

CENT PAPER NUMBER TWO (C):

SELF-ACCEPTANCE AND OTHER-ACCEPTANCE IN RELATION TO COMPETENCE AND MORALITY

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1. Introduction

In this paper I will explore the concept of **unconditional** self-acceptance (USA), developed by Dr Albert Ellis (1962¹, 1994²). In order to understand the background to the development of this idea, I will investigate the concept of **unconditional** positive regard (UPR), developed by Dr Carl Rogers³. I will then relate the idea of unconditional self acceptance (USA) to some of the most important concepts of moral philosophy, including the ideas of praise and blame. I will then relate all of these ideas to the newly emerging field of study of 'moral emotions', and show that Albert Ellis was (at least theoretically) in the 'ethical rationalist' tradition created by Jean Piaget (1952, 1954), which holds that moral judgements are driven by linguistic reasoning, rather than by emotional intuitions (as argued by Haidt, 2001⁴, 2003⁵, 2006⁶). I say that Ellis was 'theoretically' an ethical rationalist because, in practice, he is not actually a moralist of any description, being mainly a pragmatic promoter of **prudence** rather than moral codes and rules. He expressly forbids all forms of the moral imperatives: *should*, *must*, *have to*, *got to*, *need to*, *ought*. And he insists that *nobody should ever be blamed* for anything.

¹ Ellis, A. (1962) *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy*. New York: Lyle Stuart.

² Ellis, A. (1994) *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy: revised and updated*. New York: Carol Publishing.

³ Rogers, C.R. and Stevens, B. (with Eugene T. Gendlin, John M. Shien and Wilson Van Dusen) (1967/1998). *Person to person: The problem of being human; a new trend in psychology*. Lafayette, CA: Real People Press.

⁴ Haidt, J. (2001) The emotional dog and its rational tail: a social intuitionist approach to moral judgement. *Psychological Review*, 108(4): 814-834.

⁵ Haidt, J. (2003). The moral emotions. In R.J. Davidson, K.R. Scherer, & H.H. Goldsmith (Eds.), *Handbook of Affective Sciences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 852-870.

⁶ Haidt, J. (2006) *The Happiness Hypothesis: Putting ancient wisdom and philosophy to the test of modern science*. London: William Heinemann.

PART ONE: THE MADNESS OF UNCONDITIONAL POSITIVE REGARD

2. Morality and the Individual

In this section, I want to begin to write about another area of weakness in traditional REBT (Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy) theory, and that is the concept of "Unconditional Self and Other Acceptance".

This idea was a derivation-by-rejection of Carl Rogers' concept of 'Unconditional Positive Regard', which is the crazy (Rogers') idea that, no matter how other people behave we should **positively regard them!** Sheer madness: and a recipe for social breakdown and the end of civilization. Civilization, in the form of individual socialization, necessarily involves learning the rules of our mothers and fathers, our neighbours and peers, our school teachers, and so on. We cannot hope to live socially if we do not know what is allowed and what is not allowed: what we ought to do, and what we ought not do. (But as adults we also need to have clarity about 'why' something is moral, and 'why' something else is immoral. We need to engage, not merely in rule following, but also in moral discourse).

To clarify the need for a developed ability to think about morality, I want to add that, to be a moral person, it is *necessary*, but not *sufficient*, to follow the moral rules of your society. To be more fully moral, you should also have an ability to *reason* about moral issues, especially when conflicts arise between competing moral principles: (Hare, 1981)⁷.

Now I want to present some ideas about Carl Rogers (and one of his supporters, Barry Stevens) on the subject of *Unconditional Positive Regard* (UPR); and then, in the subsequent section, I will move on to Albert Ellis's *Unconditional Self Acceptance* (USA).

3. The so-called 'organismic valuing system'

Back in February 2002, when I was studying for my Advanced Diploma in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy, I had to review the ideas of Carl Rogers (as part of my study of thirteen different systems of counselling and psychotherapy). I studied this system in depth, and wrote a detailed critique in the form of a

⁷ Hare, R.M. (1981) *Moral Thinking: its levels, method and point*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

10,000 word paper. What follows below, in quotation marks, is an extract from that particular paper. I had begun by defining what I mean by "my self"; how I am a product of my social experience and my physical existence:

'Indeed, I would be incapable of functioning in a society of any kind unless I had learned to distinguish certain *acceptable* from certain *unacceptable* forms of behaviour. For Rogers, as I read him, all of these *socially prescribed behaviours and attitudes* are probably seen as forms of avoidable, and undesirable, and possibly detestable "conditions of worth". In person centred counselling, the concept of "conditions of worth" refers to the idea that "I can be worthy, or okay, if I fulfil (this externally demanded condition) or if I fail to transgress (this other social condition, or rule). And If I fail to do what I must, then I become worthless, or diminished, or not Okay".'

To clarify just how extreme Rogers' thinking is on this subject, let us use an illustration that anybody can understand, and that any sensible person must challenge:

'See for example his (Rogers') reference to a mother who criticised her little boy for pulling his sister's hair, in Rogers and Stevens (1967/1998)⁸, ... According to Rogers, the boy's "organismic valuing system" told him that the pulling of his sister's hair was nice, and good, but his mother *distorted his organismic valuing system* by scolding him for this act. See also Stevens's (1998)⁹ highly emotive diatribe against a policeman who told her son off, when he was a first-year undergraduate student, because he overloaded his car with passengers, and let several of his friends ride on the running boards of his car - (i.e. to hang on to the outside of his car while he drove along the public highway!) Again, this was seen by Stevens as distorting her son's "organismic valuing system". According to Stevens, her son needed no teaching or training, as *his innate organismic valuing system could inform him* of how to behave appropriately. (Perls, 1976, would probably see this as a good example of how misguided movements towards self-actualization can bring the individual into severe conflict with society, and thus to classification as a

⁸ Rogers, C.R. and Stevens, B. (with Eugene T. Gendlin, John M. Shien and Wilson Van Dusen) (1967/1998). *Person to person: The problem of being human; a new trend in psychology*. Lafayette, CA: Real People Press.

⁹ In Rogers and Stevens (1967/98), above.

criminal, for "...arrogat(ing) to himself functions traditionally defined as the prerogatives of the state" (page 27)¹⁰.

This peculiar belief of Stevens' – that people **know** how to behave without outside control, regulation or reinforcement – is hard to credit, given the amount of crime and anti-social behaviour we witness on our streets every day. Freud had clarified for us that people are driven from birth by two tendencies, which he termed Eros (or the love urge) and Thanatos (or the death urge); which, in CENT we refer to as the Good Wolf and the Bad Wolf side of the human personality. We each have those two tendencies, and our families need to shape us so that we mainly operate from Good Wolf, otherwise we will make their lives, and the lives of others in our communities, intolerable.

In recent writings, I have been developing a clearer model of the human ego, as a self-constructing information system, which emerges in the overlapping space in which mother and baby interact. Whatever 'organismic valuing system' might be innate in the baby is inevitably **shaped** to fit a social culture by its interactions with mother. This is as inevitable as the fact that the baby will learn *the mother's language*, and not some 'innate language'. Rogers' and Stevens' rebellion is futile, as socialization is an inevitable aspect of the human development of every individual. Or as I said in 2002:

'Such naive, juvenile rebelliousness (in Rogers and Stevens) is difficult to comprehend. I certainly was not expecting such anti-social views when I began reading ... (this book). What was so unacceptable to Stevens was the cop's suggestion, to her son, that her son was "behaving irresponsibly"! She seems to be implying that her son could not be realistically expected to put up with such an "*outrageous assault*" on his "integrity"; such a *dent* in his "self-esteem"; such an "*invalidation*" of his "organismic valuing system" as to be told that he is "behaving irresponsibly" (which we was!). And yet positive and negative feedback from our environments are inevitable aspects of our socialization and growth. And Stevens' general reaction to the accusation of "behaving irresponsibility" is quite extreme. When the words are applied to any of her behaviours, she feels it is like "a dagger being twisted in my chest".¹¹ More generally, Stevens engages in awfulizing and demandingness (on pages 30-31) about her

¹⁰ Perls, F. (1976) *The Gestalt Approach & Eye Witness to Therapy*. New York: Bantam.

¹¹ Rogers and Stevens *et al* (1967/1998), page 32.

son and also about her poor treatment by a nurse in hospital. She characterizes that unsupportive nurse as being "like Eichman" (a Nazi!) for not acting as directed (or indicated) by Stevens (the patient!) and her "organismic valuing system", which knew better than any nurse what was required! Furthermore, Stevens speaks approvingly of the fact that, many years after her son's breach of the Highway Code, he still *hates cops*.¹² (Not much space for the cop to self-actualize there! And, if everybody has an innate 'organismic valuing system', what happened to that of the cop?) Also, Perls, 1976, would not consider Stevens' son to be a "well-integrated man", because of his unwillingness, or inability, to "recognize the contact boundary between himself and his society", and because he fails to "render unto Caesar (or society) the things which are Caesar's and to retain for himself those things that are his own". Perls (1976: Page 26).

For me, these rebellious attitudes of Rogers and Stevens are just resistance to *what is so*: awfulizing about the *unavoidable* and *inevitable* fact that children are not capitulated to by their parents when the child demands that s/he must get what s/he wants, when s/he wants it, right now, yesterday! And the equally *unavoidable* fact that children are *forced* (yes, forced!) – hopefully as gently and skilfully as possible - into the Procrustean bed of whichever society they happen to be born into!

As Alan Watts says, in *The Way of Zen*,¹³ this is the unavoidable price we pay for the undeniable benefits of civilization. However, as Freud points out, we then need some kind of corrective later in life, to help us to recover from any damage done in the processes of our socialization. Nevertheless, socialized we must be; and we have to learn to be moral citizens in order to enjoy the benefits of our society and community, and to avoid harming others. My 2002 account of Rogers' false view continued like this:

'Rogers also believed that decisions made by one individual, based on their internal locus of evaluation, would not only be valid for that individual, *but also for others*. (Nelson-Jones, 2001, page 95)¹⁴. The underlying assumption here is that each person carries a "universal morality", and would know

¹² Page 30, Rogers and Stevens (1967/1998).

¹³ Watts, A. (1962/1990) *The Way of Zen*. London: Arkana/Penguin.

¹⁴ Nelson-Jones, R. (2001) *Theory and Practice of Counselling and Therapy*. Third edition. London: Continuum.

from their "body sense" what is 'right' and 'wrong' in any given situation. (Nelson-Jones, 2001: pages 95-96). I think most anthropologists, criminologists and psychologists would hotly contest Rogers' implicit concept of a "universal morality". (We may have *innate empathy for kin*, but also *aggression in defence of our demands*). Stevens is even more explicit on this point, on pages 44-45, after she has described "taking freedom" for herself. "When I am within this freedom", she continues, "it is silly to think of 'learning' ethics. Ethics course through me with my blood, without my thinking. What we call ethics simply *is* - a part of mankind, existing as a free response to life and to all living. How can I wish to hurt you, when my feeling is that you are me and I am you? How can I feel grateful that you give to me when I am you? There is only happiness in the giving that is receiving too - happiness **without responsibility or obligation**".

