Rational Emotive and Cognitive Behavioural therapies have enjoyed a great deal of success since their early applications in the 1950s. Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) has been used in many ways, including family and marital therapy, and in the treatment of depressed clients and sexual abuse victims. All clients are asked to reflect on beliefs that cause or contribute to some troubling emotional state, towards the end of changing those beliefs once they are understood to be faulty and/or not well justified. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), a sister therapeutic strategy, has been used in the treatment of multiple client concerns, including personality disorders, depression, phobias, anxiety, and insomnia. The client is asked to modify, reinterpret or rebuild a set of beliefs that cause or contribute to distressing emotional conditions. Both accept a deep and mutually influential relationship between emotions and beliefs. The primary difference is one of methodology: REBT focuses more on emotions than on behaviour, and relies principally on the therapist to point out irrational inferences and inconsistencies among client beliefs; CBT focuses more on behaviour than on emotions, and uses a Socratic method to help the client discover for him or herself that some beliefs are poorly justified or incoherent. Once the faulty beliefs are discovered, the client is free to choose a ‘better’, more justified belief system.

Philosophical counselling has recently come to the foreground, at least in philosophical circles, as an alternative to psychological therapy. Lou Marinoff, one of the forerunners in the field, suggests that questions about self-identity and personal values can lead to emotional distress, and notes that becoming acquainted with a rigorous philosophy that matches one’s basic intuitions can help one to decide matters and achieve a higher quality of life. In Marinoff’s therapeutic process, the client is instructed to recognise what emotions are involved in the current situation, and then analyse and reflect on possible solutions and how those solutions cohere with the client’s worldview. The proposed outcome is that the client will reach an emotional equilibrium through an examination and refinement of his or her worldview as it relates to the problem at hand, and will be emotionally prepared and ready to take justifiable action. Again, we see a partnership, a mutual influence, between reason and the emotions, emerge as a premise essential to the restorative process.

Though the above paragraph spotlights Marinoff’s brand of philosophical counselling, I am not suggesting that no other forms of philosophical counselling exist. I would like to express my deep gratitude to two anonymous referees of this journal, who were of invaluable assistance in the refining of these ideas. I in no way mean to imply that the recovery or success of a client is always solely due to the type of therapy implemented. I only observe that REBT and CBT have professional adherents, diverse application, and a population of prospering clients.

use Marinoff as an example in this paper because his work is fairly widely known. Ultimately the aim of the example is to show that philosophical counselling, like REBT and CBT, presumes an interaction between reason and the emotions. If philosophers reason and if counselling is about the emotional life of the client, then it is almost true by definition that any form of philosophical counselling will presume an interaction between reason and the emotions. Whether one’s practice is analytic or continental, historically based (making appeal to historical figures in philosophy) or primarily critical and focused on belief justification, rationality is presumed to influence the emotions in philosophical practice.

In this paper I seek to accomplish the philosophical task of analysing concepts and questioning presuppositions common to REBT, CBT, and philosophical counselling. I will be analysing and hopefully clarifying the concept of the relationship between reason and the emotions. As the notion of an interactive relationship between reason and the emotions is presumed by philosophical practice (as well as by REBT forms of psychological therapy), questioning and examining this presupposition is part of an adequate philosophical account of the success these approaches have enjoyed. Presumably these philosophical activities will lead us to some form of wisdom, the ultimate love of all philosophers. This critical examination is fruitful in that it leads to some interesting new possibilities for counselling methodology. We gain a possible explanation of how REBT works, and a theory that lets us develop philosophical counselling in many directions.

The basic tenet of REBT, CBT and philosophical counselling that will be examined first in this paper is the notion that emotions and beliefs at least interact, and at most are not completely differentiable. I agree that they do indeed interact, but first I must address the fact that not everyone believes this. Hume, for example, claims that ‘... reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will... it can never oppose passion in the direction of the will.’ We find the Cartesian mind-body divide applied to rationality and the emotions in Hume. Prima facie, Hume seems to prove that reason and emotion are entirely independent. Hume claims that reason, by definition, applies only to the realm of thought and ideas, while emotions and volitions apply to the realm of objects, of existing things.

