

Presentation

A Metaphysical Approach to Addiction

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Note: I was excited for this opportunity, and assumed that this audience would love a fresh view of the world of addiction. WRONG! In fact, not only did no one in the audience ask questions afterwards, but I noticed that they deliberately avoided me in the hall. I should have known better. BTW: while I no longer use the word “God” so freely, I do still feel the thrumming of the entire panoply of existence as divine.

Introduction

Once, when I was a doctoral student in philosophy, I told my teacher I wanted to write a paper about the concept of “time.” “Time?” he sniffed. “I wouldn’t touch the subject. Too difficult.”

I wanted to understand time, and space, and our interaction with them. This quest drove me then, it drives me now. Anything else I study comes under this rubric, including the phenomenon of addiction, the subject of this presentation today.

Classical western philosophical studies did not satisfy me. They seemed too narrow, too confining. I was studying dead men’s ideas, and they weren’t going anywhere. Only one philosopher grabbed me, Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein despaired of ever being understood by his contemporaries. And he despaired of ever doing good philosophy

either, because, he said, what we philosophers seem to be doing is “running up against the walls of our cage.”

Within one year after receiving my doctoral degree I became a student of astrology. That was fourteen years ago, and I am still a beginner! Actually, this is not surprising. Astrology is what philosophy should be, could be, and was, originally. Astrology studies the entire universe, and our place within it. Given an infinite field, one’s knowledge is always infinitesimal. There are no cages here, no boundaries, and therefore no experts.

I come to you today as an astrologer who has noticed a very definite signature involving the planet “Neptune” in the birthcharts of those who are alcoholics. I have studied this phenomenon intensively, both myself, and in partnership with a psychological counselor who specializes in alcoholism. Together, we have given workshops on the subject.

I come to you today as a philosopher/astrologer who is fascinated by the phenomenon of addiction, not just in its tendency to suck the life force out of individuals, but as a tragic symptom of the disease that infects our dying western scientific and industrial culture.

My fascination is not only conceptual, it is personal. I was once married to an alcoholic. He has since died, of bleeding ulcers, of liver disease. And I am an addictive person myself. Who among us, is not? I was hooked on cigarettes, marijuana and sugar for fourteen years. Caffeine teaches me still; as we say, in an effort to give our slavish needs a veneer of sophistication, caffeine is my “drug of choice.”

I was addicted to Phil, my alcoholic husband, too. I wanted to help him, to save him, heal him. Instead, he almost took me with him down his spiral into hell. Phil was the greatest teacher I ever had. Thanks to him, I now know, in my gut, that I cannot control another human being.

My growing fascination with addiction is a sign of the times. As the old order breaks down, our addictions increase. Things fall apart. The center does not hold. Rather than being centered, we are self-centered. Instead of being and moving from our depths, we identify with appearances, and aim to get more, more, constantly feeding the

peripheries of our beings with what does not nourish. Hungry, desperate, we substitute the smaller order of our habits for the larger significance for which, unconsciously, we yearn.

In Jackson, we have hard bodies. We ride our bikes, we run, we kayak, we climb mountains, we ski down them. An endless round, seasonal changes dictating movement from one strenuous activity to another. Always, the goal is to do more, to go faster, steeper, conquering time and danger with control, nerve, and technical finesse. We live on the edge, addicted to the adrenaline rush, and a mental dominance over our own bodies.

It is my feeling that, in our fascination with addiction, both theoretical and in practice, we are, in fact, beginning to run up against the walls of our cage. The cage of the old world order, western scientific culture. Wittgenstein was right about philosophy. And classical philosophy is but the abstract description of western culture. What was formerly experienced as a vast and open space now feels pinched, limited, closed. Only we don't know it. We think everything is as it should be, as it has always been; but it isn't. Blindly, we feel the walls, moving along them, seeking an opening. Going round and round in circles, we cover the same ground, obsessed, bored: addicted. No way out. Frustrated, enraged, we pummel the walls with our fists. "I can solve this problem, I will get control of it!" The walls close in on us. We feel suffocated, panicky; lashing out, we smash, from the inside, the invisible boundaries of what I would like to call the metaphysical "sphere" that contains and embodies our current world view.