How typical of the Rebellious Child ego state: no responsibility! No obligation!

This state of 'taking freedom', however, is not *normal human consciousness!* Stevens sounds like a person who has achieved some kind of "enlightenment", as defined in Zen and Sufism, which is quite an achievement; and I am happy for her liberation. (Although I am concerned that she seems to have abandoned her sense of responsibility and obligation to others!) However, the problem with her analysis is this: Stevens had to **learn** how to think and feel this way - it **did not** come naturally. It was **not** inborn! This system of **enlightenment and ethics** which she describes took her *years to establish*, through enormous struggle and emotional turbulence!

As a person who has meditated and studied Zen Buddhism since 1980, I am qualified to comment on her situation. With regard to her enlightened state, that normally arrives without warning and lasts only momentarily! And it cannot be conjured up again at will! However, some of the gains can be retained in long term memory for some (little) time after the enlightenment state departs.

If systems of ethics came naturally to all humans, then they would be shared by all humans, and society would not have fractured into antagonistic classes, races and nations; and frequently mutually antagonistic genders. If ethical systems were inborn, then it would not have been necessary for religions to emerge, and to invent ethical systems to *impose* upon individuals. And it does not support Stevens' argument to say that religious ethics were invented to

support political usurpers, because, how could corrupt political usurpers ever emerge among beings that have an *inborn ethical system*?

At the very least, we must have *inborn tendencies towards good and evil*, and that is certainly central to the theory of Cognitive Emotive Narrative Therapy (CENT), as it was to Freudianism. Therefore, individual human beings have to be shaped over time, by good parents and good teachers, in order to become good citizens.

4. Unconditional regard = 'anything goes'

Unconditional positive regard, for ourselves and/or others, does not make sense. We need to relate to people on the basis of how they behave. We would not unconditionally accept having a son or daughter who behaved viciously, or maliciously, with others. We would see it as our duty to change that aspect of their functioning, and we would not be very *happy with them* while we were working for that change.

Professor Jonathan Haidt (2006¹⁵) argues that we seem to have an innate neurological predisposition to respond with gratitude to people who treat us fairly; and to respond with vengeance to those who treat us unfairly. Clearly we would be vulnerable to exploitation and abuse to the extent that we responded to unfairness with unconditional regard for the perpetrator.

This is a very important point. Just because Carl Rogers can find – at an advanced stage in his life – a sense of 'inner guide' that he can trust to be good and wholesome – and just because Barry Stevens can find in her mind an enlightened state in which there is only 'one being', and that ***that being is Barry, and you, and me, and everybody else, all connected up together*** – it does not follow that we should promulgate this as a universal philosophy of life to be followed by everybody. Why not? Because many people will pull those elevated insights down to the level of the gutter, and use them to justify all kinds of nefarious actions.

If Carl Rogers and Barry Stevens find that they are 'automatically' ethical, that is because they have been ***socialized to be ethical***, by their parents, their educators and their wider society. Rogers, for example, came from a very religious family, who sent him to a

¹⁵ Haidt, J. (2006) *The Happiness Hypothesis: Putting ancient wisdom and philosophy to the test of modern science*. London: William Heinemann.

seminary as his second college (at the age of 22 years)!¹⁶ And Stevens has studied various systems of Eastern religious thought. My contention would be that Rogers and Stevens are not merely 'enlightened beings'; they seem to be (somewhat) 'ethical beings' who also happen to be enlightened. But not everybody who is introduced to the idea of enlightenment can be assumed to have a solid sense of ethical mindfulness. (I say they are 'somewhat' ethical because, as I showed above, they do not accept the need for moral controls and reinforcements from outside of themselves). Rogers and Stevens (and, as we will see later, Ellis) seem to be rebelling against strict religious injunctions from their childhood training.

What Rogers and Stevens (and also Ellis) seem to overlook is the question of what damage might be done by offering 'total freedom', or 'enlightenment', to individuals who have no particular commitment to acting morally. For example, Osho (2005)¹⁷ has argued that, in India, enlightenment ideas from Hinduism have been abused to facilitate self-serving forms of corruption and immorality. Hindu philosophy teaches that all existence and activity at the material level is 'measurement only', or 'name only', and that nobody dies when a conventional death occurs; and nobody exists in reality, as we are all one great organism (Atman). This has been corrupted by applying it in non-ethical ways. Osho's view is that: "...when very profound truths fall into the hands of cunning people, they prove to be more harmful than lies". (Page 249). It is an abuse of enlightenment to think: 'If we don't really exist, what could be wrong with lying or cheating?' But that seems to be precisely what unethical individuals will do with enlightenment ideas.

It is not difficult to confirm that India is very high on the international list of corrupt countries:

"The Vohra Report was submitted by the former Indian Union Home Secretary, N.N. Vohra, in October 1993. It studied the problem of

¹⁶ "A rather sickly boy (like Ellis), Rogers lived his childhood in a close-knit family in which hard work and a highly conservative, almost fundamentalist Protestant Christianity were almost equally revered. ... Until Rogers went to college he was a loner who read incessantly and who adopted his parents' attitude toward the outside world, summed up in the statement: 'Other persons behave in dubious ways which we do not approve in our family' ..." Nelson-Jones, R. (2001) *Theory and Practice of Counselling and Therapy*. Third edition. London: Continuum. Page 79.

¹⁷ Osho (2005) *Inner War and Peace: timeless solutions to conflict*. London: Watkins Publishing.

the criminalisation of politics and of the nexus among criminals, politicians and bureaucrats in India."¹⁸

"The report contained several observations made by official agencies on the criminal network which was virtually running a parallel government. It also discussed criminal gangs who enjoyed the patronage of politicians, of all parties, and the protection of government functionaries. It revealed that political leaders had become the leaders of gangs. They were connected to the military. Over the years criminals had been elected to local bodies, State Assemblies and Parliament. The unpublished annexures to the Vohra Report were believed to contain highly explosive material."¹⁹

However, it is not easy to confirm Osho's theory that this corruption is *primarily* related to enlightenment philosophy which has been abused by being dragged down to the level of the gutter. It is easier to find arguments for Indian corruption as a function of historical economic factors, such as British rule, 'socialist government', and taxation policy²⁰.

Nevertheless, there is a book on 'Corruption in Ancient India', by Upendra Thakur, which suggests that the previous arguments about the British Empire and so-called 'socialist rule' cannot be the causes or origins of modern corruption, because Indian corruption goes back to ancient times, and is interlaced with the culture of Hinduism, as it was popularly interpreted, and indeed, most likely abused.

One argument that I encountered is that, in order to overcome the current problems of corruption in India, the people need to be taught, not the **enlightenment** aspects of Hinduism, but rather the **ethical** aspects of Hinduism²¹.

¹⁸ 'Corruption in India', From Wikipedia, online:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corruption_in_India. Accessed: 8th March 2010.

¹⁹ 'Corruption in India', From Wikipedia, online:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corruption_in_India. Accessed: 8th March 2010.

See also 'Corruption in India', online:
http://www.indianchild.com/corruption_in_india.htm.

²⁰ (Cf: 'Corruption retarding India's growth, says Indian PM' - Online:
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/expat/6133572/Corruption-retarding-Indias-growth-says-Indian-PM.html>).

²¹ See 'The Rediscovery of India: tackling corruption the Dharmic way'. Online:
<http://www.sandeepweb.com/2010/02/12/tackling-corruption-the-dharmic-way/>.
Accessed: 8th March 2010.

5. The importance of teaching morality

This idea is central to the theory of Cognitive Emotive Narrative Therapy. We (as a society) need to teach people at the level at which they currently exist, which is *mainly* the level of the pavement, not the level of the clouds. That is why, in Buddhism, the individual is trained to be a moral person; a moral person; a moral person. Over, and over, and over again. Alongside this process, the individual is encouraged to meditate; to meditate; to meditate. Over, and over, and over again. Through those two processes, a solid, admirable kind of social being is shaped: a moral being. The meditation process might eventually bring about a sense of personal liberation, but not a sense that, since we are all one, I can take your stuff. Or since there is only one being, I can kill you, and no harm will be done.

Some Buddhist *philosophy* may also be taught and studied, but not of a kind that will cause the individual to discount the value of other peoples' lives; nor their right to be respected, honoured, and left to get on with their own journeys. Ethical functioning must always take precedence over enlightenment. And to use 'enlightenment' as an excuse for immoral behaviour has to be the lowest form of self-serving rationalization.

The Indian experience is an illustration of the fact that we **cannot** – *realistically* - unconditionally accept others people, regardless of how they behave. The recent collapse of the western banking system is another example of how badly people will behave when they are unregulated, and 'prized' for *being*, regardless of how they **behave**.

That is the end of my brief introduction to the madness of **Unconditional** Positive Regard (UPR). In the next section, I will take a look at the ways in which Unconditional Self Acceptance (USA) and Unconditional Other Acceptance (UOA), developed by Dr Albert Ellis, are somewhat similar to Rogers' lamentable 'philosophy'.

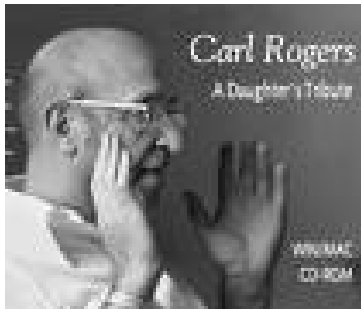
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## PART TWO: REGARD AND ACCEPTANCE: DEFINING TERMS

### 6. Opening statement on USA/UOA

This section is designed to clarify some words and concepts that I used in the previous section. By the end of this section, you should have a much clearer idea of what it being described and proposed here.



As shown in the previous section, Carl Rogers, who created person-centred, or non-directive, counselling, recommended that *we should all treat ourselves and each other with Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR)*. On the other hand, Albert Ellis - who was originally influenced by Rogers' ideas, and who then moved on to study psychoanalysis, and finally to develop his own system of therapy (called Rational Therapy) - recommended that *we should all (ideally) offer ourselves and each other Unconditional (Self or Other) Acceptance*.

In order to make this presentation as clear as possible, I have identified a range of questions that you (the reader) are most likely to have on this subject, and in the pages that follow, I will answer those questions.

### 7. What does 'positive regard' mean?

There are four definitions of different uses of the concept of 'regard' in my dictionary; but the second definition seems to be the only one that fits our present case: "2. high opinion, respect".

