

## Behavior or Disease?

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[reprinted from the Summer, 1990, newsletter, PsychoHeresy Update]

When does behavior become disease? Certainly some behavior is sickening and may be called "sick" in a metaphorical sense. And there are certain neurological/brain diseases that affect behavior. But does that mean behavior itself can be diseased? Millions in America think so and the behavior-called-disease industry has mushroomed. In fact, according to the new definitions, everyone could be accused of having some form of this disease by at least one hungry psychotherapist, psychological counselor, psychiatric social worker, or addiction treatment group.

While the Bible clearly states that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), our psychological society has substituted the word sin with sickness, so that all are sick and come short of their highest potential. The disease concept has moved from physical disorders to so-called mental illness and to a broad spectrum of addictions, which include those labeled "codependent," who are supposedly addicted to those who are addicted.

Stanton Peele graphically illustrates the insanity of calling behavior "disease" in his excellent book *Diseasing of America: Addiction Treatment Out of Control*. He lists estimates of so-called experts to demonstrate how many people in our country suffer from such "diseases." Here are some of his approximate figures:

- 20 million addicted to alcohol.
- 80 million suffering from co-alcoholism (family members of alcoholics).
- 20 million addicted to gambling.

- 80 million suffering from eating disorders (30 million anorexic or bulimic and 50 million overweight).
- 75 million addicted to tobacco.
- 25 million addicted to love and/or sex.
- 50 million depressed and anxious (mostly women).
- 40 million suffering from PMS and postpartum depression. (p. 25)

According to this list, the number of people with behaviors-called-diseases adds up to a whopping 390 million. Those numbers exceed the population of the United States by about 140 million cases of disease, which until recently were not even considered disease. While some cases of depression may be due to brain/neurological abnormalities, the above figures have more to do with thinking and behaving than with brain chemicals and tissues.

Psychological therapists fuel the industry with propaganda and with new definitions of disease. And they feed their pockets through expensive treatment programs that have not yet proven themselves to be any more effective than no treatment at all. Peele says that addiction treatment programs "are regularly forced upon people, supposedly for their own good" and that people are "then persuaded that they have a disease, often through group-pressure techniques that closely resemble brainwashing." And while such psychological professionals claim to help people, the research indicates that more people get over these "diseases" without psychological treatment as with it. Peele even argues that treatment serves as "an impediment to the normal process of 'maturing out' of addiction," especially among teenagers and young adults. (p. 27)

Dr. Herbert Fingarette, a professor at the University of California and an internationally distinguished scholar, has written a book titled *Heavy Drinking: The Myth of Alcoholism as a Disease*. The subtitle tells what the book is about. In an essay published by Harvard University, Fingarette asks, "Why do heavy drinkers persist in their behavior even when prudence, common sense, and moral duty call for restraint?" Then he says:

"That is the central question in debates about alcohol abuse. In the United States (but not in other countries such as Great Britain) the standard answer is to call the behavior a disease, 'alcoholism,' whose key symptom is a pattern of uncontrollable drinking. This myth, now widely advertised and widely accepted, is neither helpfully compassionate nor scientifically valid. It promotes false beliefs and inappropriate attitudes as well as harmful, wasteful, and ineffective social policies." (H. Fingarette, "We Should Reject the Disease Concept of Alcoholism," *The Harvard Medical School Mental Health Letter*, Vol. 6, No. 8, February, 1990, p. 4.)

In concluding his essay, Fingarette says:

*"But the greatest scandal of the argument for the disease concept as a useful lie is the claim that it helps alcoholics by inducing them to enter treatment. On the contrary, both independent and government research show expensive disease-oriented treatment programs to be largely a waste of money and human resources." (p. 6)*

There is a very serious possibility that those who treat such "diseases" are doing more harm than good by calling addictions and other related behavior diseases. Peele says:

*"By revising notions of personal responsibility, our disease conceptions undercut moral and legal standards exactly at a time when we suffer most from a general loss of social morality. While we desperately protest the growth*

*of criminal and antisocial behavior, disease definitions undermine the individual's obligations to control behavior and to answer for misconduct.... Disease notions actually increase the incidence of the behaviors of concern. They legitimize, reinforce, and excuse the behaviors in question -- convincing people, contrary to all evidence, that their behavior is not their own. Meanwhile, the number of addicts and those who believe they cannot control themselves grows steadily. (Peele, pp. 27-28, emphasis added.)*

Besides the problems cited by Peele, calling behavior "disease" has a number of problems and consequences from a biblical perspective. The Bible identifies behavior as sinful or not sinful. Sinful behavior is also called the "works of the flesh." Drunkenness is listed among the works of the flesh along with a number of other behaviors. Paul lists them in Galatians 5:19-21: "Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like." Is drunkenness "disease"? Is adultery a "disease"? Or idolatry or wrath or murder? If Christians relabel those behaviors as diseases, they are saying that the Bible is not true, that it is antiquated and does not adequately address drunkenness and other problems of living. They are, in effect, calling God a liar.

