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Addiction or Personal Responsibility?

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Dr. Theodore Dalrymple [actually the pen name for Anthony (A.M.) Daniels, M.D.] offers another article debunking the addiction hypothesis in *The Times* [London]. Dr. Dalrymple is a prison doctor and psychiatrist who writes with extraordinary insight and clarity.

From the article:

In other words, in so far as there is a causative connection between addiction and criminality, it is that criminality — or whatever predisposes people to it — causes addiction and not addiction that causes criminality.

And:

It is not true that heroin addicts take a couple of doses and then find themselves enslaved. On the contrary, addicts usually spend a year or so taking heroin intermittently before they decide to take it regularly. It would be truer to say that they hook heroin, than that (as they usually put it, in order to deny their own responsibility) they are hooked by heroin. It is simply implausible to suggest that addicts become addicted by inadvertence or ignorance: the vast majority of the addicted come from backgrounds in which ignorance of history and arithmetic is perfectly possible, but not ignorance of the heroin way of life.

Is any great harm done by pretending that opiate addiction is a disease like any other? After all, a portion of mankind will always resort to mind- altering drugs to obscure the existential problems that confront us all. Certainly methadone when prescribed carelessly — as it is in Britain — is a dangerous drug, and can cause nearly as many deaths as heroin itself.

There is a more intangible harm, however, to the pretence: the existence of drug clinics sends a message to addicts that they are ill and in need of treatment rather than they have chosen a disastrous path in life. It conceals from people their responsibility for their own lives, a responsibility we all find irksome at times, but acceptance of which is the only basis of a meaningful life.

Personal responsibility — now *that* is a courageous prescription in these times.

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