Methods for Self-Recovery

By Martin Weiss

“Do not distress yourself deliberately”—Ecclesiasticus

Introduction

This book is intended for those who are otherwise strong and capable, and yet who are impeded by their thoughts. To be more exact, it is for those who, in the process of living, have acquired certain patterns of thought and structures of the mind that prevent them from functioning appropriately in their environment, or from experiencing happiness and satisfaction. It is for the convalescent, the one who suffers, recognizes that they suffer, and wishes to be free of their suffering, but is perhaps uncertain of how they might proceed. I realize that a great deal of misleading advice on this subject is put forward, either through lack of practical experience, or for the benefit of the unscrupulous. If the reader doubts every other principle laid out in this book, they should not doubt that its sole purpose is to provide helpful guidance for those who might make use of it. As for every other sort of reader, they might derive some benefit from carefully considering the principles contained in this book.

As for me, I am just such a convalescent. I write from the experience of my own process of recovery, and the following methods and principles are derived from my own observation and experience. By applying the following methods, I have gone from being virtually incapable to enjoying a state of functioning and relative contentment. This is not a boast—indeed, in my view it is unfortunate that I should have been so impaired in the first place. Rather, it is a statement of fact: I speak with authority on my own experience, and the following methods have at least been tested in my case. This is not to say that these methods will necessarily be effective in every other case. No one who attempts recovery will have problems identical to my own, nor will their methods for recovery be exactly the same. The guidance in this book should not be taken as absolute, but as a reference to inform and assist your own process of recovery. The reader should make careful note of this point so that no mistakes are made on this book’s account, and so that my intentions are not misrepresented.

In short, this book relates methods for treating mental problems that have worked. The process can be long and difficult, but it is one that allows a severely inhibited individual to attain a clear and ready mind. In my own process of recovery, I have found conscious processes of thought to inhibit the mind’s unconscious faculties of recovery—I do not intend to provide either encouragement or discouragement. To feel good about mental problems is simply to accommodate them, and to feel bad about mental problems is simply to inhibit recovery. Instead,
the aim of this book is to detail practical methods for eliminating mental problems entirely in a concise and an exact way.

Which Problems are Treatable

The methods detailed in this book are intended to treat acquired mental problems. An acquired mental problem is some dysfunction in the mind that comes about through interacting with the world. In other words, an acquired mental problem arises from the mind’s reaction to some external factor, or “circumstance,” as we will discuss later. While an acquired mental problem does come about as the result of the mind’s reaction to circumstance—in other words, by thinking, or something that is seemingly insubstantial or, at any rate, not physical in a conventional sense—in my view, such problems do have an effect on the physical structure of the mind, and consequently on the body’s ability to function as well. This is to say that a problem of thought and emotion is also a problem of the mind and of the body. While acquired mental problems do have measurable physical consequences, this is not to say that the solution is necessarily material in nature—a course of medicine, for instance, is rarely if ever solely effective in the case of acquired mental problems. Acquired mental problems come about through a combination of circumstance and the mind’s reaction to circumstance—in my view, the most effective treatment for an acquired mental problem is therefore an alteration of the sufferer’s circumstances, and of their structures of thought, as we will discuss later.

First we should detail the mental conditions that this book does not pretend to treat. Mental conditions arising from some inherent physiological abnormality cannot be treated by the methods detailed in this book. Neither can these methods be used to treat mental conditions that come about as the result of disease. Nor, finally, can these methods be used to treat mental conditions that are the result of physical damage to the body. Conditions such as these must be treated by conventional methods of medicine—they are, at any rate, beyond the scope of this book. With that said, the methods detailed in this book may be effective in treating the incidental problems that arise as a consequence of such conditions.

This may seem like a clear distinction, but according to my understanding of modern medical practice, the line between what is considered an acquired mental problem and a mental “disease” with an unclear origin (a kind of medical “bolt from the blue”) is often blurred. To clarify, I consider conditions such as anxiety, depression, and trauma-related stress to be acquired mental problems, and consequently problems that may be treated by these methods. As mentioned, it is true that such conditions have measurable physical consequences, but it is my opinion that in virtually every case such mental problems come about as the result of circumstances and of the mind’s reaction to them.

Two “Tests”
If you are uncertain as to whether your mental problems are acquired, there are two introspective “tests” that you can perform that may clarify the issue: if you have a problem presently, but you can remember a long stretch of time in which you consistently felt differently, then these methods are likely applicable to your problem. If memory is unreliable in this case, then if you can point to a certain external factor (outside of physical damage, as described above) as the likely cause of a mental problem, then these methods are likely applicable. If the source of a mental problem such as depression or anxiety cannot clearly be ascertained through introspection, in my opinion it is likely that the cause has either been forgotten (that is, suppressed through unconscious processes), or that the emotions, memories and associations are deliberately left unacknowledged, as these are also often the sources of considerable shame, guilt, fear, and pain. At any rate, in my opinion, mental problems such as these in an otherwise healthy person are most likely the result of interactions with the world.

The Structure of this Book

This book is divided into two parts. The first part contains the methods for recovery themselves. Broadly speaking, these methods consist of three major steps: removing yourself from negative circumstances, placing yourself in positive circumstance, and following certain mental practices that can resolve problem-causing structures of thought and emotion that result from negative circumstances. The various, particular steps involved with the methods have been divided into brief, numbered sections for ease of reference and reading.

The second part is a commentary on the methods, in which mental illness is treated as a conceptual problem related to the nature of the human psyche.

A Note on the Extremity of the Methods

These methods have been written with a view to treating severe mental problems. I define severity as the degree to which one’s mental problems interfere with one’s ability to live their life. The most severe mental problems completely inhibit one’s ability to live normally, and, as such, these methods make prescriptions that involve extensive alterations and interruptions to one’s way of life. However, this is not to say that those suffering from less severe mental problems cannot benefit from employing the methods described in this book.

If you do believe that you suffer from mental problems, but your mental problems do not seriously disrupt your ability to live life normally—if they are not severe—you could attempt to adapt these methods to your own situation without making such drastic changes to your way of life. With that said, more extensive changes to your way of life will probably produce better results in terms of recovery, as acquired mental problems are bound up with the circumstances of your life. You must use your own discretion in determining the extent to which you are willing or able to follow the prescriptions of these methods.
A Note on the Usage of this Book

Comprehension is fundamentally different from practice. One can conceptually understand the steps involved in a particular practice, but this does not necessarily mean that one has taken any practical steps to completing that process for themselves. The same applies to this book. While I can record the steps I have distilled from my own experience for treating mental problems, I cannot guarantee that the reader will feel impelled to complete these or similar steps for themselves. This book should not be regarded as an absolute set of guidelines which, once understood, will necessarily result in the desired effect—it should be understood as an incitement to action, and as an outline of what that course of action might entail. Of course, the responsibility for recovery ultimately rests with the recovering individual.

This introduction will suffice. The precise nature of these methods and their intended application should become clear as the methods themselves are described, or else in the subsequent commentary. We will now consider the methods with no further delay:

1. You must have the honest desire to be well. Do not say to yourself “I want to be well” while still clinging to what makes you sick. Ask yourself if your desire to be well is truly honest: you do know if it is not. An honest, overriding desire to be well is the first and most critical thing necessary for recovery.

2. No one is coming to liberate you from yourself. No one can accomplish what you must accomplish. No one can give you the permission to recover or to be happy. Others can provide some form of help, but understand that it is you who will do the recovering.

3. Always keep the necessary thing in mind. Pity yourself if you must, or feel anger, indignation, unhappiness and misery—these feelings are only natural. But feel these things with a view to what is necessary.

4. Acquired mental problems arise from circumstance, and they are perpetuated through circumstance. Identifying what circumstances are keeping you unwell is the first practical step in recovery. Removing yourself from those circumstances is the next step.

5. Broadly speaking, problem-causing circumstances fall into three categories: they are negative relationships, habits and ways of life, and principles of belief. Examining each of these three categories will assist you in identifying your problem-causing circumstances.

6. Most human beings depend on one another to some extent, and this is natural. Indeed, this fact forms the basis of society. From the perspective of recovery, to depend on another in a limited sense is in many cases necessary and even desirable, as will be discussed later.

7. Harmful dependency, on the other hand, is one set of circumstances that might be keeping you unwell, and if you are to recover, you must be able to identify such relationships correctly, and to remove yourself from such circumstances.
Harmful dependency is a relationship in which one person depends on another for means or satisfaction to an excessive extent, and to the detriment of their ability to form autonomous habits and an autonomous mindset. It could also be a case in which the other person derives exclusive benefit from the relationship, either by exploiting the first person in some way, or by deriving satisfaction from controlling some aspect of their life. Often both elements are involved.

8. Such relationships are often characterized by a lack of reciprocity, which is to say that the benefits are concentrated in one side of the relationship. Moreover, in such relationships, it is often clear that one person occupies an inappropriately subordinate position, and the other person will often take deliberate steps to maintain the state of this relationship, e.g. through mockery.

9. The principal difficulty involved with identifying such relationships is that they often exist in the form of a socially acceptable relationship. For instance, the domineering partner might be a parent, a sibling, a friend, a lover or a spouse, and so on. In many such cases, you may have difficulty correctly identifying a negative relationship, as you may feel bound by a sense of duty, custom or responsibility.

One test to determine whether or not a relationship is harmful is to imagine yourself without the partner in question: if you feel a sense of relief, or that you would be more able to be what you are, then the relationship is possibly harmful. The most reliable method is to assess the relationship honestly, and to determine whether it is truly reciprocal and not to your detriment.

10. The people with whom you associate influence your reaction to your inner emotional responses to the world, and consequently how you interact with it. Such influence is not necessarily a bad thing, but certain forms of social influence can have a detrimental effect on recovery. For instance, suppose that you have a friend who is constantly downcast and cynical: this is not entirely a reflection of the world or of that friend’s particular circumstances, but of how that friend interprets and responds to their circumstances. If you are regularly in the presence of such a friend, you will inevitably adopt at least some small aspect of their emotional outlook. This can cause or it can perpetuate mental problems, as you will be more inclined not to accept or to dwell on the unfavorable conditions that are inevitably encountered in the world, and so you will be less able to overcome them. You should be aware of such relationships, as they are also harmful in nature.

11. A word of caution: certain mental problems may cause you to interpret all relationships as being essentially malignant, even when this is not the case. You must recognize this tendency if it exists, and use your best judgement in assessing your relationships. It is not to your advantage to distance yourself needlessly from those who might otherwise be helpful.

12. Regarding ways of life, social and economic necessity often compel you to do what is disagreeable. For instance, certain occupations might be tolerable to some, but intolerable to others. If you derive no sense of satisfaction from what you do, and yet you persist out of a sense of obligation, this is almost certainly a circumstance that is keeping you unwell.
13. The same applies for all such obligations—certain social obligations, for instance—which constitute a way of life. If you derive no satisfaction from them, and they are instead excessively onerous, then they likely are keeping you unwell.

I set aside any consideration of the social utility of such obligations. These present methods are strictly concerned with the perspective of recovery, which is to say that we are taking the interests of the recovering individual alone into account.

14. Where you live also has a great deal of importance. The climate of a place, its environment, the people there, their worldview and ways of life can occasion or enforce patterns of thought that are detrimental to recovery. Pay careful attention to where you live, and try to assess if your surroundings are harming your ability to recover.

15. As for personal habits, they are bad only if they cause regret or shame, and are thus detrimental to recovery. You should also avoid habits that harm your physical health. In many cases, the habit in question is both a symptom and a reinforcing factor for an underlying mental problem. If this is true, then it is often better to treat the underlying cause than to attempt to stop the habit itself.

16. To use an example, many people are dependent on or addicted to some substance—drugs, alcohol and the like. In some cases, the substance is used to alleviate the pain resulting from a mental problem, though the problem itself either goes unrecognized or is ignored, while the addiction is treated as the essential problem. In cases such as these, combatting the addiction directly through forced abstinence and similar methods is rarely effective, as this is to remove the palliative without treating the pain. If the substance in question is the only source of pleasure counterbalancing the pain of a mental problem, some form of relapse is virtually inevitable.

If you find yourself in a cycle of abstinence and relapse, it is best to make an honest assessment of your condition in order to determine the original cause of the addiction.

In sum, it is necessary to understand personal habits in relation to the mind’s problems, as the condition of your mind influences what habits you adopt, and your habits influence the condition of your mind.

17. Given certain acquired mental problems, habits that were formerly pleasurable and beneficial can become detrimental to recovery, especially if they are pursued rigorously and without enjoyment. It is important to understand when this is happening. It is also important to understand what is possible in a state of health is not always possible in a state of recovery. Finally, you should remember that a state of health is the end of a state of recovery, which is to say that the enjoyment of your former habits will eventually return.

18. Finally, we consider principles of belief. These are circumstances because they are commonly socially-enforced ideas that regulate individual behavior by encouraging or discouraging certain activity. They are detrimental to recovery when they cause distress or displeasure, either when they contradict your inherent tendencies, or when several held
beliefs contradict and conflict with one another. It is important to understand when this is happening.

19. As for idiosyncratic principles of belief, or superstitions, it is rare that they are of any use at all. At best, they can confer a false sense of flourishing. At worst, they can inspire fear and dread that is in some cases severe. This is to say that they either impede recovery, or worsen sickness. Be aware of your superstitions—they even have undone the great.

20. Because the term “superstition” is used somewhat loosely, it is necessary to clarify how it is meant in this context. A superstition is a belief or a habitual practice that is thought to have some supernatural, causal bearing on one’s life, and that is not founded in a systematic, socially accepted interpretation of the world. According to this definition, communally-oriented activities such as prayer are not superstitious, and may in fact be beneficial in the context of recovery.

21. Note that these categories of circumstance are not hard and fast. Is it not the case that addiction is both a habit and a sort of dependency? Are certain principles of belief not bound up with a certain place, so that environment and belief constitute a single sort of circumstance? Or again, could a family not enforce some unusual belief so that this circumstance falls into all three categories? You should not tax yourself in attempting to fit your circumstances into some category. These categories only exist as an aid in identifying circumstances that are detrimental to recovery.

22. It is also possible that not every circumstance that is detrimental to recovery has been identified here. A circumstance detrimental to recovery is some persisting situation or behavior that causes undue agitation to the mind. What is agitating to some may not be agitating to others. In essence, if you feel that you are fighting against some external thing, you are likely experiencing a circumstance detrimental to recovery. You must use your best judgement in identifying such circumstances.

23. When circumstances detrimental to recovery have been identified, you must next remove yourself from them. We will next discuss some of the ways in which this is possible in each category, beginning with relationships of pathological dependency.