If we think of a world view as an invisible "sphere," and ourselves inside it, then once we have explored the limits of its "time" and its "space"; once we have begun to sense that our world view is not the universe, but rather, a closed, finite, system within it — then our continuing response to that system, while remaining inside it, can only be addictive. In addiction, we repeat ourselves: going round and round in circles, those circles tend to tighten with time. Digging our rut deeper and deeper, we get caught in a downward spiral. No way out.

No way out — unless we break out entirely. Our growing fascination with addiction is a sign of the times; it is also a portent for the future, a symbol of hope. As we run up

against the walls of our cage, they thin; inevitably, sooner or later, we push through them and are born — reborn — into a larger, more inclusive reality.

In my talk here today, I hope to inspire a vision for our future. I pray that when we walk out of this room, it will be with new eyes to see, new ears to hear, a new world within which we are beginning to live. I pray that as we settle into this larger space, we can look back, look down, and view the more limited space of addiction — as a whole.

Let us remember. The world we are leaving is ground we have already covered, and to which we have no need of return. We humans are explorers by nature. Our path is an ascending trajectory, an upward spiral, aiming for the stars.

It is by first visualizing, and then entering the larger sphere that we begin to systematically understand — and dismantle — the smaller sphere of addiction. A problem can be fully understood once we situate it within a context larger than itself. This way we gain distance, perspective; we learn to see this space from afar as a point within the larger space, and surround it with meaning.

To approach the phenomenon of addiction from a metaphysical perspective is to see it as a whole, as a figure upon a ground. Without the background context, there is no contrast, and the figure does not snap into place, as a form. But to do this takes a great leap of imagination. Indeed, we must smash through the walls of our cage even to grasp what I am saying here. This is not an easy business. This is perhaps the most important difficult business we have to conduct in our lifetimes. As Gregory Bateson said, towards the end of a long life filled with discovery, “Addiction is a nice problem, about which we know almost nothing — almost nothing formally. It is one of the big ones, on which civilizations rise and fall.”

Yes. Our addictive civilization is about to fall. And from its ashes will arise, phoenix-like, the new world.

The Fruits of Newtonian Science

From our point of view, the new, larger space we are about to enter is absolutely frightening. It feels infinite, limitless. Just thinking about it makes us confused, dizzy,

even nauseated. Like little children, when suddenly presented for the first time with an entire park to play in, we cling to what makes us feel secure. Yet we are excited too, quivering with eagerness to explore, to drink in with all our senses what it has to teach. Since we have not yet penetrated its reaches, we have not yet run up against the walls of its cage. No doubt they exist. Perhaps our children, seven generations hence, shall know them.

The old, western, narrowly scientific world view was once felt to be infinite, limitless, too. Three centuries ago, science was a vigorous new approach to perceiving and inhabiting reality. The goal was truth, and the method was to be inductive, objective. The murky medieval fog of superstition would gradually disappear, to be replaced by the clear light of Truth.

The result now, is not the big truth we were hoping for. Science did not replace God. Instead, we witness an endless stream of isolated facts — I call them “factoids,” as their half-lives are so short! — connected as dots via theoretical constructs, maps in the mind.

Three centuries ago there was plenty of time to roam, both inside the imagination, and outside, exploring the frontiers of the planet. The scientific world view helped us develop the linear, rational left brain into an extraordinary power. A power that, literally, changed the face of the earth through technology.

Now, instead of sensing mother earth, participating in her mystery, her eternally recycling fecundity, we observe her from afar, cameras and telescopes and microscopes inserted between our bodies and hers. Only rarely — on vacation! — do we walk barefoot on the earth, feeling her intricate and ticklish irregularities, warmed and cooled by soil’s reflected sun, our nervous system nourished and stimulated by shifting pressures underneath.

