

Self Loss and Self Recovery : a case of addiction

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Post modernists' onslaught on autonomous and solid self seemingly makes the problem of identity and autonomy of the self obsolete. Healthy, strong, integrated self is gone. What we do have in this post modern age is something fragmental, unbounded, and fluid.

Although post modernists criticize modern concept of self, in this paper I do reclaim self identity and autonomy. There are people called addicts—they drink, take drugs, or gamble till their whole existence undergoes erosion. They are enslaved by alcohol, drugs, or gambling. These addicts seem to have two selves—sober and intoxicated. Their sober self resides in this world, but their drunken counterpart drifts into the other world. The other world expands endlessly and excludes all the reality, and the addict self wishes to reside in this timeless world of fantasy and ecstasy. However unfortunately (or fortunately), they become physically worn out, their financial resources exhausted. Worse their intoxication does not enliven them anymore; it only isolates them from the rest of the world. Even if they return to this world, they must face harsh realities, or consequences of intoxication (divorce, debt, loss of job, hospitalization etc.). Resentment for what they have lost in the past and intense fear for what they have to face in future drive them into the other world—of drinking or gambling.

Although we usually characterize these addicts weak-willed, addicts try to control their addiction desperately. It is their illusion of control, or their refusal to accept their failure to control that drives them into futile effort of controlling their addictive behavior, and they fail.

People cannot become addicts without someone who enables them to continue their addiction. These enablers are in many cases spouses, parents, or close relatives and intimate friends. These people bail out addicts, for instance by believing in their lies, paying their debt, or throwing away bottles, etc. They also criticize and blame addicts, thus providing fuels and excuses for addicts to drink or gamble. "You always nag, that's why I go to card rooms." When these enablers start to fulfill obligations that addicts are supposed to do, they become addicts' co-dependents. The co-dependents are controlled by their futile effort to control addicts' behavior.

Addicts lie repeatedly, and co-dependents "buy" the lies repeatedly. If co-dependents believe in lies, at least for a brief moment, they can experience triumph—addicts stopped drinking, co-dependents' devotion was rewarded, and from now on everything will be fine! Mutual flows of talks between addicts and co-dependents are in fact monologues based on the former's lies. The latter try to control addicts' addiction and fail, repeatedly. For both of them to recover, they have to accept powerlessness, the former over their addiction, the latter over addicts' behavior.

For addicts to recover, they attend self-help group meetings, where they recall what they have done in the past. They tell their own stories of who they are, how they have become what they are, and how they will be in future. At the meetings, they not only tell their stories, but they listen to other participants' stories and recognize similarities in others. Others' stories become their own stories. They see themselves from others' viewpoints, in a sense they obtain reflexivity. Meeting is the place where addicts reclaim their identity. In their recovery process, they choose not to become slaves of alcohol or gambling, that is they obtain freedom to choose.