24. If a relationship of harmful dependency has been correctly identified, the most reliable method of removing yourself from that circumstance is to end that relationship. This can be accomplished by distancing yourself from the person in question, and by eliminating all forms of communication with that person as far as is possible. No doubt this will seem distressing in certain cases—as noted, such relationships often have the appearance of a normal, socially acceptable relationship, and you might feel a sense of duty or obligation to the person in question. You may be tempted to discuss your grievances with the other person in order to repair the relationship: perhaps this may work in some cases, but if the relationship is indeed a relationship of harmful dependency (and, once again, it is critical to identify such relationships accurately), it is doubtful that the other person has the interest in or the capability to form a healthy relationship with you. The ill-effects of such a relationship
may linger for a long time, and they may be treated using the methods and mental practices that we will discuss, but recovery cannot occur until the source of the ill is removed.

25. If you have been caught in a relationship of harmful dependency, it is likely that you yourself are excessively dependent, meaning that you rely on other people for emotional support or for means of living to a degree that is harmful to yourself. This is not an accusation—remember that excessive dependency is not necessarily a personal fault, as human beings are born into a state of dependency, and can be conditioned to remain in such a state. In such cases, independence is also a necessary goal in the process of recovery.

What is independence? Independence is not the deliberate attempt to offend another person or to frustrate their expectations of you. This is perhaps better defined as petulance: it is probably only possible to want to frustrate the expectations of another so long as you still feel bound by them—it implies rebellion against dependency undertaken in a condition of dependency—and so it is not independence. At any rate, willfully refusing to do something in the world is in most cases only harmful to yourself—deliberately harming yourself or making questionable choices in order to offend is even less prudent. Independence, on the other hand, is positively pursuing your own purposes, or it is at least doing something in the world that is motivated by separate considerations to the express expectations of other people.

To be more exact, I define independence as the ability to determine one’s own direction in life, and the ability to regulate one’s own emotional responses to the world without reference to other people.

There are varying degrees of independence, and every adult must be independent to some degree if they are to be happy and healthy—especially in modern society. Attaining independence often requires deliberate effort. As implied above, the first step is removing yourself from relationships in which you are the excessively dependent partner. The second step is ending the inner patterns of thought that compel you to depend on others to a harmful extent. Not everyone can achieve absolute independence, nor is absolute independence necessary for recovery in every case.

Remember that not every form of dependency is necessarily bad. A dependent relationship is only detrimental to recovery if you are very obviously harmed by it—that is, if your ability to live and to fulfill your needs is impeded by it. To what degree human beings are dependent in society and to what degree and how dependencies are considered abhorrent will be treated at greater length in the commentary.

26. As for all other forms of harmful relationships—I mean cases in which you are negatively influenced by a person, but are not heavily dependent on them—you should end these as well. This should be considerably easier than cases of harmful dependency, though you may still feel bound by a sense of obligation to continue such a relationship in spite of the harm it causes you. Remember that if you are resolute in attempting recovery, then your health takes precedence over social duty, and you must be willing to risk offending other people.
27. Regarding obligations and ways of life that impede recovery—meaning, for instance, a
job or a career that you consider unbearable—you must find some way to remove yourself
from such circumstances. This may be difficult, as you may be constrained by social or
economic necessity, as previously mentioned. In such cases, you might for instance attempt
to find a job that is more tolerable, or save money so that you may spend a suitable period of
time without any occupation. Remember that if you do honestly desire to recover, then
recovery is the priority, not attaining wealth or social status—these might be pursued when
you have recovered your health.

28. It is also worth noting that, if you are suffering from mental problems, you should not
enter into any new long-term obligations. The exception to this rule is if you are certain that
the obligation in question will provide you with purpose and deep, natural satisfaction.
However, this is rare—much rarer than you might think—and you should not be willing to
give up on recovery on the basis of false promises or self-delusion. In all other cases
involving new long-term obligations, recovery is unlikely, and, if it does occur, moreover
incidental.

29. If you are sure that your environment is impeding your recovery, you must move
elsewhere. This may involve considerations similar to what was described in relation to
removing yourself from certain obligations.

30. We should now discuss addiction. If you do suspect that you are using a substance to
counterbalance the pain of an acquired mental problem, you should not necessarily take
extensive measures to combat the addiction itself, unless it is particularly severe. If this is the
case—if your life is in immediate danger—you should first take steps to make the addiction
manageable before proceeding to treat the underlying mental problem. Sometimes traditional
methods such as forced abstinence are indeed advisable.

However, if the addiction is comparatively mild—if it is not life-threatening—but it does
still cause you distress, attempting to combat the addiction directly will often only result in
frustration and further distress until the underlying mental problem is first treated. Moreover,
in the process of recovery, it is often important and necessary to indulge yourself, as will be
discussed later, and so complete abstinence from external sources of pleasure is not even
advisable. It is important to note that addiction to certain substances, while not life-
threatening, can nevertheless damage your health. The solution is to find some substitute for
the substance in question, which can be done by researching the matter. This is all of course
temporary; once the underlying mental problem is treated, the addiction itself can then be
treated with relative ease, as its cause will have been removed.

31. As for addictions that are not caused by an underlying mental problem, these can and
should be treated through traditional methods, but this subject is not relevant to the present
discussion.

32. As for habits that were previously enjoyable but are now causing you distress, you must
set aside those habits for the time being. This can be difficult, especially for those who love
cultivating themselves, but you should understand that this is a temporary measure, and that
your previous habits can be resumed with greater benefit once you are healthy. This is not to say that no form of self-improvement should be undertaken during recovery—on the contrary, beneficial and enjoyable habits should be taken up, but they should not be onerous, nor should they impede recovery.

33. As for principles of belief that cause distress by contradicting your natural inclinations, you must reject them or find some way to reconcile them with your condition.

34. Sometimes it is the case that several beliefs do not necessarily contradict your nature, but they do contradict one another, which causes distress: if this is so, you must either reject them all, keep some and reject others, or find some way to reconcile them. This can be difficult, especially if there is a pressing social expectation for you to believe in a certain way, but bear in mind that if you suffer from a mental problem, your guiding principle is now recovery.

35. As for your superstitions, you must cease adhering to them immediately. This may be initially distressing, as in some cases certain superstitious signs or rituals are thought either to bring about a desirable state of affairs, or to avert misfortune. The best way to prove to yourself that this is not the case is to cease adhering to the superstition in question, and to observe over a period of time that nothing bad results from this. Left unchecked, superstitions can become a consuming source of apprehension, and so you should abandon them sooner rather than later.

36. In sum, it is necessary to remove yourself from circumstances that you honestly believe to be detrimental and distressing, and that are not conducive to recovery. This also applies to circumstances which have not been explicitly identified here.

37. I hardly expect that this will be an easy process for you, and in some cases this may be the most difficult stage of recovery. Persevere, and do what is best for your health.

38. On the other hand, you might find that you are already in circumstances that are conducive to recovery. In such cases, the only thing needed might be the mental practices which will be detailed later. Remember that this stage is only necessary if you do indeed suffer under distressing circumstances—you should not try to find such circumstances where they do not exist. You must use your own judgement in these matters.

39. So much for ongoing circumstances that impede recovery. As previously indicated, the same circumstances that impede recovery from a mental problem might also have been the original cause of that problem.

   In other cases, the cause of a mental problem is situational, which is to say that it is a circumstance that lasted only a short time, or that is at any rate not ongoing. Such circumstances are too numerous to detail in any single account. Moreover, whether or not a situation can cause a mental problem is largely relative to one’s own ability to tolerate adverse conditions, which is in itself variable. After one has suffered such circumstances, it is then possible and even likely to enter into different circumstances that impede recovery. In a
word, circumstances that cause a mental problem and circumstances that impede recovery from a mental problem are sometimes different and sometimes the same.

40. For your purposes, it is enough to know that such circumstances exist, and that a mental problem and difficulty recovering from it are often the result of various, interconnected circumstances. Remember that identifying the likely cause of a mental problem is also important to the process of recovery.

41. You must be unscrupulous in the measures that you take to recover. The license that you take should be proportionate to the degree that you suffer. Do not allow social mores and custom to impede your progress: the satisfaction of being dutiful is nothing in comparison to the pleasure of good health.

42. So far we have discussed removing yourself from circumstances, but this is not to say that every circumstance is bad, nor that removing yourself from every circumstance is at all desirable or even possible. Indeed, the desire to insulate yourself entirely from the world’s influence is often the product of a mental problem—it is both the symptom of a sickness, and a factor that makes you sick.

43. Instead, your aim is to place yourself in circumstances that are most conducive to recovery. Such circumstances are probably highly personal, and in the end you must discover for yourself the things that make you well. However, we will outline some desirable circumstances that might be beneficial to you.

44. If you are intent on moving or if you can live elsewhere temporarily, you should seek out a place with a pleasant climate, and with surroundings that are welcoming. I have found that warm, pleasant places on the seaside are very beneficial to the process of recovery, and indeed, countries situated on the Mediterranean were often visited for the purpose of health in the past.

45. Next and most importantly, you must free yourself of every obligation so that you can live for an indefinite period of time in a state of pleasant idleness. Once again, this may be to accomplish owing to economic or social necessity—the next best arrangement is to have as few obligations as possible, and to have obligations that are not taxing so that you can achieve a feeling of rest and ease.

46. You should not be under the mistaken belief that idleness and leisure are in themselves bad things. At the least, you should remember that this is all being prescribed with a view to facilitating recovery. Once your health has been recovered, you can work yourself to death if you so desire—but you should not be surprised if frustration and exhaustion contribute to a shattered psyche, and give rise to fresh problems.

47. However, you might justifiably ask the reason why idleness is so necessary to recovery. When one is active in fulfilling one’s obligations—work and the like—the mind is tense and ready to resist adversity. In this state of readiness, the structures and patterns of thought that constitute acquired mental problems are inaccessible to the conscious mind. This is because a mind that is engaged in habitual activity must assemble itself into a rigid and inflexible
whole in order to meet outside circumstances. This is not in itself a bad thing, but when one has mental problems, such a state of activity prevents them from being treated. The goal of idleness is therefore to allow the mind to open itself so that its structures of thought may be addressed and treated.

48. In this state of idleness, boredom is almost inevitable, but boredom is not in itself a bad thing. Boredom that is somewhat pleasant, and that allows you to think freely and to assess yourself openly and honestly is, in fact, one desirable result of idleness. On the other hand, boredom that is oppressive and monotonous is detrimental to recovery, and should be avoided. How you experience boredom is to some degree down to your natural inclinations, but how boredom is experienced seems to be largely determined by circumstance—whether or not you find your circumstances agreeable and pleasant will determine your relationship to idleness, which is why it is so necessary to place yourself in circumstances that you find pleasurable.

Your degree of autonomy may also have some relationship to idleness: we will discuss this later.

49. To be idle is not to be entirely inactive. This may seem like a contradiction, and so we should draw a distinction between activities that you want to do—activities that produce pleasure, or that are done for their own sake—and activities that you must do—these are obligations that are needed for your livelihood, but that do not necessarily produce enjoyment.

Idleness, or leisure to be more exact, is therefore a state of being free from obligation, and of being able to do what is enjoyable exclusively.

50. It is possible for these two types of activities to coincide—for necessary activities to be enjoyable. Attaining this is an important step in achieving fulfillment, and you should strive for it, as we will discuss later. However, you should not mislead yourself into believing that you do enjoyable work, when in fact you are unhappy—if you do have mental problems, it is unlikely that you are experiencing fulfillment. At any rate, obligation requires some degree of mental tension, and so for the purposes of recovery, complete idleness is best.

51. Of activities that are enjoyable, some are strictly enjoyable, while others are both enjoyable and beneficial. Most beneficial activities are absolutely beneficial: for instance, learning a new skill or studying some subject is beneficial to anyone. However, what is enjoyable is largely relative to your own inclinations—some find enjoyable the things that others cannot stand. You must therefore determine for yourself how best to spend your leisure time, and you should feel by no means obligated to prefer one type of activity to another—all that you do in this context is with a view to your own recovery. However, I will outline activities of both kinds that are either enjoyable to all, or that most would find enjoyable.

52. Physical exercise is the sole exception to what was said above: this should be pursued regardless of whether you enjoy it or not. While recovery is still the priority, follow a
regimen of physical exercise that is as rigorous as your time and interest allow. Some mental problems make adhering to a habitual schedule difficult, and you should not distress yourself in this way, but you must perform some sort of physical exercise.

A strong body makes the mind better able to overcome its infirmities, and in health it is a guard against sickness. This is not to mention the inherent advantages of strength. You are your body and your mind: a strong body makes a strong mind, and a strong mind makes a strong body.

53. Proper training methods and diet should be followed alongside a program of physical exercise, but this subject is beyond the scope of this book. You should research these things independently.

54. Though the influence of certain mental problems may tempt you to withdraw from company, during recovery you should spend time with friends. To be with a friend is to draw the mind away from morbid inner thoughts, and it provides easy enjoyment. Remember that a single night of laughter can redeem many weeks of bitterness.

55. The exception to this rule is if you feel that your old friendships have a negative or a distressing influence on your frame of mind. If this is the case, you should refer to the guidelines above with regard to insulating yourself from such people. I should also note that there are times when being alone is best—however, you should not make withdrawing from company a habitual part of your life, and risk becoming isolated. As a rule, solitude is only bad in this context when it is either distressing or not conducive to recovery.

56. While recovery does necessarily involve a degree of self-indulgence, you should not behave self-indulgently towards your friends. I hardly need to remind anyone of how to behave with a friend: tolerate their faults, as they do yours. Be pleasant in their company, as they are in yours. If your friend by accident injures you, be quick to forgive them, as they are with you. In a word, to be a good friend is to make reciprocal decency a matter of principle.

57. Confide in your friends when it seems appropriate. Remember that relating a source a source of pain in many cases relieves it. However, do not charge your friends with your recovery. Remember that you are chiefly responsible for your recovery. Be as cheerful as you can—do not burden your friends too much, or make them resent you.

58. Neither should you be ashamed if your problems cause you to act irregularly: a good friend will understand the reasons why.

59. Indulge yourself on occasion. Do not do this too regularly, however, or you will develop dependencies. You know your own limitations, and so you should use your own judgement.

60. As for other beneficial activities, you should do what you find enjoyable. Studying can have the pleasant effect of distracting you from your problems. Learning some new skill has a similar effect. Once again, recovery is the goal, and you should not pursue beneficial activities to the point of distress.
61. The purpose of these prescriptions is gradually to replace negative and morbid experiences with positive and pleasurable experiences. This greatly facilitates recovery, as a preponderance of good experiences allows the mind to open itself, making its structures of thought easier to access and adjust. Seeking out positive experiences is therefore the guiding principle during this stage of recovery.

62. There are some mental problems that may make you look contemptuously on this aim, or that may make you think that you are not allowed or not able to find enjoyment. Remember that every human being is capable of experiencing enjoyment. If you do honestly want to recover, you must act in spite of these thoughts and find some way to give yourself pleasure.