Usually, we don’t walk at all. There isn’t enough time, we think. Time for what? Time for our projects, time to reach our goals. Time for our straight line linear projections into a future which, unless we change our view of time, release that addiction too, will not exist!

The future, according to think tanks that view it as a set of straight line projections from the past, looks mighty bleak. The world's population grows by billions geometrically. The world's resources shrink in equal, and devastating proportion. By the year 2000 . . . but we don't want to think about the world in the year 2000. So we block it out, and concentrate on our selves, our projects, our success, here and now. Nervously stealing glances at our watches, we drive to our appointments in cars, or fly overhead, or lift off earth entirely, in rockets.

Instead of fully Being here, we Know, we Do. Instead of stopping, and listening, and truly feeling the ever-recurring subtle swell and subsidence of our own body's pain and joy, and that of our mother earth, we fend off those feelings, and treat ourselves as machines. Keeping a stiff upper lip, we pretend it's all okay. Yet secretly, in private, our mouths open to ingest more, more; we are distracting ourselves from a constant low level anxiety — a soul hunger — via an endless stream of addictions.

The power of the left brain has overreached itself. Asphalt and concrete pave the planet; our dear mother earth can no longer breathe! Pollution invades and corrupts air and water and soil. Defying our deepest animal instincts, we spoil our own nest! Pollution invades our bodies too. Our bodies are corrupted — and since we no longer feel them, we are unaware until it is too late. Our immune systems fail us. We feel we can no longer defend ourselves against what is out there. All the filth, all the fear. The more we fear, the more we stress our immune systems, the more susceptible we become to diseases of all kinds, and the less and less are we able to rally the deep instinctive life force of survival.

Our daring and imaginative investigation into the heart of the atom has been perverted, into the creation of nuclear technology for more and more power over both nature and ourselves. Our much vaunted "control" over nature has now run out of control, into the Bomb. The two bombs that destroyed two cities in Japan in 1945 have now mushroomed into 80,000. How many are enough? This question, for the addictive society, is irrelevant. There are never enough. The bomb is our final addiction. And our final clue, too. Certainly, bombs blow up cages. In contemplating that fact, we can see it as a symbol for what we need to do.

Our addictive society hungers, we ache, for true security. Like children, we are naïve. Still mesmerized by deadly war toys, we look to the outside to supply our inner needs. Real security will be found as we open ourselves up to who we really are. Breathing the same air, hearts beating in unison, we are one world, one community.

Two Kinds of Questions

Let us call the seemingly infinite sphere within which the smaller sphere of addiction is embedded the “spiritual world.” I think everyone here would agree that the psychological and sociological dynamics of addiction need to be viewed within a context that is spiritual in nature. The first two steps of the Twelve Step Program of AA have shown that to us. We must admit that our lives are out of our control. We must surrender ourselves to a Higher Power.

Little children come to us from God. They are still immersed in that other, larger and more mysterious reality. Children teach us, through their questions, to remember where we came from, who we are, where we are going.

“Mom?” — my son Colin, then three years old, came wandering into the kitchen, bouncing a ball: “Which is more real, my dreams or yesterday?”

What would you do when presented with Colin’s question? Would you try to answer it? What kind of answer would do?

There are two kinds of questions, factual and metaphysical. Factual questions can be answered, according to the rules and databases that belong to some kind of organized, recognized, and closed system. Metaphysical questions, on the other hand, are posits in infinity. To attempt to answer one is to pretend it arises from a finite, closed world. A world where the rules of its organization allow for only certain possibilities — even certain questions — as valid. A world wherein whatever does not fit its criteria is altered — co-opted — into something that does.

To attempt then, to answer a metaphysical question — that herald from and point to what lies beyond any closed world — is to betray the original intent of the question. All

we can do, and remain true to the value of Colin's question, is to honor it, expand upon it, attempt to explore it with him.

When I was six years old, and frustrated, I raised my hand during initial lessons in arithmetic. Trembling, terribly serious and shy, I asked my teacher, a Catholic nun, "But . . . what is a number?" The chalk, busily writing figures, stopped in midair. She turned and stared at me, long; so long my face burned. Finally, she muttered, "That is not a question, dear."