If this is the case, the success of REBT and its fellow practices goes unexplained. If there is no reason-emotion interaction, then examining one’s beliefs and subjecting

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7 This paper claims to produce an ontology of reason and the emotions. I choose the word ‘ontology’ for two reasons. First, I will not be undertaking a Wittgensteinian or otherwise linguistic analysis of ‘emotion’ or ‘belief’, but instead I will assume them to be existent according to a common, or folk psychological view. (I am examining and hypothesising about their being – thus, ‘ontology’.) Second, ultimately I am uncertain that these folk psychological claims of existence are more empirically verifiable than any other ontology regarding reason, the emotions, and the success of some forms of therapy or counselling. I suspect many explanations will be virtually empirically equivalent to my own, suggesting that this paper goes beyond the realm of empirical evidence into the realm of the ontological/metaphysical.

them to rational scrutiny should have no effect on one’s emotional states, and ultimately no effect on one’s behaviour. For if reason is the handmaid of the emotions, as Hume insists, then without emotional motivation, thoughts that might have an effect on behaviour will never occur. No one would ever enlist in REBT, because no one would desire to do work for no reward and no change (and pay someone in the process.)

Aside from the fact that the REBT family has a healthy population of healing clients, we can find arguments to suggest that reason and emotion do interact. Hume himself finds a pineal gland in judgement to solve the problems that come with his Cartesian dichotomy. Reason influences judgement, and in turn, judgement activates the emotions. Emotions are never themselves not well justified, according to Hume, because they do not reflect truths or falsehoods. They do not represent reality. However, he adds that emotions may well be based on judgements that are false. Change the judgement and the emotion changes with it. And of course, the tool that can ultimately change these judgements is reason.

But rather than simply appeal to Hume, let’s look at why he opted to give judgement this mediating role. Simple reflection on our own inner lives does suggest that rationality and the emotions are linked to some extent. We may be annoyed by a co-worker’s behaviour until we discover the reasons for that behaviour. When we understand why another person was acting in a certain way, we have the opportunity to re-interpret the behaviour in a positive light, and our emotions toward that behaviour change. Perhaps a supervisor asks an employee to attend a conference. The employee may feel annoyed at the burden of an additional task until it comes to light that the employee must attend the conference in order to qualify for an accelerated raise and promotion. The employee moves from annoyance to pleasure. The additional belief seems to affect the emotional states directly. Indeed, no other explanation for the change in emotional state is readily apparent.

But we need to go beyond superficial reflective evidence. Let’s assume that emotions and rational beliefs do not interact. Two consequences emerge from this assumption. First, no belief states could be formed from an emotional experience. So, upon experiencing the feeling of being in love, no person could then develop the belief ‘Being in love feels wonderful.’ But, this in fact happens all the time. So any thesis barring this possibility is false. Second, no emotional experiences could be influenced by belief states. The success of REBT and its sisters notwithstanding, we need only consider the case of telling a joke. Certain beliefs are suspended while others are put in place, in order to bring about an emotional response. If beliefs and emotions do not interact, there would be no humour.

The question remains as to how beliefs and emotions interact. What is the ontological relationship between beliefs and emotions? I propose that emotions form a nebulous grounding for more sharply defined belief states. Once a belief network forms, it reinforces whatever emotions are already present. REBT and its sisters work because emotions are always less well differentiated than belief networks, and thereby belief networks are underdetermined by their emotional evidence - there is no neat one-to-one relationship between beliefs and emotions. Once we have underdetermination, a virtual empirical equivalence of belief states becomes possible. Because there is more than one network of belief states from which to choose, the therapist or counsellor (with the client) is at liberty to remove one belief network and replace it with another network.

One might object first that emotional states could be very subtle and nuanced, and so are not necessarily more nebulous than beliefs. I am not claiming that there are not sophisticated nuances of emotion. Rather, I argue that the level of verbal finesse necessary to fully describe an emotional state will always be lower than the level of verbal finesse necessary to explain why one is in that emotional state. I take as a
premise that explanation and description are verbal, cognitive and rational activities. Given this premise, why might someone accept my view?

An explanation of X is always more complex than a description of X because the explanation of X includes a description of X, and goes beyond it. For example, consider the self-descriptive claim ‘I am feeling weary.’ While one might go on to describe the weariness in full detail, including terms such as tired, overworked, exhausted, fatigued, spent, languid, torpid, drowsy, stupefied, listless, debilitated, lethargic, phlegmatic, and so on, the explanation carries as its burden a full account as to why the person is experiencing the states so described. A description of X is a necessary condition for an explanation. One cannot explain what is left undescribed.