63. Regarding autonomy, I define it as both being able to live on one’s own terms, and actually living on one’s own terms. By this I mean being able to dictate what you do, when you do it, and why. Among other benefits, it seems that having more autonomy allows one to enjoy idleness to a greater extent, which is helpful to the process of recovery. There are obviously cases in which having a greater degree of autonomy is not feasible, such as when one is still a child. In other cases, some may feel greater satisfaction with relatively less autonomy. This is not inherently wrong, so long as such circumstances do not produce negative experiences.

At any rate, if you do honestly feel that you would be happier with a greater degree of autonomy, then that should be an aim for you to pursue.

64. There is one important exception: there are some mental problems that make you unable to be autonomous. In such cases, actually having autonomy can be profoundly distressing. In such cases, you should seek out help or put yourself in the care of a trustworthy person. This is a temporary measure that you should follow until you are once again capable of having autonomy.

65. In other cases, having autonomy is unavoidable and unavoidably distressing: so long as the distress is not life-threatening, this will improve as you recover.

66. If you do follow this book’s prescription and are able to make yourself idle, you will obviously have a great deal of time for contemplation. Once again, while your priority is to recover, you should also spend your time considering what you might do for your livelihood that will provide you with fulfillment. This is no easy task, and it does require careful consideration of your talents and inclinations, as well as actually attempting the things you wish to do. Despite the difficulty involved, there are few greater cures than doing what you feel you should be doing. You should consider this problem throughout your process of recovery.

67. So far we have discussed removing yourself from some circumstances and placing yourself in others. This prepares the mind for the resolution of mental problems, and so it is an absolutely necessary step in the process of recovery. However, the substantial part of recovery consists in following the mental practices that will be described shortly. First I will
identify and describe some of the acquired mental problems that this method can potentially treat.

68. Anxiety is an irregular, irrational or unwarranted sense of unease and fear that arises in certain situations, or in most situations. In many cases, anxiety is a nuisance, meaning that, while it is unpleasant and obtrusive, one is able to live and function in spite of it. This often makes the cause of anxiety difficult to identify and treat, as there is no pressing need to eliminate it—in some cases, anxiety is even said to have no clear source at all. While some are more predisposed to worrying than others, anxiety in most cases is likely caused by certain thought structures that have come about either through some negative situation or circumstance in the past, or through one’s habitual or conditioned response to a particular sort of situation.

69. On the other hand, severe cases of anxiety can inhibit one’s ability to acquire practical experience in some necessary area of life. This seriously impairs one’s ability to function in the world. Moreover, it is often a significant source of distress. We will discuss such cases later, as it is first necessary to detail the mental practices mentioned above.

70. Depression is an involuntary aversion to performing activity necessary for life. It is often accompanied by sadness, despondency, a loss of interest in formerly enjoyable activities, or an acquired inability to feel any form of enjoyment. Depression varies widely in severity, and in the worst cases it is a complete unwillingness to function in the world. Depression often comes about from prolonged dissatisfaction with a particular set of circumstances, either through uncertainty, a complete absence of pleasure, or because one’s natural inclinations are being persistently contradicted. It can also come about when some source of pleasure is suddenly removed from one’s life, or when the circumstances of one’s life change dramatically. Finally, it can come about as the result of prolonged exhaustion, or as the result of other mental problems.

71. Trauma is the result of an acutely distressing situation, or when some distressing circumstance persists over a period of time. Trauma can produce cognitive difficulties, emotional problems, emotional pain, or otherwise some difficulty in functioning in the world. One is most susceptible to trauma when one is a child, and indeed, many mental problems are the result of forgotten trauma from the past.

72. Severe cases of trauma can cause major cognitive difficulties, emotional numbness, heightened susceptibility to agitation, and sleeplessness. It can also cause one to withdraw from society. Above all, one will both consciously and unconsciously avoid memories of the situation that produced the trauma, as these memories are extremely distressing. Such severe cases of trauma can come about when something happens that is far beyond one’s ability of acceptance, such as when one’s life is suddenly or unexpectedly threatened.

73. There is also a condition with a name I do not know: it occurs when one works hard and fruitlessly over a long period of time, and finally exceeds their capacity to tolerate this. It causes severe cognitive difficulties, a badly impaired ability to function, acute distortions of spatial perception, ongoing mental pain, and sleeplessness.
74. Outside of the inner anguish caused by mental problems, various physical infirmities apparently have mental problems as their cause. A long-standing pain in the shoulder, for instance, might be caused by the unconscious tensing of the muscles as the result of a mental problem. The intestines are particularly susceptible to disorder in the mind, and a variety of digestive and food-related issues are caused directly by certain mental problems. These physical issues fade as their corresponding mental problems are treated.

75. It is also probable that the body in general is more susceptible to illness when the mind is affected by severe mental problems. This has two possible causes: first, if one is unaware of or has not acknowledged one’s own mental problems, one might seek the cause of one’s suffering in some suspected illness, which in turn might lead to the development of physical symptoms similar to that illness, or, indeed, of the illness itself. Second, when the mind is impaired by severe mental problems, it is likely that the body loses some of its ability to protect itself from illness. In short, when one’s grasp on life is weakened, the body as a whole is also weakened and made vulnerable. If you have been suddenly inundated by various illnesses without any evident external cause, this could be an indication of acquired mental problems.

76. Other acquired mental problems exist that have not been specifically described here, such as compulsions and negative, persistent patterns of thought. So long as they are the result of circumstance and not an inherent sickness, as detailed above, it is probable that they can be addressed with the following mental practices.

77. Here I hesitate, as we are about to move from a discussion of certainties in the world to a discussion of mental phenomena as they appear to my own observation. It is first necessary to describe and define these phenomena before proceeding to a description of the practice of treating them. Assuming that we as human beings share certain aspects of our inner experience in common, it may be possible to communicate with language both the nature of these phenomena, and the means of interacting with them. Because of the inherent difficulty involved in describing these phenomena, I ask the reader to assist me by making an effort in earnest to understand my attempts at description. For my part, I have attempted to convey my impressions of inner experiences as best I can in writing. At any rate, these mental practices comprise the real substance of the methods, and so whatever truly practical information there is to be gained from this book is contained in the following passages.

78. In essence, acquired mental problems are caused by negative thought structures. I call them “structures” because they seem to consist of three parts:

1. The “kernel” of the negative thought structure. This is a complex of highly unpleasant emotions bound closely together with memories or associations that the mind is unable to process, or “resolve.”

   Emotions are involuntary reactions to the ways in which one is affected by their circumstances. Normally, emotions are felt and shortly thereafter resolved, leaving no lasting negative effects on the mind. However, in some cases, the mind is not able to resolve an emotion normally. For instance, this can happen if one refuses to
acknowledge or “feel” an emotion when the intensity of the emotion is beyond one’s ability to tolerate it, or if the emotion in question is the result of an ongoing set of circumstances. Unresolved sets of emotion remain in the mind and cause a variety of issues.

2. The thought patterns that deflect the mind away from accessing the kernel consciously or unconsciously. When an emotion goes unresolved, it is pushed outside of one’s immediate awareness, and a pattern of thought emerges that prevents the mind from accessing and resolving the kernel of emotion. This is perhaps in part to prevent the mind from experiencing the pain of confronting these emotions directly.

3. The fact that one becomes accustomed to having these negative thought structures, so that one mistakenly assumes that the negative effects of these structures are an intrinsic feature of one’s mind.

79. Different circumstances produce different negative thought structures, and different negative thought structures produce different mental problems, some of which I have identified in the preceding sections. The unresolved kernel of emotion itself can produce various undesirable effects on the mind, the deflecting thought patterns can incidentally prevent certain parts of the mind from being utilized properly, and the fact of being accustomed to negative thought patterns prevents one from realizing that these mental conditions can and should be changed.

80. I moreover call these phenomena “structures” because they very probably result in and correspond to abnormal physical changes to what constitutes the mind. This is because particular negative thought structures seem to be localized to different parts of the subjectively experienced mind, and because “resolving” these negative thought structures does certainly result in measurable physiological reactions. We will discuss both of these elements later. However, you should note that to apply these methods successfully is probably to change the physical structure of your mind for the better.

81. In order to eliminate negative thought structures, there are three necessary things which must be accomplished that correspond to the three parts of a negative thought structure:

1. You must realize that some of your difficulties are being caused by alterable structures in your mind.

2. The deflective patterns of thought must be located, understood and interrupted.

3. The underlying kernel of emotion must then be accessed and resolved.

82. If you are reading this book in order to begin a process of recovery, it is likely that you have already completed the first step. In some cases, mental problems are so severe that they impair functioning, so that it is plainly evident that some form of recovery is needed. Following an extremely distressing situation, a sudden breakdown of confidence and certainty accompanied by a panicked attempt to explain this breakdown is almost invariably
the sign of a severe mental problem—you should not look for the cause of these new problems in unrelated conditions.

In uncertain cases where you do suspect that you are suffering from a mental problem, but can function, think and feel in a relatively normal way, it is not strictly necessary to attempt a radical change in your habits and circumstances unless you are very intent on overcoming your mental problems, and are fully able to do everything necessary to accomplish this. If yours is a less severe case, you can follow the mental practices of the methods experimentally and in your leisure time, and, if you do positively determine that you have a mental problem, you can make gradual adjustments to your circumstances in order to facilitate recovery.

83. The second and third steps outlined immediately above are the most difficult and time consuming to accomplish, and the following mental practices are intended to accomplish these two steps.

84. Place yourself in a comfortable position. There is no specific etiquette or discipline involved with this—just ensure that you are comfortable. Next, allow your mind to relax and drift. Attempt to prevent any resisting, fighting or pushing away in your mind. If you feel at all rushed or pressured, it is unlikely that you will accomplish anything. This is why it is so necessary to carry out these practices in a state of relative idleness. You must allow the mind to open itself.

85. Now, notice any “place” in your mind where you do feel the involuntary need to push something away. Notice any place in your mind that seems to be inaccessible, “blocked off,” or inhibited from functioning properly. These are the likely “locations” of negative thought structures, and you must concentrate your efforts there.

86. While the mind is not literally a physical space, different modes of thought seem to be associated with sensations in particular parts of the head, which is why I use terms such as “place” and “location” with reference to the mind. Negative thought structures seem to be concentrated in certain parts of the mind, and particular negative thought structures, which, again, consist of memories and emotions, seem to be consistently associated with a particular part of the mind. By this I mean that particular memories and emotions that constitute a negative thought structure—the memory of a childhood injury, for instance—are usually associated with one particular part of the head, and will remain associated with that part of the head until they are resolved.

To use a few examples, negative thought structures can be associated with sensations in the front of the head; the top-center part of the head; the back of the head, from the top to the base; and in the front right portion of the head. In addition to being associated with sensations in a certain part of the head, a negative thought structure may produce additional sensations associated with different parts of the body, such as behind the eyes, or on the sides of the neck—feelings of intense, irrational fear especially seem to be associated with this part of the body.
87. Outside of the signs previously indicated, there are also various persistent emotions that can point to the location of a negative thought structure in the mind. A recurring sense of anger, fear, guilt or shame without any direct situational cause is a good indication of the presence of a negative thought structure. Pay attention to the patterns of thought that regularly produce these feelings: attempt to notice the parts of the mind associated with these thought patterns, as this is the likely location of a negative thought structure.

88. Emotional numbness is also an indication of a negative thought structure, especially if there was a time when you experienced emotions normally. Attempt to notice a strong, unpleasant “blunt” sensation in a particular part of the mind associated with the emotional numbness, as this is a likely location of a negative thought structure.

89. Certain kinds of dreaming are caused by mental problems, and so dreams can sometimes indicate the location of a negative thought structure. When you are asleep, the mind relaxes, and so certain parts of the mind that are consciously suppressed during the day are experienced while you are dreaming. If you have a recurring nightmare or unpleasant dream, upon waking attempt to notice the parts of the mind that seem to be most active in association with the dream. These are the possible locations of a negative thought structure.

90. When you have located what you suspect to be a negative thought structure, attempt to access the underlying emotional “kernel” of it. You may “glimpse” the kernel, or feel a sudden jolt of painful sensations and emotion. Attempt to remain focused on the kernel, while also keeping your mind open to all of the sensations that you are experiencing. You may find that your focus is quickly directed to a less painful subject. If you have followed these instructions correctly, you may begin to understand the nature of this problem: you must remain focused on the kernel, but this causes pain, and the mind by its nature prefers not to experience pain unnecessarily.

91. This is a reasonable preference, but not with regard to eliminating negative thought structures, or, indeed, to medicine in general. With medical treatment, it is often necessary to undergo sharp, immediate pain in order for an injury to heal, and in order to avoid complications and prolonged suffering. For instance, a broken bone must be set. This procedure can be as painful as the break itself, but it is necessary for the body to continue functioning properly. The case is the same with negative thought structures. Exposing the mind to the kernel of a negative thought structure can cause acute pain, but if the kernel is resolved, the mind will experience relief and greater clarity.

92. Of course, most do not understand that resolving these emotions brings relief, which is why they make no conscious attempts to access them. Indeed, in the past, you may have chanced upon a thought or a memory that caused intense fear, dread or pain, so that you subsequently avoided this thought without understanding what had happened. Knowing now that this was likely what I am calling a negative thought structure, you must proceed despite the pain involved. You should do so with the understanding that to eliminate negative thought structures is also to eliminate mental problems.
93. The basic principle of this method is to keep the mind relaxed and open while attempting to focus on a kernel of unresolved emotion. However, as we have seen, deflective patterns of thought are often present in close association with the kernel that prevent it from being accessed. For instance, these might subtly direct your thoughts to a different subject, or they might give you a sense of tension and immediate threat, causing you to push the kernel away involuntarily. You must find some way to halt these deflective patterns of thought. If your thoughts are being directed to a different subject, as you attempt to focus on the kernel, pay careful attention to the way in which your thoughts are being directed. If you can identify the point at which your focus begins to shift away from the kernel, you can attempt to halt the pattern of thought as it redirects your focus. Once you have “caught” the thought pattern, you can begin to condition yourself not to stray away from the kernel.

94. For instance, suppose that someone injured you in some way in the past, and that you were never able to resolve the consequent emotions. As you attempt to access this kernel of emotion, your thoughts may shift to anger and laying blame—exactng imaginary revenge is easier and more pleasurable than resolving the painful emotions left to you. You might then begin to contemplate and blame the motivations for the injury, the other people involved, the conditions under which it occurred, and so on. This creates an entire cycle of thought whereby the kernel of emotion is recognized, but never resolved. You might go through such a cycle innumerable times through the course of many years. This reaction is only natural, and you should not regard it as a failing, but understand that it accomplishes nothing in the way of recovery. In order to stop such a cycle, you might recognize that the first thoughts of blame are in fact shifting your focus away from the kernel, and you might then attempt to stop these thoughts while remaining focused on the kernel.