If that is not a question, then there are no questions that reach beyond the walls of our cage. If that is not a question, then there is no way out, and we are condemned, as history seems to show us, to repeat ourselves.

If what happens the first time is tragic, then the second time it is farce — Karl Marx. History — his story — is a farce! An endless boring story of war and rape and plunder, and it is still going on! History itself is an addiction, a constant repetition of the territorial struggle of one against all. We have been running around in circles, from one end of the globe to the other, getting nowhere. We have been distracting ourselves from our true purpose, our path on earth, which is, as Socrates said, to know ourselves. And in this ancient Greek view, such knowledge is virtue; and evil, mere ignorance.

Those who continue to fight with one another, to take from one another, to blame one another, are ignorant. Peace will come when we get down to business, and look inside. An infinity awaits us. The new frontier lies within.

Learning, says Socrates, is remembering, *re-membering*. Is putting ourselves back together again, with what we've always known. Even the original meaning of the word "education" reveals the Socratic message. The word, from the Latin, "educare," means, "to pull out, to draw forth." Not, notice, "to put in." Real learning has nothing to do with accumulating, but rather with a process of emptying ourselves of all trivial factual data and reentering that place of the spirit. The place from which we come, and that we've always known. To truly know our own deep selves, mystics have reminded us for centuries, is to reach into infinity and behold the face of God.

Current Science Is Mystical

Current scientific theory is finally catching up with mysticism. The universe, we are now told, is an infinite streaming of energy transformations. Matter converts to energy. Matter is energy, condensed. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as “materialism.” The foundations of our materialistic world rest on nothing, no thing, limitless energy.

Within the new mystical science, the world is structured hologramatically. The form of every part in it, no matter how tiny or insignificant, reflects the form of the whole. Macro meets micro. The two orders are one. The composition within a single atom mirrors that of an entire galaxy.

As above, so below, says the old Hermetic principle. And what links the two is our very selves. We stand midway between the very large and the very small. This is no metaphor. Within our protective skulls the tiny space that holds the vibrating pineal gland is both atomic and galactic. The link between the galaxy and the atom is nothing less than human!

At birth the human fontanel is open. Only thin skin covers the opening in the top of the skull. The pineal gland sits underneath this opening, in the center of the brain, composed of tissue like that of the optic nerve. Both are activated by light. Light hits the pineal gland at birth. We enter this planet in light; we come here, as Wordsworth said, “trailing clouds of glory, knowing all and everything.”

Within a year or two that fontanel has closed. Within seven years the plates of the skull fuse. From then on, we are on our own, cut off from the light, fully caught by gravity’s pull. Losing ourselves in the glamorous illusion of the physical world, eventually we will want to turn around, find our way back. Only we don’t know it. Gradually, we sink into “time” and “space” as our society has organized them. Gradually, we build that spherical bubble within which to live as a light being hidden within a body, while here, on earth.

In the view of Western medical science, the pineal gland has no known function, it is a useless vestige from an earlier evolutionary time.

Rene Descartes, however, back in the 17th century — and some would call him the philosophical founder of the age of science — viewed the pineal gland as the “Seat of the Soul,” the link between the visible and invisible worlds. Descartes further referred to this tiny ductless gland as our internal or “Common Sense.” Far cry from what we consider to be common sense! The only senses we recognize are private, and they exist on the surface of our beings. Within our so-called “common sense” we have no senses in common, no third eye. Nothing links us to others. No wonder we feel alienated. No wonder we build bombs. No wonder we have trouble appreciating our unity, our community.

Interestingly, classical philosophers today take everything Descartes said seriously, except his views on the pineal gland!

Nevertheless, certain Indian tribes still pick their future spiritual leaders from those children for whom the fontanel closes over late. Indians, and other aboriginal cultures, never do lose their original links with our larger natures.