Thus we can say that Carl Rogers added the word "positive" to "regard" to clarify the fact that he was referring to definition 2, and not to one of the other three definitions. We can also say that he was advocating that we each have "an unconditionally high opinion of, or respect for, ourselves and all others". Well that is one thing we could do, but we will have to think about that, and contrast it with Ellis's suggestion, and also with my reasoning, and perhaps with some other ideas. (However, as suggested above, it seems quite senseless to hold a high opinion of somebody who is behaving unethically or immorally!)

## 8. What does 'acceptance' mean?



Unfortunately for Albert Ellis, there are two aspects of the definition of the word "accept" which could apply here. The first is: "2. regard favourably". And the second is: "5. put up with".

I am going to rule out the second of these definitions, on the grounds that Albert Ellis was not simply asking us to 'put up with' ourselves and others. If we go for the first of these definitions, then it would seem that "self acceptance" and "self regard" mean the same thing; so that Ellis was not moving as far from Rogers as he thought. (And again, it seems to be self-evidently unjustified to 'regard favourably' somebody who is behaving unethically or immorally).

## 9. How does 'regard' relate to 'acceptance' and 'non-acceptance'?

Essentially, Rogers and Ellis were involved in the same mission: to find a way to help despondent, depressed and discouraged counselling clients *to believe in themselves; to accept that they are okay; to accept that they have some worth* - and to reject their own idea that they are *worthless*. For it was widely agreed, and still is, that for the client to continue to believe that they are worthless, because they have screwed up badly in their lives, is to continue to be neurotic and self-defeating in their beliefs, and thus to continue to feel lethargic and directionless; or just plain stuck.

Ellis seems to have essentially been saying: "If you regard yourself highly when you succeed, then you will, logically, and necessarily, regard yourself lowly when you fail. Thus regard, as a form of 'self esteem', is part of the problem, and not part of the solution.

This is not as self-evidently obvious as Albert Ellis thought. Why? Because, in theory, I could decide to regard myself **highly** when I succeed; and then when I fail, to **refuse** to regard myself lowly, but rather to say "I will continue to regard myself highly, even if I don't succeed, just so long as I keep setting goals, and keep functioning intelligently towards their achievement".

I could also say that "I will regard myself highly because I have the goal to be a **moral** person; and even when I **fail** to behave morally, as long as I regret that action, and repent in some way, there is no reason why I should not continue to regard myself highly".

Furthermore, I could say: "You (other people) should regard yourselves highly, so long as you are striving to be the best person you can be (in terms of *effectiveness and morality*); and you should also continue to regard yourselves highly, even when you fail in this mission, so long as you did not deliberately fail, your behaviour is not blameworthy, and you continue to be committed to being an effective and moral person". And if your behaviour is blameworthy, you can feel remorseful, make amends, and commit to avoid that behaviour in the future.

I could also go further and say: "Even if you (other people) fail to show any form of effectiveness in vocational matters, or you demonstrate lack of success in personal relationships, you can still regard yourself highly, so long as you continue to try to be a good (moral) person".

And of course, all of the statements above will normally prove to be either:

1. **Articulations** of cognitive-emotive convictions which are hard wired in my brain; or:
2. **Affirmations** of intent which I am going to repeat over and over and over again until they eventually become hard-wired cognitive-emotive convictions in my brain.

## 10. What are USA and UOA?

Ellis was interested in how to avoid his identified problem, of, on the one hand, rating yourself **highly** when you succeed, or when you get love and respect from others; and then, on the other hand, rating yourself **lowly** when you fail in work, or fail to get love and respect from others. (This is a common problem, but as I showed above, it is not the only way to go with this idea). His solution was this: "Never rate your 'self' as a whole human being at all. Only rate your *acts* and *deeds*. And accept yourself **unconditionally**, whether or not you do well, and whether or not anybody loves you".

This seems like an elegant solution, and indeed Renata and I have been pursuing this solution - called Unconditional Self Acceptance (USA) - for many years now, with great success. (The other elements of the system are Unconditional Other Acceptance [UOA] and Unconditional Life Acceptance [ULA] - which call for us to accept other people unconditionally, no matter how they behave or fail to behave; and to accept the world exactly the way it is, no matter how that happens to be).

What is missing from Ellis's presentation is a serious consideration of morality. He omits to distinguish between "personal effectiveness issues" and "personal morality". It is okay to let people off the hook when they behave ineffectively or inefficiently in relation to their personal effectiveness issues, or practical goals and actions in the world. However, it is quite another matter to say: "Even if you kill a few people, that will not make you bad", which Ellis not only implied, but also said, including in relation to Adolf Hitler. On the contrary, if you kill just one person, that will make you necessarily *persona non grata* with the rest of society, because you are a threat to the peace and viability of society. It will make you a law breaker. You will be arrested and deemed culpable (or blameworthy) – unless you can present extenuating circumstances – such as temporary insanity – which will *exculpate* you (or nullify your blameworthiness). You will be treated – quite appropriately – as a bad person, unless and until you have paid your debt to society, and have shown remorse and made amends.

When Ellis invented his USA/UOA system, he was obviously operating at the 'transcendental' level of the Upanishads: the Hindu texts which caused so much moral confusion in India. It makes no connection with practical, everyday reality.

### **11. Am I saying that I am opposed to 'positive regard' for myself?**

Yes and no. In principle, I try to never rate the whole of myself highly when I do (personal effectiveness actions) well in the world, and never to rate the whole of myself lowly when I perform (practical tasks) badly in the world. And perhaps I achieve that about 80% or so of the time. However, the other 20% of the time, I do rate myself highly when I do well in the world; and especially when I exceed my moral norms. I sometimes, for example, exclaim that 'I am an exceptionally good therapist', as Albert Ellis has also been heard to say in public! And I do occasionally get on my own case if I cannot move my business forward in line with my goals.

And since I have been developing CENT, I no longer say that "even if I broke my own moral code, that would not make me bad". I now consider that, if I broke my own moral code, I would be culpable (or blameworthy) unless and until I show true repentance for my action, make amends, and commit to avoid that, or similar, immoral acts in the future.

However...

## 12. Do I 'accept' myself?

...in the main, up to 2005, I did try to stick to Unconditional Self Acceptance (USA), Unconditional Other Acceptance (UOA) and Unconditional Life Acceptance (ULA), as Ellis's argument is very powerful, and the results of these systems are that I almost never disturb myself about my performance in life, or how other people respond to me.

## 13. Am I saying I am opposed to 'positive regard' for others?

Yes and no.

No, I am not opposed to positively regarding other people in this sense: I relate to all others on the basis of Carl Rogers' core conditions: I treat all other people with respect, genuineness and empathy. And that is a form of regard. I also tend (without willing it) to regard highly those people whose work I admire - e.g. fellow researchers and writers on personal development and therapy topics. And I allow that to continue because it seems a harmless form of admiration. Furthermore, I admire praisingly those individuals who behave in an outstandingly moral manner.

However: Yes, I am opposed to 'positive regard' in this sense: I **try not to** regard most people positively when they perform well at their work, and then regard them negatively when they perform badly in their work. That would be to confuse them and their performances. They are not their performances. They do the performance; and they are responsible for it. But they **are not** it.

But I do regard bad work as bad work, and I believe that that behaviour had better be corrected. And I do regard good work as good work, and believe that good work should be acknowledged, and the worker praised for that good work. I do think that individuals should be encouraged to aim high, to set goals for personal effectiveness, and to strive to achieve them.

That still leaves the question of whether or not I would offer unconditional positive regard to another human being, and I will deal with that further down this page...

## 14. Do I 'accept' others?

Yes, I do aim to accept all other humans exactly the way they are, and I try not to **\*demand\*** that they should be different from the way they happen to be.

However, again, would I accept another human being unconditionally? We will see in a little while that I would not, and why not...

### **15. What are the advantages of USA/UOA?**

In the past I have found this effect: If and when I accepted myself unconditionally, I no longer got upset with myself when I failed to achieve a goal, or when I screwed up in a practical task, forgot to do something, or made an embarrassing mistake in public. "What would you expect from a fallible (or error-prone) human?" I would ask myself and the world. But I still accept myself as being okay, just because I'm alive, and just because I choose to do so.

The advantage of unconditionally accepting others (UOA) is that when they let you down, screw up, or fail to give you what you want, you won't go up the wall and have a screaming fit, because after all, you accept them as being okay, even though they are fallible (or error-prone). You accept them just because they are alive, and because you have chosen to be accepting towards them, even though they will always be somewhat imperfect.

### **16. What are the potential disadvantages of USA/UOA?**

It was not until July and September 2005, when the board of the Albert Ellis Institute split 4:3 on votes to remove Albert Ellis from his professional role; and later to remove him from the board; and then (allegedly) to refuse to pay his medical expenses (when he was a sick, ninety year old), that I began to see that offering **unconditional acceptance** to others is unrealistic.

When Albert Ellis was asked how he felt towards one of the key figures who had been instrumental in having him removed from key roles in his own institute, he did not say: "I accept him unconditionally; and I can clearly see the distinction between his bad actions and his totally acceptable essence!" No: he said something more like this: "I want **him** Denounced, Dismissed, Discarded". He made no distinction between the individual and his actions. And why was this? Because we were now dealing, not with a theoretical philosophy, but with (Ellis's perceptions of):

1. A **moral** issue; and:
2. A **personally painful** issue.

(However, Albert Ellis was not always clear about his stand on this. In one interview with Benedict Carey and Dan Hurley, in the *New*

*York Times*, October 11, 2005, he said: "I think it's unfair (how they have treated me), but they have the **right** as fallible, screwed-up humans to be unfair, that's the human condition"). However, this was technically incorrect. If his adversaries had a 'right' to be unfair, then somebody – the person against whom they were allegedly being unfair (Albert Ellis) – must have had a corresponding duty to accept their unfairness, which he clearly did not have, and did not accept that he had. He did, after all, **take them to court** over his dismissal. Here thereby proclaimed publicly that they had been unfair, which they **should not** have been. In other words, they had no right to do so. Therefore, we can see that Ellis was badly split between his statements and his actions; and in defining some of his terms.

### **17. How does CENT deal with regard/acceptance?**

It took months for me to be able to make sense of this situation, but I eventually came to recognize, as a general rule, applied to any part of the world, at any time, present or future, that it is not okay to attribute "unconditional acceptance" to anybody, if that means exempting them from the normal moral and legal standards of his/her society.

Albert Ellis did not offer **Unconditional** Life Acceptance (ULA) to his life as it stood in September-December 2005. No: he went to the court system to demand redress for what **he saw** as a major act of unfairness. (Of course, his adversaries presented a **counter** case). In the process he found out **why life must be fair, even when it is proving to be unfair**. It must be fair, because anything less than fairness will not work for any reasonable person. (Of course if achieving that fairness proves to be impossible over the longer term, it then becomes necessary to 'accept the uncontrollable fact that, **this time**, I cannot win'). And once a society, or community, drops below a certain critical level of fairness, that society or community is doomed to fracture and fall asunder. Fairness is the glue that holds families, communities and societies together<sup>22</sup>.