95. If you realize that tension and unease are preventing you from accessing a kernel of unresolved emotion, you must redouble your efforts at making your mind relaxed. This may take practice, as the shift out of a relaxed frame of mind is often subtle. However, you must always be aware of the impulse to push a kernel of emotion away, and you must attempt to resist it. Keeping the mind relaxed despite this tension will eventually expose the kernel.

96. Once you have halted these patterns of thought, remain focused on the kernel and allow the mind to experience all of the resulting feelings. There is little conscious work to be done at this point—in essence, these mental practices are intended to remove everything that inhibits the mind from carrying out its unconscious processes of resolution and healing. The feelings that result from accessing unresolved emotion can often seem overwhelming and intolerable—you must resist the urge to interrupt these feelings. They are temporary, and experiencing them is necessary for eliminating mental problems.

97. Once you are successful in applying these methods, the resolution of a negative thought structure may be accompanied by any number of sensations: a sudden release of emotion, and sometimes an outward display of laughing or crying; a sensation of pressure being released; tingling in a particular part of the head; a sudden, sharp stabbing sensation in a part of the head along with tingling; sensations in the gums or the teeth; pressure or a “popping” sensation behind the eyes; and numerous other similar sensations.
In virtually every case, resolving a negative thought structure will bring immediate relief and greater clarity of thought—this is the principal sign of success.

98. Note that I have included descriptions of these sensations only so that you have some sense of what to expect when a kernel of emotion is resolved. By following these methods you may incidentally experience these sensations. However, you should not attempt to experience these sensations deliberately under the mistaken belief that these constitute recovery itself, as you may cause further harm to your mind. Once again, these sensations are only incidental effects of resolving a negative thought structure. You may never feel any of these sensations—an immediate sense of relief is the more reliable indication of success.

99. Once you have completed these steps with one negative thought structure, you must repeat them with the others that you are able to locate in your mind. This process will become progressively easier because you will better learn how to apply these methods through practical experience, and because you will have increasingly positive thoughts and feelings as unresolved emotions are eliminated from your mind.

100. It is worth noting that eliminating negative thought structures is rarely as smooth a process as these written instructions seem to imply. Sometimes you will resolve one part of a structure, while the other part will persist for weeks. Sometimes you will fruitlessly attempt to resolve a structure for a long time before succeeding after a chance realization. Sometimes you will need to change physical location or to distract your conscious mind in order to achieve results. In short, though resolution brings immediate relief, there is often a great deal of struggling before that moment. Recovery is a process that is both gradual and sudden.

101. So far we have discussed negative thought structures in general terms. This is because these methods work in a similar way in most particular cases. However, there are some cases in which the application of these methods differs slightly from the standard pattern. I will detail some of these cases now.

102. As I have indicated, there are some negative thought structures that cause manageable mental problems, meaning that you can live in spite of them. On the other hand, there are also severe mental problems that seriously interfere with one’s ability to function. Severe mental problems and their corresponding negative thought structures are more difficult to treat because the painful unresolved emotions are usually more intense, and because of the extent to which they inhibit the functioning of the mind, which makes applying the methods more difficult.

If you suffer from severe mental problems, you should expect a more gradual process of resolution. Relax and open your mind as usual, and place your focus on the entirety of the negative thought structure. Severe negative thought structures feel as though they occupy a very large part of the mind, and this is usually very distressing. You may therefore feel a strong impulse to push such negative thought structures away from your awareness. Resist this impulse, and simply allow the negative thought structure to inhabit this large part of your mind. As you do, you may feel your mind beginning to “probe” this occupied area. If you allow the mind to do this unconscious work, eventually a part of the structure will resolve. As
this goes on, the negative thought structure will become increasingly more manageable, and the methods can be applied as normal.

103. Sometimes a negative thought structure consists of a fact that you cannot accept for some particular reason. In cases such as these, the issue is often pushed away in the mind with consequences similar to a more “conventional” negative thought structure (e.g., one caused by trauma). For instance, you might recently have lost a loved one, and you find it difficult to tolerate the resulting emotions. While pushing these emotions away may alleviate some immediate pain, if they are left unresolved, they will eventually cause mental problems that are far more painful. Of course, in some cases such feelings are so intense that they inhibit the mind’s ability to function, making it necessary and even inevitable for such strong emotions to be pushed away to some extent. However, once the initial intensity of these emotions has subsided, you should begin attempting to accept the fact and to experience the associated emotions. In truth, there is no reliable way to expedite this process of acceptance—time is most necessary. You must keep your mind open, and endure the bad.

104. In essence, every negative thought structure is the result of an emotion that has not been accepted. For your purposes, it may be helpful to think of eliminating negative thought structures in terms of accepting emotions that were not initially accepted.

105. There are some circumstances that may have caused you to want death. This is probably an involuntary reaction to circumstances that are so overwhelmingly unfavorable that the mind unconsciously understands that no pleasure is possible. Even certain animals have been known to display suicidal tendencies, apparently by pure instinct.

At any rate, this can be disconcerting, especially if you are determined to continue living despite what you feel. It is perfectly reasonable to suppress such a desire so long as the unfavorable circumstances continue. However, when you arrive in more favorable circumstances, this desire does not necessarily resolve of its own accord, and you will likely continue to suppress it, which can cause mental problems. Understand that this desire is an emotional reaction like any other: in order to be rid of it, you must entertain and accept it with a relaxed mind, but without the intent of acting upon it—this is a crucial point.

106. The same applies to an excessive fear of death or injury. While such fears are natural, when they become your overriding preoccupation, they can inhibit proper functioning. Relax and open your mind as usual while focusing on the place in your mind where these excessive fears reside. You will find that they can be resolved like any other negative thought structure.

These are difficult emotions to resolve, but if you are able to do it, no other part of recovery should seem impossible. Is there any thought stronger than the fear of death? If you can overcome the desire for death, what else in the mind is daunting?

107. Next, we will discuss cases in which severe anxiety inhibits proper functioning in the world. Anxiety can do this in two ways: the first way is by preventing the acquisition of practical experience in some area or activity necessary for life. Every activity that is not done from birth is at first difficult both to initiate and to accomplish. By performing an activity
repeatedly—by gaining practical experience—both difficulties are gradually alleviated until the activity in question becomes second nature. However, anxiety can cause a painful fear intense enough that it is preferable to avoid a given activity altogether. When this is the case, gaining practical experience through the repetition of an activity becomes difficult if not impossible, meaning that one is potentially left without the ability to perform an activity necessary for living a satisfying life.

108. When adequately learned, most activities or interactions with the world are performed unconsciously or instinctually. This is to say that the majority of activities are most effectively performed unconsciously, or at least with minimal intervention from the conscious mind. Additionally, satisfaction and pleasure in relation to an activity are most usually derived from that activity’s unconscious performance. The pain of anxiety causes the conscious mind to intervene and disrupt unconscious processes at inappropriate times. Therefore, the second way anxiety inhibits proper functioning in the world by preventing the effective performance of certain activities, and by robbing them of pleasure’s appeal.

109. Two methods must be used to overcome activity-related anxiety. First, you must gain experience with the activity in which you are deficient. This can be difficult, and so to alleviate this difficulty, you should begin with small, manageable or non-threatening steps, and progress from there. Do not try to expose yourself to an activity all at once. You must not assume that a particular activity should be difficult because you dread it. The best way to gain experience is to place yourself in circumstances where regular, repeated exposure to a particular activity is guaranteed. Do not be easily deterred. Your first attempts may be painful or embarrassing, but you will improve with time.

110. As you perform the problematic activity, you will be inducing your own anxiety. When this happens, make note of the parts of your mind that seem to be affected. When you are able, focus on these parts of your mind in a state of relaxation, and employ the mental practices described above. It is important to expose yourself to the problematic activity with regularity, as this will bring your anxiety to your awareness. Do this until your anxiety is resolved, and until you can perform the activity in question with pleasure and ease.

111. When treating activity-related anxiety, you should see your difficulties as a problem that can be resolved rather than an inherent incapacity to perform a particular activity. This is the most important aspect in recovering from anxiety, and, indeed, in recovery in general.

112. Lastly, we will discuss attitudes that are desirable or undesirable for recovery.

113. Conscious thought is often only a reflection of or a justification for the underlying structures of thought, memory and emotion in the mind. This is to say that the thoughts that occupy our conscious mind are determined by the emotional imprints of our experience of which we are not always consciously aware.

For instance, suppose that a loved one once betrayed your trust in a significant way. If the consequent emotions are not resolved, then they become negative structures in the mind, as we have discussed. Such structures affect your behavior in unconscious ways—that is, your
behavior will be in part determined by these thought structures even if you have forgotten or are unaware of the reason why you are compelled to act in a certain way. Using this example, you would likely find it difficult to trust new people and to form rewarding relationships. Your unconscious resistance to social trust is the result of thought structures left by a particular experience, but assuming that you are not aware of these unconscious thought structures, you would likely form conscious, ostensibly “rational” justifications for the behavior that you cannot seem to control. For instance, you might develop a dislike for other human beings, and attribute your inability to form relationships to some malignancy latent in human nature. You might even be vaguely aware of the thought structures that negatively influence your behavior, though you blame the offending person as the cause of your undesirable behavior. Of course, these justifications are false—the cause of your behavior is the negative thought structure, which is the result of the mind’s reaction to a particular experience.

In practical terms, such conscious processes of thought can be dangerous, as you may adhere to them as though they constituted a fundamental part of your identity. Though you may detest your own behavior which is the consequence of some particular experience, by clinging to such conscious justifications for your behavior, you are paradoxically clinging to that behavior itself, as the conscious justification for some behavior can only exist so long as the unconscious cause of the behavior still exists. In other words, such conscious justifications for a particular mode of behavior may actually constitute a deflecting pattern of thought, which is part of a negative thought structure.

In sum, it is often best to ignore conscious processes of thought if you are attempting recovery. Once again, these are largely determined by the unconscious structures of thought and emotion which you are attempting to eliminate. In essence, the aim of the mental practices I have described is to clear away conscious processes of thought so that the mind can interact with and resolve the unconscious structures of thought and emotion which are the true cause of acquired mental problems.

114. In order to achieve a desired state of mind or set of habits, it is often necessary to experience the emotions of the opposite state of mind. This may seem confusing and counter-productive, but the only way to establish a positive mindset is first to clear away the negative emotions that prevent you from having that mindset.

For instance, suppose that you want to be open, friendly, and sociable, but the residual emotions from some past experience cause you to recoil from social interaction. A natural reaction is to suppress these impulses and to attempt to socialize normally, but the unconscious structures in your mind will likely render such attempts ineffectual or even painful. Such experiences in turn may compel you to shrink further away from social interaction.

In this case, the true solution is to confront, acknowledge, and accept your negative associations with social interaction as a part of your own experience—as a part of what you are. Only then can your mind resolve the negative thoughts associated with the behavior in
question. Once again, this is extremely counterintuitive—in essence, you must accept being one thing in order to become something else: in this case, you must accept being unsociable as a result of your past experiences in order to become sociable.

115. When resolving negative thought structures, one consequence is often that the mind will become completely encompassed by the negative emotions that are being resolved for a period of time. This can be a matter of minutes or hours, or it can be a matter of days or even weeks. Because these emotions are negative and often painful or distressing, it is usually tempting to push them away in order to reestablish a relatively content state of mind. Instead, you must persevere in the face of strong negative emotions—remember that if such emotions are pushed away, they will continue to influence your thought and behavior unconsciously. The only way to establish a truly light and contented state of mind is to eliminate such structures of emotion entirely. Periods of instability and distress are an unavoidable aspect of recovery.

116. As you begin your process of recovery, it is unlikely that other people will understand what you are doing. Indeed, they may work against you. This is usually out of ignorance: no matter how you express yourself, no one can experience what you are experiencing. Additionally, their expectations of you probably preclude you tending to your own health: society needs productive people, not perfectly healthy people. In these cases, it is natural to feel resentment, but you should not harbor it unnecessarily. You must be prepared to act on your own for your own sake.

117. There are also cases in which a person will prevent you from recovering out of malice. This is probably a case of harmful dependency, and you should separate yourself from such a person as soon as you can, as discussed previously. Once again, do not nurse your hatred for such people, but do not suppress it either. Understand that they likely suffer from their own inner hell of unresolved mental problems.

118. On the other hand, there are some who will accommodate you as you heal, assist you unobtrusively, and demand nothing from you in return. Do not undervalue such rare and exceptional people.

119. Generally speaking, there are two ways in which someone suffering from a mental problem will respond to it: they will either consider the pain to be overwhelming, and convince themselves that they are incurable; or they will refuse to acknowledge that they suffer, and will push the problem away while attempting to live normally. Perhaps you believe that one is a sign of weakness and the other a sign of strength, but understand that both attitudes accomplish nothing. The correct attitude is to remain calm and self-possessed, to acknowledge your problems, and to have a readiness for pursuing practical methods for eliminating their causes.

120. Mental pain is very real, but it does not represent an immediate mortal threat. Bear this in mind if you are excessively afraid of inner emotional pain, and also remember that the mind has the capacity to heal its own emotional wounds—you are not incurable.
121. Pushing your problems away will only cause more problems. It is not disgraceful to acknowledge and to allow yourself to experience your inner emotions. You are not above your emotions—you are still human. If you are strong enough to live in spite of your problems, then you are also strong enough to confront your pain and unresolved emotions.

122. There is a popular bias which runs that the ideal life is one in which no pain or discomfort is ever experienced, and so unfavorable circumstances are necessarily objections to life. This of course is nonsense—life necessarily entails some form of pain, and such pain is often frequent and exists at least in equal measure to happiness. By thinking that pain must be avoided at all costs, you will almost inevitably suppress your painful emotions, which can cause mental problems. Pain and unfavorable circumstances—the “dirtiness” of the world—must be acknowledged and embraced if you are to experience authentic happiness. No life is perfectly ideal.

123. Feelings of futility and impotency often accompany severe mental problems. Do not fight these feelings or push them away. On the other hand, you should not accept them and allow them to dictate your behavior. Instead, you should acknowledge them as undesirable consequences of your mental problems, and you should understand that they are among the first things to fade as you have your initial successes in the process of recovery. Nevertheless, it will be difficult to take the same pride in yourself as you did when you were strong and uninhibited. Let your pride and strength consist in your rigid adherence to the logic of recovery.

124. Do not be ashamed if you have expressed your own sense of futility. You were probably misled by the social attitudes that encourage the expression of helplessness caused by mental problems. In reality, doing this accomplishes nothing. Remember that, while you are perhaps unable to function as others do while you are unwell, through the methods you can retain control and possession of your life—you have no cause to beg pity from others. Build up and carefully guard your self-worth as you pursue practical methods for recovery. Let what you have done stay in the past.