The individual mirrors society

As above, so below. The addictive person mirrors the addictive society. Each addict who enters the process of recovery, who steps through the bars of the addictive cage, the veil of the finite closed system we have all trapped ourselves within, helps to heal us all. Likewise, as we fill our minds and hearts and spirits with a new vision of possibilities, the new endless and open world to come, we infuse others with that energy, and catalyze their recovery of what we have always known.

It is not surprising that not only individuals, but our whole society can be described as addictive. We begin that process of closing ourselves down to the larger sphere from which we come by the way we are trained as children. By pretending that all children’s questions can be answered, by treating all questions as if they are factual, we assume a finite, closed world — and assure our children’s slide into addiction later on, once the limits of that world are reached. We destroy all possibility of wonder, discovery, gratitude at the glory which both surrounds and lives within us. We despise and fear and make fun of those grand transformations — where we step, automatically, through the

veil — and which everyone whose heart is still beating undergoes at least three times in life.

- At birth. When we push through that long dark tunnel into the light — into high intensity artificial light, unfortunately; a first clue as to what awaits us. Then we are spanked!

- At puberty. When the miraculous ability to create new life suddenly blossoms within. Parents don't know what to do with us. Determined to keep our feet on the ground, they "ground" us. (To be "grounded" then, becomes something to avoid. Our avoidance of earth begins early on.) To curb our imaginations, they talk to us sternly. And, it seems, no matter what we do in our efforts, during that short, explosive time, to make sense of life, they shake their heads, lips pursed, disappointed.

- At death. When again we enter a long dark tunnel into the light. A light that has overlit our lives all along, only we don't know it until we give this life up. A light that could enhance our lives, could be a shining star to which we owe allegiance, and/or to which we strive, endlessly, to perfect ourselves while here.

Why are we so afraid?

Why are we so afraid of stepping through the veil? What are we afraid of, really? The remark of one woman still stands out vividly in memory. She was sitting forlornly at the piano in an empty bar early one morning. Stale smoke hung in the air. "This is my second day without cigarettes," she said, eyes nervous, darting. Her walls were beginning to thin. The woman was terrified. "There are so many empty spaces," she whispered, shaking her head in fear and confusion, "so many empty spaces."

I suspect that what makes us tremble so is our fear of empty space, of infinity, the void. Seemingly by instinct, we see it as a nightmare, as in those dreams at night, where we fall, endless, through space, screaming, and wake up with a start, paralyzed.

Philosophers fear it, they call it the fallacy (sic) of the "infinite regress." Colin, however, doesn't fear it. Once, when his older brother Sean came home from his Catholic kindergarten, he stood in the kitchen doorway and asked me, as if he already

knew the answer, “Hey Mom, who made the world?” Well,” I said, wanting in my answer to not foster an already incipient dogmatism, “some people say God made the world.” My qualified answer unsettled Sean, which is what I intended. Then three year old Colin, nonchalantly bounding a ball, piped up, “Yeah, and another god made that god and another god made that god . . . there are lottsa gods!”

As a graduate student I had to take a course called formal “Boolean” logic. In this kind of logic, there’s a move you’re not supposed to ever make. You can’t ever say A equals not-A. Contradictions are not allowed. Most students took this structure for granted. I, on the other hand, wanted to know why, and one day got up the nerve to ask the teacher. The question unnerved him. He became agitated, crying out: “Because, if we allow contradiction, then anything follows. Anything is possible, *anything!*” To him this was a horrible situation to contemplate. To me, it is a clue to what we must do to break out of our cages.

Rather than awaken to the vastness — emptying ourselves into the continuum, where all feelings flow as one, where there is no separation, and we are one, one community, one world — we prefer to bind time and space, creating singular and separate egos and their projects, and then live within that, taking that, that puny simulacrum, for reality.

Rather than, like the ancients, gazing into the vastness of the night sky, opening into ourselves the dark pregnant spaces among the shining stars, we look down, make sure we don’t stumble, watch the signs, obey the rules, get on and off the highway according to commuter schedules day by day. And at night, beneath the shining starry sky, we sit under roofs in houses, exhausted, numb, watching television. Our laughter is canned. Our smiles are video. There is no magic. God is not present here.

