Clarion Review

Health & Fitness

The Essentials of Chemical Dependency: Toward a Unified Theory of Addiction

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Five Stars (out of Five)

If you ask an addict why he takes drugs he is likely to say that he likes or enjoys them. To someone who has witnessed an addict's behavior that may seem astounding even impossible but it's true. In *The Essentials of Chemical Dependency* the McAuliffes have examined and isolated the essential factors of addiction—those characteristics which all addictive behaviors have in common. The most amazing characteristic of all is that addiction is a love relationship. Robert and Mary McAuliffe have defined it this way: "Chemical dependency is essentially a committed pathological love relationship to a mood altering chemical substance."

The first edition of *The Essentials of Chemical Dependency* grew out of materials assembled for a college course that trained specialists in chemical dependency treatment. This book is the second edition expanded and improved. It examines in detail the nature of chemical dependency its pathology its causes and its diagnosis.

The McAuliffes conclude that chemical dependency is a disease. Some would say it is a choice but choice does not apply to the addict. It applies only before addiction. Once the love commitment is made reason and choice are not available. The shift is made to emotional compulsion. The addict is now in the grip of an emotional commitment that warps reason and restricts freedom of choice. A rigid defense system is also produced warding off any interference with the addict's behavior. And the seal is set to the situation by delusion. The addict's perception of reality is distorted which further impairs his reason and judgment. If these elements were mildly present in a love relationship between a man and a woman it would be normal even comical. But in a love relationship to a chemical it is disastrous producing a debilitating downward spiral toward both personal and social disorder and destruction.

"We know *that* things are when we perceive them directly in their existential reality" the authors write. "But our minds do not rest with knowing that things are; we are not mentally

comfortable until we come to know *why* things are." Along with providing the specifics of chemical dependency the McAuliffes have also supplied an excellent view into how the mind works. In the process of describing chemical dependency we are also shown an excellent model of mental processes: intellect and emotion reason and will freedom and dependence. The truth of the principles discovered in examining chemical dependency is shown by their application to other domains. Though the book is specifically about drug addiction the value of these insights into psychological processes is considerable.

The Essentials of Chemical Dependency is not a self-help book designed for popular entertainment. It is scientific in its thorough approach and to the average reader may seem a bit redundant as it examines every facet of the addict's attitudes and behaviors. However those who are willing to make the effort can gain a deep understanding of these baffling aberrant behaviors. This would be an excellent choice for a college text.

David George