125. Never say “life is suffering.” You might say “my life has been suffering,” and this might be true enough. No one should be so naïve as to suppose that every living human was born into happy conditions. However, you should understand that every human being has the potential to be happy. Examine the lives of others—have you not noticed that many of them are similar to yourself, and that they have attained happiness even in spite of misfortune? In short, you should not deny the possibility of happiness only because you have never been happy before.

126. Your happiness may not be the happiness of others. Do not mistake the two. Your happiness may be as yet undiscovered.

127. Are you too proud to attempt to live a happy life? Do not be so obstinate—you are only harming yourself.

This concludes the methods.
Commentary

Mind and Circumstance

Humans are animals, and as animals they are by nature active. A human is active at all times, and if a human is not active, then he is not alive. A human has certain desires intrinsic to his particular nature, the fulfillment of which is necessary both for life and for a satisfying or a happy life. Activity is both motivated by these desires, and it is aimed at their fulfillment, either directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously. Thus, these desires together with a human’s limited capabilities constitute an inner constraint on his behavior—that is, a human can do only what he is physically capable of doing with a view to fulfilling some desire.

Because people are bound to a particular place according to a linear tract of time, activity takes place within a particular, and usually a constant context. I will call this context the circumstances of activity, or simply circumstance. Circumstance is the totality of a person’s orientation in the world, which includes their physical environment, the social customs of a place, the overall sense of the attitudes and emotional states of the people around them, the intellectual currents of their time, the ongoing sequence of events and occurrences in the world, the narrative that forms around these happenings, the reasons why they are in a particular place at a particular time, and so on. Human beings can only act according to what is possible given their circumstances, and so circumstance represents the outer constraint on human behavior.

Bound by these two forms of constraint, human behavior is subject to change so that human desires can be fulfilled according to what is possible given the circumstances. As behavior—which is habitual activity—changes, the body—and consequently the mind—also undergo changes in order to accommodate new modes of behavior. For human beings, circumstances are subject to frequent and often significant change. These three facts taken together constitute the principle of radical human plasticity.

According to this principle of plasticity, circumstances imprint themselves upon every aspect of a particular person’s being. It is the fact of being-radically-affected-by-circumstance that can give rise to problems relating to a person’s being. Because the mind is in part responsible for registering and representing the total condition of being to the subject, these problems relating to being are made manifest in the mind.

Functions of the Mind

Interpretation is one of the essential functions of the mind. It is a continual, unconscious process that cannot be entirely halted so long as a person is alive. It consists of three parts, two of which were indicated above: registering the subject’s condition of being, which means assimilating facts of the subject’s inner state along with and in relation to the subject’s outer
circumstances; representing, which is the continual assembling of these constantly-changing facts into a form or an inner image that is wholly comprehensible to the subject; and the contextualization of this inner image, whereby meaning is ascribed to the fact of the subject’s being, and elements of it are judged to be right or wrong. The first two parts of interpretation are relatively fixed and not subject to radical change, but the process of contextualization is determined by the pressures of inner necessity—desires, physical condition, and the like—and outer necessity, or circumstance. This is to say that circumstance affects both the facts of a person’s being and the way in which these facts are interpreted, though it is better simply to say that circumstance affects the facts of being, as the interpretation of being is also a substantive fact of being.

Once again, humans are active animals, and in terms of the ways in which they actually interact with the world, withholding is one of the principal functions of the mind. As has been stated elsewhere, most human activities, when learned, are performed unconsciously or instinctually. Withholding is the mind’s ability to interrupt or halt these unconscious processes. Withholding is most usually done in line with interpretation. Unconscious processes are halted in order to prevent an undesirable set of circumstances, so that the subject might eventually arrive in desirable circumstances. Withholding also occurs in order to prevent a person’s interpretation from becoming incoherent, i.e. to prevent activity that would contradict a person’s interpretation, and in other, similar cases. In a word, withholding is usually done to maintain a particular interpretation of being. To use an example, Odysseus’ longing to be in Ithaca, and his refusal to accept any other way of life together can be taken as an illustration of withholding in the service of interpretation (i.e., Odysseus considers himself to be the king of Ithaca, the husband of Penelope, the father of Telemachus, etc. and he will not allow himself to accept any circumstances of life to the contrary).

The Emotions

As previously indicated, the emotions are an involuntary response to a person’s circumstances. To be more specific, they arise from a person’s innate desires encountering outer circumstances. For instance, when a person’s desires are being met within a given set of circumstances, the result is some shade of a pleasurable emotion, or happiness to use a broader term. On the other hand, if a person is frustrated in meeting their desires, or if their desires are being contradicted by their circumstances, the result is a painful emotion, such as anger or sadness. A person’s interpretation of circumstance can also give rise to an emotional response, although such emotions are generally shadows of authentic emotion. Authentic emotion cannot be deliberately conjured in the absence of some provoking circumstance. (While such “interpretational emotion” lacks authenticity, this is not to say that it does not motivate some activity, or that it cannot have a profound effect on the psyche.) Emotion is an involuntary, unconscious process; emotion can be interrupted through withholding.
A Note on the Emotions

In sum, I contend that withheld emotions are the cause of acquired mental problems. I do realize that for some the term “emotion” connotes a response to a situation that is somewhat superficial or even petty—for instance, when a child has a toy taken away, he becomes angry or distraught, and he may cry or throw a tantrum. However, such responses should not be taken lightly. As we have established, emotion is the result of the interaction between desire and circumstance, and they indicate whether desire is being fulfilled or not. Moreover, we have seen that human desire is the innermost part of human nature, and that the fulfillment of human desire is necessary both for life and for happiness. Thus, emotion is the pain or pleasure of the desires, which is the most essential part of a person—emotion is a total indication of how a person is faring in a certain place at a certain time. This is to say that there is no pain or pleasure greater than that of the emotions.

When painful emotions are withheld, this keeps the pain of unfavorable circumstances alive in the mind even when the circumstances themselves have changed. When pleasurable emotions are withheld, this prevents a person from experiencing the enjoyment of desire’s fulfillment. When pain is present when it should not be, or when pleasure is not experienced when it should be, this can cause a person to think or behave in ways inappropriate to their circumstances, which constitutes a mental problem. Moreover, because much of the mind is responsible for processing pain or pleasure with regard to various aspects of existence, when the process of experiencing these sensations is interrupted, vital processes of the mind are effectively being interrupted. This can also constitute a mental problem.

The Aim of Our Inquiry

Bearing these principles in mind, we should investigate the cause of acquired mental problems from a general perspective—that is, not with a view to their medical treatment, but with a view to attaining a better understanding of the human psyche. The cause of acquired mental problems seems to be some interaction between innate desires, circumstance, and interpretation which results in the dysfunctional accommodation of emotions through the process of interpretation. By “dysfunctional accommodation” I mean cases in which emotions are interpreted and potentially withheld in such a way that causes distress. Below we will examine the ways in which such interactions may produce the dysfunctional accommodation of emotion.

Circumstance and Desire

Once again, emotions are an involuntary response that indicates whether or not innate desires are being fulfilled given a certain set of circumstances. In nature, painful sensations are avoided, while pleasurable sensations are sought out. For most animals, this is sufficient to guide them away from unfavorable circumstances and into favorable circumstances. However, human beings are fairly unique in that we can be confined to circumstances unfavorable to the fulfillment of
our desires. Negative emotions are persistent so long as a person remains in unfavorable circumstances. Such ongoing negative emotions are often withheld in line with interpretation in order to make unfavorable circumstances more tolerable. Mental problems can come about from this interaction if a person remains in unfavorable circumstances for a long time so that the mind is forced to withhold a great deal of negative emotion, or when a person enters into more favorable circumstances, and yet the mind continues to withhold the negative emotions from past circumstances.

**Interpretation and Circumstance**

Sometimes a particular set of circumstances are inconsistent with a person’s interpretation. This can result in fulfillment-attaining processes being withheld when they would not otherwise be withheld in other circumstances. When desires are consistently prevented from being fulfilled, negative emotions can result. Mental problems can be caused by this interaction either if a person’s interpretation is not adjusted to accommodate their circumstances, or if a person is unable to alter their circumstances in line with interpretation.

**Interpretation and Desire**

Certain desires can be interpreted as being wrong. Thus, the corresponding fulfillment-attaining activities are withheld and halted, which results in painful emotions. Sometimes such activities are performed in spite of the inhibitive interpretation, so that pleasurable emotions are withheld, and painful emotions are felt in their place. In both cases, the resulting negative emotions are ignored, as withholding these processes is thought to be the right thing to do. Mental problems will almost certainly result so long as such an interpretation persists.

**Interpretation, Circumstance, and Desire**

In some cases, circumstances will contradict a person’s desires, but such circumstances are considered correct according to that person’s interpretation. Concepts of duty and obligation are usually the cause of such an interaction. Once again, the resulting negative emotions will be ignored in such cases, as the circumstances are interpreted as being correct. Mental problems can result when this arrangement persists for a long time, or when the resulting negative emotions are particularly intense.

**Severity and Length of Occurrence**

Whether or not acquired mental problems will arise and the severity of these problems is largely determined by the severity of negative emotions, and consequently the extent to which they must be withheld. The severity of negative emotions is determined by the extent to which a desire is contradicted, and the strength or priority of the desire being contradicted. To use an
example, the desire to continue living is typically a strong desire. If a person’s life is suddenly and unexpectedly threatened, then the resulting negative emotions will be intense.

Of course, whether or not such emotions result in mental problems depends on whether or not the process of experiencing them is withheld in line with interpretation. Once again, whether or not a given person’s interpretation will accommodate a given experience is determined both circumstantially, and by certain individual factors. To return to our example, there are some cases in which the sudden threat of death results in severe mental problems, but there are other cases in which death itself is accepted with relative calm and equanimity. We will call the ability of an interpretation to accommodate such experiences the capacity for toleration. As noted previously, this is largely variable from person to person, and it also varies according to a person’s circumstances.

The length of time in which a person’s desires are contradicted also determines the severity of consequent negative emotions. If a person’s desires are strongly contradicted over a short period of time, this can result in mental problems. On the other hand, if a person’s desires are contradicted in small ways over a long period of time, this can also result in mental problems. Of course, if a person’s desires are contradicted in a strong way over a long period of time, severe mental problems are much more likely.

Why Mental Problems are Difficult to Overcome

Human beings are unique in that we need some understanding of ourselves in relation to the world in order to perform necessary activities, and the continual, involuntary process of interpretation provides that meaning. This is to say that, so long as a person remains in a certain set of circumstances where some activity is necessary, they will be compelled to adopt a particular interpretation, and consequently to withhold and push away any negative emotions arising from these circumstances. Thus, so long as a person remains under unfavorable circumstances, the negative emotions that cause mental problems cannot be adequately accessed and resolved.

In addition, when a certain interpretation has been held for a long enough period of time, in many cases a person will incorrectly assume that this interpretation is the essence of their identity. Consequently, they will cling to this interpretation and any associated habits of withholding out of a misguided sense of pride and obstinacy.

On the other hand, in some cases, a person will recognize that their habits of withholding are causing them problems, but these habits are so deeply engrained that they are difficult to overcome. Thus, such habits can persist even after that person’s circumstances have changed.

Finally, experiencing withheld emotions is often very painful, which in many cases is why such emotions were withheld in the first place. Consequently, a person may continue to withhold such emotions out of the simple animal impulse to avoid excessive pain.
The Purpose of the Methods

In order to overcome mental problems, a person must alter their circumstances, disrupt the process of interpretation, and alter their habits of withholding. Altering one’s circumstances serves three purposes. First, leaving unfavorable circumstances relieves the need to adopt a problem-causing interpretation. Second, leaving unfavorable circumstances ideally stops the source of negative emotions. Third, entering into favorable circumstances causes a person to experience pleasurable emotions, which makes completing the other steps of the methods considerably easier.

As noted, an interpretation can often persist even after the provoking circumstances have been removed. It is therefore necessary to disrupt this interpretation. This is why some degree of idleness is so crucial for recovery, as the absence of obligation removes the need to adopt any rigid interpretation, and because a person can more readily identify and assess their desires and the aspects of their being in a state of idleness. Knowledge of this can help a person avoid unfavorable circumstances, and to adopt a more beneficial interpretation.

Finally, a person must alter their interpretation, and overcome their habits of withholding problem-causing negative emotions. This is often a counter-instinctual process, and a person will have the forces of pain and habit working against them. This is why it is necessary for a person to develop some method for deliberately overcoming these habits of withholding. The mental practices detailed in this book may be helpful in this regard.

A Note on Responsibility

The reader may have noticed that I have identified the source of acquired mental problems as some interplay between intrinsic, unchangeable desires, and circumstance, both of which are more or less beyond a person’s control. The reader may therefore have the impression that a person often has little control over whether or not they develop mental problems: this impression is right. However, while a person may justifiably feel anger or indignation at their condition, responsibility for overcoming such mental problems still rests with that person. This is because the person with mental problems alone can reliably control what circumstances they experience, as well as their thoughts and their relationship to their emotions. Perhaps it is the case that others can help a person to recover, or that the sufferer will accidentally find themselves in favorable circumstances so that they do manage to recover in some way. However, should such circumstances change, that person’s problems may return—it is only through self-control that mental problems can be reliably eliminated.

In addition, a person’s desires and being can be fully know by that person alone, which is to say that only a given person is capable of knowing how to avoid bad health, and how to achieve recovery and happiness. Health can only be guaranteed by self-knowledge and the ability to act on it.
Criminals and the Like

Of course, we are accustomed to thinking of ourselves as having more control over our patterns of thought and behavior. The reader might bring up the example of violent criminals: surely they choose to go against the law and standards of good conduct—surely they choose to afflict themselves with mental problems through their habitual obstinacy and defiance. In reality, such people have natural desires that are not compatible with social circumstances, or they have, at any rate, been conditioned by their circumstances to reject broader social custom. In former cases, “reforming” such people—or making them accept and take pleasure in the circumstances of regular society—is not possible. At best, such strong, tyrannical impulses can be redirected to ends that are not expressly forbidden by society. This is why the philosophers have somewhat unscrupulously called for the destruction of the “incurable,” “incurability” being determined by the criterion of social custom. It is, moreover, the reason why some of the philosophers themselves have been put to death, or have struggled to avoid this, at any rate.

Popular Misconceptions

Indeed, the extent to which human beings can choose anything in their lives should be called into question. According to popular belief, a human being is a subject or a moral agent with the “free will” to choose any particular course of action, and that a human being can largely determine their own course in life. This is believed even while most human beings live their lives according to a rigid, socially-determined pattern. At any rate, the popularity of this belief has its root in Christian theology, and it flies in the face of what most better thinkers have taught. Not to rely on the authority of such thinkers, however, this belief may be readily disproven by the fact that many human beings act in certain ways despite being discouraged by their circumstances, and even despite their own inner objections. Moreover, the fact of the intrinsic necessity of basic desires such as the need for food is not challenged—why, then, should we assume that larger decisions in life are not the result of some great inner necessity? Human choice is constrained to doing or not doing what is intrinsically desired. We have some limited ability to control what circumstances we do experience; we can also control how we interpret those experiences to a certain extent. However, we cannot control how those circumstances affect our own intrinsic, natural desires. In a word, “our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own.”

