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# THE METAPHYSICS OF ADDICTION

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## Abstract

In the present study, I tried to argue the fact that the aetiological polymorphism of addiction demands a multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary approach that will take into consideration not only data from Neurology, Sociology, Pedagogy, Chemistry, etc., but also the data from Philosophy and Theology. Such an approach is the more necessary as the genesis of addiction also involves reasons of a metaphysical order. The more profound cause of addictive behaviour is the distancing from the ontological source. This makes us dependent to things, phenomena or states that are only its surrogates as a reversed thirst of infinity is consumed through addiction. Anxiety, the interior void, the lack of sense, absurdity, the neurosis, the decrease of will, different psychotic forms are only consequences of the altered relationship with the ontological source.

*Keywords:* psychoactive substance, soteriological act, anthropology, patristic, transcendence

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## 1. Introduction

The exacerbation of the addictive phenomenon is to a great extent the consequence of losing the ultimate meaning, of the removal of the postmodern man from the ontological source, of the ethical tolerance and of the hedonistic spirit, realities specific to the times we are just traversing.

The causes responsible for the excess pathology and actually, for the chronic forms of addiction are generally known to any psychologist and psychiatrist who has a minimal clinical experience. The metaphysical dimension of dependence is one of the less talked about.

Any discourse concerning the phenomenology and therapy of addiction should take into account the fact that human beings is structurally, ontologically ill. This is on the one hand. On the other hand, the contemporary man, living in a world devoid of meaning, stripped of the vocation of belief in a transcendental court capable of ensuring him a soteriological horizon, searches for substitutes of the ontological source in the immanent realm.

Unfortunately, contemporary psychology treats man as a machine of flesh and blood, like a cognitive robot, without taking into account the metaphysical, spiritual and noetic bearings that actually confers its essence.

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Considering the aetiological polymorphism of addiction, the analysis of this phenomenon, exclusively from a psychological perspective, is unilateral and thus inefficient. Only a multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary approach, that will take into account the data from Philosophy, Theology, Pedagogy, Biology, Chemistry and Medicine, may lead to the therapeutic success of addictive behaviour.

After delineating the area of competency in Metaphysics and a brief history of the moments of this science, we will take a general look at the addictive phenomenon that will have a short foray in the patristic anthropology.

Having established the characteristics of the two investigated concepts, we will consider their relationship straightforwardly (the addiction between metaphysics and psychology) by analyzing the categories and mechanisms of the metaphysical background involved in triggering the addiction: the ontological source and the meaning of life, anxiety and addiction, freedom and addiction.

## **2. The area of Metaphysics**

Made up of the Greek words ‘meta’ (after) and ‘physika’ (about the nature), the notion of metaphysics has been used by Adronicos of Rhodos, Greek philosopher and editor of Aristotle’s texts, in order to differentiate his initial works from his posthumous ones, in the sense that the 14 books that made up the ‘filosofia prima’ had been ordered after the Natural sciences treatises. Subsequently, the concept of metaphysics will designate that which is beyond the sensitive universe. As a philosophical discipline, Metaphysics studies the nature of reality, the coming into existence, freedom, divinity, immortality, the soul, time, justice, good or the problem of happiness.

The roots of this philosophical science originate in Plato’s philosophy who, by differentiating between intelligible and sensible, distinguishes between the field of Metaphysics and that of Physics. Unlike Plato, who considered that nature as a merger of existence with nonexistence does not offer a stable epistemic approach, Aristotle extends the metaphysical horizon to all bearings of the being, even if the relationship between divinity and the physical world will not be sufficiently clarified. Later, medieval philosophers insert in the metaphysical equation the biblical idea of the creation of the world out of nothing which will make a qualitative differentiation between the divine ontology and that of the created being.

In the modern world, Metaphysics is linked more to a methodological labour meant to create the possibility of a passage from the phenomenal world to the intelligible reality. These concerns will confiscate the minds of philosophers until the debut of the Kantian criticism that uncovers the incognoscibility of the intelligible by proposing a metaphysical knowledge focused on speculation, without the aid of the epistemological apparatus owing to the exact sciences.