Specifically, an explanation of why we feel a certain way will always be more complex than a description of what we feel because description will be limited to an emotional sub-language. Even though that sub-language may be both large and subtle, the explanation will include other types of language. Consider the case ‘I got mad.’ Even though a preliminary explanation may still be couched in emotional terminology, e.g. ‘I got mad at that driver because he frightened me’, other terminology is still necessary for a complete explanation. We need words for everyday objects, e.g. ‘The driver frightened me because he cut me off with his car’, as well as for non-emotional mental states, e.g. ‘He must have been unaware of my car.’ While it is the case that the original description of an emotional state also includes a vocabulary of subjects (per Descartes, in order to be angry or frightened or weary, one must exist), still, a more limited vocabulary is used in mere description of emotional states. Because many emotional states are caused by the proximity, or lack thereof, of 3-dimensional objects, the explanatory language will always be larger than the emotional language.

Finally, most people do not differentiate their emotions as carefully as they do their beliefs. This is not to say that most people are terribly careful in the carving out of their beliefs. Rather, at least beliefs are subject to some scrutiny through the educational process as well as in many water cooler debates. Emotions are often not reflected upon, and might even be mentally shoved away, sublimated, denied, or ignored. So in fact, as well as in theory, we have the relative underdevelopment of an understanding of the emotions as compared to an understanding of beliefs.

This difference in sophistication allows us to develop several belief systems that are all equally, or at least superficially equally, able to account for felt emotions. This point is key to the final explanation of the efficacy of REBT. If the counsellor examines and works with the client to change a belief system with the aim of changing the emotional state, then there must be more than one belief system that the client could accept. I take as a premise that clients will not accept belief systems that do not account for most, all, or at least the most important aspects of, their experiences. These experiences include emotional experiences. So, no client will accept a belief system that is inadequate in its description and explanation of emotional states commonly experienced by the client. Given this, I take the counselling process to be primarily the changing of one workable, descriptively adequate belief system in favour of another.

I shall now argue that even if on close examination two or more belief systems are not precisely empirically equivalent, a client might still consider them to be empirically equivalent because the client is ignorant of the connections between his beliefs and his

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9 A belief system that does not take into account a strange feeling experienced a single time or very infrequently by the client may still be accepted as long as it works well and accounts for the majority of other experiences. There may be one or two cases left unexplained.
past, or between his beliefs and emotions. This client might take the theories to be strong competitors with one another, such that choosing one over the other becomes a task of the counselling process rather than a decision easily made via an examination of the evidence. But aside from the ignorance of the client, there is a good case to be made that explanatory beliefs outstrip the emotions they explain in terms of complexity.

First, consider the various explanations that can arise when the event to be accounted for is relatively simple.

*My telephone call to last weekend’s date is unreturned.*

Explanations: 1) The date is not interested in speaking with me.
2) The date is too busy to return calls promptly.
3) The date lost my phone number.
4) The date wants to call, but does not want to appear eager.

If the event remains at this rough level of description, with no additional evidence, then each option is equally likely. We may be able to weigh the likelihood of the various options were we given more information about the date. If that information is not forthcoming, or is distorted or untrustworthy, then we cannot decide between the explanations.

Now for an emotion based example.

*You are mad at me.*

Explanations: 1) I didn’t do the dishes.
2) I dented the car.
3) I insulted you in public.
4) I forced you to eat vegetarian chicken.

Given no further information, all of these theories are empirically equivalent. Of course, the controversy about the in-principle possibility of empirical equivalence hinges at least partially on the fact that more information can always be acquired. Different theories are highly likely to have some predictive difference if we search long and hard. The point in the case of emotions and their explanations is ultimately epistemic. That is, the availability of information about emotional states may well be limited. Thus, while we may be able to decide between our four theories in principle, if you are not sure why you were angry, then we are confronted with virtual empirical equivalence, empirical equivalence in practice. The point evoked above in the third argument for emotional description always being more primitive than its explanation is that, at least for most people, epistemic access to emotions and their causes is somewhat limited or underdeveloped relative to epistemic access to beliefs. You may not know exactly why you are angry, but if you bring your anger to a Rational Emotive Behaviour therapist, that therapist will help you choose the explanatory theory to adopt that is most rational. Since the belief networks are virtually empirically equivalent, a therapist or counsellor can help the client to choose between them on the basis of criteria beyond accountability to the data, such as their consistency, their usefulness as a guide to behaviour, and especially their influences on the less well differentiated mass of emotions that underlies them. The first two options are general strategies of a Rational Emotive based therapy. The third pertains most to my own.