A second misconception is the belief that humans have equal desires that may be fulfilled on equal terms. Even the most cursory, honest (I mean one not informed by ideological bias) examination of history will disprove this belief. In truth, not even the proponents of this belief believe it: they assert human equality, while claiming that groups with intrinsically different desires should be given special political privileges—“should be treated as an equal” is fundamentally different to “is intrinsically equal,” and it is a political privilege.

Indeed, these two beliefs are most usually invoked for ideological purposes, which is to say in order to gain or to enforce some political or social advantage. Ideologically desirable behavior is called “intrinsic,” while ideologically undesirable behavior is called “chosen.” Speaking
honestly, no human being is responsible for the desires that they do have—whatever they may be—though humans may determine how such desires are expressed and shaped.

How Circumstance Affects Interpretation

These concepts are instances of principles of belief. To give another definition of the term, principles of belief are socially-enforced doctrines that largely determine how an individual perceives the world and ascribes meaning to it. This is to say that principles of belief constitute a major part of circumstance, and that this aspect of circumstance principally affects interpretation. Insofar as principles of belief affect interpretation, they have the potential to regulate individual behavior by encouraging or discouraging certain activities—we have discussed this aspect of such principles briefly in the methods. As we have seen, the validity of these principles may be challenged, meaning that a principle of belief is not necessarily true despite its being socially enforced. (What is truth? Can we grasp the essence of our being, or is every concept simply something that overlays our being? Sensations of pleasure and pain in relation to the desires are perhaps the only doorway to any discernable reality—these at least are certain enough.)

Regardless of their actual validity, we can assess principles of belief from the perspective of mental health in terms of how they motivate or discourage activity, and how they affect the expression of the desires. This is to say that the validity of a socially-enforced doctrine is irrelevant from the perspective of how it interacts with and facilitates human desire.

Individual Health versus Social Health

The methods are aimed at restoring the health of the individual, and their prescriptions often run contrary to social expectations. This is because social expectations—principles of belief, law, unwritten custom and the like—as one aspect of circumstance are often the cause of mental problems, as we have already seen. This seems to imply that the individual is always at odds with society, and so it may seem to the reader that I am contradicting the purpose of this book by discussing how society should and should not be. This is only an apparent contradiction. Bear in mind that if a person’s circumstances are in harmony with their desires, then they would have no acquired mental problems to begin with, and hence no need for recovery, the methods for which, again, are the subject of this book. In truth, many can be made happy or unhappy depending upon their social circumstances.

With that said, it is probably the case that there will always be certain individuals that suffer to some extent under any set of social circumstances, and who can be happy only under circumstances of their own fashioning. These methods will perhaps always have some relevance to them.

I should also note that, while better social circumstances might not have occasioned mental problems in the first place, this fact should not be used as an excuse for an individual to avoid responsibility for their own recovery. Once again, outside factors may cause mental problems, but responsibility for absolute recovery always rests with the individual. In any case, we will
now investigate mental health from a collective standpoint rather than from an individual standpoint.

The State of Our Collective Mental Health

Society is sick. The incidence of mental problems has never been higher. Indeed, our modern age has invented mental problems as we now know them—we have at any rate invented their study and their terminology. This is because society has been organized to benefit the desires of a few under the guise of benefitting many. Perhaps this has always been the case, and perhaps it will always continue to be the case, but careful investigation of our modern circumstances will show that fundamental human desires are being contradicted in ways that they never have been before, which is the cause of our peculiarly modern epidemic.

Culture, Science, and Ideology

While there are many aspects of modernity that contribute to this general sickness, the greatest threat to our collective health is the destruction of native cultural principles by scientific processes for the sake of ideological principles and foreign cultural principles.

Native cultural principles are social expectations that shape and set a pattern for life. They develop according to the demands of the environment of a particular place, and according to the needs of the majority or the dominant sort of desires present in a particular population. (In other words, they are social circumstances that develop out of non-social circumstances and become a part of the general circumstances of a place that shape individual behavior.) Native cultural principles are more “natural” in the sense that they simplify human adaptation to a particular environment, in the sense that they are in harmony with the most prominent sets of desires, and in the sense that a given society has generally followed such principles for a long period of time so that it is well-accustomed to them. Because native cultural principles are in this way more “natural,” a society that follows them is healthier in the sense that its members are more confident and secure, and are happier in carrying the functions necessary for life in their particular place. In other words, they have clear reasons for living life that are in accordance with their environment, and also with their natural desires.

Science is the attempt to interrupt, examine and control natural processes with a view to obtaining an understanding of them for the sake of some human purpose. When turned towards the natural world, science is relatively “objective,” because its purpose there is generally human utility, or manipulating the world with greater ease, which is in the interest of most. When turned towards human society, however, science becomes an attempt to interrupt and control social circumstances in accordance with some principle which seems to be universal, but is in fact rooted in some particular set of human interests, or desire. Once again, because science is carried out for the sake of some human purpose, and because human purposes are variable according to
the variability of human desire, science when applied to society is never apolitical—it reflects the natural interests of the operating party.

Ideological principles are social doctrines that dictate how human beings should and should not live. They develop out of the similar desires of a particular group, and they are advanced with a view to obtaining some political or social advantage for that particular group. Ideological principles are not always formulated for the explicit purpose of benefiting some group: sometimes they are thought to be believed for the sake of their correctness, but they are always at least unconsciously formulated in order to benefit some group, as there can be no body of normative thought with regard to human society that is not in some way relevant to some set of human interests.

As ideological principles in every case develop in opposition to some particular set of native cultural principles, they are by their nature opposed to them. Because native cultural principles are rooted in a particular place and exist for the sake of a particular people, the body of thought that constitutes the reasons for their social acceptance is correspondingly narrow and concerned with particulars. The chief weapon of ideology against these principles is therefore a justifying body of thought that is at once more comprehensive, universal and exclusionary of other social principles, so that it seems to be universally correct and beneficial, while actually benefitting a particular group. For instance, monotheism was the weapon against native paganism, and “rational” principles in turn were used to supplant religious doctrine. The practical, political association of ideology with science and rationalism was one of the principal innovations of the modern age.

Foreign cultural principles are simply native cultural principles that originated in another place.

Society has increasingly come to rely on science to validate its worldview. Science is in a natural alliance with modern ideological principles, both because of their more universal justification, and because of their foundation in seemingly rational principles. Thus, “social science” is employed in the service of modern ideology, and it is used as a weapon to challenge the validity of native cultural principles. In being challenged, the validity of native cultural principles erodes away, and so they are destroyed.

Meanwhile, foreign cultural principles a granted a moral premium simply because their presence in a native place cheapens and renders native cultural principles impotent—according to the dictates of modern ideology, enjoying, promoting, and living in accordance with one’s own cultural principles is absolutely prohibited.

This is detrimental to mental health because individuals lose the confidence in carrying out life functions that is conferred by native cultural principles. Definite guidelines for social interaction are eliminated, and many are left alienated and isolated from society. Under ideology, every natural impulse must be checked against ideological doctrine, and desires are often suppressed— withheld—simply because they do not conform to some absurdly convoluted conceptual principle. Modern humans are nervous, inwardly cynical and perennially downcast
because they suffer under monstrously anti-natural ideological principles. It would now be worthwhile to examine some of these ideological principles in detail.

**Bourgeois Materialism**

The world of the bourgeois man is harsh and cold. He has always found his principal advantage—his means of survival, influence, and the fulfillment of his nature—in accumulating wealth, and so profit-making is the absolute priority in his life. Perhaps some bourgeois individuals enjoy other aspects of life—love, sentimentality in general, virtue and liberality, contemplative pleasure, and so on—but these are luxuries for him, and they are readily sacrificed in the interest of profit-making—this is his web, his den, his means of stuffing his gut. Now society has been ordered according to his interests. The bourgeois man sits on top. Values are used for buying and selling, and they are bought and sold, as are women (bourgeois marriage being a polite form of prostitution), aesthetics, politicians, people. All human intercourse has been reduced to material transactions. The “dispensability” of life’s other aspects make them contemptible in his eyes, and he has an arrogant sneer for anyone who claims not to be motivated by money, while unconsciously knowing that his cynicism comes “from the gutter.” Of course, the most basic, appetitive desires of human nature are regarded as “most real” to him, because they can be satisfied by material means.

Above all, he is a patron of the materialistic interpretation of history in accordance with his natural prejudices: political institutions and culture become glorified banks and the repositories of monetary value with which he is most familiar. To be sure, the swinish sort of philistinism that has paralyzed the western intellect is due in no small part to this very materialism.

But to the point: this is all damaging to collective mental health because the rest of society is forced to imitate the life of the bourgeois man while enjoying none of its advantages. Considerations of money—which for the majority of society is relatively scarce—take precedence over and very usually destroy the values that make communal living decent and pleasurable. In our psychological terminology, such desires for close social connections are withheld to no discernable end. Many are made to perform labour that is meaningless and degrading, and they often do so willingly while whispering “success” like an empty prayer. In other words, people are bound by necessity to circumstances that contradict their desires and interpretation, which in many cases is the cause of the endemic career-related “depression”—this is often regarded with a sort of naïve bewilderment: how can “the good” make life bad? Indeed, these very circumstances are responsible for our modern ennui and the “purposelessness” that young people speak of today—to be sure, this life has meaning for the bourgeoisie—for them it is supremely meaningful and satisfying—but it is meaningless for all others.

Further, the aspects of life which are for the bourgeois man “dispensable” are for others the very essence of life. Artists and the like love, feed on, and are motivated by an overabundance of sentimentality, and for this to be crushed by obsession with material considerations does them little good. In the long epoch of aristocracy, sentimentality, contemplation and aesthetic merit—the luxuries of leisure—were at least held in high regard, and the artists enjoyed a prestigious—if subservient—position in society. However, this was lost with the rise of the bourgeois man—
materialist pragmatism has been largely responsible for two centuries of rancor against the modern age. The modern age is so romantically decried because artists have eloquence—they are born for eloquence: the bourgeois man is far too clumsy to justify his own advantage.

What is at Issue

None of this is to say that these problems can be solved through the even distribution of material goods. This is laughable. All living things tend towards advantageous circumstances relative to their own needs—for human beings, this is commonly power, social distinction, agreeable social circumstances (i.e., the aim of political factions and parties), and so on. In other words, human beings do not simply strive for the fulfillment of their own needs, but for circumstances in which the fulfillment of their needs has priority, and in which they are fulfilled according to their tastes. (Of course, I should note that control over material resources is almost always one aspect of favorable circumstances, but it is almost never the exclusive aspect.) This is why those who subsist on charity are still wretched and miserable: their immediate needs are met—they can exist indefinitely—but they have no control over their circumstances. Wealth is not so much an end in itself as it is a means to achieving a social advantage. Why do you suppose that some incidentally wealthy people spend recklessly and lose their fortunes? It is because their advantage—their chief desire—lies elsewhere.

In truth, the ethical principle of the equal distribution of wealth is an attempt to reconcile the prejudices of the bourgeois era with the democratic ideals of enlightenment thought. In other words, the materialistic interpretation of history and human society is in fact a confirmation of latent bourgeois feeling, which once again stems from their principal means of finding their advantage in the world. This is why economists and sociologists—the intellectual branch of the bourgeoisie—reach so readily for historical materialism and all of its related ethical principles despite the fact that they were formulated in seeming opposition to the bourgeoisie.

In a word, to defeat scarcity may very well eliminate the basis of the bourgeois man’s social advantage, but it will not eliminate social competition itself. As the defeat of scarcity is highly improbable, the bourgeois man will likely find his way into some degree of wealth for all time to come—again, this is what he has lived to do since the dawn of civilization. This is not the issue. The issue is the social influence of the bourgeois man.

Productivity and Accumulating Wealth

It was mentioned in the methods that holding contradictory beliefs can result in distress. The oppositional values of accumulating wealth and productivity, or “hard work,” are a good example of this, as they are commonly held in tandem, and are associated with one another.

Accumulating wealth is an individual end. Wealth is the means to the fulfillment of various desires, and so to aim at the accumulation of a large amount of wealth is tacitly to express that one’s desires should have social priority. This is further heightened by the fact that wealth is
typically accumulated at the expense of others, and so it is almost openly an anti-social end. Indeed, these facts form the basis of bourgeois individualism.

Wealth is actually accumulated by first knowing how it might be accumulated, by being able to exploit various social arrangements, by being able to act effectively on one’s knowledge, and by being able to act in a way that is contrary to collective social interests—no small thing.

On the other hand, productivity is a social end. In large part, society is founded on the mobilization of human labour in order to achieve collective purposes. How to motivate a society to achieve collective ends when its members often are not thereby directly advantaged is a major preoccupation for those in power. At any rate, the productivity of a worker is principally advantageous to the collective of which the worker is a part, and only incidentally advantageous to himself, if at all. If a worker does receive rations or a wage, it is only so that he will continue to be productive—these are always given with the collective’s interests in view, and if they are not, then the collective will cease to exist.

How these two values came to be associated with one another is truly baffling. I do not think that merchants in past centuries ever found their work to be particularly arduous—their more immediate concern was acquiring capital and the risks involved with selling their wares, as is still the case for the bourgeoisie today. Indeed, the work involved with accumulating wealth is often incidental, and moreover pleasurable and relatively easy because it is directed toward one’s private interests.

I suspect there are two reasons for this association: first, by claiming that the accumulation of wealth is the result of being productive, the end of the dominant bourgeois class is falsely identified with the directive of the workers, so that workers are motivated to be productive under the illusion that they may eventually attain the advantages of their social superiors. Second, this association implies that anyone may attain the advantages of the bourgeoisie, when in reality these are reserved for those with a very particular set of natural predispositions. In other words, “productivity means wealth” is a typically democratic euphemism to conceal the exclusionary nature of bourgeois society.

### Excessive Individualism

Humans naturally form hierarchical relationships. They are natural because they come about either by accident of human biological relationships, e.g. parent-and-child, or through the intrinsic human predisposition towards social interaction. They are hierarchical because they typically comprise a more-dependent party, and a less-dependent party. (The most notable exception is the relationship of friend-and-friend: two friends must be of approximately equal standing, and if one friend goes very far above or below the status of the other, then the authentic aspects of the relationship are quickly ended.) Humans are more or less dependent from factors such as age, experience, social status, willfulness, and certain other natural inclinations.
While the less-dependent party of a relationship does enjoy certain advantages, this is not to say that the less-dependent party necessarily plays the tyrant, nor that the more-dependent party is necessarily oppressed and miserable (though such arrangements certainly are possible). In fact, the less-dependent party has a greater degree of natural responsibility since their actions affect the happiness and well-being of their dependents. When the roles in a hierarchical relationship are properly played, the result is positive experiences that fulfill the natural human desire for social interaction for both parties. In any case, the hierarchical nature of most relationships is an intrinsic feature of social interaction, and so a great deal of happiness or distress can result from how this intrinsic feature is interpreted.