By rejecting the rationalist metaphysics, Hegel replaces it with one of the dialectical type thus ignoring the principle of noncontradiction [1]. The pure being must contain in itself the difference from itself and its own identity simultaneously. In an antinomy, Hegel states that, to be identical with itself

means to be different from itself. Without such a relationship, neither the coming from Eternity nor the determined reality of the world out of God could not have been inferred [2].

The last observation concerning metaphysics, worthy of being noted, belongs to Martin Heidegger which, after making a severe criticism of prior metaphysical doctrines, from Plato to modern thinkers, states that the being is presence, not the thing. The essence of subjectivity is transcendence. Transcendence does not mean overcoming a space that would close the subject in its interior. That which is overcome, is not the threshold between the interior and exterior, but the coming into existence in its whole. Transcendence consists precisely in the overcoming of the coming into existence which includes the Dasein [2, p. 51].

Besides immanent factors that predispose the subject from an addiction to the other (hypersensitivity, mental lability, sexual abuse during childhood, family, social, cultural environment etc.) there are also mechanisms of a metaphysical nature, transcendental and transcending determinants involved in human behaviour, including the addictive one.

### **3. The addictive behaviour**

The term 'addiction' derives from the Latin word *addictus* which means *slave due to default debt* and defines dependence to an object, substance, state, phenomenon, activity or person. The lack of object which creates the addiction creates the subject a pronounced state of mental discomfort (called withdrawal), that will determine it to repeat the respective experience.

From a psychological standpoint, addictive behaviour is a tendency of take refuge from reality which is due to some emotional trauma, an inferiority complex in childhood, feelings of fear and uncertainty or some attempts to transgress everyday difficulties, family conflicts etc., being considered by addictologists belonging to the realm of narcissist pathologies rather than to the Oedipal range [3]. When considering drug consumption, other facilitating factors may be added: depression, anxiety, weakening of the volitional faculty, shyness, daily routine, the wish for novelty, group influences etc.

There are researchers, who consider addiction not only as a simple behavioural, learned atypia but also one that affects the brain's reward circuit which seriously modifies cognitive mechanisms, emotions and perceptions of the individual.

A psychological taxonomy of addiction would include: chemical addiction (alcohol, drugs, tobacco, hypnotics, sedatives etc.) and nonchemical addiction which pertains to gambling, video games, internet, sex and pornography addiction, emotional addiction, shopping, anorexia, bulimia etc.

Addictive behavioural therapies consist of individual psychological counselling, counselling of the dependents, desintoxication for withdrawal diminishing, group psychotherapy, etc.

#### **4. Homo addictus**

The human being is ontologically dependent. We are dependent on food, climate conditions, air, sun, water, fire, books, friends, social relations, the law of gravity, the terrestrial habitat, the macrocosmic equilibrium or God. Dependency is a reality so familiar to our nature that the human being has been righteously called 'homo addictus'.

The spiritual escape from temporal horizon, the transcendence of the existential tragism and the abandonment in the mystical imaginary through the ingestion of psychoactive substances is, ultimately, an archetypal issue, if we are to consider that in the archaic cultures, many of the actual drugs were considered sacred and were consumed during religious rituals. The unconscious reiteration of such collective archetypal reminiscences plus the exacerbated hedonism, the scepticism, the nihilism, economic instabilities, the moral crisis and lack of meaning of the postmodern man are only a handful of causes for the increase in toxic morbidity.

The human brain contains natural receivers for drugs, which means that it synthesises chemical substances similar to the drugs called endorphins that have the role of naturally limiting the intensity of pain and dictating pleasure and emotions [4].

The human psyche is an abyss of thoughts, ideas, conflicts, unloading, repressions, conscious and unconscious instances, pulsions, archetypes, images, constellations of memories and galaxies of oblivion that constitute themselves in a genuine psychovers whose laws are partly hidden, partly or, in any case, less predictable. For instance, a person which passes through a traumatic experience has the tendency to repeat the event, traumatic neurosis being nothing else than the mental reliving of the respective unwelcome events, either awake or asleep. The repetition of the incident under an imaginary form, whether symbolic or attenuated is in fact an attempt to integrate one's own psychism [4, p. 34]. There are also unconscious mechanisms through which our desires and compulsions head towards objects or representations different from the ones we tend consciously (see the concept of movement from psychoanalysis) as there are people that, following the loss of a great love not accomplished through marriage, come to develop different forms of addiction as a defensive reaction against the adored person, similar to an unconscious entrenchment of the dependence on her.

