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Opinion Articles

Why do we call it *addiction*? Epistemological reflections on the world of *addiction*

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Starting from its definition, the topic of *addiction* has revealed its epistemological framework. *Addiction* derives from the Latin *addictus*, a term used in ancient Rome to indicate a state of slavery (Oxford English Dictionary, 2008). This study aims to understand if those who use drugs or have a behavioral disorder such as gambling disorder (Clark et al., 2013; Frisone et al., 2020a, 2020b; Frisone, 2021) should be considered mainly as slaves.

By clarifying the origin of the definition, it is noted that underlying the world of *addiction* a vision prevailed, in which the center of the attention was not the person as a whole, but the substance or behavior that brought the same person to repeat their conduct (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Brewer & Potenza, 2008; Broos et al., 2012; de Castro et al., 2007; Grant et al., 2014; Karim et al., 2012; Ladouceur, 2004; Mobilia, 1993).

This type of epistemological framework is derived from the current techno-scientific *Weltanschauung* (Achella & Schlimme, n.d.; Dilthey, 1998; Galimberti, 2002; Giugliano, 2013; Jaspers et al., 1995; Jaspers & Loriga, 1950): it is through applying the natural-scientific method

that greater resonance is given to all those quantitative data that can be obtained from the empirical point of view (Brentano, 1997; Galimberti, 2018). According to this perspective, the psychophysiological effect generated by substance use or the impulsive solicitation that behavior can cause on a person becomes more important than the person himself (Galimberti, 1999; Stanghellini & Rossi Monti, 2009).

However, before the techno-scientific *Weltanschauung*, other epistemological frameworks were proposed to frame the phenomena that, today, are counted in the world of *addiction*.

A study of Szasz (1977) showed that the way to see the phenomena changed radically when the *Weltanschauungen* changed. For example, concerning the transition from mythical-religious *Weltanschauung* to techno-scientific *Weltanschauung*, the theme of temptation has been replaced by that of the drive, i.e., if a man was first given a type of freedom in which it is foreseen punishment and torture when he could not resist, with the introduction of the concept of drive, a more passive image of man was instead favored, since in this case, the drive is represented as an “external” force, which would hinder the possibility of controlling certain behaviors.

In this regard, Szasz observed that “the transformation of the religious perspective on man into a scientific perspective [...] lead to a radical shift from a vision of man as a responsible being in the world to a vision of man as a reactive organism subjected to biological and social ‘forces’. In this process, the rhetoric and vocabulary of morality were replaced by biological fantasy and psychiatric metaphor. Temptation - which can be resisted or succumbed - has been supplanted by drive, instincts and impulses - which can be satisfied or frustrated. Virtue and vice have been transformed into health and disease” (Szasz, 1977, p. 159).

These reflections, therefore, allow noting that if today the term *addiction* is used to refer to such behaviors, it is because of the current techno-scientific *Weltanschauung*.

Furthermore, the current epistemological framework seems to have directed the so-called border sciences as psychiatry and psychology (Borgna, 2002; Callieri et al., 1999; Cargnello, 1980), to consider the world of *addiction* using the scientific-natural method as a point of reference.

Bringing psychiatry and psychology to the order of the biological and psychophysiological framework, however, increases the risk of obscuring the complexity of *addiction* phenomena, which could go beyond the classification of man as *homo natura* if seen from a psychological point of view (Binswanger et al., 1973; Binswanger, 1946).

One of the reasons it is advisable not to interpret the phenomenon of *addiction* only through the scientific-natural gaze is that this classification cannot evaluate a person in his entirety, precisely by methodological reasons (Cartesio, 1999).

Natural science, in particular psychophysiology, has given precious contributions regarding the detection of impulsive solicitations or the effects of a substance or behavior on someone. However, it is not the prerogative of the scientific method to grasp the *intentionality* of individual consciousness – because in this case, exploration is needed to understand the meaning linked to the implementation of conduct – nor its transcendental openness, which is identified by the psychopathologist and philosopher Jaspers (2013) to also underline the multiple possibilities of meaning that the same person gives to his conduct.

Therefore, the methodological limitations of natural science should induce, above all, psychology and psychiatry not to settle on this methodology to frame the phenomenon because, as Jaspers (2013) said, “science knows, but does not know the sense of his knowledge” (p. 16).

Another aspect to reflect on is that, as seen previously, the phenomenon of *addiction* has not been given the same meaning. Through different eras before the imposition of the techno-scientific *Weltanschauung*, substances were known with different dimensions, mostly ritualistic; for example, the same substances were used to try to get in touch with a divine (Correale et al., 2013). It was a conception where the person was at the center of interest and not the substance and its psychophysiological effect; that is, where it is started to grasp the meanings that the same person was trying to derive from his state of altered consciousness.

Given that many substances are the same as in the past, the changing factor is the meaning that each *Weltanschauung* has attributed to these behaviors. Nevertheless, can psychology and psychiatry remain predominantly anchored to the results highlighted by psychophysiology?

Currently, psychology and psychiatry should avoid being trapped within the techno-scientific *Weltanschauung* that mainly includes the results that emerge from empirical evidence. If border sciences disengaged from this approach, they would understand better those phenomena that appear in a certain way because they are determined by a definition that has allowed them to be circumscribed and framed within a specific *Weltanschauung*. Taking this into account can help psychology and psychiatry question a whole range of interpretations about phenomena that were thought to be the phenomena themselves.

Conceiving *addiction* only as a form of slavery protects and legitimize the public institutions to have full decision-making power over the lives of these people; however, if it is understood

what the right way to safeguard mental health, the label “*addictus*” would not be used for the same individual.

Furthermore, questioning not only the psychophysiological effects that arise from a substance or the implementation of behavior but also what it means to do the best for the patient involved in these dynamics could generate new modes of interpretation. In this regard, it could turn out that these patients may not be slaves for their impulses but instead are searching for freedom that frees them from unsustainable constraints or from assuming responsibilities of which they do not find meaning.

In psychological terms, i.e., trying to keep the person at the center of attention, it is noticed the opportunity that those who adhere to such behaviors are not limited to be slaves to a substance, but felt disinterested in their life that nothing is more satisfying than that refuge offered by substance use as in cases of drug *addiction*, or activity as in the cases of gambling disorder.

The question remains whether the mental health sector does the efforts needed to improve the lives of those who risk everything in the mere present because they lack both a significant past and a hope of achieving a satisfactory future project (Bin, 2005; Di Petta, 2012; Jaspers 1964).

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any potential conflict of interest.

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