Individualism is a socially-enforced ideological doctrine which conceives of each human being as their own free agent, whose goal it is to maximize their own gain, which is typically defined in terms of material possessions or social status. The self-contradiction here should be immediately evident: on the one hand, individualism is a socially-enforced doctrine—society being a collective of human beings—on the other hand, individualism compels human beings to pursue ideologically-defined private goals in spite of society. In other words, with individualism, human beings as members of society are told not to function properly in society.

In terms of immediate social interaction, individualism instructs human beings to feel extreme discontent if they do not have the superior social position. Moreover, those who do occupy the less-dependent role in their relationships are encouraged to neglect their natural responsibilities to their dependents in favor pursuing their own, often frivolous desires.

Our excessive individualism destroys the possibility of loyalty, love, trust and natural affection, and it gives all social interaction a harsh, exploitative, and needlessly competitive character. We now see an absurd situation in which parents resent their children, and children resent their parents; husbands are forced to compete with their wives, and wives with their husbands; friends smile while secretly despising one another; statesmen make false promises for their own sake, while the people are filled with bitterness and resentment. In these conditions, children are born virtually half-mad, and those that do grow up without an entire array of mental problems become thoroughly self-obsessed. These circumstances contradict the basic human desire for positive social experiences by making an essential feature of social interaction unacceptable to interpretation.

Second Critique of Individualism as a Social Doctrine

To put this another way, individualism as a social doctrine abolishes nothing. Humans are still obligated to one another in hierarchical ways. For instance, even in democracy, power rests in a single, central figure, as has been the case in every form of government for thousands of years. Neither does individualism accomplish anything. To sacrifice one’s consideration for others in order to fulfill one’s own frivolous, superficial desires does not constitute an advantageous set of circumstances, especially when one is still dependent on society for benefits and a livelihood. Once again, advantageous circumstances are those in which one’s most essential desires are fulfilled consistently and with priority—this is typically accomplished.
through some favorable social arrangement. If the reader were to examine the lives of the most powerful men and women who attained their influence, they would quickly find that their advantage was gained not by stamping their feet like children, but by obligating themselves to the appropriate people, and by fulfilling certain social expectations—in a word, by appearing “selfless.” Of course, their aims may have been profoundly selfish, but the means to achieving selfish ends in society has always been social obligation. Even the most obstinately selfish bourgeois capitalist usually has some group of friends to facilitate his business dealings—he still performs favors, and he still provides his dependents with some form of livelihood.

In sum, the social doctrine of individualism only makes the fundamental aspects of society and human social interaction psychologically abhorrent.

This is not to say that there are not those who require a life of self-indulgence—typically in the form of leisure—in order to carry out their work. However, as we have seen, it is not strictly possible to live a life of self-indulgence while one is still in some way obligated to society. The solution is therefore to remove oneself from society, or to seek out solitude—at the least, such people sever their bonds of dependency on society. This is why many artists and philosophers have lived either parts of their lives or most of their lives in seclusion. To attempt to live a life of self-indulgence while one is in some way obligated to society will only result in frustration. Not only is doing this irrational, it is also irresponsible, as it can cause deep harm to others, especially if one has dependents. “Self-will is the companion of solitude.” Is this not so?

How Individualism Functions as a Social Doctrine

Doubtless many do suspect that individualism as a social doctrine is causing social issues. Perhaps many more realize that they suffer from a lack of fulfilling social experiences. How, then, does individualism remain such a compelling force? Once again, it is a socially-enforced doctrine, meaning that it is sustained in part by general belief. Individualism as a social doctrine also presents a dilemma in which if one does not behave “individualistically,” then one will potentially experience pain, and will fail to attain certain petty social benefits. For instance, if one behaves deferentially, this will be interpreted as a painful condition, and others typically treat the deferential as though they were a servant or a slave—once again, in accordance with individualism. Recall that we have established that the less-dependent do have certain responsibilities to the more-dependent. In addition, some do attain certain advantageous circumstances by behaving self-indulgently—society will sometimes tolerate the self-indulgent if they are amusing—and so others imitate these people in the hope of attaining similar advantages.

In other words, the pain of not behaving “individualistically” is often greater than the pain of not experiencing social fulfillment, which makes individualism a particularly pernicious social doctrine.

Mediocrity

Ideology aside, the world is hard. Living things are constantly vying with one another for power and control, and one must often struggle simply to survive. It is probably better not to be
born. At any rate, in order to attain happiness—in order to find advantageous circumstances—it is above all necessary to be strong.

However, humans have entered into unfortunate circumstances in which they can exist in modern society without being strong enough to fulfill their desires. Further, this weakness is being actively encouraged by those who feel that they may benefit from the weakness of others: this is how low modern ideology has sunk. People in general, and men in particular, have become feeble and effeminate, and a great deal of despondency in modern people is down to an inability to fulfill what is innately desired.

An adult has no right to be weak, either physically or—most especially—mentally. An adult should be strong enough to fulfill their social obligations, and to attain their own share of happiness. They must also provide a good example for their immediate dependents, and for the succeeding generation in general. If we do not set an example of strength, the current generation will risk perpetuating this culture of weakness.

**A Note on the Desires**

We will now turn to a more thorough examination of ideology’s relationship with desire, and so this is an appropriate place to discuss some fundamental aspects of human desire. Human desire is differentiated through circumstance. Put another way, innate human desire is only a general impulse towards a certain thing. This general impulse finds particular expression through circumstantial conditioning.

Take food for example: when one first tries a particular dish, one is usually indifferent to it, or repulsed by it. However, if the dish is tried subsequently, one may develop a tolerance for it, which then may become a craving. When this craving is fulfilled, it results in heightened pleasure when the dish is eaten again. While hunger is only a general impulse and may be satisfied by any source of nutrition, a human will tend towards the foods that they have been conditioned to enjoy, as these foods give more pleasure in the process of satisfying the general impulse of hunger. It is also like this with the other desires.

To further this example of food, consider the Spartan “black broth.” This was a dish which was considered virtually inedible by the other Greeks, but for the Spartans, who consumed the dish from childhood, it was thought to be a delicacy. Thus, the way in which the desires are fulfilled constitutes a fundamental aspect of group identity, and as such it is a central political preoccupation. Once again, these *tastes* are largely determined by circumstance, which is to say that fundamental aspects of one’s own identity, or self-conceptualization, are also determined by circumstance.

Originally, the ways in which the desires were fulfilled were largely determined by the environment. However, when a group became accustomed to fulfilling their desires in a particular way, this way of life was further reinforced by emerging social customs (or cultural principles), which became a part of the broader circumstances. After this group had lived under
their circumstances for a long period of time, each subsequent generation was born both with general human impulses and an innate predisposition for their group’s way of fulfilling them—they were at least bound to some degree by the force of tradition. This is the origin of the various nations, classes, and ethnic groups.

A Second Example

To use another example, Christianity—and many traditional societies in general—emphasizes chastity, sexual propriety, and so on. As such, it is typically criticized from an ideological perspective for preventing the fulfillment of the desires. However, in terms of what Christianity actually establishes in society, through the institution of marriage the human sexual impulse is still fulfilled. In fact, many have a strong innate predisposition for this sort of fulfillment. It is only the way in which this desire is fulfilled that is repugnant to adherents of modern ideology.

Christianity, Modern Ideology, and the Desires

Christianity has largely been supplanted by modern, ostensibly rational ideologies. However, there are still large bodies of the population that adhere to Christian doctrine—there are still places where Christian doctrine is a dominant, socially-enforced component of circumstance—and so it would be appropriate to treat it briefly.

As indicated above, Christianity is commonly criticized for inhibiting the fulfillment of the desires. This is certainly true—it inhibits the fulfillment of desire as it is defined by modern ideology. However, as we have established, Christian society by and large does provide avenues for the fulfillment of desire itself, and many do take pleasure in this way of life. Indeed, the emphasis placed on modesty, communal responsibility, familial obligation and duty, and the fact that value is placed upon spirituality and aesthetic sensibility are all appealing aspects of Christian society, historical and modern.

As we have seen, modern ideology is diametrically opposed to all of these things, and it is, once again, the more dominant body of thought in western society. Thus, the distress for the modern Christian individual stems not so much from the fact that Christian doctrine itself inhibits the desires as from the fact that they believe one thing, while society compels them to do its opposite. When a body of thought is socially enforced—in this case modern ideology—it sets up certain rigid avenues for the fulfillment of the desires—the “ways” of fulfillment. For most, these are either followed or they are not followed—for most, this is the limit of individual “choice.” Christian individuals outside of Christian society therefore face either the pain of adhering to their doctrine and not fulfilling their desires, or the pain of following the modern way of life and violating their doctrine. In other words, in both cases interpretation works against circumstance so that either the pleasure resulting from desire-attaining processes is withheld, or so that the desire-attaining processes themselves are withheld. If we assume that some have an
innate predisposition for the “Christian way of life” from centuries of familial habituation, then in those cases circumstances would be contradicting the desires with similar results.

In brief, this can be taken as another instance of two conflicting beliefs held by the same individual causing distress.

Christianity and Desire Itself

Of course, all of this has been said in relation to what Christianity actually establishes in society. I will not pretend that Christian doctrine itself does not specifically encourage the suppression of various broad, essential human desires. This can cause—and has caused—distress, especially among the intellectually sensitive. We should therefore consider whether it is or is not reasonable to maintain that God would demand the suppression of human desire, as Christian doctrine purports.

We should first assume that no essential desire is unnatural. By this I mean no desire is acquired that a human would feel under any circumstance. For instance, a human becomes hungry regardless of their circumstances. Given this, it is incoherent to affirm the following three propositions at once: 1. That God created all of what humans are, 2. That God is benevolent, and 3. That God would reveal laws that specifically contradict essential human desires.

The concept of free choice is commonly employed as the solution to this apparent problem: if human will were absolutely free, then individuals would have the power to “choose” sources of pleasure that are “evil” according to divine law. However, we have seen that absolute freedom of the will is nonsense, and that what humans do desire is largely determined by inner and outer necessity. Even if we were to grant that the will is absolutely free, this does not explain why, for instance, God created humans with the ability to choose evil at all, or why breaching divine law is met with such severe supernatural punishment. Both of these facts seem inconsistent with the proposition that God is benevolent, or that God wants humans to be happy. While it is certainly possible to affirm any two of the above propositions, it is once again absurd to affirm all three of them at once, and anyone concerned may safely conclude that Christian doctrine is not, in fact, an expression of divine will.

Pentheus’ Problem

If Christian doctrine is not an expression of divine will, then it is evidently a doctrine intended to organize society for some political end, which is to say for the benefit of some group. This presents a new problem: if it is not God’s will that human desires should be suppressed, what earthly, political advantage can possibly be gained from this? The myth of Pentheus might clarify this point, and, indeed, it may illuminate a fundamental problem regarding ideology in general.
In the myth, Pentheus is given control of the city Thebes. However, at that time, the god Bacchus with his train visits from Asia, bringing with him strange and foreign rites of worship. Under his divine influence, the women are made insensible, and, in a kind of involuntary secession, move to the forest to celebrate his orgiastic rites. In response, Pentheus attempts to stop and suppress these rites with all of his authority. In other words, Pentheus, in order to maintain political power and control, attempts to halt the outward expression of involuntary processes that produce pleasure. On a basic level, Pentheus’ response to Bacchus may be a thematic expression of human unease with the experience of overpowering unconscious processes that seem to contradict the human experience of having a sovereign and deliberative consciousness, but for the moment we are concerned with how this myth might illustrate the functions of certain political phenomena.

Of course, in the myth, Bacchus causes Pentheus to be murdered by his own wife and mother, but this is perhaps an expression of the values of a people who understood the importance of these unconscious processes. In reality, if we imagine ideology in the place of Pentheus, we see that virtually every human desire has been successfully suppressed at some point in history according to some political doctrine, and for every conceivable sort of reason. Indeed, music, dancing, alcohol and sex—the “Bacchic” impulses—are the predictable targets of an ideology in its early, energetic stages, although, once again, a variety of reasons are put forward for suppressing these activities. Why is this such a common phenomenon?

In the first place, living life while consistently suppressing the desires requires considerable force of will. If this is a defining feature of a given ideology, this can be a proof of the strength of its adherents—and consequently of the ideology itself—in opposition to the native customs that accommodate the desires to a greater extent. In a sense, ideology is a political manifestation of the urge for the mind to “gain control” over the “base” impulses of the body, which in itself is a compelling idea for certain types of people.

Perhaps more significant is the fact that, in order to gain power, a person, group, political faction or an idea must first be autonomous. In order to be autonomous, the power-seeking entity cannot be seen to follow all of the customs or behavior of its enemy entities. As the reader will recall, ideologies were said to form in opposition to some native set of social principles for the benefit of a particular group. A common step in the development of an ideology is therefore its adoption of principles that contradict native custom, or that call for the suppression of the desires most valued by the native customs. In this way, ideologies have called for the suppression of many human desires throughout history.

One significant problem arising from this is that, through the course of millennia of ideological habituation, humans have apparently come to associate the suppression of some desire with “good conduct” as such. Thus, as new ideologies arise with the ostensible purpose of “liberating” human beings from the constraints of self-suppression, they meanwhile call for the suppression of different sorts of desire, further complicating the already existing issues with regard to collective mental health.
The Culture of Pleasure

To be clear, nothing is good that encourages the suppression of fundamental human desires. For everything that Christian society does provide in the way of social satisfaction, Christian doctrine cannot clear itself of the charge of making life seem bleak owing to the suppression of the desires. On the other hand, neither is it good to emphasize one shallow sort of pleasure at the expense of every other desire.

Yet this is precisely what is being done. It is true that “happiness,” “satisfaction” and “fulfillment” are popularly given out as the aim of life, and this is a worthy sentiment. However, this “satisfaction” is narrowly defined as the simple sort of pleasure that comes from sex, alcohol and drugs. Society is organized according to this principle. Ours is a hedonistic individualism that is ugly and debauched: human beings are assessed in terms of how much pleasure they may provide. The end of socializing is an unfeeling sort of exploitative pleasure, and young people are compelled to take up filthy habits simply in order to have a social life. This is gladly encouraged: they must also take up modern ideological doctrine to excuse themselves—dirty thoughts for dirty habits. This society is harsh and cruel. No doubt this social arrangement agrees with the vulgar, but it is offensive to essentially gentler people.

