

Therapy for the Sane

How Philosophy Can Change Your Life



Lou Marinoff, Ph.D.

Author of *Plato Not Prozac*

How Not to Offend the Insane

Introduction to this Waterside Productions
edition of *Therapy for the Sane*

As every author knows, the publishing world can be wild, woolly, and well-nigh unpredictable. *Therapy for the Sane* was conceived and written as a sequel to *Plato Not Prozac*—in retrospect, a tough act to follow. After having been initially rejected by every major publisher in New York, *Plato Not Prozac* received a second look from HarperCollins, which published it in 1999. It swiftly became an international bestseller. Then, in early 2001, I faced a different challenge: writing a successful sequel. My agent of record submitted the finished proposal for *Therapy for the Sane* in the summer of 2001, and this time half a dozen major New York publishers expressed their interest.

Bloomsbury sought to make a pre-emptive offer for world English rights: they sensibly wanted the book, and understandably did not want the proposal going to auction. Bloomsbury is a fine English publishing house, and was then in the process of opening a New York office, to establish a beachhead in the US market. They were looking for “franchise” US authors, and their acquisitions editor envisioned me in that role. So far, so good.

So we met with Bloomsbury, which indeed acquired the book with a pre-emptive offer. Before the meeting ended, I distinctly recall reminding them that I am not politically correct (a British understatement!), and that this book—as indicated clearly in the proposal—contains a chapter critiquing political correctness, and another chapter discussing social consequences of sex difference. “No problem,” said the chief editor. But he had misspoken. It was going to be an enormous problem.

At times the publishing industry resembles a revolving door, with editors coming and going at a dizzying pace. An author is fortunate indeed if the same editor who acquires his book remains in place long enough to see it through production, and into print. I would come to meet many authors whose books fell through these cracks, ending up orphaned or even aborted by the very houses that had acquired them. *Therapy for the Sane* would soon meet a similar fate.

Having signed with Bloomsbury, I got straight to work on the manuscript. I live for creativity, and take pride in professionalism. In the non-fiction world, publishers acquire proposals, and expect finished manuscripts to resemble them closely. So it was with *Therapy for the Sane*. I delivered the finished manuscript in early December 2002, right on schedule, and was invited to a production meeting shortly thereafter. As I eagerly made my way to Bloomsbury’s funky offices in the historic Flatiron Building, little did I suspect that this meeting was going to be the literary equivalent of a train wreck.

Seated around the conference table was the new chief editor, along with her in-house publicity and promotion team. My agent met me there, and we took our seats. The editor who had acquired the title was long-gone through the revolving door, and no longer in the picture. The person now in charge wasted little time in showing her politically correct colors. She called the meeting to order and aired her first agenda point.

“We have to change the title,” she began. “We can’t call it *Therapy for the Sane*.”

“Why in Heaven’s name not?” I inquired. “It’s a great title, and everybody who hears it loves it.”

“Because,” she replied evenly, “It might offend the *insane*.”

I could scarcely believe my ears. How could offering normal people philosophical guidance for everyday life possibly offend inmates of insane asylums? But this is exactly what’s wrong with political correctness. Its cardinal rule is never to say anything that *anyone* else finds offensive. If someone feels offended by what you say, it becomes *your* fault. In other words, we are all held responsible for everybody else’s state of mind, but never for our own. But offenses are *not* like harms: they cannot be inflicted on others (as are harms) against their wills. If I harm you physically, then I am indeed responsible for inflicting a harm. But if you decide to take offense at something I say verbally, then *you* are responsible for taking it. Fear of offending others, which stems from confusing offense with harm, ends up imposing censorship on society entire, preventing people from asking important questions, such as “If I’m offended, am I harmed?” Ultimately, political correctness will muzzle every philosopher in existence, since we thrive on asking questions, even if some folks prefer not to hear them. While it’s your prerogative not to listen, no-one has a right to censor questioning itself.

So given this chief editor’s fear that a book title might offend the insane, I could not help blurting out “You are apparently well-qualified to know.” This witticism apparently went straight over her head, which was just as well. Otherwise, she surely would have felt offended herself.

“We’re going to call it *The Big Questions*,” she continued.

“But that’s insipid,” I responded. “And totally unoriginal. There are already philosophy books with that title.”

“It grows on you,” piped up a publicist.

“Nothing grows on me,” I replied. “I shower every morning.” Nobody laughed.

“Moreover,” the chief editor continued, “We’re going to delete two chapters: “If You’re Offended, Are You Harmed?” and “Can Anybody Win the War of the Sexes?”

“But those are two of the most important chapters in the book,” I objected. “They provide vital insights into problems afflicting contemporary societies. In point of fact, they were part and parcel of the proposal. Your house bought the proposal. Nobody objected to them then. I categorically refuse to be censored now.”

She scowled, but relented. What was left of the meeting then concluded. I departed with my agent, who had remained silent throughout. Only when we exited the building did she speak:

“You took a big gamble standing up to her. She could have killed the book then and there.”