Addiction, regardless of its nature, is a state that takes the individual out of the conventional realms of human behaviour, the equilibrium of its existence being more or less influenced by the satisfaction caused by contacting the addictive object/phenomenon.

Nevertheless, if we are to make a taxonomy of addiction by obviously relating to the common sense in axiology, we should know that there aren't only negative addictions, but also positive ones. The addiction to sacred rituals, addiction to prayer, to communion with God (theoaddiction, godaddiction), addiction to reading, addiction to writing (graphoaddiction), addiction to

thinking (nooadiction), addiction to music or other forms of nonaggressive dependence towards the subject and the community it is part of are obviously positive, while addiction to psychoactive substances, drug addiction, alcohol addiction, tobacco addiction, sex and pornography addiction or cyber-addiction are obviously negative forms of addiction.

The human being is structurally a dependent being. To cure the human being of dependency means to deprive it of one of its main features. This entitles us to state that human dependency cannot be treated, but redirected.

## **5. Incursion in the patristic anthropology**

Unlike Gnostic systems which disregarded the body, patristic anthropology reconsiders the value of the somatic element, emphasising the irreducibility of the human being to one of its two components (the body or the soul): “Once the body has been created, having only the body alone, man is not yet complete as the body belongs to the man, being as such a part of him. Neither the soul in itself represents man because it too belongs to him, thus being a part of him as well.” [Sfântul Irineu, *Contra ereziilor*, V, 6, 1]

This ontological nature (double, yet without being dualistic, as man is a unitary whole) is responsible for all the works of the human being, whether good or bad: “In any work, [the body and the soul] belong to each other and share its fruits together. How can you then separate them from each other, if you admit that our works will be judged? And if the works belong to one and to the other as well, why do you make the soul solely responsible for them?” [Sfântul Grigore de Nyssa, *Omiliile la Sfintele Pasti si la Învierea Domnului*, III].

Despite the close link with the body, the soul is incorporeal and thus superior to the body, independent towards it and definitely immortal.

Christian ascetic uses the term passion for some ways of addiction. In passion, an infinitely reversed force acts and leads man in a direction where he can never find satisfaction: “The objects of passions' search cannot satisfy them, for they are finite and as such, they don't meet the passions' infinite thirst. [...] But the objects are through their nature finite, both as sources of satisfaction and as length, easily passing into nonexistence, through consumption. Even when the passion needs the human person to satisfy itself, it reduces this to an object, or sees and uses only its object side, missing its indefinite depths, hidden in the subject side.” [5]

As ‘irrational functions of the soul’, as John of Damascus calls them, passions spring from exaggerated self love, and from forgetfulness of God. As a created being, man finds himself in a paradoxical situation: the more he desires to become autonomous (more independent from God) the more he becomes dependent on things.

## 6. Addiction between Metaphysics and Psychology

The contribution of Psychology, Psychiatry, Neurochemistry, Neurophysiology, Pedagogy to the description of addictive mechanisms, the dependent patient's profile as well as prevention and therapeutic strategies related to the phenomenon of addiction are not to be contested. Nevertheless, a multidisciplinary approach to addictive pathology will never be exhausted and consequently efficient without the call for a philosophical theological discourse or that of abyssal psychology, the only ones capable of identifying the abyssal causes of dependence.

The majority of addictions settle in because of sorrow, boredom that in turn appear as a result of the lack of an ultimate meaning. It is true that there is a series of diseases described by contemporary Psychiatry which are also to be found in the patristical noosography (*pride* = over evaluation of one's self; *philautia* = narcissism; *akedia* = depression/asthenia, etc.) [6], hence for subject with a concrete religious commitment, but are insignificant in comparison with the thousands of neurosis and psychosis inventories by modern psychopathology. On the other hand, anxiety/disgust for life/depression/akedia are states that express the nostalgia of the primordial condition of the human being. A proof of this fact is the sudden appearance of such a symptomatic picture which, most of the times, has no underlying reason.