No wonder we are addictive! No wonder we turn to some substance, or some small behavioral process, as a fetish, a substitute for what we have lost. We crave the larger order, pattern, meaning, purpose, significance. We have not found it in a world fat, and flat, with facts. All we have is the smaller order of our habits. They help define us, keeping the outside out and the inside in — we hope. We are in control — we hope. But we can’t help it. We are hungry, we want more. So we smoke more, or drink more, or

gather more money, or more success, or fame, or property. But to no avail. It does not satisfy. Something is missing. Something. What? We don't remember. There's only a vague feeling, a sort of itch. We scratch it. It doesn't go away. We scratch it again. We bleed.

Meanwhile, outside — and inside, way down deep — the stars wink and glow and stream forth endlessly, endless fiery energy. This energy fumes deep at the core of our mother earth. This energy fumes deep in our human hearts.

Our hearts are full with feeling — frozen feeling. Our hearts beat as one, each beat counting down — to one. We are volcanoes. And we are about to blow — creatively, or otherwise.

Let us dare to step into the void. Let us look infinity in the eye and bow to her larger substance. Let us acknowledge our deeper selves and go forth, with God, into the wilderness that is our unknown nature.

Aboriginal peoples live their lives in accordance with nature. They participate in the life of a cosmos both mysterious and unknown, and also vast and regular in its motions, ordering their lives in a way which has both beauty and complexity. Sleep and waking cycles are governed by the daily rotation of the planet upon which they live. Planting and harvesting cycles are timed to the annual changing relations between sun and earth, the equinox and solstice points serving as grand structural markers, climaxing periods of time, ending one and beginning another. Human celebrations are timed in accordance with these natural ceremonies, the part reflecting the whole, the inside mirroring the outside, the way of the above corresponding to the way down here below. Aboriginals are natural mystics. As we all are, at birth, and often are, at puberty, and again, at death. The larger world does intrude upon the smaller one at least at these points. It could do so forever. It could do so now.

Love steers the stars

Ancient man's flow in harmony with the larger universe was read by learned ancient astrologers. The heavens declared the glory of God, and God lived among them.

Warming them as golden light in endless blue by day; enveloping them with infinite inky black by night, its depths broken by tiny points of light circling the earth in ever-changing patterns of regularity. The longer the ancients watched, the more regularity appeared. Long cycles held smaller ones, gave them context, meaning, significance.

Within the cycle of one human life are embedded many smaller cycles, each of them with its own purpose, its own point. As each of these cycles completes itself, there arises a feeling of closure, satisfaction, significance; that profound sense of safety and rightness which comes from bowing to necessity, in obedience to inner laws of being and becoming.

The longer we live, the longer are the cycles we encompass; the more humble and compassionate we become as we see/feel the patterns of our experience as a whole, and how similar our patterns are to those of others'. The longer we live, the more energy we can contain and express at will: our personal wills surrender to the whole; we dedicate ourselves in service to the universal order.

The cycle of human life as a whole is embedded within an infinity of larger cycles, concentric rings, spheres of meaning, radiating out from the center, our centerpoint. Our sensing of these larger cycles is an attunement to mystery, to magic, to miracle. In surrendering to what these cycles teach us, we release our small egos, the cage created by binding space and time, and embrace the unknown. This is faith, faith in the substance of things unseen, faith in the larger order, faith in God.

That center point within us, that small still point of a turning world, when looked at from close to, reveals a hole, vast and dark and mysterious. As we direct the searchlight of consciousness into that void, we ourselves are illumined, and all is one. All is love. Love steers the stars.

The movement from the smaller addictive sphere into the larger mystical vision is imminent. I speak literally here. What has been the province of isolated individuals in the past is to become a mass cultural event. Nothing less will do. The condition of both the planet and the human spirit demand it. The miracle is at hand.