### **18. The non-viability of USA/UOA**

I was involved in the **Justice for Albert Ellis Campaign** between 2005 and 2007, when it was finally closed down. My opponents, who, as long-standing REBT practitioners, had trained in Unconditional Other Acceptance (UOA) for decades, **did not accept me unconditionally**. One very senior REBTER – let's call him Larry -

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<sup>22</sup> Wilkinson, R. and Pickett, K. (2010) *The Spirit Level: why equality is better for everybody*. London: Penguin Books.

described me as a **unconditional**, because I acted in defence of Albert Ellis. He (Larry) 'forgot' to accept 'me' **unconditionally**, and to only condemn my 'unacceptable actions'.

For a very long time, I and my colleagues in the Justice for Albert Ellis campaign refused to deviate from the core philosophy of REBT (at least in our explicit statements, if not in our implicit beliefs, displayed in some of our actions). We sincerely believed we had to extend Unconditional Acceptance towards the opponents of Albert Ellis, and only criticize their **actions** – not **them** as individuals.

However, in time I came to see that I must preserve to myself the right to **conditionally** accept others - and that **one condition** that I must always preserve to myself is this: I accept all other humans, exactly as they are, **provided they act from a reasonable moral sense or code**; that they commit to operate within the law; and that they actually refrain from immoral and illegal actions! This is what I call **One-Conditional Other Acceptance (or O-COA)**.

I also apply **One-Conditional Self Acceptance (O-CSA)** to myself: I will accept myself as being okay just so long as I am clearly committed to living my life as a moral person, within the law of the land; and **succeeding** in doing so. It is not enough to say: "I am *committed* to being moral, but because I am a fallible human, I keep **acting** immorally!" That is unacceptable. A very high level of success in keeping to a moral way of life is necessary in order for anybody to be accepted as being okay, in terms of their character!

I will not *unconditionally* accept anybody, including myself, who is behaving immorally. I will describe that as immoral action, and I see the perpetrator of immoral actions as (at least temporarily) a 'bad person'; meaning **a person of bad character** (in at least some **specific** respect)! It is only after they admit their immoral action, repent and make amends that I will consider that they have resumed being a 'good person' – which means 'a person who has their Good Wolf in the driving seat of their life'.

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PART THREE: WHAT WAS THE FOUNDATION OF ELLIS'S USA/UOA?

19. Ellis's campaign against the concept of 'sin'

Rogers and Ellis seemed to have a common agenda: to promote greater self acceptance among their clients, which, on the face of it was laudable. However, that project went too far in that it insisted

upon 'unconditional' acceptance of self and others, regardless of how immoral the actions of self and others might be. This is not only unrealistic, but also illogical.

In Chapter 7 of Ellis (1962)²³, Albert Ellis seems to begin with a conventional moral position, as follows:

"In a recent symposium in which I participated with Dr Mowrer, he made some excellent points with which I heartily agree (Mowrer, 1960b²⁴): namely, that psychotherapy must largely be concerned with the (client's) sense of morality or wrongdoing; that classical Freudianism is mistaken in its implication that giving an individual insight into or understanding of his moral or antisocial behaviour will usually suffice to enable him to change that behaviour; that if any Hell exists for human beings it is the Hell of neurosis and psychosis; that man is pre-eminently a social creature who psychologically maims himself to the degree that he needlessly harms others; that the only basic solution to the problem of emotional disturbance is the correction or cessation of the disturbed person's immoral actions; and that the effective psychotherapist must not only give his (client) insight into the origins of his mistaken and self-defeating behaviour but must also provide him with a highly active program of working at the eradication of this behaviour". (Pages 132-133).

This seems eminently sensible. Also, please note the reference to Hell (and later there are references to sin, and the need to keep the concept of sin out of psychotherapy). This is what I meant in an earlier reference to Albert Ellis being a man of his time; of being in conflict with an oppressive, religious patriarchy, which needed to be moderated, and which no longer applies in Western Europe today. Ellis then continues:

"On the surface, then, it would appear that I am in close agreement with Mowrer's concepts of sin and psychotherapy. This, however, is not true: since one of the central theses of rational-emotive psychotherapy is that there is no place whatever for the concept of sin in psychotherapy and that to introduce this concept in any manner, shape, or form is highly pernicious and anti-therapeutic". (Page 133).

²³ Ellis, A. (1962) *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy*. New York: Lyle Stuart.

²⁴ Mowrer, O.H. (1960) Some constructive features of the concept of sin. *Journal of Counseling psychology*, 7: 185-188.

I would agree that there is no place for the 'religious concept' of sin in psychotherapy, because religion and psychotherapy serve two different social functions, even if they overlap, and have some complementary elements. Also, psychotherapy today, especially in Western Europe, presents itself as a mainly secular, professional activity.

However, the 'religious concept' of sin, in secular language, can be rendered as 'folly', or 'imprudence', especially the folly of breaking moral rules. And sin can be seen as "an act that breaks a religious or moral law"²⁵. If we mean by 'sin' that the person has broken a moral law, then that concept, used in that way, might be acceptable to some therapists and some clients, but probably not to all clients and therapists.

In Western Europe today, this conversation about 'sin' is not highly emotive, but rather cool and academic. However, in 1960-62, when Albert Ellis was writing his magnum opus, this was a hot potato, and people had very strong emotional attitudes towards 'sin' and 'God'. (Ellis famously railed against God; a being in which he had no personal belief!). So, if we were in New York City, and it was 1962, I would say immediately: "Okay. Let's drop the use of the word sin completely, in all its meanings". But beyond this point I would then part company with Albert Ellis; especially when he says:

"The rational therapist holds, on the contrary, that no human being should **ever** be blamed for anything he does; and it is the therapist's main and most important function to help rid his (clients) of every possible vestige of their blaming themselves, blaming others, or blaming fate and the universe". (Page 133).

20. The value of praise and blame

This seems, on the face of it, to be an extreme view which flies in the face of moral philosophy as established up to that point. **Praise** and **blame** seem to be essential elements of any system of morality. For example, in Atkinson (1969)²⁶, Chapter 4 deals with 'merit and demerit: praise and blame'. (Pages 38-50). Atkinson argues that the concepts of merit and demerit are complex, and that usually we are not praised for normal fulfilment of our moral

²⁵ Soanes, C. (2002) *Paperback Oxford English Dictionary*. New York: Oxford University Press.

²⁶ Atkinson, R.F. (1969) *Conduct: an introduction to moral philosophy*. London: Macmillan.

duty, but rather for going *above and beyond what could be expected on average performance* (of all humans). The concept of *blameworthiness* is also called *culpability*. If an individual commits an immoral act – such as killing somebody by firing a loaded gun – then they would normally be held to be culpable – or blameworthy – unless there are extenuating circumstances (or circumstances which ‘exculpate’, or neutralize their culpability).

From the time of Aristotle onwards, individuals have been held to be blameworthy in the circumstance described above, unless they can demonstrate external ‘compulsion’, or ‘ignorance’ of what they were doing. (Or ignorance that they were breaching a moral rule: Atkinson, page 45). Of course, we also know of cases of diminished responsibility, which also exculpates. According to Atkinson: “...liability to praise or blame is related to *average* performance, and not simply determined by whether or not moral requirements are fulfilled by a particular agent” (Page 41). In other words, if my moral actions are *above* what would **normally** be performed by the average citizen, then I am praiseworthy; but if my immoral action is *below* the level that could **normally** be expected of the average citizen, in comparable circumstances, then I am *blameworthy*.

Furthermore, from the time of Ellis’s formative work, in the 1950s and 60s, psychological and philosophical discourses about morality, guilt and shame have moved on.

Freud’s theory of moral development, which was another early influence on Albert Ellis, but one which he rejected, included the idea that our internalized parents (normally called our ‘super-ego’, or over-I) controlled our moral behaviour, via our emotions of guilt or moral-anxiety, related to blameworthiness; and pride and self-esteem, related to praiseworthiness. But Freud thought the super-ego frequently induced anxiety, through moral ideas of guilt, which psycho-analysts should try to eliminate – which puts Ellis back in Freud’s camp.

Learning theory and social learning theory mainly emphasized conditioned behaviour, or imitation; though Eysenck maintained that guilt is central to moral control.

And the cognitive developmental theories of Piaget (1952, 1954), which was further developed by Lawrence Kohlberg (1975)²⁷, and which clearly influenced Ellis (1962), emphasized moral knowledge and information, reasoning, logic and understanding – to the exclusion of emotion.

²⁷ Kohlberg, L. (1975) The cognitive-developmental approach to moral education. *Phi Delta Kappa*, June: 670-677.

Subsequently, Hoffman (2000)²⁸ moved beyond Piaget and Kohlberg, by focussing on the importance of empathic feelings for moral development. Then Gibbs (2003)²⁹ integrated Kohlberg and Hoffman, by combining reason and emotion to the idea that skill training programmes can correct the anti-social tendencies of individuals.

I have previously argued that Albert Ellis deprived us of the concepts of moral discourse, in the form of *should, must, have to, ought to, got to, need to*; and I now add to that charge, that he also deprived us of the very useful concepts of **culpability** and **praiseworthiness**.

Of course, his defence would be something like this: 'I was trying to help my clients to escape the pain of guilt and shame; which was distressing them'. Now that is a laudable aim, but my claim is that Albert Ellis conflated the emotions of guilt and shame, and dumped guilt because shame is so emotionally disturbing.

21. The concepts of guilt and shame

Let me now present a definition of both guilt and shame, from Blackburn (1994)³⁰:

"Guilt is the uncomfortable feeling of having done wrong, and therefore deserving the anger of others. Shame is the sense of deserving the contempt or disdain of others".

Quite clearly these are distinct emotions, and while shame is likely to trigger feelings of low self-esteem, guilt need not do so. And while guilt is likely to be a result of being (appropriately) blamed for bad actions or omissions, shame is much more likely to result from internalizing a sense of being denigrated or condemned for something that seems to be central to the very character or soul of the person.