In past centuries addictions were looked upon as sinful habits. Jesus came to save people from their sin and to enable them to overcome sinful behavior. Nevertheless, Christians are turning away from biblical words (drunkenness and sin) and embracing worldly words (alcoholism and addictions) and the disease mentality. There is hardly a Christian leader who has not bought into the Alcoholics Anonymous mentality and a Twelve-Step world view. Christian books on alcoholism (not called "drunkenness") and other addictions (not called "sinful habits") copy the world in both diagnosis and treatment, except that they engage God in their worldly explanations and admonitions.

Peele warns:

*"Disease conceptions of misbehavior are bad science and are morally and intellectually sloppy. Biology is not behavior, even in those areas where a drug or alcohol is taken into the body. Alcoholism involves a host of personal and environmental considerations aside from how alcohol affects the bodies of drinkers. Furthermore, once we treat alcoholism and addiction as disease, we cannot rule out that anything people do but shouldn't as a disease, from crime to excessive sexual activity to procrastination." (pp. 26-27)*

With "anything people do but shouldn't" labeled "disease," those who oppose Christianity may very well call prayer, worship, reading the Bible, faith in Jesus Christ, and obeying the Lord "diseases" or symptoms of a religious "disease." The organization Fundamentalists Anonymous is based upon the idea that strict Christianity (believing that Jesus is the only way and that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God) is a serious, debilitating addiction.

The psychotherapeutic and addiction industries are proliferating so rapidly that nearly every citizen will join the ranks of patients whether he wants to or not. George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four predictions of control through the Ministry of Love may come true a decade later than he thought, but they are on the horizon. In commenting on Orwell's book in 1983, psychology professor Dr. Philip Zimbardo says: "The current practitioners in our Ministry of Love come from the ranks of the mental health establishment (psychiatry and my own field, psychology), social welfare agencies, education and business." (P. Zimbardo, "Mind Control," On Nineteen Eighty-Four. Palo Alto: Stanford Alumni Association, 1983, 0. 210.) Seven years later, addiction treatment centers must be added to this list.

By embracing worldly ideas, Christians have put aside their armor. They have left themselves vulnerable, not only to temptation, but also to deceptions and weakness. Many can no longer resist sin because they

have relabeled it "disease" and feel helpless and overwhelmed without the help of addiction priests and addiction groups. Moreover, they lay themselves open to becoming captives of a world system that, underneath all the fine rhetoric, hates Jesus Christ and all who would follow Him to the cross.

I John 2:15-16 says:

*"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."*

And James 4:4 says that whoever "will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." Christians become friends with the world when they follow its psychological theories to understand themselves and others and to change behavior. They are friends of the world when they call sinful behavior "mental illness" and sinful habits "diseases."

### **The Codependent-No-More Message of Me-Myself-and I**

Along with AA and its Twelve-Step program comes a host of other "diseases," including that of "codependency." Built on premises of Al-Anon and first applied to spouses of alcoholics who supposedly enter into an addictive relationship with the alcoholic, the concept of codependency is now applied across the board to thousands of women who put their husbands and families before themselves.

Besides being a New York Times bestseller, Melody Beattie's book Codependent No More is a hot-selling item in Christian bookstores. Once again the ideas of the world are embraced by Christians. While those in the world may choose to put self on the throne, Christians are to put Christ on the throne. Thus there is a definite conflict between true Christianity and the philosophy/psychology promoted in codependency books and groups.

Although the psychological way continues to expand in the church, the Word of God will prevail. We pray that more and more Christians will recognize the dangers and wrest themselves from the grip of psychological theories and therapies. Moreover, we pray that men and women everywhere will draw closer to the Lord Jesus Christ and truly live by His life, His Word, and His Spirit.

May our Lord and Savior manifest Himself in and through you for His glory. And may He make you as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves as you live by His life and contend for the faith. For readers interested in further development of this and related topics, the books: *The Psychological Way/The Spiritual Way*,

*PsychoHeresy, Prophets of PsychoHeresy I* and *Prophets of PsychoHeresy II* are available through EastGate Publishers, 4137 Primavera Road, Santa Barbara , CA 92110. The newsletter PsychoHeresy Update is available through the same address.