

**The Treatment of Alcoholism**

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In the article "W(h)ither Alcoholism Treatment" (I suppose without the "h" the statement is imperative and with the "h" it becomes a question of: "where goesth thou, alcoholism treatment?"), the introductory editorial to the medical professional trade journal Alcohol and Alcoholism printed in England and full of medical abstracts and experimental data, Raymond M. Costello assesses what he believes to be the present state of alcoholism treatment and he does not present a positive view. My main criticism concerning his comments is that he offers only criticisms and no solutions. I think someone of his position, authority, and profession should suggest positive alternatives not just pessimistic, fatalistic gloom.

He mentions Alcoholics Anonymous as a competing agency advocating total abstinence which, in my opinion, is the correct route to take for everyone including nonalcoholics since I believe (or I can safely say based on scientific data: know) alcohol to be an unhealthy substance to put in one's body despite the balderdash of some people that a moderate amount can have a healthy tranquilizing effect on nervous (i.e., alive, alert, the majority of non-dead persons) people. He considers most treatment as ineffectual and that the term "treatment" should be used only for the biological, medical aspects of alcoholism and not for the sociopsychological efforts to change the behavior of the consumer of alcohol, who usually stubbornly and adamantly resists psychological treatment, though that is a petty, semantic consideration.

The causes of the use of alcohol are social and psychological so those issues should be addressed. The difference between physical and psychological addiction is that physical addiction involves a physical disturbance when the drug is absent whereas in psychological addiction the disturbance is manifested in unpleasant emotions and psychological stress. However, both types of addiction have social and psychological causes. All people, especially addictive personalities, need to learn to live with and accept anxiety as a normal, and at times, stimulating human emotion rather than anesthetizing themselves to the difficulties and challenges of life. The alcoholic's desire to enter dull oblivion can be replaced by enthusiasm to encounter and realistically respond to life's experiences. I think the psychiatric trend to erase all emotion through the administration of drugs to make the patient sluggish, dull, subordinating, and average is as horrifying and smacks of Orwellian totalitarianism.

For those who drink alcohol because they feel socially ill at ease in particular situations, it may be comforting to them to know that everyone is uneasy in new situations regardless of their social status, though few may admit it, and that the unease usually dissipates and relaxes with familiarity. Inhibition, or shyness, is normal. Of course, extreme and pathological shyness is usually treatable and that person, with a developed, acquired skill and productive environment, usually overcomes it. Most sensitive people go through phases of shyness when entering new environments and usually adjust to the new situations. For those who use alcohol because of lack of self esteem perhaps developing a skill

would enhance their self confidence.

The physical and societal destruction caused by alcoholism is enough to turn any rational person against it. To cite the physiological damage done by alcoholism is almost unnecessary since most everyone is already familiar with them: the destruction of brain cells; the damage done to a mother's fetus so that when it is born it can be deformed ( small heads, and heart and body deformities), mentally retarded, and already addicted to alcohol; the damage to membranes, chromosomes, organs, and bloods vessels; and ulcers and the list goes on. Clearly, alcohol is a toxic substance to the body yet people continue politely (and sometimes not so politely) to poison themselves with alcohol. Besides the slow chronic suicide of alcohol abuse the suicide rate of the population is 48 times greater for alcoholics than nonalcoholics.

The dangers to society are increases in violent crime, automobile accidents, accidental injuries, and lack of productivity to name but a few. Yet despite its injurious effect on individuals and society it is still consumed and its use is still glamorized as stylish by greedy advertizing and alcohol industry executives.

The effects of alcohol on the individual and those who surround the alcoholic can also be devastating. Irritability, denial, loss of memory, social hostility, and despondency mark the behavior of the alcoholic as well as the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde syndrome of the socially charming person who, under the influence of alcohol becomes violently, abusively, bitterly, and aggressively hostile. The addict will violate all of the rules of logic and employ the full glossary of fallacies from appeal to pity to

abusive irrelevance to satiate their alcoholic appetite.

Mr. Costello mentions alcohol as a symbol of freedom and instrument of pleasure yet alcoholism exists in similar proportions in the Soviet Union (Alcoholism in the USSR, V.G. Treml, Duke Press, 1982.) and we are free to self destruct if we choose to do so. Human nature is human nature anywhere in the world and under any political system. And if alcohol is an instrument of pleasure why does it cause so much misery? He also says "we are in danger of losing our objectivity." Good. We **should** lose our objectivity since alcoholism is a subjective, self-created condition; it should be countered subjectively. He uses a good example of pseudolanguage and medical jargon when he says "the socio-psychological model is both rational in that it provides clear proof of determination to conform to broad social expectations for tolerable drinking and paradoxical in that by yielding power to the individual more power is accrued to the transaction". He must know what he means-- I certainly don't.

I think the problem of alcohol can be defeated but ultimately the life affirming decision rests on those people who self destructively consume alcohol. What can the nonuser do to help alleviate the problem? Other than halting the production and sale of alcoholic beverages, we can encourage the user to join such programs as Alcoholics Anonymous and Employee Assistance Programs and help give them skills to help build their self confidence and esteem to encounter life's problems.

The intoxicating effects of alcohol were accidentally discovered thousands of years ago when fermented fruit juices

were consumed and people were lured to its numbing effects. To say a problem will always exist because it has existed throughout history is to misunderstand the human spirit and its ability to overcome adversity. Maybe a few thousand years from now historians will inform amazed students that human beings once put harmful poisons in their bodies and destroyed themselves and each other.