²⁸ Hoffman, M.L. (2000). *Empathy and moral development: implications for caring and justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

²⁹ Gibbs, J.C. (2003). *Moral development and reality: beyond the theories of Kohlberg and Hoffman*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

³⁰ Blackburn, S. (1994) *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

In a review of Tangney and Dearing (2002)³¹, on shame and guilt, Dr Hilary Clark reports that: "According to the authors, shame is a 'primitive', self-centred emotion associated with anger, aggression, depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, family violence and suicide. In its focus on the bad self, shame is an 'extremely painful and ugly feeling' ... that sufferers will usually do anything to defend against – hiding from others, for instance, or lashing out at them. On the other hand, guilt is the more 'adaptive' emotion; indeed, the authors argue that it is the more moral emotion, as it is other oriented and empathic: '[Modern] morality centres on the ability to acknowledge one's wrongdoing, accept responsibility, and take reparative action' (Page 127 of Tangney and Dearing). While the authors could have done without the problematic distinction between 'primitive' and 'modern' morality, they nonetheless argue convincingly that a well-developed capacity for guilt leads not to neurosis (as Freudian theory would suggest), but to a morality of reparation and empathic regard – clearly better for humankind than a shame morality or blame and vengeful anger that can lead to violence, feuding, and war". (Clark, 2003)³².

Clark (2003) goes on to say: "Tangney and Dearing sum up their thesis quite bluntly: 'The pattern is pretty clear-cut: guilt is good; shame is bad'. (Page 136). The authors come to this conclusion after surveying a great deal of empirical research on guilt and shame, research using a number of standardized measures".

These modern ideas about the moral emotions of guilt and shame (and embarrassment and pride), are also supported by Barker (2003)³³; Tangney, Stuewig and Mashek (2007)³⁴.

From the point of view of psychotherapy and counselling, we need to be aware that there are likely to be individual variations in proneness to guilt and shame among our clients. And we need to

³¹ Tangney, J.P. and Dearing, R.L. (2002) *Shame and Guilt*. Guilford Press.

³² Clark, H. (2003) Review – shame and guilt. *Metapsychology*, 7(33): Page 1. Available online: http://metapsychology.mentalhelp.net/poc/view_doc.php?type=book&id=1832&cn=394. Accessed: 9th March 2010.

³³ Barker, P. (2003) Guilt and Shame. *Beyond Intractability*. Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. Posted July 2003. Available online: http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/guilt_shame/. Accessed: 9th March 2010.

³⁴ Tangney, J.P., Stuewig, J. and Mashek, D.J. (2007) Moral emotions and moral behaviour. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58: 345-372.

know how to intervene skilfully, not by dumping moral emotions, but by better understanding how to manage them effectively. Clark (2003) looked at Tangney and Dearing's discussion of how these kinds of individual variations come about, and commented as follows: "The authors look to environmental differences, particularly in the family context, for answers. Children learn 'moral emotional styles' from their parents or caregivers: from a family-systems perspective, there are 'intergenerational continuities' in shame-proneness vs. guilt-proneness, acquired through direct modelling and more general interactions between parent and child. The shame-prone parent is more likely to punish his or her child through ridicule and humiliation, emphasizing *the defective self*; in turn, the shamed child is learning to do the same. Intervention must centre on educating parents in 'disciplinary strategies that encourage **an adaptive capacity for guilt** versus **maladaptive shame** reactions' (page 156); that is, parents must be shown how they can discipline their children more humanely and effectively by targeting **unacceptable actions**, not **defective selves**."

Finally: "Tangney and Dearing emphasize that 'there are good ways and bad ways to feel bad', about having transgressed (Page 194). Guilt is the good, the more 'moral and adaptive' way; shame is the bad way, the inner demon responsible for so much psychopathology and violence in society. 'Our lives as individuals, as social beings, and as a society can be enhanced by transforming painful, problematic feelings of shame into more adaptive feelings of guilt. Recognizing the distinction between shame and guilt is an important first step in making ours a more moral society' (page 194)." (Clark, 2003, page 3).

22. Applied moral philosophy

Tangney and Dearing's ideas are very timely for the profession of psychotherapy. We want to help our clients to avoid dysfunctional, inappropriate emotions; but we also want to ensure that we are not undermining the fabric of society – no matter how imperfect our society currently happens to be. Anarchy is not an improvement on our current unequal capitalistic societies. We need to move forward in progressive politics by preserving what is good about social morality, and to encourage more fairness and justice as the best way to improve the psychological lives of all our citizens.

The last thing we need to do is to add to our current problems of anti-social behaviour, alcoholism, drug addiction, greed, growing inequality, and other forms of moral degeneration that we see all around us on a daily basis. But that is certainly what we will be doing if we preach **the "pleasures of guiltlessness"**.

Let us now take a look at an example of applied moral philosophy, in relation to praise and blame within surgical services in hospital contexts, as presented by Beauchamp and Childress (1989)³⁵; two of the finest theorists of professional ethics in print today:

“An instructive study of the role of our assessments of **virtue** and **character**, as well as their place in our judgement of praise and blame, appears in Charles L. Bosk’s *Forgive and Remember: Managing Medical Failure*, an ethnographic study of the way two different surgical services in ‘Pacific Hospital’ handle medical failure, especially on the part of surgical residents (or young, specialist doctors in training)³⁶. Bosk found that these surgical services distinguish, at least implicitly, between different sorts of error or mistaken action. The first is **technical**: The professional discharges role responsibilities conscientiously, but his or her technical skills or information fall short of what the task requires; every surgeon can be expected to make this sort of mistake occasionally. The second sort of error is **judgemental**: a conscientious professional develops and follows an incorrect strategy; these errors can also be expected. Attending surgeons (or senior supervisors) forgive momentary technical and judgemental errors but remember them in case a pattern develops indicating that a person lacks the technical and judgemental skills to be a competent surgeon. The third sort of error is **normative** (prescribing and establishing norms or standards): This error violates standards of conduct, particularly by a failure to discharge obligations conscientiously. At this point a **moral judgement** about the person enters. Bosk contends that technical and judgemental errors are subordinated in importance to normative errors, because every conscientious person can be expected to make ‘honest errors’ or ‘good faith’ errors. Normative errors are especially serious because a pattern indicates **a defect of moral character**, where moral character is understood in terms of good faith or conscientiousness”.

From this extract I conclude that we need to recognize that, when we are praising or blaming an individual, we are not praising or blaming the ‘whole of them’. We are focused on their **virtue** and **character**. Secondly, when they make errors which are technical

³⁵ Beauchamp, T.L. and Childress, J.F. (1989) *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*. Third edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

³⁶ Bosk, C.L. (1979) *Forgive and Remember: Managing Medical Failure*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

or judgemental, we are dealing with weaknesses of **competence**, and not of *virtue* or *character*. And also, in relation to technical and judgemental errors, we are not talking about the person, but about their actions. When we say *a person is bad*, we are pointing to a *defect of moral character* – based on several instances, or repeated instances of **normative** lapses - which is at least theoretically fixable. When they have fixed it, we will no longer appraise them as being a bad individual. We are **not** damning *the whole of them*, and we are not damning them *for all time*. We are judging them to have a defect of moral character, which, at the moment, makes them, for our practical purpose, a bad individual because of that behaviour, and not because the whole of them is bad. This will normally induce feelings of guilt in them, but not of shame. “Shame is ... commonly defined as referring to the self while guilt refers to the act”. (Baggini and Fosl, page 125)³⁷. Guilt also seems to me to refer to feelings that **a significant part of me** is culpable, and not just some isolated actions. A significant part of me, but not the whole of me.

Another way of saying this is as follows: When I am challenged over a pattern of **normative lapses**, or lapses of good faith and conscientiousness, I wake up to the undeniable fact that I have somehow **allowed the 'Bad Wolf' (or Thanatos) side of my character to get into a dominant position** in my functioning; instead of having kept my 'Good Wolf' side (or Eros) in the driving seat of my life. I do not have to feel shame – or worthlessness – over these lapses, because I know I have a very good 'Good Wolf' side, which I can get back into the driving seat of my life, with commitment and determination.

23. Criticizing bad character

It would seem that we can always judge a person to be morally deficient **as a person**, and not just in terms of their action. To quote Robert Young³⁸:

“...to the extent that we can regard someone as a free, responsible agent of an action, we can morally assess both the action **and the agent**. If Jacinta was morally responsible for her actions in driving dangerously and causing injury to Cedric, her behaviour is morally condemnable and *she herself*

³⁷ Baggini, P. and Fosl, P.S. (2007) *The Ethical Toolkit: a compendium of ethical concepts and methods*. Oxford: Blackwell.

³⁸ Young, R. (1993/2005) The implications of determinism. In: Singer, P. (ed) *A Companion to Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell.

is seen to be morally deficient in that she took insufficient account of the interest of others in behaving as she did”.

That judgement would presumably make Jacinta feel both appropriate guilt and appropriate shame (where I define appropriate shame as *awareness of being judged by others to be guilty of immoral actions* – and not, as Ellis maintains, a sense of **worthlessness**). She does not become ‘a worthless shit’, but rather **a person** who allowed their **moral character** to weaken, and to develop a weakness for normative transgressions. Of course, as we saw in the work of Tangney and Dearing (2002) above, we need to beware of the danger of triggering *excessive shame*, or *inappropriate shame*, which centres on the **essence** of the individual, their very self, and not just on their (changeable) character traits.

At some point in this conversation, we always come to the question of culpability, or blameworthiness. This, in extreme cases, requires us to ask: “To what extent can we regard someone as a free and responsible agent in a world determined by natural laws?” Individuals either have free will or they don’t. Some philosophers believe we cannot have free will if the world is wholly determined. (Those particular philosophers are called ‘incompatibilists’ – because they see free will and determinism as being incompatible, so they cannot co-exist). On the other hand, ‘compatibilists’ believe that the natural world can be wholly determined by natural laws, but that this does not rule out free will, because free will is an action that is determined by our preferences and choices.

Albert Ellis and his followers have mainly been compatibilists, who believe that humans have free will. However, even if we live in a completely determined world, in which there is no substantial free will “...we cannot contemplate setting aside our reactive attitudes (of praising and blaming)”. (Page 540, Young, 1993/2005)). Why is this so? Because “Even if no-one deserves to be punished, and the usual forms which punishment takes have little to recommend them, we still **need to protect the law-abiding** from those who, because of their individual psychology, or the sociology of their situation, break the laws (Murphy, 1973)³⁹”. (Page 541 of Young, 1993/2005).

24. Ellis rejects all forms of guilt and blame

Back to Ellis (1962): “With Mowrer and almost all ethicists and religionists, then, I accept it as fact that some standard of morality

³⁹ Murphy, J.G. (ed) *Punishment and Rehabilitation*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

is necessary as long as humans live in social groups. But I still completely reject the notion that such a standard is only or best sustained by inculcating in individuals a sense of sin or guilt. I hold, on the contrary, that the more sinful and guilty a person tends to feel, the less chance there is that he will be a happy, healthy, or law-abiding citizen". (Page 134).