Now let’s take a case of the original formation of a belief system. A child grows up in an abusive home. In the pre-verbal stages of life, the child experiences a wealth of
negative emotions - guilt, fear, anger, desperation, etc. As the child learns language and develops beliefs, the child naturally seeks to explain his or her situation. Given specific developmental constraints, we can construct a simple belief system likely to emerge and show why such a belief system is likely to emerge.

Children are egocentric, and tend to overestimate both their efficacy in the world and the focus of others' actions on themselves. Thus the child who is beaten will probably most easily develop a set of beliefs about not only causing the beatings (not taking into account the psychological heritage or drug induced state of the offending adult) deserving the beatings (being somehow unworthy of better treatment), and acting in such a way as to avoid the beatings (failing to understand that it could be the mental state of the adult rather than the behaviour of the child that is the most proximate and forceful cause of the abuse.) This belief system accounts for all the data (the child's internal states of fear and anger, and the external situation of being beaten), and also gives the child some hope for control over the next attack. By developing a negative self-image, the child explains to him or herself why the beatings are taking place - because he or she is bad. By developing low self-esteem, the child explains why he or she deserves such treatment. In attempting to be better, and of course, ultimately failing to ward off the next attack, the child preserves some sense of efficacy and also produces an explanation for the continued beatings - because he or she failed to be good.

In contemporary groups that focus on self-help, be they psychological or philosophical, there is a radical reinterpretation of the child's situation. This alternative set of beliefs places the responsibility for the beatings on the adult rather than the child, does not assign any intrinsic badness to the child (quite the opposite), and gives the child little or no control over his or her environment. Rather, the abusive adult needs to learn self control and better ways of coping with a stressful world, needs to reinterpret his or her own past, and needs to be prepared to allow the child both childish behaviour and a vast array of needs. The child is seen as a victim and a survivor rather than a perpetrator.

As an adult, the beliefs formed by the abused child persist. The person has probably felt negative emotions more consistently than positive emotions throughout life, and the 'low self-worth' belief system has accounted well for those negative feelings. Why should anyone who is so worthless feel good? Further, the belief system has probably served to explain other events, such as the break-up of romantic relationships or any career trouble that may have been experienced. Indeed, the belief system may well be partially responsible for the perpetuation of self-destructive behaviours. With the abusive adult at some distance from the person being abused, the primary cause of the belief system is gone. The set of self destructive beliefs is then held in place through 1) habit 2) explanatory power (it does still explain many events) and, importantly, 3) descriptive power (it does still explain the primitive feelings of anxiety, fear, and depression felt by the person being abused.)

Such belief systems notoriously resist 'positive' empirical evidence. A person with genuinely low self worth will find the cloud under the silver lining. For example, a person may believe he or she is stupid. When confronted with high test scores, which would seemingly refute stupidity, the person may explain this as: 1) a fluke, or luck; 2) being book-smart but street-stupid; 3) having a good memory but no real ability to think or reason; 4) having good test taking ability but no real academic skills. Re-testing the person will be to no avail, for the results then can be interpreted as a result of practice, or further evidence of mere memory, good fortune in testing, etc.
In REBT, CBT or philosophical counselling, the client will examine beliefs about the ability (or lack thereof) of a child to cause behaviour in an adult, and about appropriate parenting methods, as well as beliefs about the self. The pressing question in the growth process of the client is that the old belief system has been doing well in its descriptive and explanatory efforts, though it is also simultaneously reinforcing the client’s depression. Again we bump up against the virtual empirical equivalence of the two belief systems. The client may have no real reason to choose one over the other except that one interacts with the client’s emotional states such that the client feel more hopeful about the future. When the client finally shifts into a different belief system, that belief system must also be able to explain events and account for the vast array of negative emotions still felt by the adult. A survivor of child abuse will still probably experience periods of depression, helplessness, anger, and suspicion of others. Rather than attribute these negative emotions to ‘being a bad person, being an ineffective, stupid or untrusting person’ the client is given the option of believing that all people who experience abuse will experience these corollary emotions, that these emotions are undeserved, and can ultimately be felt, thought through, and overcome.

The difference between belief systems in the REBT system is one of rationality - the belief system brought to therapy by the client fails some rational standard, such as predictive efficacy or adequacy in justification. But predictive efficacy confronts empirical equivalence, and justification has many measures (correspondence, consensus, and coherence, to name three.) The difference between belief systems in my form of philosophical counselling is one of subjective state influence - the old belief system suggests to the client that he will continue to feel bad and do poorly, the new belief system suggests that though the client does feel bad, this is not a permanent condition, and that days of happiness and felt efficacy are possible. Note that the difference is ultimately one of interpretation of events, of subjective feelings rather than of objective experiences, so virtual empirical equivalence persists.

