autosuggestion is affecting them before they proceed to use positive counter-suggestions to change things. But Coué and his school had already clearly emphasized this notion of "autosuggestive insight" and, indeed, made it the essence of their own method,

> Autosuggestion is a double-edged weapon; well-used it works wonders, badly used it brings nothing but disaster. Up to the present you have wielded this weapon unconsciously, and made bad suggestions to yourselves, but that which I have taught you will prevent [you] from ever again making bad autosuggestions, and if you should do so, you can only beat yourself upon the breast, and say: It is my own fault; entirely my own fault! [Coué, 1923, p. 102]

Coué's fundamental insight was that autosuggestion could be a force either for good or bad, we either use it for our benefit or allow it to work spontaneously and, perhaps, to our ruin. The most important part of his method is that clients should come to share the same insight.

However, Ellis also criticizes Couéism for encouraging positive thinking without direct *disputation* of the original negative thoughts. He sees this as a kind of "magical thinking" that attributes too much power to positive affirmations.

> Many people think that rational therapy [REBT] is closely related to Emile Coué's autosuggestion . . . but it is actually just the reverse of

these techniques in many ways. It is true that clients become emotionally disturbed largely because of their own negative thinking or autosuggestion, and that is why they sometimes snap out of their depressions and anxieties quite quickly—if temporarily—when they are induced to do some kind of positive thinking or autosuggestion.

But accentuating the positive is itself a false system of belief, since there is no scientific truth to the statements that "Day by day in every way I'm getting better and better" . . .

> In fact, this kind of Pollyannaism can be as pernicious as the negative claptrap which clients tell themselves to bring about neurotic conditions. [Ellis, 2004, p. 37]

Ellis expresses this concern in his own notoriously forceful style, not unlike the blunt or even abrasive language sometimes adopted by Stoics like Epictetus, and the Cynic philosophers before him.

> In REBT we do not merely stress positive thinking or autosuggestion, but a thoroughgoing revealing and uprooting of the negative nonsense which clients endlessly repeat. . . .
>
> Another way of putting this is to say that no matter how often a woman repeats, "Every day in every way I'm getting better and better," . . . if she keeps saying to herself much louder and more often, "I'm really a shit; I'm no fucking good; I'll never possibly get better," all the positive thinking in the world is not going to help her. Unless she is forcefully led to challenge and undermine her own negative thinking, as in effective cognitive psychotherapy, she is still a gone goose. [*ibid.*, pp. 37–38]

To some extent, this criticism is justified, and the subsequent combination of Coué's methods with those of Dubois undertaken by Baudouin and others would help to redress this imbalance. However, in all fairness, Coué himself did insist that clients should become more aware of the negative autosuggestions they give themselves and thereby realize that they were both false and harmful.

Baudouin and Lestchinsky's The Inner Discipline

Coué wrote little and most of his books contain transcripts of seminars or exhortations aimed at the public. However, a follower of

Coué, the French academic and psychotherapist Charles Baudouin, provided a more erudite account of the New Nancy School approach, into which he assimilated elements of early psychoanalysis and classical philosophy. Baudouin recognized the relevance of Stoicism to modern psychotherapy and self-help, and its particular similarity to the "rational persuasion" therapy of Dubois (Baudouin & Lestchinsky, 1924, p. 50). Hence, he and Lestchinsky dedicated a whole chapter of their short book *The Inner Discipline* (1924) to expounding the basic therapeutic principles of Stoicism and its relevance to psychotherapy. Although Hellenistic philosophy in particular, and, indeed, much of classical philosophy in general, can be seen to prefigure modern cognitive–behavioural psychotherapy, like Ellis and Beck almost half a century later, Baudouin and Lestchinsky saw Stoicism as the ancient precursor of rational psychotherapy *par excellence*.

> One of the most original characteristics of Stoicism was the stress it laid upon a vigorous discipline, upon the education of the character. That is why, in the present handbook, we select Stoicism for special consideration from among the classical philosophies. [*ibid.*, p. 89]

Baudouin and Lestchinsky recognize the emphasis found in Stoicism upon continual rehearsal of practical exercises as part of a therapeutic regime. Summarizing the common principles of different modes of therapy, they write,

> One of the most firmly established among such principles is the law of habit, and the need for *training*. Exercises must be assiduously practised, daily if possible. The yoga of the Hindus was founded upon the principle of daily training. The Stoics were likewise familiar with the value of regular exercise of the will. . . . In the latest form of psychotherapeutics, autosuggestion, stress is also laid upon diligent and daily practice. [*ibid.*, p. 216]

Likewise, modern CBT can be distinguished from other modalities of psychotherapy by virtue of the fundamental emphasis it tends to place upon daily practice of homework assignments. Clients are trained to develop cognitive and behavioural skills that are rehearsed in the consulting room under the supervision of the

therapist before being practised at home, between sessions, until they become habitual.