Note, firstly, that Ellis offers no sources in the psychological or philosophical literature to defend his claims here. These are his own emotional convictions, which probably relate to his own experience of religious oppression in his childhood. And while I am not going to defend the use of the concept of sin or sinfulness, nor even shame, I certainly want to defend the concept of guilt – as one of the most important of the moral emotions - and to affirm the usefulness to society of appropriate levels of guilt; and I will later show it to be a valuable moral emotion.

And note, secondly, that Ellis argues that "...the more ...guilty a person tends to feel, the less chance there is that he will be a ...law-abiding citizen". This is not supported by any evidence, whereas I have presented above substantial evidence that guilt normally proves to be 'an adaptive, moral emotion'. I could also counter this intuitive insight of Ellis's with my own intuitive insight that there probably has been evidence of 'appropriate guilt' and 'inappropriate guilt' connected with social morality, especially the Catholic and Jewish moralities that Ellis would have been encountering daily in New York City in 1952-62. Appropriate guilt would include individuals feeling bad about lying, cheating, stealing and physically or emotionally hurting others. Inappropriate guilt would have included feelings of guilt about not attending mass or Seder, or some other religious event; or about having sex before marriage. Ellis undoubtedly would have seen lots of this kind of exaggerated, inappropriate guilt, but failed to distinguish it from appropriate guilt about real harm done to others; or real transgressions of social codes of morality. He is probably also, as I suggested earlier conflating the concepts of guilt and shame, and claiming they both lead to a sense of worthlessness, when the evidence does not support this conclusion.

25. Ellis and morality

Next, he presents his own ideas on morality, as follows. (I have divided this quote up into three sections, for later analysis, using the three symbols (#), (*) and (+)).

"...I do believe that, as citizens of a social community, we must have some standards of right and wrong. My own feeling (sic) is that (#)

those standards are best based on what I call long-range or socialized hedonism – that is, the philosophy that one should primarily strive for one’s own satisfactions while, at the same time, keeping in mind that one will achieve one’s own best good, in moral instances, by giving up immediate gratifications for future gains (*) and by being courteous to and considerate of others, so that they will not sabotage one’s own ends (+)”. (Ellis, 1962, page 134).

This statement, from where I inserted the hash mark (#) down to the point that I have indicated with an asterisk (*) is **not a moral statement at all**. It is a statement of **prudence**, which is a virtue, but not a **moral** virtue. Let me first look at the definition of prudence, and then morality:

Atkinson (1969) describes prudence like this: “Prudence is neither simply a matter of going for what one wants nor simply a matter of subordinating one’s wants to those of others (or to the requirements of morality, if that is different). **It (prudence) is rather the subordinating of occasional and less important wants to long-term, fundamental ones**. To the extent that prudence involves disregarding certain wants it resembles morality, but in so far as this is done for the sake of other wants (albeit long-term, fundamental ones) it differs from it. Prudence, so long as there are no errors of calculation, will always pay the individual, morality need not”. (Pages 32-33). Hypothetical imperatives – such as, *I must give up this short term interest, in order to pursue that long term goal*, are obviously rational. “But the imperatives of morality are different. They (enjoin) people to do or (resist doing) (something) irrespective of what they want, and are accordingly termed **categorical**”. (Page 33). Prudence is regard for our own welfare, while morality is regard for the welfare of others (and ourselves).

Ellis’s statement above - (#) to (*) – is clearly a statement of *prudence* as defined by Atkinson (1969). But let us also ask: *Why is it not about morality?* It is not about morality because it does not contain any **prescriptions** (*ought, should, must*) and it does not **proscribe** any particular kind of behaviour. Prescriptions of what ought to be done, and proscriptions of what ought not to be done, are the essence of morality; combined with praise and blame for particular moral/immoral acts that rise above or fall below average performance.

The simplified difference between prudence and morality can also be expressed by the statement that prudence is regard for one’s own welfare, and morality is regard for the welfare of others. A parallel definition could be made using the concept of justice rather

than welfare. Or, as Atkinson (1969) expresses it: "Morality may provisionally be distinguished from prudence (regard for one's own welfare) as regard for the welfare of others, or of *everybody* including oneself". (Page 36).

The final part of the quotation by Albert Ellis (1962), above, **seems** to be about morality:

"...(*) and by being courteous to and considerate of others, so that they will not sabotage one's own ends (+)".

But is this really a moral statement? No, it is not a moral statement, because it carefully avoids saying: "...and individuals **ought** to be courteous to and considerate towards others, given that that is **the minimum** level of treatment that we could require of them towards us". (This, if he had said it, would have been a form of *the Golden Rule*).

Here is a final statement from Atkinson (1969) which highlights the dilemma of Albert Ellis in trying to formulate a position on morality:

"It is easy to understand the need for a basic, social morality. There are **rules** that must be fairly generally observed if social life is to be possible or tolerable. Social morality is not wholly determinate, rules of conduct need not be and have not been the same everywhere and always, but there are areas of human concern where rules of some sort have almost invariably been found necessary, notably, property, sex and aggression. And much of the content of most moral codes can be seen as a response, differing according to a great variety of circumstances, to the need for basic rules of social conduct". (Pages 34-35).

...

"We try to pin down morality, to say what it is and what it is not, but it seems to expand as we look at it. This is not accidental, it reflects the practical character of morality that I, at least, take to be essential to it. Morality is practical in that it relates to the questions of *what we **should** choose* and *how we **should** act*. And, consequently, everything that bears upon these questions may fall within its scope". (Atkinson, page 36).

Because Albert Ellis rejected the use of *should* and *must*, and all other *prescriptive* words, he could not propose any form of morality, because prescriptive words are central to what morality is.

Here is a quote from Ellis (1994⁴⁰), where Albert Ellis reviews and updates his 1962 statements. Again, I have divided this text up using (*), (&), (+) and (#), for ease of analysis. Ellis (1994) records that: "Because REBT teaches people to have unconditional positive regard (self-acceptance) for themselves and others it is sometimes accused of having **no morality** and of encouraging **irresponsible behaviour**. Not so! (*) Because it aims to help clients – and other people – to relate well to others and to avoid being penalized by their social group (&), it normally has no **special** moral rules (+) but **tends** to adopt those of the community or culture in which the individual lives(#)". (Page 186).

This statement is not accurate, in that it implies that the claim that "(REBT has) no morality" is false. (That's what he means when he says: "Not so!"). However, in the section between (*) and (&), he is describing 'social etiquette' and not morality. In the section between (&) and (+), he admits that REBT does not have any moral rules. (The use of the word **special** here is an obfuscation of a basic truth. REBT does not have any moral rules). Then finally he makes an indefensible statement, between (+) and (#). It is not true that REBT "**tends** to adopt the moral rules of the community in which the individual lives" – because REBT specifically **outlaws all forms of moral prescriptions: should, ought, must, etc; and insists that nobody should be blamed for their moral transgressions**; and REBT helps people to get over their guilt without acknowledging wrongdoing and making amends, by teaching them that "they **should** be the way they are and they **must** have done whatever they did!". (The use of the word **tends** is a second obfuscation).

24. Ellis as a prudential 'pragmatic ethical rationalist'

Ellis then goes on to illustrate that, to the extent that he theorizes about ethics at all, he is an ethical rationalist – which was the flavour of the era when he wrote his original article on 'sin and psychotherapy', back in 1962. An ethical rationalist – like Jean Piaget - is one who believes that moral action is a function of reasoning; or thinking through of moral issues. I previously erroneously thought that Piaget's theories did not arrive in New York until 1968, but Ellis (1962) cites, as sources for his thinking, Piaget (1952)⁴¹ and (1954)⁴². Piaget emphasized the individual

⁴⁰ Ellis, A. (1994) *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy: revised and updated*. New York: Carol Publishing.

⁴¹ Piaget, J. (1952) *The Language and Thought of the Child*. New York: Humanities Press.

child exploring the universe, learning as it goes. His was a theory of biologized stages of development. The child learns increasingly complex tasks as its brain become capable of handling them. His theory of moral development also includes the idea that childhood morality is a function of cognitive development, or the capacity to think and reason. Some years later, Lev Vygotsky critiqued Piaget's theories, and emphasized the importance of socialization and instruction⁴³. And we now know that **emotion** is a very important feature of moral functioning.

Ellis's (1962) view is that **thinking** is central to moral functioning.

"The problem of all human morality", he says, "...is not the problem of appeasing some hypothetical deity or punishing the individual for his supposed sins. It is the very simple problem ... of (*) teaching a person (+) (a) not to commit an antisocial act in the first place, and (b) if he does happen to commit it, not to repeat it in the second, third and ultimate place. This problem, I contend, can consistently and fully be solved only if the potential or actual wrongdoer has the philosophy of life epitomized by the internalized sentences: (#) (a) 'If I do this act it will be wrong', and (b) 'Therefore, how do I *not* do this act?' (@) Or: (a) 'This deed I have committed is wrong, erroneous, and mistaken'. (b) 'Now, how do I not commit it again?'"

Apart from the fact that this language is too imprecise to be clearly addressing *real moral problems*, the drift of this statement is wrong, in that it ignores the **emotional component** of moral behaviour.

Also the statement begins (from (*) to (+)) with (a) "teaching a person" to be moral, *about which process he says nothing*. He admits that we need to teach each generation, but he does not explore what should be involved in that teaching. To a moral philosopher it would seem obvious that we **need** to teach our children what they **should** and **should not** do; and we **need** to use praise and blame to do that; and they (the children) **need** to learn to feel appropriately guilty when they break our moral rules; and they **need** to learn to apologize and make amends. But Ellis cannot make any of these statements, because he has outlawed all **musts** and **shoulds**; and he has outlawed all **praise** and **blame**.

Instead of working on what we need to teach people in order to ensure they are most likely to behave in moral ways most of the

⁴² Piaget, J. (1954) *The Moral Judgement of the Child*. Glencoe, Ill: Free Press.

⁴³ Wood, D. (1988) *How Children Think and Learn: the social contexts of cognitive development*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

time, he jumps forward (presumably at least two decades) to a mature person having a set of internalized sentences. The first set of internalized sentences (which he does not describe as being attached to any emotion) is indicated by the symbols from (#) to (@) but this proves not to be a moral statement, because the second clause (b) does not say: "I ought nor..", or "I must not perform this act".

In earlier chapters, Ellis (1962) had argued that cognitions (or thoughts) and emotions overlap and are in some respects essentially the same thing. However, when he comes to look at internalized sentences about morality, he does not ask: "Which emotions are likely to be linked to these sentences?"

27. Moral emotions

Firstly, there is now evidence that the individual's philosophy or explicit moral code does not predict their moral action nearly as well as their emotions do. This has been established by the use of magnetic resonance imaging of brain regions in laboratory experiments: (Moll, et al, 2002)⁴⁴.

