

DRUG ABUSE, HUMAN NATURE AND SPIRITUALITY: EXPLORING THE CONNECTIONS

Celestine C. Ozor and Simeon C. Dimonye, Ph.D

Department of Philosophy
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

ozorcelestine43@gmail.com; simeon.dimonye@unn.edu.ng;

DOI:13140/RG.2.2.20708.80001

Abstract

Drug abuse is the result of 'some bizarre' changes or experiences within the victim. These changes are considered bizarre due to the victim's ignorance of the basic truth about human nature and the place of spirituality in the human life project. If these changes were understood from their right perspectives, perhaps the attitude of the victim of drug abuse would have been radically different — one that would not lead to the unfortunate end of drug abuse and its negative concomitants. This paper explores how the basic truth about human nature and the place of spirituality in the human life project might interface with the chances of a person getting entangled in drug abuse/addiction. The study employed phenomenology and critical analysis methods: first, to examine the experience of drug abuse from the third-person perspective, and second, to analyze the experience with the notions of human nature and spirituality as critical imperatives. The study concludes that what the victims of drug abuse are experiencing in the act is a misguided and misdirected attempt to fill the void that exists in every human person, which only knowledge about human nature and spirituality can fill when followed up with the right condition. The study is particularly instructive for the youth who, by virtue of their age, might have very limited knowledge about these spheres of life.

Keywords: Addiction; Drug Abuse; Human Condition; Human Spirituality; Victim; Youth

Introduction

The term 'drug' encompasses two distinct yet interrelated connotations. Positive usage of the term denotes substances, whether naturally occurring or synthetically produced, utilized for medicinal purposes. On the negative, drug refers to criminalized substances used for recreational purposes, performance enhancement, or simply due to one's inability to stop using them. Hence, the negative connotation of 'drug' is intricately linked to illicit activities and addictive tendencies. It often extends beyond substance misuse to include even compulsive behaviors. It refers to "any activity that you cannot stop doing; e.g.: work is a drug for him" (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 3rd Edition, e-copy). This dual interpretation draws attention to the link between medicinal applications of drugs and their abuse or misuse. It highlights the adverse implications of substance abuse and addiction in contrast to the positive therapeutic interventions aimed at improving the quality of life. Thus, the term "drug abuse" refers to the harmful misuse of substances meant for helpful therapeutic purposes.

Drug abuse can lead to a numbing of sensory perception and a blunting of moral consciousness. Examples of substances classified as (hard) drugs include cocaine, heroin, opium, marijuana, methylamphetamine (mkpuru-mmiri), and similar substances. Some drugs exist in a gray area between positive and negative connotations. These are referred to as prescription medications, and access to them is restricted to those receiving medical treatment under a doctor's prescription. Compared to over-the-counter pharmaceuticals, which may be bought without a prescription from a doctor, this category of prescription drugs is different. People who abuse drugs on a regular basis are often called druggies or addicts. Drug pushers are people who deal in illegal drug sales. It is important to note that a druggist refers to a trained professional, typically a chemist or pharmacist, who dispenses and sells medications within a retail setting.

The issue of drug abuse, particularly among young people, encompasses various facets that warrant exploration. These include looking into the origins and consequences of drug usage, understanding the connection between drug abuse and culture, and understanding how people are exposed to drugs. In addition, it involves the investigation of ways to address the problem and the provision of care, support, and rehabilitation for those who are affected while, at the same time, examining drug abuse demographics and classification. It also involves theories that shed light on drug abuse, evaluate the impact of environmental factors on drug abuse, research how drug-related issues are spread globally, investigate the relationship between drug abuse and governmental policies, and address ethical issues surrounding drug abuse, among other things. However, this study focuses on comprehending drug abuse through phenomenological and philosophical anthropological lenses. It delves into questions regarding the nature of man and seeks to explain why individuals engage in drug abuse. While drawing insights from various dimensions of the drug abuse discourse, the primary objective is to philosophically analyze the underlying motivations that drive different instances of drug abuse, with an inclination towards offering prescriptive solutions rather than solely descriptive accounts.