Besides the subjective unconscious described by Freud or the collective one discovered by Jung, we consider that there is also a metaphysical unconscious consisting in memories and remnant images that belong to the primordial state, when man stood near the supreme ontological source.

The fact that drugs can induce a self transcendence experience, changes in consciousness with euphoric accents is already known [7]. This fact apparently contradicts the contemplation of the uncreated light and the union with the divine Absolute, mystical phenomena encountered in the great religions. Unlike the authentic mystical ecstasy, the artificial ecstasy induced by psychoactive substances is inconsistent, incomplete, incapable of taking man, (once he has returned to reality) out of the anxiety, suffering and moral misery in which it finds itself (delinquencies, deviant sexual behaviour, sexual tourism, alcoholism, etc.) which means that such transcendence is nothing else than false ecstasy, a slide towards a confused dreamy horizon, lacking in concrete substance, an occultation based on chemical means of the true mystical ecstasy [8], which, once consumed, totally transforms the human being.

With all its relativistic, deconstructivist and nihilist arsenal, the postmodern man cannot sabotage the being, cannot outsmart his ontological software. Churches become empty, but psychiatry clinics are filled; the ones that ask for the aid of spiritual advisers become rarer, but the number of those who knock on the doors of psychotherapy practices grows exponentially.

## **7. The ontological source and the meaning of life**

Deprived of its metaphysical, spiritual content, life has no purpose. Without an eschatological horizon, man becomes only a conscious mammal, with vague moments of pleasure, dreams, sufferings and pride, whose trajectory ends in the grave.

The ultimate purpose of the human being is the awareness of his ontological source and the living according to it. The ontological source represents that intelligible reality, infinite, transcendent, whose existence is due only to itself (*causa sui*) while at the same time is the cause of all coming into existence. The ontological source may obviously not become a subject of scientific research, rather, as Immanuel Kant puts it, a regulative idea of reason.

Besides, from a scientific standpoint, the research of the three programs: logicism (Georg Cantor, Russell, Frege) intuitionism (Kronecker, Poincaré, Brouwer and Heyting) and formalism (Hilbert), which have debated the relationship between Logic and Mathematics [9] and have shown the main limits of Mathematics in front of absolute infinite (the theological Infinite), which is really beyond Mathematics, therefore above rationality.

The concept of infinity is derived from the Latin adjective *infinitus-a-um* (unended, unbounded, undetermined) and is the dominant element in at least four fields of the spirit: Philosophy, Mathematics, Physics and Theology. Each of these tries to decrypt the essence of the world even if their methods and namings for this ultimate ontological source differ: *the prime principle (arche), the concept of supreme Good, Iahve, the Prime Cause, Being, The One, God, (The) Absolute, (The) Undetermined, Alah, pure Act, Substance, transcending Ideal, Supreme Being, pure Being, absolute Idea, limit, perfect Being, transfinite number, The Great Anonymous, etc.*

If presocratic philosophers consider that the concept of infinity is related to the search for the prime principle (water, air, apeiron, fire, The One, The Being, the number etc.), Plato considers transcendence (and therefore infinity) as being taken into account not only from a cosmological perspective but especially from a metaphysical one. Plato talks about the overintelligible feature of Goodness, i.e. a transcendence with a state that is absolutely more radical than the transcendence of ideas towards things. Goodness as a transcendental source of the intelligible world, coordinates the cognitive activity of the intellect [2, p. 40-42].

By analysing the traditional meanings that circulate in the Greek philosophy from the Milesians to Plato, Aristotle tries to systematise the species of the infinite and this way, he identifies the extensive, intensive, potential and actual infinite. Even if an opponent of a transcendence expressed in terms of distance as with Plato, Aristotle sets up the conceptual basis of a transcendental entity in qualitative order.

