

## Musturbation

A contemporary look at the noble truths (meaning of life)  
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The 1<sup>st</sup> noble truth (suffering) and the 2<sup>nd</sup> noble (its arising or cause) help us see our **meaning of life**, how we create our own world and our problems. In simple terms, the 1<sup>st</sup> truth reveals to us how we see our world; more specifically, how we have a problem before us, right here and now.

This **problem** we have is invariably the result of a view we have, and its result working on us. Someone has “insulted” us! Our view is that “I **must** be liked by everyone to be happy.” Such views are there in our **unconscious**: hence, we rarely, if ever, know or acknowledge them.

## Ellis’ hilarity

Albert Ellis (1913-2007), American psychologist (regarding as having more influence on modern psychology than Freud himself), is humorously blunt in naming our irrational ways of thinking. Since we have irrationally thought that we “**must**” be liked by everyone to be happy, he calls this act **musturbation**!

When a client said, “I have to get all A’s this semester in college,” Ellis may respond, “You’re musturbating again.” Ellis uses his slang, “**awfulizing**,” to refer to the mental exaggeration of setbacks or inconveniences we claim to have burdened us. When a client feels bad for a whole week because of a dent in her new car, he would tell her: “Stop awfulizing!”

## Dialogue

The following dialogue between Ellis (1962) and a client not only illustrates Ellis’s blunt style but also makes explicit his theory of the relationship between thoughts and emotions—a theory shared by most cognitive therapists. The client began the session by complaining that he was unhappy because some men with whom he played golf didn’t like him. Ellis, in response, claimed that the client’s reasoning was illogical—the men’s not liking him couldn’t make him unhappy.

Client: Well, why was I unhappy then?

Ellis: It’s very simple—as simple as A, B, C, I might say. A in this case is the fact that these men didn’t like you. Let’s assume that you observed their attitude correctly and were not merely imagining they didn’t like you.

Client: I assure you that they didn’t. I could see that very clearly.

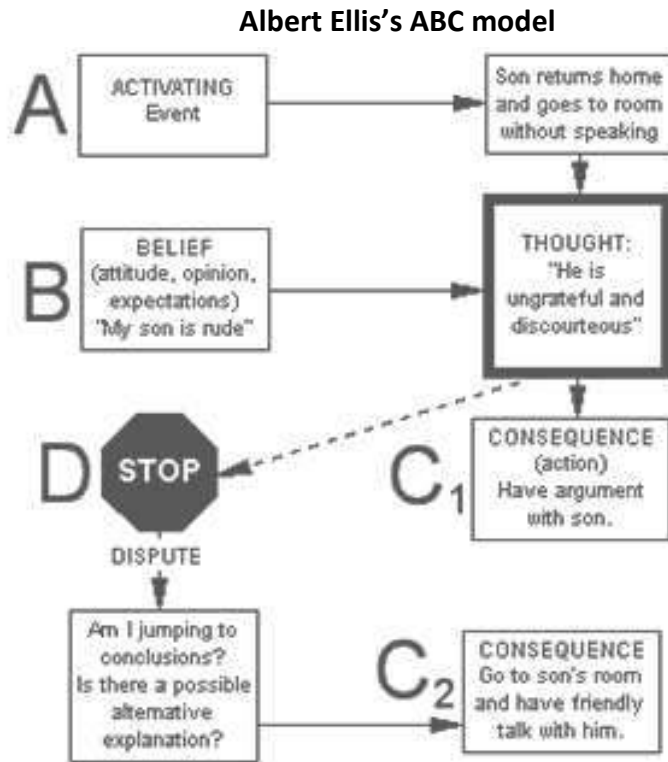
Ellis: Very well, let’s assume they didn’t like you and call that A. Now, C is your unhappiness — which we’ll definitely have to assume is a fact, since you felt it.

Client: Damn right I did!

Ellis: All right, then: A is the fact that the men didn’t like you, and C is your unhappiness. You see A and C, and you assume that A, their not liking you, caused your unhappiness. But it didn’t.

Client: It didn’t? What did, then?

Ellis: B did.  
Client: What's B?  
Ellis: B is what you said to yourself while you were playing golf with those men.  
Client: What I said to myself? But I didn't say anything.  
Ellis: You did. You couldn't possibly be unhappy if you didn't. The only thing that could possibly make you unhappy that occurs from without is a brick falling on your head, or some such equivalent. But no brick fell. Obviously, therefore, you must have told yourself something to make yourself unhappy. (Ellis, 1962: 126 f)<sup>1</sup>



### The ABC Model

This dialogue shows how Ellis uses his famous *ABC Theory of Emotions* (1957):

**A** is the *activating event*,  
**B** is the *belief* that is triggered in the client's mind when the event occurs, and  
**C** is the emotional *consequence* of the triggered belief.

In a **flow-chart schema**:

- A = Activating agent (eg an insult)
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- B = Belief (eg: "I **must** be liked by everyone to be happy") ["musturbation"]
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- C = Consequent emotion (eg, unhappiness) ["awfulizing"]

<sup>1</sup> Albert Ellis. *Reason and emotion in psychotherapy*. New York, NY: Lyle Stuart, 1962.

## Healing

Our understanding or application of the noble truths can begin with either the 1<sup>st</sup> truth or the 2<sup>nd</sup> truth, depending on whichever we notice first. When we notice the **pain** first, that is the 1<sup>st</sup> truth; when we complain about how or why it occurs, that's the 2<sup>nd</sup> truth. It is helpful to understand how this 2<sup>nd</sup> truth is actually the **cause** or **arising** of the pain (the 1<sup>st</sup> truth).

Our healing starts when we remove or change B, the 2<sup>nd</sup> truth that we have understood and accepted. The example above illustrates how we suffer because we believe irrationally that we must be liked by everyone (a case of musturbation): so, if someone doesn't like us, we are unhappy.

Hence, we need to understand that it is irrational or unwholesome to expect everyone to like us and that there is little or no harm in not being liked by some people. Reflecting in this way, we accept the true reality of the situation: our problem is solved and we are wiser when we apply this truth model whenever we need to.



**Reading:** Gray & Bjorklund, *Psychology*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed, 2014:681 f.

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