As a Christian, and limited by the classical scholarship of his day, Baudouin's enthusiasm for Stoicism is qualified by a preference for Christian self-help. However, he quotes both Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius over and over again, at much greater length than either Beck or Ellis, and clearly outlines the basic therapeutic philosophy of Stoicism. As such, Baudouin undoubtedly provides the best example to date of an attempt to assimilate Stoic literature within modern "rational" psychotherapy, itself a close precursor of CBT. He and Lestchinsky begin by recognizing the fundamental dogma of Stoicism: "One of the first of these philosophers' precepts is that we must thoroughly grasp the distinction between the things which are in our power and the things which are not in our power" (*ibid.*, p. 40). On this count, I believe Baudouin has surpassed Beck and Ellis in his grasp of Stoicism's relevance for psychotherapy. The basic principle that reminds us to carefully distinguish internal (thoughts) from external (facts) seems to be more fundamental to Stoicism than the maxim of Epictetus quoted most often in modern CBT literature, which attributes emotional disturbance to our judgements rather than to things themselves. As mentioned in the first chapter, this distinction quoted by Baudouin is the very first principle introduced in the *Enchiridion* of Epictetus, from which the other aspects of Stoicism follow.

Baudouin and Lestchinsky also recognize the relevance of other features of Stoicism for modern psychotherapy to a much greater extent than either Beck or Ellis. They discuss the Stoic psychology of self-knowledge, determinism, and their attitude of acceptance and resignation toward that which is outside our control. Although the sages of classical antiquity seemed to them to over-value reason, Baudouin and Lestchinsky think that they were basically right to see the proper use of man's rational faculty as a powerful means for the "inner discipline" of self-help and psychotherapy.

> In the first place it enables us to gain an accurate *knowledge* of ourselves and of things. Knowledge is power. "Know thyself," said the Greek philosophers, and Buddha voiced the same precept. The Stoics tell us that we must distinguish clearly between things in our power and things not in our power, in order to regulate our desires

in the light of this distinction, and to avoid unreasonable wishes. Thus, for the philosophers of the Stoic school, an understanding of universal determinism, a recognition of the inexorable interlacement of causes and effects, was one of the first premises of wisdom. We cannot but be interested to note that, in our own day, Dubois founds his therapeutic method of moralisation upon the same principle of determinism.

> But our reason has an additional task in this struggle with ourselves. We can use it in the form of the *rational persuasion* which Dubois has organised into a therapeutic system. We shall do well to remember that the Stoics had grasped the importance of this method, for their advice was that we should practise a pitiless analysis, that we might convince ourselves of the worthlessness of the objects towards which passion was leading us astray. [Baudouin & Lestchinsky, 1924, pp. 217–218]

Baudouin and Lestchinsky's criticism of the over-valuation of reason in classical Socratic philosophy is a common one; people often discount Stoicism as being "overly-rational" or "intellectual". However, to some extent, this may be based upon misconceptions caused by difficulties in translation. The Greeks and Romans used different words to describe different aspects of reasoning. Moreover, their emphasis upon the role of exercise and training, which these authors note, clearly implies that they appreciated various processes were involved in reasoning, some of which required repeated practice in order to instil change. Baudouin and Lestchinsky's addition, the concentrated repetition of auto-suggestions, is not completely alien to ancient philosophy, and can be compared to various passages found in the Stoic literature and elsewhere, as we shall see. It will suffice at this stage to draw attention to the contradiction involved in dismissing Stoicism as "merely intellectual" when it is clearly characterized by a practical emphasis on the development of psychological self-discipline through specific daily exercises. As we shall see, Stoicism consists of both *cognitive* and *behavioural* exercises that constitute part of a therapeutic lifestyle and daily regime.