Meanwhile, the milder pleasures of communal and familial life, honest contemplation and self-cultivation are not only forgotten, but are actively discouraged—only ideological thought and ideological action are permissible. This precludes amiability, natural affection, authenticity and genuine insight, as these things are contrary to the agenda of a thoroughly corrupt and diseased body of thought. In essence, because the ideology of individualism has robbed society of the milder pleasure of a deep, spiritual sense of connection with the community, harsh, momentary pleasures are pursued in its place—this is so that the dissatisfaction of an empty society may be concealed in order for certain groups to enjoy a hollow elevation. It is to this end that humans must be thoughtless savages fornicating aimlessly in a world that is emotionally stale and sterile.

This is the sort of pleasure that has no meaning. Genuine pleasure comes from living in favorable circumstances—for instance, through learning, through gaining mastery, through genuine expression, through power, through love. Genuine pleasure is attained through interacting with one’s circumstances; this “illusory” pleasure is turning away from them. Granted, this is occasionally necessary: a “release” from the tension of day to day life is both pleasurable and good for one’s health, but to define this shallow pleasure as the only aim in life is social ruin. In a word, this “doctrine of pleasure” is the ideological conquest of the “Bacchic” impulses over the other desires.

This is enough on social sickness. It would take a political physician to treat it.

Five “Cases”
So far we have discussed mental health in abstract. Doubtless the reader is curious as to how these principles look in reality. We should therefore examine the lives of great men in order to determine their mental condition, and what measures, if any, they took to treat themselves. I will arrange these “cases” in order from least healthy to healthiest.

**Tiberius**

Control is the overarching theme in the tragic life of Tiberius: he was controlled for the sake of sadistic satisfaction, and he was controlled on the pretext of political necessity—in turn, Tiberius used power to control and torment others, possibly in an attempt to alleviate his own inner suffering.

Rome in the time of Tiberius was in a late stage of its social development, and its communal bonds had everywhere dissolved in the face of private interests. An artificial moral code was enforced to curb the extravagance and casual murder that had characterized the late republic. The ambition of individual men was checked by imperial authority—the best along with the most ambitious had all been killed—but the consuming avarice and cruelty of a decadent society still simmered underneath the newly-established despotism.

Women were discontent, and reveled in corruption: marriage was expediency; divorce, inevitable; children were the pawns of scheming; bribery was openly expected. Livia Drusilla, the mother of Tiberius, met this pattern of a woman, exceeded it, and set a new one in her image. Scheming and unscrupulous, she made herself pleasing to the powerful as it suited her interests—she affected charm—while she was cruel and manipulative to those within her power. We may gauge her personality by the fact that she openly mocked Tiberius even when he was emperor—she was generally manipulative and overbearing.

We can speculate about his childhood: there is little reason to doubt that Livia was the type of woman who would have attempted to establish dominance over her children by any means possible—through humiliation or denying her children affection, for instance. Tiberius’ lack of personal confidence, evident, for instance, in his reluctance to claim the imperial title, might indicate a lack of maternal affection in childhood. Moreover, his unusually strong attachment to Vipsania is characteristic of the sort of relationship common to individuals with cold, uncaring mothers.

As for Augustus, Tiberius’ step-father, it is true that the authoritarian measures he took were necessary to preserve the stability of Rome. However, he was equally controlling towards his own immediate family. He dictated their marriages, and exiled them when they committed some impropriety in accordance with his vision of a moral society. Tiberius was no exception: Augustus largely determined the course of his adult life.

Between these two domineering figures, Tiberius had little control over his own life. He regarded his time in Rhodes as the happiest period in his life, and his time there did perhaps have the makings of what was described in the methods. However, he was recalled to Rome at the
express demand of Augustus. This is also a theme in his life: political necessity prevented Tiberius from realizing himself, from escaping harmful circumstances, or from treating his inner problems—he very evidently did not want to be emperor.

As a consequence, he harbored long grudges and intense inner anger over even slight injuries. He likely hated humanity. However, so long as Livia was alive, he kept his sadistic impulses in check. After she died, he began committing every imaginable atrocity. He killed the innocent in barbaric ways, he performed debauched sexual acts on children, and in general he seemed to enjoy inflicting pain. (Incidentally, Tiberius’ troupe of young sexual servants is a good example of people being corrupted by circumstance against their will.) This was all perhaps the result of the inner anguish experienced by Tiberius from the sense of helplessness and futility felt by those who have been badly manipulated. This type of pain gives rise to a desire to inflict pain on others—sadism—as one is unable to experience pleasure normally oneself, and so one derives a perverse type of pleasure from robbing others of an enjoyable life. It is worth noting that, partway through his reign, Tiberius did move his court to Capri, possibly in an attempt to regain his sense of autonomy and to recover from a lifetime of inner wounds—this evidently failed.

Who could claim that power is corrupting? Circumstances corrupt—power only gives corruption the means of absolute expression. While we may rightfully detest Tiberius for his cruelty, we might also pity him for the fact that his sadism was not entirely of his own making.

**Antony**

Mark Antony was a remarkably capable man who failed to establish an independent way of life. From an early age, it seems that he needed some other person to give his life meaning and direction. In his youth, he had a friend who exerted control over him by forcing him into a life of drinking and debauchery. This impressionability likely had its root in Antony’s childhood: perhaps one or both of his parents were too timid or too overbearing. At any rate, he never recovered either from these habits or from his impressionability, and he perhaps felt the need for external affirmation because he never asserted control over his own life.

He next fell in with Caesar, and he served him with loyalty and distinction. After Caesar’s death, Antony’s political successes might be attributed to the fact that he felt vindicated by his former relationship with Caesar. However, the military campaigns Antony undertook under his own authority met with little success, perhaps because he did not feel fully justified in fighting on behalf of his own interests.

His affair with Cleopatra is commonly celebrated as an ideal romance, though it does in fact reveal deep insecurity on Antony’s part. It may be contrasted with Caesar’s affair with the same woman: Caesar loved Cleopatra while pursuing his own agenda, while Antony fitted his agenda to his love for Cleopatra. For instance, while Antony did demonstrate remarkable fortitude and generalship during the Parthian campaign, its failure may be fairly attributed to his preoccupation with Cleopatra. He did on one occasion move his whole army away from the direction of the enemy for the sole purpose of enjoying a rendezvous with Cleopatra. At Actium, he retreated to
follow Cleopatra and her own retreating section of ships when he was nowhere near defeat. Out of despondency, he then failed to organize a defense on the ground—his indecisiveness ultimately cost both of the lovers their lives. Antony’s affair—so far from being ideal—is in fact a good example of how love is useless without strength of mind.

This sort of excessive dependency is not necessarily fatal in normal cases, though it can nevertheless be a source of considerable distress. However, in seeking absolute command, one must have complete confidence and belief in one’s own cause. At no point did Antony attempt to achieve this by treating his own issues. There might have been an emperor Antony were it not for this great flaw.

Demosthenes and Cicero

Demosthenes is remarkable in that he seems to have undergone a self-treatment similar to what was described in the methods. He came from a wealthy family, but was orphaned at a young age. The guardians assigned to him stole openly from his estate, taking advantage of his youth. Demosthenes’ interest in oratory originated with his desire to prosecute his faithless guardians, and to gain control of his inheritance. While he did possess a formidable intellect, he was initially inhibited by an inability to deliver his orations effectively. He had a stutter, and his first public appearances were marred by his nervous and anemic delivery. These faults and his apparent lack of confidence probably stemmed from neglect or mistreatment at the hands of his guardians—we have little reason to suppose that they treated him well.

To improve his delivery, he secluded himself in a room for a period of time, shaving half his beard to prevent himself from venturing out into the city. During that time, he overcame his stutter—which was likely the physical manifestation of a mental problem—and he greatly improved the delivery of his orations. After this, he became the most influential statesman in Athens, and he won renown as the greatest orator of his time.

However, his success in treating himself was not complete. Signs of his old timidity showed when he fled from a battle that he himself had brought on—he discarded his shield, which for the Greeks was a sign of cowardice. “Cowardice” such as this is often not so much a deliberate, personal failing as it is the result of the way in which the mind has been conditioned to respond to the world by circumstance. He also obstinately continued to oppose the Macedonian interest even after Athens had lost all its practical capacity to resist. Perhaps he felt insecure in the face of a clearly stronger force—perhaps he imagined that he was still fighting his guardians, and he never put that incident entirely behind him. At any rate, Phocion, a strong, solid, masculine figure, was perfectly willing to work with the Macedonians in order to preserve Athens.

As for Cicero, he had a brilliant literary mind and an overriding desire for fame—he was also wracked with debilitating anxiety. This was so severe that, for most of his life, he could not eat at all until the nighttime. Even after a long and successful career in politics, he became exceedingly nervous before giving a speech, and he would often begin his orations weakly, gaining confidence as he spoke.
Like Demosthenes, his career initially suffered from his feeble and uncertain delivery—like Demosthenes, his talents lay with the more literary process of writing an oration. He overcame his weakness through practice, and through a rigorous regimen of physical exercise. Despite his success as an orator, he was evidently unable to overcome some of his mental problems. His relationship with Terentia, who as a wife was shrewish and overbearing, and his unusually strong attachment to his daughter might provide some indication as to how he was raised, and how his mind was conditioned. He had a habit of making cynical and cuttingly offensive remarks which might indicate that he was uneasy with social life. This habit harmed his career—indeed, his vitriolic “Philippics” spoken against Antony were ultimately responsible for his violent death.

In sum, is certainly possible to live and act with mental problems, but it is also possible to cure them entirely. Nevertheless, we are right to admire two men who achieved immortal fame in spite of persistent mental problems.

Caesar

Every obstacle that we as individuals face is in essence an inner obstacle, as humans tend to seek out tasks that they have the power to complete. Caesar was a man who eventually overcame his every obstacle, and his obstacles were some of the greatest in the history of the world—that is why we call him great.

Caius Julius Caesar’s life was characterized by an incessant struggle for independence. Given his obstinate nature, this struggle could only have ended in a violent death, or in absolute rule, and indeed both possibilities were realized in his lifetime. At sixteen, he inherited his father’s estate, married, and was chosen for the priesthood of Jupiter. Sulla, who had at that time assumed the dictatorship by force, demanded that Caesar divorce his wife. Caesar refused, and he was pursued by Sulla’s men while combatting a serious illness before he was eventually pardoned by his the dictator.

This was perhaps the defining period of his early life: indeed, most of the great conquerors experienced some circumstances in which their own needs were ruthlessly disregarded by others, which in turn perhaps made them more willing to sacrifice others for their own purposes. In spite of this, Caesar’s famous principle of clemency—his deliberately cultivated image of being merciful—probably developed out of a refusal to imitate Sulla’s murderous proscriptions.

Following this incident, he did not sink into timidity or submissiveness, or, if he did, he did not remain that way. In public, he was eloquent and evidently good-natured. Among his soldiers, he had an unaffected charisma that compelled them to distinguish themselves and to endure every form of hardship—his military successes were due to this charisma as much as they were to his generalship, which was also excellent.

He also famously suffered from epileptic fits. While it was perhaps impossible to cure himself of this, he was able to mitigate their severity through activity and physical exercise, which, as we have seen, is a very effective form of self-treatment.
During his campaigns, he was frequently outnumbered and under-supplied. Added to this was the fact that his campaigns were nearly continuous, and that he simultaneously managed his political and his private affairs. His virtually-uninterrupted string of successes shows that he had extraordinary mental fortitude.

Finally, his decision to oppose Rome—a decision that was brought on by necessity, and that he did not make lightly—shows that he was successfully able to assert his own needs over those of the whole state, and he was moreover victorious in the ensuing conflict. Such a feat is exceedingly difficult to accomplish, and it is rare in the whole of history.

Caesar was remarkable in that he seems to have maintained a sound mind in spite of every form of adverse circumstances, and the reader should note that this can be achieved by virtually anyone so long as mental problems are seen as obstacles to be overcome. Caesar was an accomplished general, statesman, and author, and he was in every way a magnificent human being.

Alcibiades

As stated, these cases have been arranged in order from least healthy to healthiest, and so it is fitting to conclude with a man who seems never to have suffered from mental problems. By every appearance, Alcibiades lived a life of uninterrupted felicity. This was not owing to wealth or natural advantage—both of which he did have in abundance—but to his ability to turn every circumstance into something favorable.

The Greeks of antiquity have been called “ever young,” or the “youthful stage of humanity,” and this is right: they seem to have had an inexhaustible exuberance and love of life, even in spite of—or, in some cases, because of—the most terrible circumstances. It is also right to say that their worldview was principally characterized by “openness.” It is true that the Greeks openly enjoyed music, dancing, alcohol and sex. However, social obligations and the family were also venerated, as were death, war, strength, victory and power (but victory most of all). In short, the Greeks acknowledged, accepted and quite literally deified every aspect of human existence. Because they accepted every aspect of human existence, they were happier and far less fractured—they were complete.

Of the Greeks, Athens at its height most embodied this youthful exuberance, and Alcibiades as an individual most embodied the qualities of Athenian society. He spent most of his youth either in the company of Socrates, or carousing with friends and courtesans. He seems to have had an ambition to achieve something great: he first arranged an alliance with the Argives, but the combined forces of the alliance were defeated by the Spartans in a land battle. He then brought about the massive expedition to Sicily, but he was recalled from command to stand trial for impiety. Escaping to Sparta, he advised them on strategy which turned the tide of the war in their favor. He seduced King Agis’ wife in the hopes that his line would reign in Sparta. Alcibiades was suspected for this, and so he fled to Persia. Some time later, he then assumed command of the Athenian navy in the eastern Mediterranean, and he won several naval battles and one land battle against the Spartans—the first the Athenians had won. This turned the war briefly back to the Athenian’s advantage, and he was accepted back into his city with adulation.
He quickly fell back out of favor, and so he retired to Phrygia, where he lived with his mistress. He then attempted to advise the commander of the Athenian navy on the eve of the Battle of Aegospotami, but the commander refused to listen out of pride, and so Athens lost the battle and the war. Alcibiades was then killed on the orders of King Agis.

Alcibiades was not remarkable because he indulged himself to excess. Anyone with money can do this. Alcibiades was remarkable because he controlled the course of a major war in order to suit his whims. We could join the philosophers in criticizing Alcibiades for disregarding his community, but, in truth, men with such tremendous abilities are their own criteria of right and wrong. Social “oughts” and “ought-nots” seem feeble and petty by comparison.

His strength lay in the fact that he was able to accept and fit himself to every circumstance, and that he found his way to the top in every case. He seems to have had no fixed prejudice as to what he should be, save that he should be the best—nothing could wound him. Though he actually accomplished little, his life itself is monument to the man. He was a model of strength and health.