The interpretive difference is the ultimate key to the success of the REBT family of practices. The client believes he has achieved a more rational belief system, and thus one that is closer to the truth. Ultimately, the client has chosen the more pleasing belief system. Because the client will only accept a belief system that describes the reality he or she experiences, the difference in empirical description of past events and past and present emotions must be low to nil. Occasionally a therapist or counsellor can generate evidence for the more positive and hopeful belief system by noting some success of the client that could not have been achieved by someone intrinsically incompetent or unable, or by pointing out that the client has had moments of happiness to which an intrinsically bad person may not be privy. Other than these incidental pieces of evidence, the acceptance of one theory over another lies in that theory’s ability to describe and explain new events in the client’s life in a pleasing way. Rationality is generally pleasing, at least to the common western client.

Here I go beyond REBT and its sisters to suggest a further constructive role for the counsellor based on this proposed ontological relationship between beliefs and emotional states. In the REBT family, the therapist examines the justification and rationality of the belief system in order to show the client that many negative beliefs are not well justified and can be replaced with more scientifically sound beliefs. If what I have said above is correct, then sufficient evidence for choosing between two belief systems may never be forthcoming. No matter what the client thinks, feels or experiences, both belief systems have great explanatory power. If this is the case, then a key role for the counsellor is to teach the client to reinterpret events as evidence for the positive belief system rather than for the negative one. We use high analytic philosophy in a practical situation, examining the nature of justification and belief, and once finished
with this examination, turn to a brighter lesson from Nietzsche - if the text disappears under the interpretation, then we may as well find a life affirming interpretation.

Let’s return to our abuse victim. Perhaps the victim has had a terrible day working at the tire store, culminating in his being fired. The victim feels sad, angry, helpless, overwhelmed, etc. The old belief system is ready to explain all the events and emotions at the drop of a hat. Only someone this stupid and incompetent could get fired, the client deserves to feel terrible, and once again vows to do better without particularly knowing how to do better or even what to do next. Maybe he should be relegated to the flower shop. The new belief system notes that the client felt these same feelings as a child, that such emotional reactions are expected, and that although being fired could be due to incompetence, it may well be due to the overreaction of the supervisor, or any number of other factors. The new belief system may explain the job loss as an indication that his talents (it assumes he has talents, as compared to the old belief system) were not being utilised there, and that perhaps he should apply at the flower shop instead. Both systems explain what is happening currently. Why choose one over the other? The counsellor encourages the client to take the firing event as evidence that the old belief system was not working, because the old belief system sent the client to the tire store in the first place, and may even be responsible for the client getting fired.

The client applies at the flower shop and does well in his first week. The old belief system tells him he has taken a step down in life, because he was unable to do the more difficult work at the tire store. The new belief system suggests that he may have found his calling, that being fired from the tire store was a blessing in disguise, and that working in the flower shop is a respectable and exciting job. Why choose one over the other? The counsellor might suggest that the good emotions felt by the client while thinking in terms of the new belief system are evidence for its truth or proximity to truth, or might suggest that regardless of truth, certainly this new belief system is helping the client to feel more positively about his life and circumstances.

The break between my form of philosophical counselling and the REBT family is clear. Ultimately, the counsellor’s suggestion to interpret evidence as evidence for the second belief system is not itself rational, but only serves to make the client happier. REBT is based on notions of absolute truth and absolute justification: if the client were to examine his or her beliefs, he or she would find that many are not well justified and do not lead to truth. The REBT therapist then assists the client in finding better justified beliefs, and, once closer to truth, presumably leads a happier life. My form of philosophical counselling does not subscribe to notions of absolute justification (i.e. reasons that lead to truth with perfection and epistemic certainty) or to notions of absolute truth. While we can still use the tools of REBT, and critique the beliefs of the client on grounds of consistency and cohesion, ultimately the choice between belief systems is based on making the client feel better and not on proximity to truth. Indeed, if
we were to find that one belief system is true, there is no guarantee that happiness would follow from its adoption.\footnote{There is, of course, a great danger in this relativism. The client may well adopt a thoroughly egocentric belief system that violates the rights of others in order to ensure his or her happiness. Laws are present to control such clients, and alternative belief systems that do not violate rights and laws are also available, and can be encouraged by the therapist or counsellor.}

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