Here is a statement from the introduction of the paper by Moll et al (2002): "Recent theoretical developments in moral psychology, which had been dominated by rationalistic theorists for centuries, have emphasized the role of emotion in models of moral development and behaviour (Gilligan, 1993⁴⁵, Haidt, 2001⁴⁶). 'Moral emotions' have been the focus of several recent experimental psychology studies; they differ from basic emotions⁴⁷ in that they are intrinsically linked to the interests or welfare either of society as

⁴⁴ Moll, J., de Oliveira-Souza, R., Eslinger, P.J., Bramati, I.E., Mourão-Miranda, J., Andreiuolo, P.A. and Pessoa, L. (2002) The neural correlates of moral sensitivity: a functional magnetic resonance imaging investigation of basic and moral emotions. *The Journal of Neuroscience*, April 1, 2002, 22(7):2730-2736. Available online: <http://neuro.cjb.net/cgi/content/full/22/7/2730>. Accessed: 9th March 2010.

⁴⁵ Gilligan C (1993) *In a Different Voice*. Third edition. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

⁴⁶ Haidt, J. (2001) The emotional dog and its rational tail: a social intuitionist approach to moral judgement. *Psychological Review*, 108(4): 814-834.

⁴⁷ The 'basic emotions' as identified by Paul Ekman, in his work in Papua new Guinea, include: anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness and surprise. These are the "emotions we show on our faces across all cultures, and they re thought to be biologically determined". (Simons, 2009, page 1).

a whole or of persons other than the agent (Damasio, 1994⁴⁸; de Waal, 1996⁴⁹; Rozin et al, 1999⁵⁰; Haidt, 2002⁵¹). Moral emotions are readily evoked by the perception of moral violations; it has been suggested that, in contrast to laborious deductive reasoning, they enable rapid, automatic, and unconscious cognitive appraisals of interpersonal events: (Haidt, 2001)".

Jonathan Haidt (2001) argues that we are not primarily individual and rational animals, but rather social and emotional animals with a 'rational tail'. And as we know, a 'rational tail' cannot wag an 'emotional dog'. The emotional nature of the brain is also emphasized by Le Doux (1996)⁵². And, as mentioned above, in Chapter 2 of Ellis (1962), Dr Ellis had talked about the ways in which thinking and feeling are "...not two disparate or different processes, but that they significantly overlap and are in some respects for all practical purposes, essentially the same thing". (Pages 38-39). However, when he comes to think and talk about morality, in Chapter 7, he seems to overlook the fact that adult individuals are already wired up emotionally to act morally (or immorally) and he forgets to ask himself: *what kinds of emotions drive good, moral behaviour?*

Recent research on emotions "...has turned to the 'self-conscious' emotions, which are sometimes also referred to as 'moral', 'social', or 'higher order' emotions. These are the emotions that an organism can only feel if it has a highly developed sense of self-reflection. Usually, the 'self-conscious' emotions are listed as these four: guilt, shame, embarrassment, and pride". (Simons, 2009, page 1)⁵³. ... "The self-conscious emotion binds us back to others –

⁴⁸ Damasio A.R. (1994) *Descartes' error: emotion, reason, and the human brain*. New York: Avon.

⁴⁹ de Waal F (1996) In: *Good natured: the origins of right and wrong in humans and other animals*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.

⁵⁰ Rozin P, Loewry, L., Imada, S., Haidt, J. (1999) The CAD triad hypothesis: a mapping between three moral emotions (contempt, anger, disgust) and three moral codes (community, autonomy, divinity). *The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76: 574-586

⁵¹ Haidt J (2002) The moral emotions. In: Davidson, R.J., Scherer, K., Goldsmith, H.H., (eds) *Handbook of affective sciences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁵² Le Doux, J. (1996). *The Emotional Brain: the mysterious underpinnings of emotional life*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

⁵³ Simons, I. (2009) The four moral emotions. Published on the *Psychology Today* website: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/print/34902>. Accessed: 9th March 2010.

to their expectations and ideas". ... "Self-conscious emotions are emotions in which we imagine our conformity or nonconformity to society's norms". ... Simons (2009) goes on to use an example of somebody who behaves immorally, then feels guilty and ashamed, and then makes amends by doing some free social works. "...guilt is undoubtedly 'right' when we think of the social contract it serves. In this way our emotions serve both to propel the individual and to protect the larger group that affords every individual safety. Emotions are our rubber bands for propelling individual (and group) gain while protecting the society in which gain happens". (Simon, 2009, page 2).

28. The 'social intuitionist' model

This is a very different account of moral functioning from the conscious, language-based reasoning, of an isolated individual, presented by Ellis (1962). By contrast, not only does Haidt (2001, 2002) invoke the emotional dimension of the individual, but also the social (in Haidt, 2001), as follows:

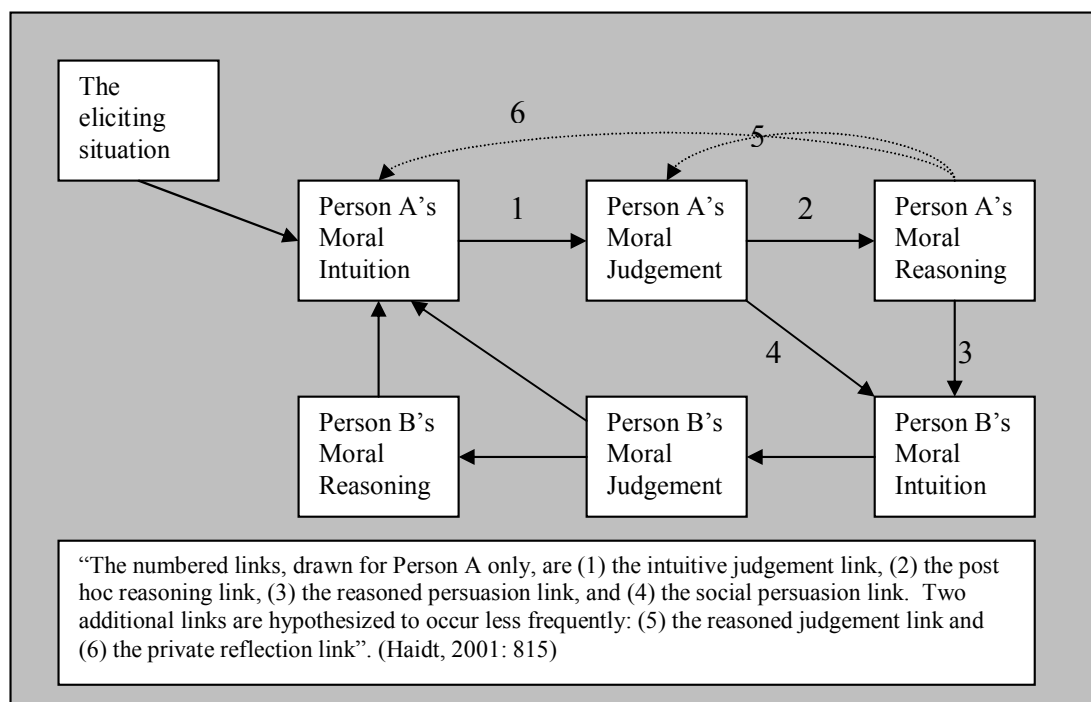


Figure 1: Jim Byrne's rendition of Haidt's (2001) model of moral judgement

This figure, which is "a plausible alternative" to the rationalist model of Piaget (and later, Kohlberg et al.), rather than an established psychological theory, suggests that Person A's Judgement and Reasoning (in the top row of the model), impact Person B's (present and future) Moral Intuitions (via link 3 [the reasoned persuasion link] and link 4 [the social persuasion link]). On a future occasion,

then, Person B is highly likely to be influenced by this new Intuition, which will affect his/her Judgement and Reasoning, and thus his/her moral action.) Therefore, therapists need to be careful how they talk to their clients about moral issues, lest they mislead them into immoral actions.

In Haidt (2001), Professor Jonathan Haidt presents a thought experiment that he runs with groups of students to demonstrate that we are **not primarily moral reasoners**, but rather *moral emotivists*, who reason about our emotive judgements after the event. This thought experiment involves imagining a brother and sister who finish university study in the same year, and decide to take a European tour together as their final experience of substantial time together, before they head off into their separate lives. After several days travelling together, from hotel to hotel, from country to country, they decide to experiment with having sex together, *just this once*. They will never do it again. It's a kind of curiosity thing, an enquiry. They will then part and go their separate ways in life. During sex, they will use the contraceptive pill, a condom, and a spermicidal spray, and gel, so there is no possibility of the girl becoming pregnant – which would be against the law of consanguinity, and could result in a handicapped child being born. They have sex and then go their separate ways, and never do it again.

Haidt then asks, 'Is this an immoral act?' Virtually all of his students are incensed at this obvious immoral act.

Haidt then asks, 'Why is it immoral?' At this point the students flounder. They 'know it is immoral', but they have real difficulty knowing why. They think of pregnancy; but that has been taken care of. They think of the social implications, but there aren't any because the brother and sister will never meet again like this. And so they are stumped, but they still 'know' this is an immoral act.

29. The value of 'critical thinking' skill

This thought experiment demonstrates that Ellis is wrong to think that people **reason out** their moral positions, in sentences. They actually are wired up **emotionally**, by their childhood experiences, to **feel their morals**.

Hare (1981) distinguishes between this 'intuitive level' of moral 'thinking', and the 'higher level' of 'critical thinking skill'. Because of my critical thinking skill studies, I can argue that the brother and sister **acted immorally**, not because of **what** they did, but because, by allowing their actions to become **public knowledge**,

via Jonathan Haidt, they have **promulgated** as legitimate a particular action which, if widely promoted, could result in the breakdown of the family rule prohibiting sex between brothers and sisters, which could further result in the widespread abuse of young girls by their older brothers. Therefore, because of the likely **worsening** of *social circumstances for significant numbers of children*, this is an **immoral** act. And the promotion of *this story* is also an immoral act, if Jonathan Haidt leaves his students with the idea that “there is no earthly reason why this sister and brother should not have had sex”. There is actually *a very good reason*. It is a **bad example** for others, once it is made public; and if it spreads through a society, it will be bad for – meaning it will *harm* – many young girls. This second statement is an argument based mainly on utilitarianism.

It could also be argued, from deontology (or duty ethics) that the brother and sister **should not** have had sex together, because they are abrogating to themselves the responsibility of forming moral rules; and they may each go on to do that in a number of other (equally tempting) experiments, in which they steal something; lie to people; and break their promises; resulting in a coarsening of their characters; all because they do not get that *morality is something we get from a culture*. It cannot, by definition, be made up by isolated individuals.

From a *virtue ethics* perspective, *sexual misconduct* is a vice, and therefore to be eschewed. Sex between brothers and sisters is virtually universally proscribed as a serious form of sexual misconduct. Therefore virtuous individuals will not engage in this form of sexual activity.