To achieve its goal, this paper will adopt the methodology that will comply with the following outline. Starting with the definitions of drug abuse, it will delve into the causes of drug abuse. The third section will explore the concomitants of drug abuse and the oddities connected in addition to that. Then, the study will proceed to investigate the philosophical anthropological understanding of the human person – the victim of drug abuse. The fifth section is constituted of a second look at drug abuse, this time from the prism of critical theory. After that comes the phenomenological re-evaluation of the subject matter. The study will be capped up with the conclusion embodying some recommendations as to the way forward. At this juncture, the paper will have achieved its goal of logically demonstrating the connection between the preponderance of drug abuse among the youths and the dearth of true knowledge of the human nature as well as its spiritual undertone. Let's begin by defining our subject matter.

The Definitions, Causes, and Concomitants of Drug Abuse

Drug abuse is defined as the systematic, excessive, and frequently obsessive use of psychoactive substances in a way that is not in accordance with accepted medical norms.

This includes both illegal and prescription drug usage. This behavior typically involves the misuse of drugs for non-therapeutic purposes, leading to harmful consequences on an individual's physical health, mental well-being, and social functioning, not minding the negative implications that may result from such behavior (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024). Olatuwara and Odejide (1974) define drug abuse as the self-administered use of substances outside of medical necessity, often in amounts and frequencies that impair effective functioning and lead to potential physical, social, and emotional detriment. Substances that are often abused are anabolic steroids used by athletes to boost muscle growth, which can cause health problems; psychotropic substances, which alter mental states, such as opium derivatives, hallucinogens, barbiturates, cocaine, amphetamines, tranquilizers, various forms of cannabis, and alcohol (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024).

Given that drug abuse, as recognized by Campos et al. (2022), poses a serious threat to global health, it is imperative to comprehend the complex and interconnected causes of drug abuse in order to develop effective prevention and intervention strategies to address it at the individual, community, and societal levels. The causes of drug abuse are many. It includes situations in which people unintentionally develop a negative use pattern, dependence, or addiction to drugs that a doctor has prescribed for them. It also includes intentional drug use for non-medical purposes, such as performance enhancement and recreation, that deviates from the drugs' intended pharmaceutical utility. The former finds expression in cases where, for instance, a person treating pain with medications like tramadol develops an addiction to the drug due to its psychoactive effects. This person, hence, continues taking the medication even when the pain for which it was prescribed has been resolved. The latter, on the other hand, occurs when people, by their own volition and without any prescription, take psychoactive substances for the sole purpose of altering their state of mind. Yang (2019) finds that drug abusers, in the latter sense of the expression, have two major motives. These motives are determined by the age and stage of life of the abuser, which, in turn, determines the kind of drugs abused. The younger population, Yang observes, is more inclined to abuse synthetic drugs due to their tendency to act as stimulants that energize users, leading to heightened activity and a desire to engage in various tasks, resulting in excitement, heightened sexual arousal, and increased talkativeness. The study found a reduced propensity to abuse synthetic drugs among older people who instead tilt more towards less-synthetic opioids like heroin due to its characteristic of inducing feelings of relaxation, tranquillity, drowsiness, or forgetfulness.

The above insights trace the root cause of drug abuse to the desire to alter one's mental state, either as a mood boost or as a suppressant of the vividness of the inherent worries that are tied to being alive, which often pushes itself to the forefront of our consciousness. Hence, people take drugs to feel good, either by enhancing their otherwise dulled mood or by masking and numbing their feelings of worry and anxiety over the vicissitudes of life. As such, drug abuse is more or less a coping mechanism for many of the abusers.

However, societal influences—which include factors like family relationships, peer pressure, and cultural norms—have a big impact on the abuse of drugs. Exposure to drug use within one's social sphere or community, coupled with a lack of positive role models or

adequate social support, can contribute to the initiation and perpetuation of drug abuse. This is particularly common among young people. This phenomenon elucidates why recreational drug abuse, such as cannabis consumption, often occurs within social circles or cliques of young people. Hence giving rise to the misguided adage among young cannabis users that "a friend with weed is a friend indeed." In a similar vein, youngsters raised in areas where drug use is prevalent have an increased risk of substance abuse problems.