The scholastic Medieval Ages transfer the theme of infinity from the field of Mathematics and Logic to that of theological thinking. God is the only entity that enjoys the feature of infinity. Descartes states the infinity of free will as a

faculty of the human being, as well as the implicit existence of infinity in the finite realm, which makes it completely knowable [9, p. 41].

The Spinoza substance is also seen through the infinity concept: "Through God, I understand the absolutely infinite existence, that is substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, each of them expressing an eternal and infinite essence" [*Etica*, XVI].

Unlike Spinoza, who keeps the statements and eliminates negations, Hegel eliminates both negations and statements, thereby leaving not only the pure void, but also the pure being. In this way, between the being's identity, with the void and difference of the being before the void, Hegel comes to the concept of becoming. After he creates the categories at a logic and natural level, The pure Being passes on the steps of The Spirit (subjective, objective and absolute). The pure being reaches upon the entirety of determinations, it becomes self-conscious spirit only towards the end [9, p. 43].

Infinity is hence one of the attributes of the divine over-essence that manifests itself in creating the cosmic coherence (physical, mental and spiritual) and in God's providential initiative towards it, initiative that culminates with the Christic Kenosis [9, p. 51].

As it is not a being *per se* and is therefore incapable of generating itself, man has a purpose in the universe only as it acknowledges its metaphysical paternity and keeps a lively relationship with this original ontological source. Outside this transcendent lineage, that ensures its ontological restoration through the soteriological act, the human condition is reducible to the plain status of a conscious mammal, having an existential route which is tragic and time limited, as a walking digestive tube or a galactic waste meant for decomposition.

Etiologically speaking, addiction is not a biological or a psychological condition, rather a spiritual one, triggered by a tainted relationship with the supreme ontological source, which ultimately leads to some kind of cosmic fatherlessness, existential void and lack of purpose.

As created beings, brought to life and taken out of it without our own consent, we are left but two alternatives: either we acknowledge the supreme ontological source and respect the principles of such a lineage, or we become dependent on its substitutes. Consequently, either we become dependent on God, or its surrogates towards which the unconscious defence mechanisms of our psyche lead us. We are left to choose between *anamnesis* and *amnesia*, between remembrance and forgetfulness!

## 8. Anxiety and addiction

The throbbing rhythm of life, the information boom, indigence, family issues, social obligations, diseases, overcrowding, professional failure, etc. create upon the postmodern man a diffuse anxiety, whose severity differs with the psycho-emotional profile of the individual. Besides the anxiety induced by family, social economic issues, etc., there is also a metaphysical anxiety,



theorized in the European philosophical space by Soren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger.

As a contemporary with a scientific paradigm, dominated by a certain superficial optimism that ignored the existential issues of the individual, Kierkegaard concentrates his entire intellectual energy on integrating man and his metaphysical status in front divinity. Placed under the sign of the original guilt, man becomes an eminently tragic being. The burden that man carries during history would be marked in a more profound sense, by an original anxiety that will anticipate Heidegger's concept termed *Angst*.

The issue considered by the Danish philosopher will have its repercussions on the constitution of an ontological analysis of the humane. Such an echo will be identified in Heidegger's philosophy, when he will analyse the *Dasein* in which the constitutive finiteness is synthesised by the German philosopher in the phenomenological concept of *Sein zum Tode*. Heidegger's existential elements are the correlative and complementary term of the categories. These elements aim at the relationship between the being and void, death and the world (*Angst, sein zum Tode* and *Sorge*) as they are reducible to the existential core of concern.

Therefore, Heidegger's view of Anxiety (*Angst*) is that of a feature of the human being (*Dasein*), it is part of its finite condition, the perspective of death, being different from the fear of something determined (*Furcht*). There are obviously more forms of anxiety but the 'fundamental anxiety' is still the one related to the finite condition of the being (death anxiety), accompanied by inner void and lack of purpose. We are dealing with an anxiety of an ontological, existential type and not with one which is psychological, psychiatric, neurotic or psychotic. Nonetheless, the two typologies are not necessarily in a state of exclusion [10].

More than just neurotic situational anxieties, the existential becomes one of the major causes of addictive behaviour. Man searches for possibilities of overcoming this frustrating sorrow that actually conceals the fear of self-dismantling, the horror due to nonexistence, setting on the surrogates of the Absolute that offer him short term anaesthesia, but without which he feels life is becoming impossible.