“She had already de-fanged it by changing the title, and was attempting to neuter it by removing those two chapters. Killing it would have put it out of its misery.”

So *Therapy for the Sane* came out in 2003, re-titled *The Big Questions*. It was otherwise uncensored. The line editor on the project had also silently agreed with me, although he too had held his tongue during that fateful meeting, prudently preferring to err on the side of keeping his job. “Political correctness has gone too far,” he later admitted to me. Yes, it had already gone too far in 2002. Now, in 2020, it has gone way too far beyond too far. Untreated and unchecked, the cancer of political correctness has metastasized through the entire body politic, infecting every institution in Western civilization. By now practically inoperable, it threatens to kill Western civilization itself, by prohibiting its formerly unalienable freedoms of thought and expression.

In retrospect, *Therapy for the Sane* was a canary in the coal mine of free speech. Like *Plato Not Prozac*, it became an international bestseller in far-flung countries that had not yet succumbed to the fatuous tyranny of political correctness. Its attempted censorship in the US by Bloomsbury’s chief political commissar mimicked

the daily censorship of dissenting (i.e. politically incorrect) views on university campuses, and by mainstream media alike. It anticipated by fifteen years the cancellation of Milo Yiannopoulos's book contract by Simon & Schuster, the firing of professors for speaking politically incorrect truths, the dis-invitations issued to conservative or libertarian speakers on radicalized campuses coast-to-coast, and the refusal of politically correct politicians to call Islamic terrorism "Islamic terrorism," among many other travesties. It anticipated the state of outright totalitarianism imposed and enforced by "progressive" fascists, wherever they are permitted to poison the wells, and wellsprings, of liberty.

Therapy for the Sane (under its proper tile at last) was re-published by Perseus Books in 2013. This newly-revised and updated edition is published by Waterside Productions, Inc. I would like to thank John H. Spencer and Juan Francisco Tellez for their help with the revisions, Bill Gladstone and Josh Freel for their help with publication, Ken Fraser for creating the cover even more perfectly than I envisioned it, and Hieronymus Bosch for the prescient painting—*Extracting the Stone of Folly*—on which it is based.

Over the years, I have received a lot of fan mail from readers of *Therapy for the Sane*, thanking me for the book, which has helped them question and change their lives in many positive ways. Perhaps strange to say, during all this time I have never received a single complaint from any inmate of an insane asylum claiming to be "offended" by the title. Perhaps some overly-zealous editors in chief should put that fact in their politically correct pipes, and smoke it!

“Lou Marinoff is a fellow pilgrim, always ready to tell the story that hasn’t been told, always ready to take the risks that haven’t been taken.”

—**Paulo Coelho**, author of *The Alchemist*

“Lou Marinoff is a lively writer who boldly tramples on the constraints of political correctness. In an age filled with too many glib how-to books, *Therapy for the Sane* is instead a timely and thought-provoking exposition on how the wisdom of the great philosophers can help those wrestling with the big questions of life. This is therapy for the thoughtful.”

—**Arlene Getz**, *Newsweek*

“Guiding the reader through the finest work of the human mind, Lou Marinoff shows that problems of relationship health and general dissatisfaction can be solved by realizing some of our latent human potentialities. Problem-solving then becomes an uplifting adventure.”

—**Laura Huxley**, author of *This Timeless Moment*

“Lou Marinoff is one of the prime movers behind the contemporary phenomenon of philosophical counseling. Reading this book is like being a fly on the wall in his private sessions. In its pages, you’ll see the range of pressing questions that bring people to his door, and you’ll get a good taste of the interesting philosophical guidance he is able to give them.”

—**Tom Morris, Ph.D.**, author of *The Art of Achievement*

Professor Lou Marinoff’s first book—*Plato Not Prozac*—drew on the wisdom of the great philosophers to solve our everyday problems, launching a global movement that restores philosophy to what it once was: useful in all walks of life. In this sequel, *Therapy for the Sane*, he takes the concept to the next level, applying centuries of philosophy and iconic literature to help answer central questions of modern and postmodern existence. Professor Marinoff uses case studies from his philosophical counseling practice to show how wisdom from immortal thinkers can help us define our own philosophy, and thereby reclaim our sense of well-being. He asks and answers questions that go to the heart of the human condition: How do we know what is right? What is love? How can we cope with change? Why can’t we all get along?



Lou Marinoff is a professor of philosophy at The City College of New York, and an internationally best-selling author. He helps individuals, groups and organizations manage everyday problems, applying wisdom drawn from Western and Asian traditions alike. *The New York Times* called him “the world’s most successful marketer of philosophical counseling.” Lou’s insights are guaranteed to be thought-provoking if not life-changing. His hobbies include tennis, classical guitar, and nature photography. He is also a former Canadian and US table hockey champion, and an ambassador of the sport.



Waterside Productions