While using illegal drugs might raise dopamine levels and momentarily activate the brain's reward system, the long-term negative effects of drug usage much outweigh these brief benefits (NIDA, 2018). Positive self-improvement, improving our surroundings, and cultivating connections are generally the things that the brain's reward system pushes us toward because they inherently result in satisfying experiences. However, when drugs artificially trigger feelings of reward that should stem from genuine accomplishments, it disrupts our innate drive for personal growth. Long-term drug use causes the brain to get accustomed to these unnatural stimuli, which increases the desire for drugs in order to maintain the rewarding feeling. Consequently, people might take more drugs in an attempt to experience the same satisfaction again, which could lead to addiction. According to NIDA (2018), addiction affects a number of cognitive processes, including memory, learning, decision-making, and stress management.

Drug abuse has the capacity to significantly influence negatively, one's mental health and lead to a wide range of grave consequences. Examples of this include the development of mental health conditions like suicidal thoughts and feelings, depression, anxiety, hallucinations, and volatility of mood. A recent World Health Organization report emphasizes the complex relationship between substance addiction and mental illness, as well as the fact that co-occurring mental health concerns are frequently experienced by those who battle with substance use disorders. Conversely, substance use disorders are more likely to develop in people with mental health diseases (WHO, 2022). Furthermore, the study emphasizes that substance misuse and mental health disorders significantly increase the likelihood of engaging in suicide behaviors, highlighting the vital significance of addressing these interconnected problems in a holistic manner.

Furthermore, drug misuse has detrimental effects on interpersonal interactions within families and social circles, in addition to its harmful effects on an individual's health. Drug misuse puts a burden on relationships that frequently results in breakdowns in trust, communication, and general cohesiveness among friends and family. These divisions can have long-lasting effects on the affected person as well as their social network as a whole, and they can be challenging to mend. Furthermore, the stigma associated with drug usage makes these problems worse since people may feel alone and hesitant to get the help they need. Legally, drug abuse has significant implications. Penalties for drug abuse can range from fines to jail time, and these have the potential to alter people's lives and opportunities significantly. Such legal issues could have a lasting impact on a person's capacity to obtain employment, pursue their educational dreams, and, in certain situations, obtain lawful immigration status. As a result, the effects of drug abuse go far beyond one's own health to include social, legal, and professional ramifications that call for thorough consideration

and response.

A Philosophical Anthropological Understanding of Drug Abuse

The exploration of man's essence and his potential for flourishing, aligned with his rational essence, hinges upon a comprehensive and coherent understanding of his intrinsic nature. Philosophical anthropology, as a branch of philosophy, embarks on this endeavor to comprehensively study the authentic essence of man, recognizing him as a multifaceted being whose essence can be examined through various lenses, such as culture, religion, politics, history, and social interactions. Philosophical anthropology, often interchangeably referred to as the Philosophy of Man, engages in critical rational inquiry into the essence of man — anthropos. The central question of this investigation is what it really means to be human. It is entwined with questions about personhood and selfhood, exploring the nature of the self and the idea of personhood itself. In his timeless dictum "Man Know Thyself," Socrates underlined the centrality of self-awareness and understanding in human existence.

However, drug abuse starkly illustrates a distortion or outright absence of self-awareness on the part of the abuser. A profound understanding of the consequences of drug abuse would dissuade individuals from engaging in such harmful behavior, echoing Socrates' observation that no one willingly commits evil acts but does so out of ignorance or misguided beliefs about what constitutes goodness (Plato, 2019). This dichotomy between knowledge and ignorance is foundational, as knowledge is inherently virtuous while ignorance leads to vice (Russell, 2010). The drug abuser, albeit unknowingly, responds to an innate need to nurture the spiritual facet of his existence. However, due to cognitive distortions, this need is fulfilled through means that are not only inappropriate but also detrimental to his well-being — akin to consuming toxic sustenance to satiate hunger, which paradoxically highlights man's inherent urge to nourish the physical body. The sought-after well-being through drug abuse is only attainable through a life where the spiritual dimension of man is comprehended and accorded its rightful place in human existence. It is this profound understanding that eludes the drug abuser, leading to the perpetuation of harmful behaviors and consequences stemming from a lack of true self-awareness and knowledge.

