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Elliot D. Cohen is well known in the philosophical counseling community as a founding member and director of the Society for Philosophy, Counseling, and Psychotherapy in the United States and the author of several respected books in that and related fields. The present work is written for a lay audience and is intended as a self-help book for any intelligent person who has the ability and the willingness to order their own lives rationally.

The basic premise of the book is that any person's practical thinking can be analyzed in accordance with the form of the practical syllogism so as to uncover the major premise (which Cohen calls a 'rule') and the minor premise (called a 'report') which led to the action or to the emotional reaction of that person in a given situation. Following Aristotle, Cohen believes that one's feelings and emotions, like one's actions, flow deductively from one's reasoning albeit that the latter may contain many assumptions of which one is not aware. The task of 'self-control through the power of reason' begins with bringing these assumptions into consciousness. The next step is to refute those premises which can be seen to be faulty. To this end, a person should be aware of standard fallacies, such as hasty generalization and believing without adequate evidence, to which we are all prone. However, clarifying and correcting one's thinking will often not be enough. One must also exercise willpower so as to undo the habits of thinking, acting, and feeling into which one has fallen in the past. It will be one's clearheaded awareness of the faults of previous thinking and the necessity of correct thinking.
for the future that will drive this effort of self-control.

Cohen illustrates his method with telling examples and describes patterns of faulty thinking and inappropriate emotional reaction which he designates as 'fallacies'. Fallacies of emotion include 'demanding perfection' and 'though shalt upset yourself' while more cognitive fallacies include 'black-or-white thinking' and 'magnifying risks'. The extensive explications that Cohen provides for these and many other thinking patterns would help reflective readers recognize and confront such faulty forms of thought in themselves. Moreover, such fallacies often arise in sets which he designates as 'syndromes'. Cohen also provides readily understandable strategies for countering these patterns, which he calls 'antidotes'. Finally, he offers helpful advice on handling such troublesome emotions as anger, anxiety, and depression.

While the title of the book indicates an Aristotelian inspiration, the stronger influence on the book, as Cohen himself acknowledges, is that of Albert Ellis' Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy. Apart from the structure of the practical syllogism and reference to the Golden Mean, there is no reference to such Aristotelian concepts as a fundamental human tendency towards happiness or the virtue of practical judgment (phronésis). There is however, one theme which is drawn, if not from Aristotle specifically, then from the more general philosophical anthropology of the ancient Greek philosophers: namely, that of control of the passions on the part of reason. It is a matter for scholarly discussion as to whether Aristotle's holistic model of the human person can be bifurcated to the extent needed for theorizing self-control in this somewhat dualistic manner. It should certainly not be demanded of this book that it broaches this matter. But one is left with a lingering doubt as to whether rational self-control is adequately conceived when it is described as an exercise of muscular willpower which sets out to subdue the unruly emotions (an image that is more at home in Plato than in Aristotle). The reason why one has this doubt is because of the assumption that the book makes that being rational and determined is enough to give people the degree of awareness and command of themselves that would be needed for them to overcome their problems. Aristotle's view would be that mature virtuous persons do not need this kind of muscular self-discipline because their emotions and desires are consistent with, and inform, their reason so as to issue in 'prudent' practical judgments. Such persons are at one with themselves. But then, apart from training for the immature and education for the more mature, Aristotle does not tell us how to achieve this ideal state.

Cohen's assumption also seems quite unaware of the unconscious drives and motivations which modern depth psychology has disclosed to us and which militate against the kind of lucidity which Cohen's self-reflection demands and against the kind of self-control which clear thinking and willpower are said to promise. What if one's phobia or distorted perception won't yield to willpower? It is striking that in some of his cases Cohen recommends behavior modification training strategies, and that in the case of his own father's death, he has to allow himself to be irrational and to let go of self-control. Perhaps the solution to this problem, as with any case of philosophical counseling, is to ensure that the client or, in this case, reader of the book, does not have the kind of psychological problem which is intractable to reflection and critical thinking. If we leave cases of psychosis and neurosis to one side (and where is the borderline?), then Cohen's approach can surely be helpful in leading people to greater self-awareness, more rational decisions, more appropriate emotions, and more harmonious interpersonal relationships.

It is certainly a strength of this book and of the classical worldview that lies behind it that people are encouraged to take responsibility for their own actions and reactions and to seek to improve them by way of their own efforts. This can only be seen as a welcome departure from the promised quick fixes and the 'triumph of the therapeutic' which are so widespread today.

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