## **9. Freedom and addiction**

There is possibly no other faculty of the human being so involved in the addictive mechanism more than freedom. This is a fact as natural as possible if we think that any type of addiction assumes the elective act. Common mentality, teachers, society, juridical codes or religion hurry to tell us that we are perfectly free beings. Analyzed in depth human liberty seems to be an unsolvable issue.

Man is par excellence a constrained being. We are causally, genetically, physiologically, socially, politically, morally, geographically, ethnically, economically, culturally, religiously, logically or conceptually constrained.

The attempt of Christian theology to save freedom, through the concept of free will, otherwise intelligent, opens new questions: what is the relationship between providence and freedom? How can divine omniscience and human freedom be reconciled? If God knows the trajectories of our lives from birth, how can we speak of freedom?

Under divine omniscience, man does what God knows he will do and not something different. Man does not know what God knows he will do, hence the illusory impression that he acts freely.

In order to do what God knows we will do, he brings us into existence with our choices while us, by means of free choice, only choose His choices. But for us to choose His choices He prepares us mentally, somatically, emotionally, causally, temporally, etc. even before birth. It is true, God does not have prior knowledge in time, but outside time, as temporal categories (past, present and future) are not own to Him, but His eternity includes our time as well.

When we do a certain act, we are faced with multiple options. We materialise only one, but in God's mind it may be that all are real. It is as if God would write more novels but would publish only one.

We are free and bound at the same time. There is probably a level on which our freedom is different from God's and another plan in which there is only God's freedom.

Like phobias, where the anxiety element may frequently be only a disguise for different trauma suffered by the patient during childhood, adolescence or even maturity and, in the case of dependence, the addictive object – tobacco, alcohol, drugs etc. - is subordinate [4, p. 152]. This thing confirms that psychological factors have an important role in the addiction's settlement [4, p. 152]. The psychological status however is determined in turn by metaphysical factors. A brief analysis of the freedom mechanisms shows that elective acts come from an uncontrollable volitional realm. We know from Seneca (*velle non discitur/to want will cannot be learned*) and Schopenhauer (*Der mensch kann was er will; er kann aber nicht wollen was er will/Man does what he wants, but he cannot want what he wants*) that man actually does what he wants, but instead he cannot predetermine his will. In this case another question is born: where does evil come from? This can only come from a metaphysical instance, other than God, most probable from His partner in ontological affairs: the devil. But then we ask ourselves where does good come from?

This dilemma remains unanswered as long as we don't have access to the causes of the contract established between the two metaphysical partners.

The issue of freedom escapes any logical and rational human discourse, as its ultimate essence is unsolvable, aporematically. Epistemological solutions seem to come from the field of quantum physics. Of course, we must accept that inframolecular level undetermination does apply to the microcosmic level.

There is probably a metaphysical level on which the human being will be left only to be assumed by divine will, enjoys freedom. But can an ontological cancellation of freedom take the place of freedom?

## 10. Conclusions

The etiological polymorphism of addiction demands a multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary approach that will take into account the data from multiple science fields amongst which Philosophy and Theology. Besides the favouring factors involved in the genesis of addictions there are also mechanisms of a metaphysical nature responsible for this conduct, a fact that contemporary Psychology ignores, content to treat the addictive patient as a biophysical aggregate. Dependency is a feature so consubstantial to our nature that the human being can rightly be called *homo adictus*. There are negative addiction (drug addiction, sex addiction) and positive addictions (addiction to God, addiction to reading, etc.).

Outside of the ontological source, (the theological Infinity) that offers man a soteriological horizon, the human condition is reduced to that of a conscious mammal whose unique existential trajectory ends in the grave.

More than any faculty of the human soul, elective freedom is deeply involved in the addictive phenomenon even if its ontological mechanisms often elude a rational foundation. Free or not free, man tries by the instrumentality of the pleasures he ultimately becomes dependent to, to find his happiness in the mundane realm, forgetting that such an ideal can only be fully attained in a restored ontological condition.

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