Man as a Spiritual Being

The mention of spirituality often provokes the idea of religion. This has resulted in many philosophers preferring to use the expression "mind" to refer to the immaterial aspect of the human being. Some others use the term soul. However, "soul," just like "spirit," provokes a sense of religion, resulting in many avoiding it. While the human mind, soul, and spirit are sometimes used interchangeably as they all refer to that dimension of the human being, which is immaterial and simple — not extended in space — they have their key differences. The soul is that which animates the body (Aristotle, 2021). Hence, "the soul is the first grade of actuality of a natural organized body ... It is substance in the sense which corresponds to the definitive formula of a thing's essence. That means that it is the 'the essential whatness' of a body." (Aristotle, 2001, *De Anima*, Bk II, Par 412b, lines 1-15). It is that which makes any organism alive, such that when gone, the organism ceases to live. As

Jose and Francesco (2018) rightly aver, the soul continues to animate the body even when the manifestations of life are not discernable, such as when a living thing is in an inactive state — hibernation, for instance. In such a state, a sustaining force still exists that maintains life. This is what is designated as the soul or "anima" in Latin, and it distinguishes living entities as animate and non-living ones as inanimate. This implies that having a soul is not a quality exclusive to man. Other living things have souls insofar as they remain animated and sustained in life by something other than their extended physical bodies. The unity of the soul and body forms a singular entity known as the living being. This is evident in the rapid cessation of movement and commencement of decomposition following death (Jose and Lambo, 2018).

Spirituality, however, applies exclusively to the human soul. This is because the human soul is different from the souls of other animals. The question then arises: what is it about the human soul that differentiates it from those of other organisms such that it bestows a special status — spirituality — to it? Jose and Francesco (2018) make this distinction between the human soul and those of other organisms by pointing out its key uniqueness:

1. The rationality faculty: this allows individuals to engage in intricate cognitive processes, abstract reasoning, and introspection. This capability makes complex thought patterns possible. It also fosters the exploration of abstract concepts and the pursuit of a deeper comprehension of one's own existence. Therefore, rationality forms the cornerstone for contemplating the transcendental dimensions of human existence. It is through the lens of rationality that individuals navigate the complexities of the human experience, seek transcendent truths, and endeavor to unravel the mysteries of consciousness, morality, and the true nature of reality.
2. Self-awareness: Humans exhibit an elevated level of self-awareness. This encompasses an understanding of their own thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and sense of identity. This heightened self-awareness affords individuals the capacity to delve into their inner experiences, contemplate the intricacies of meaning and purpose, and cultivate a more profound comprehension of themselves. Through this introspective lens, individuals can embark on journeys of self-discovery, seeking to unravel the complexities of their inner experiences while forging meaningful connections between their identity and the other dimensions of their being. This phenomenon of self-awareness not only enhances one's introspective capabilities but also fosters a deeper engagement with existential questions, ethical considerations, and the pursuit of transcendental truths.
3. Moral Consciousness: The concept of the human soul intertwines with moral consciousness. Moral consciousness involves a rich tapestry of values, ethical considerations, and a nuanced sense of morality encapsulating notions of right and wrong. This moral dimension inherent to the human soul serves as a guiding force

that influences human behavior. It informs decision-making processes and shapes the ethical choices individuals make in their lives. This intricate interplay between the soul and moral consciousness underscores the intricate nature of human as a spiritual being, emphasizing the intrinsic connection between personal values, ethical frameworks, and the quest for moral clarity and integrity. Through the lens of moral consciousness embedded within the soul, individuals navigate complex ethical dilemmas, grapple with ethical decision-making, and seek to align their actions with a deeper understanding of ethical imperatives.