Thus, Albert Ellis, in 1962, should have been asking: *What is the general and basic moral code applicable to citizens of New York City today? Is it defensible? Which bits might need to be changed, because of evolutionary changes over time?* Instead he took the global position that: (1) Guilt is **bad** for people, because it makes them feel worthless; (2) Nobody should ever be **blamed** for anything; and: (3) We should all **accept ourselves** and each other exactly as we are, no matter how **immorally** we behave. This is a revolution against morality; and not just a campaign to reform and update moral rules to avoid excessive or inappropriate guilt.

30. Reviewing Ellis’s arguments

Recent research on ethics has moved the debate on well beyond where Albert Ellis had it in 1962. His internalized sentences, listed above, show an isolated individual – in the individualistic, Piagetian,

constructivist tradition – making up his own morality on the fly. But our more recent conceptions of the social and emotional nature of morality do not fit with this image. Ellis was in the ethical rationalist tradition (of Piaget, 1952, 1954); but I am in the social intuitionist tradition pioneered by Hare (1981) and Haidt (2001, 2002, 2006).

Ellis (1962: 135) also seems to imply that moralists (who will not give up blaming people for doing wrong acts) leave only one option open to the potential transgressor of moral rules:

“The individual can say to himself: ... ‘If I do this wrong act, I will be a sinner, a blackguard’. If this is what the individual says to himself, and firmly believes, he will then perhaps be moral in his behaviour, but only at the expense of having severe feelings of **worthlessness** – of deeply feeling that he is a sinner”.

This is very much the language of a past era, in terms of European moral discourse, as we now live in a post-Christian world. The concept of sin is unlikely to cause much human disturbance in most areas of modern Europe, nor even, I imagine, in many North American cities. But beyond that point, **this argument is false**. This is the argument reconstructed:

Ellis’s Argument One:

Premise 1: If I do this wrong act, I will be a sinner, a blackguard.

Premise 2: I do actually manage to **avoid** doing this wrong act.

Conclusion: Therefore, I feel like a **worthless** sinner.

This does not follow logically at all. This argument is false on two counts:

1. The concept of “**worthlessness**” has been smuggled into the conclusion, though it does not appear in the premises. This is a false move.
2. The conclusion is the **opposite** of what it should be, if it had been developed logically. The conclusion that actually follows from the two premises above is this:

Conclusion: Therefore I am **not** a sinner or blackguard.

In order to reach the conclusion that Ellis (1962) reaches, we would have to change one of the premises, as follows:

Ellis's (reconstructed) Argument Two:

Premise 1: If I do this wrong act, I will be a sinner, a blackguard.

Premise 2: I note that I have *actually **done*** that wrong act.

Conclusion: Therefore I am a sinner, a blackguard.

Why did he fail to make this argument correctly? Perhaps he non-consciously could see that this reconstructed argument weakens his case. If somebody **has** done a significantly bad act – especially against you! – why should he be able to *escape* feeling like a blackguard, or a person of bad character? There is no good reason why he should! And to the degree that he feels able to excuse his bad actions, and not feel bad when he does bad acts, he will tend to escalate his badness unless and until he is constrained by the legal system, or by a *vigilante* response.

Furthermore, we can conclude that:

Argument Three:

Premise 1: If there are individuals who live in societies which say that people who do immoral (or wrong) acts are to be defined as sinners;

Premise 2: And if it is the case that those individuals are strongly influenced by the moral beliefs of their societies;

Premise 3: And if some of those individuals nevertheless do immoral (or wrong) acts.

Conclusion: Then, those individuals will most likely feel like sinners when they do immoral (or wrong) acts.

And, by the same token:

Argument 4:

Premise 1: Since there are today individuals who live in societies which say that people who commit immoral acts *are **guilty** of immoral behaviour*;

Premise 2: And, since it has been established in psychological studies that people are strongly influenced to conform to

environmental pressures, including the moral codes of their societies;

Premise 3: And since, nevertheless, some of those individuals do commit immoral acts;

Conclusion: Therefore, when one of those individuals commits an immoral act, *they are most likely to feel guilty*.

Does it necessarily follow from Argument 4 that these individuals must feel **worthless**? No, it does not. The concept of worthlessness has no necessary connection to the concept of guilt.

It seems Ellis (1962) conflates the concepts of guilt, shame and worthlessness into a unified syndrome, and cites no sources to sustain that argument. Most authors I have consulted distinguish between guilt and shame quite clearly, and some have mentioned worthlessness in connection with shame, but not guilt. However, while guilt applies to an action by the individual, shame normally relates to the whole self. It could therefore be argued that a person will tend to denigrate themselves when they feel shame, and will tend towards reducing their sense of worth; but this does not apply in the case of guilt.

For example, Blackburn (1994)⁵⁴ says this:

"Guilt is the **uncomfortable feeling** of having done wrong, and therefore deserving the anger of others". (Page 164).

31. I can stand feeling guilty (until I make amends)

Since guilt is an **uncomfortable feeling**, it seems indefensible for Ellis to try to invalidate socially appropriate guilt in defence of the psychological health of the client. It seems highly probable that most psychotherapy clients *can handle appropriate levels of guilt*, proportionate to their culpable behaviours. (If Ellis had thought about this, he would have had to conclude that: "They certainly **can** stand it" – since he **insisted** that they be able to stand any kind of physical or material insult, up to, but not including death itself. Why then does he consider his clients to be such 'wimps' that they **cannot stand** feeling appropriate levels of guilt when they transgress their moral codes?) Of course there may be cases of **inappropriate** guilt (such as guilt about having sex before

⁵⁴ Blackburn, S. (1994) *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

marriage, or of masturbating), and **excessive** guilt (such as Ghandi's inordinate guilt about not being present when his father died, because he [Ghandi] was making love to his wife at the time). Furthermore, some people may be guilt-prone – having an excessively strict super-ego – and need help to reduce that, and to grow their Adult functioning in relation to their inner Parent. And there is also the problem of 'guilt-tripping', where one individual is victimized or exploited by another, who knows how to make them feel guilty if they do not go along with the wishes of the guilt-tripper. These problems - of inappropriate and excessive guilt; and overly-strict conscience; and how to cope with guilt-tripping individuals - are legitimate concerns of the psychotherapist. And some clients might need to be taught the more practical insight that they can **clear up their guilt by admitting their culpability and making amends** to the offended, deprived or damaged party. We do not have to dismantle the entire edifice of social morality to solve problems of *excessive* or *inappropriate* guilt; and we should not even consider the matter in relation to *appropriate* levels of guilt for blameworthy acts.

One of the problems of promoting the idea of 'guiltlessness' as a goal of psychotherapy is this: "'Lovelessness' and 'guiltlessness' are seen as the distinctive features of the psychopath"⁵⁵; and we therapists must be aware of our responsibility not to give permission to clients to move in the direction of psychopathic behaviours. The guiltlessness and lovelessness of the psychopath "...can be interpreted as a failure to have two sub-classes of moral emotions, the (moral) rule-emotions and the altruistic emotions. ... The psychopath misses a positive commitment to both moral rules and to the well-being of fellow man(woman). The psychopath is characterized as a moral imbecile, and it is assumed that his/her moral development is stagnated in an early developmental stage. As a young child, the psychopath has not acquired the disposition to feel sympathy". It is no part of our role to promote more psychopathy; and indeed we could be said to have a responsibility to try to reduce any psychopathy that presents itself in our counselling and therapy clinics and offices.

32. Conclusion

In this paper I have reviewed the philosophy of Unconditional Positive Regard, promoted by Carl Rogers, and deemed it to be a

⁵⁵ Spiecker, B. (1988) Psychopathy: the incapacity to have moral emotions. *Journal of Moral Education*, 17(2): 98-104.

form of anti-social madness that is out of touch with how humans are wired up, and how society works.

I have also reviewed the REBT philosophy of Unconditional Self and Other Acceptance, and found that it arose out of Albert Ellis's campaign against the use of the concepts of 'sin' and 'sinfulness', back in the 1950s and early 60s. I also showed that Ellis conflated the concepts of 'guilt', 'shame', and 'worthlessness', which caused him to fail to consider that there might be appropriate levels of guilt (and even shame); that these might be moral emotions which are the driving forces of social morality; that psychotherapy clients might better be helped by working on their ***inappropriate feelings*** of guilt; or excessive levels of guilt; or overly-critical super-egos (or consciences).

I have concluded that I no longer subscribe to unconditional self acceptance. I now accept myself totally, provided only that:

- (1) I live my life from a commitment to be a moral person; and:
- (2) That I have my goals, and I function as intelligently and energetically as I can to achieve them.

If, despite my best efforts, I fail in relation to either of those two commitments, then I will still accept myself, provided I re-commit to both of those aims, and do my best to get back on track.

I accept that some my actions may prove to be praiseworthy, if I go above and beyond the call of duty (which is normally called supererogation). I accept that some of my actions may prove to be blameworthy (which is often referred to as culpability). I accept the broad moral code of most societies:

- I must not kill another human (or significantly harm them).
- I must not lie.
- I must not steal or cheat.

I also take on the three moral rules of the Buddhist Eightfold path:

- To engage in right speech.
- To engage in right action.
- To pursue right livelihood.

I also take on the five precepts (or duties) of Buddhism, which are:

1. I undertake the precept to refrain from harming living creatures.
2. I undertake the precept to refrain from taking what has not been given.
3. I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual immorality.
4. I undertake the precept to refrain from speaking falsely.
5. I undertake the precept to refrain from taking intoxicants.

A moral approach to life demands that we each have an explicit moral code: (Chaffee, 1998⁵⁶, pages 303-345).

I accept myself **one**-conditionally, not **un**conditionally, for the reasons explored in this paper. I accept myself provided I live from a moral commitment. I also accept others **one**-conditionally, and that condition is *that they live their lives from a commitment to be moral people*.

I do not accept you (or anybody else) *unconditionally*. There is no law of the universe that says I **must** do so! And there may be a **virtual law of the universe** that says I must respond vengefully whenever anybody treats me unfairly, according to Haidt (2006). In keeping with this hypothesis, there is evidence that the senior REBTers involved in the conflict around Albert Ellis's status, in 2005-2007, tried to stick to their philosophy of unconditional acceptance of others, but *many of them failed publicly*, on significant occasions.

Perversely, it may be that of the two aspects of USA/UOA, it is only *unconditional self acceptance* that is realistic of achievement, but it would be thoroughly counterproductive to promote this any further than has already happened. Why not? Because it would allow individuals **to dump their appropriate feelings of guilt**, and thus to behave immorally with impunity

We (humans) need to dump the idea of unconditional acceptance of ourselves or others in favour of *moral functioning*.

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<sup>56</sup> Chaffee, J. (1998) *The Thinker's Way: 8 steps to a richer life*. Boston, Little Brown and Co.

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