Moreover, despite his partial criticism of the philosophical approach to therapy, Baudouin acknowledged the value of Stoic contemplative exercises. Central to Dubois's rational psychotherapy was the concept that simply encouraging clients to contem-

plate the meaning of determinism often had positive psychological benefits. Baudouin recognized that this particular method of philosophical contemplation, as a form of psychotherapy, was also fundamental to Stoicism. Both Dubois and Baudouin were psychotherapists who were forced to educate their clients in "plain English" rather than through abstract or technical philosophical jargon; we call this aspect of therapy "psycho-education" today. Both therapists illustrated the contemplation of determinism to the layman simply by reference to the expansion of modern science.

> Science, a philosophical knowledge of the world, discloses the existence of universal determinism, discloses the never-ending chain of causes and effects, and thus proves to us how numerous are the things which are not in our power. [*ibid.*, p. 40]

There are many ways in which one can contemplate determinism, and many psychological benefits that can be drawn from this kind of philosophical meditation. As Baudouin points out, one benefit of this perspective is that it encourages a realistic and balanced attitude toward the question of which things are within our power to control, and prevents us from expending energy wastefully by fighting against ourselves. Contemplation of determinism tends to promote a sense of emotional equanimity in many people, as the Stoics observed.

> For, as concerns things which are not in our power, there is but one manly attitude, that which is summed up in the Stoic maxim "*sustine et abstine*"—be steadfast, and forego . . .
>
> Nothing should be done without a purpose. We must not wish for the impossible, or try to do what is impossible. We must not run our heads against a wall, for we shall only injure ourselves without breaking down the wall. If we follow these recommendations, we shall certainly economise our energies! This principle of economy of effort ("*abstine*") pervades the Stoical doctrine. [*ibid.*, pp. 42–43]

The slogan that Baudouin quotes in Latin was a well-known maxim of Epictetus and his Stoic school, and is more commonly translated into English as "endure and renounce", or "bear and forbear".

The Stoic novitiate probably began his training by learning both to *endure* the fear and pain caused by illusory harm, and to *renounce* the craving and sensory pleasure caused by illusory gain. By this

was meant the loss or gain of external things, that is, wealth or reputation, classed by the Stoics as fundamentally "indifferent", or, rather, not worth worrying about. Instead, he learns to place absolute value upon the cultivation of wisdom (*sophia*) and mental well-being (*eudaimonia*), the only things that truly matter in terms of the philosophical art of living. To put it simply, the Stoics felt that common sense tells us, on reflection, that people tend to disturb themselves by worrying too much about things that are outside of their control, banging their heads against a wall, and that it requires patient practice and self-discipline to train oneself to be on the outlook for this bad habit and to nip it in the bud. The price we pay for becoming overly preoccupied with external events, a natural human weakness, is that we tend to become forgetful of our own attitude toward life, and neglect to look after our own mental health. The inner strength of the ideal Stoic sage begins with what Baudouin calls his "economy of effort"; he carefully avoids wasting his energy on futile preoccupations, allowing him to focus more of his attention on what he can actually change.

Moreover, Baudouin and Lestchinsky recognized that the Stoic concept of our sphere of control and responsibility offers a possible philosophical solution to the issue of morbid rumination over the past and the unhealthy and excessive sense of guilt, self-blame, etc., so common among clients in modern psychotherapy.

> As for regret and remorse, as for the tortures we inflict on ourselves on account of a past which we cannot change, these also fall within the category of the wishes that relate to things which are not in our power. They involve a futile expenditure of energy. Let us see to it that we do better in the future, but let us cease to deplore having done ill in the past. Phocylides, the poet and sage who lived in the sixth century B.C. wrote: "Do not let past evils disturb you, for what is done cannot be undone." [*ibid.*, p. 44]

Modern CBT has attempted to dispute irrational self-blame or unhealthy obsessions with past events in a similar manner, by drawing attention to our inability to change the past. If guilt serves a purpose, it is surely to motivate us to change *today*, in order to prepare for *tomorrow*, but not to condemn ourselves to endless complaining about *yesterday*. Likewise, as Baudouin notes, the Stoics advise us against attaching too much importance to the

distant future, to the neglect of the present moment, because the future is both uncertain and beyond our immediate control. The true locus of our control, and therefore our primary concern, is the *here and now*, from moment to moment. It is in the present moment that lessons are learned *from* the past, and preparation is made *for* the future. Many modern therapists think of the "here and now" as an important concept derived from Buddhist thought, but it is an idea native to European philosophy, and a characteristic feature of Stoicism is its emphasis upon the here and now and learning to live more in the present moment. It is the reason we have the English phrase "here and now".

Baudouin and Lestchinsky's writings have the virtue of expressing Stoic ideas in plain and simple language, although sometimes they may be guilty of over-simplification.

> Imagination and opinion are pre-eminently to be classed among the things which are within our power. There is a familiar adage: If we can't get what we like, we must like what we have. The Stoics held the same view, though on a somewhat higher plane. Instead of lamenting because we cannot change our lot, let us learn to love it. Happiness and unhappiness are, to a great extent, matters of imagination and opinion. [*ibid*., p. 45]

Nevertheless, they provide a good introduction to Stoic thought and its role in psychotherapy and self-help. Moreover, as far as I am aware, this book is the only example of a detailed discussion of this topic in the literature of twentieth century psychotherapy, and certainly it both predates the writings of Beck and Ellis and makes more explicit reference to Stoic therapy.

We have now looked at the way in which a range of "rational" or "cognitive" psychotherapists such as Dubois, Baudouin, Ellis, Beck, and others, have drawn upon Stoicism, and related philosophical literature. In doing so, we have already had the opportunity to mention some of the most important Stoic authors, to introduce some of the basic precepts of Stoicism, and to touch briefly on the kind of therapeutic exercises employed in ancient philosophy, such as the contemplation of determinism. We are ready to focus our attention directly on the general concept of philosophical therapy in antiquity, and the nature of Stoic theory and practice in particular.

CHAPTER THREE

A brief history of philosophical therapy

To understand the relationship between Stoicism and psychotherapy, we need to consider Stoicism's own roots. It seems likely that some therapeutic concepts and practices, as we shall see, were already in use by the followers of one of the very earliest philosophers, the enigmatic Pythagoras of Samos (ca. 580–490 BC). The precursors of certain therapeutic concepts may perhaps even have been in use among the mystery cults, such as Orphism, from which Pythagorean philosophy probably evolved. However, to the endless frustration of modern scholars, these pre-Socratic traditions were notoriously secretive and clandestine, still primarily oral traditions, and very little can be said about their practices or beliefs with confidence.

The Socratic schools of philosophical therapy

Socrates himself wrote nothing that survives, but his character and the events of his life made such a profound impression upon his contemporaries that, following his notorious execution, he became a kind of philosophical martyr, and propelled interest in philosophy

to the forefront of Greek society. Ten schools or "sects" were founded by his immediate followers, most notably the great Academy of Plato, but also the sects of Antisthenes, a forerunner of the Cynics, and the briefly-lived school of the Greek general Xenophon, both forerunners of Stoicism. "Of those who succeeded him", writes Diogenes Laertius, "and who are called the Socratic school, the chiefs were Plato, Xenophon, and Antisthenes" (Laertius, 1853, p. 74). Each of the ten schools developed Socrates' ideas in different ways. Plato's Academy, probably the first formal educational institution of its kind, published numerous written *dialogues*, which often portray the philosophical discussions of Socrates in dramatic form, and may have been designed for oral re-enactment. However, Plato appears to have been increasingly drawn to the abstract mathematical and astronomical speculations of certain followers of Pythagoras, such as his friend Archytas of Tarentum, and the direction in which he took the Socratic teaching could be described, to some extent, as "academic", in the modern sense of being abstract and intellectual at the expense of practical application. Diogenes the Cynic is often portrayed as representing a rival "Socratic" tradition to that of Plato, and they appear to have exchanged several barbed remarks (*ibid.*, pp. 225–226). Diogenes and the Cynics placed greater emphasis upon the practical lifestyle of the philosopher, whereas Plato was more concerned with sophisticated philosophical dialogue. It is important to understand, however, that ancient philosophy in general had a *practical* emphasis that was lost over the centuries, and that most philosophers were more concerned with self-improvement than with theoretical debate for its own sake.

Among the other sects inspired by the circle of Socrates, by contrast, were the "Cynics", reputedly derived from a group founded by his student Antisthenes who, unlike Plato, was present with Socrates at his execution. The name Cynic derives from the Greek word for *dog*, and refers to the frank and often abrasive manner in which Cynics would challenge others and encourage them to adopt a more philosophical life. Diogenes of Sinope, the most celebrated of the Cynics, reputedly explained that while other dogs bite their enemies, the Cynic bit his friends to save them. Likewise, Antisthenes reputedly mused that physicians must sometimes use bitter remedies to cure their patients (*ibid.*, p. 218). The