4. Transcendence: Humans possess an inherent capacity for transcendence, which refers to their ability to surpass the limitations of their immediate physical and material existence. Through transcendence, humans establish connections with higher realities, universal truths, or transcendental dimensions of their being. This enables individuals to experience profound moments of awe, wonder, and expansion that extend beyond the constraints of the material world. It encompasses a dynamic process of reaching beyond the mundane and delving into deeper meaning and existential contemplation. Through transcendence, individuals tap into realms of consciousness that are beyond ordinary perception, facilitating experiences that evoke a sense of interconnectedness with broader cosmic forces, universal truths, or divine realities. This capacity for transcendence fosters personal growth and spiritual development.

Critics like Paul Taylor (2011) challenge the notion of human superiority by arguing that attributes such as rationality, moral consciousness, and self-awareness, often cited as indicators of human superiority, do not inherently make humans superior or confer any special status upon them. Taylor contends that rationality and other anthropomorphic qualities are essential characteristics of humans, and individuals lacking these traits cannot be considered good humans. He draws attention to the fact that humans lack certain physical attributes found in other species, such as a cheetah's speed or a monkey's agility. Yet, we do not view these creatures as superior solely based on these qualities.

While Taylor presents a compelling argument against human superiority, he falls short in justifying his assertion that humans are not special. Even if we concede that rationality and other human attributes do not confer superiority, it is reasonable to argue that humans possess unique qualities that make them special. Possessing certain features or abilities not found in other species is sufficient to characterize humans as special beings. This acknowledgment does not diminish the uniqueness or specialness of other animals in their own right. However, humans claim spiritual designation as their prerogative, rooted in their distinct attributes.

Taylor overlooks the underlying reasons for the differentiation in qualities between humans

and animals, which serve both individual and collective purposes within the natural order. The unique qualities attributed to humans suggest a capacity to reign supreme and exert dominance over other creatures.

In contrast, the concept of 'mind' emerged in the 20th century as a way to move away from the ancient notion of the soul, or at least to detach from its religious implications. English philosophers utilize the concept of 'mind' to denote the non-material aspect of the human being without invoking religious or theological connotations (Njoku, 2010). This concept finds significant usage in fields like psychology and scientific inquiry, providing a framework to understand the immaterial dimension of human existence within the scientific paradigm.

The Nexus Between Spirituality and Religion

While it can rightly be said that “spirit” or the “spiritual” is a category of religion, it may be misleading to take it as given without properly explaining the import of the word religion beyond the usual infantile understanding of the term as a sect. This is particularly important in the face of the growing popularity of the statement “I am spiritual, not religious” among young people on social media. This statement is a direct consequence of this reductionistic conceptualization of religion as nothing other than a sect. What these young people mean by the aforementioned statement is that they acknowledge the existence of a supreme being but do not want to be identified with any of the religious groups — Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, ATR, etc. This is usually in response to what many young people have come to identify as wrong practices among some of the adherents of these religious groups.

Religion, however, refers to man's acknowledgment of his limitations and finitude and his recognition of and longing for a reality that transcends him. It designates the act of man opening up to a reality beyond him. This reality is what some people refer to as God. St. Anselm, referring to the natural propensity of man to open up to that which is beyond him, insists that the human being is not sufficient unto himself and, as a result, cannot be the source of his own wholeness. The human being, he continues, is fallible and finite and must find his true fulfillment in a union with that which is infallible and infinite. (St. Anselm, Letter 136). This suggests that there is always a sense of vacuum inherent in man that always yearns to be filled by something not only external but superior, as it were, to man. St. Augustine made a similar declaration in his Confessions when he cried out thus: “You made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” (St. Augustine, 1986, 13).

However, the acknowledgment of the existence of God is not necessary for one to be considered religious, for it is not unreasonable for one to acknowledge his yearning for a reality beyond his finitude while denying that such reality is God. What makes one religious is his recognition of the fact that he is a limited being and that something beyond him exists regardless of what sense he makes of the true nature of this being. Many people find this reality (that transcends them) in different things. For instance, a humanist finds his in humanity. He understands that he is a finite, limited member of humankind — a reality that transcends him— which he cannot do without but not vice-versa. Humanity existed before

his emergence and will continue to exist and thrive long after his death. Hence, humanity becomes that which he opens up himself to. He aligns himself with humanistic ideals and casts his faith and hopes on the human project. He recognizes himself as a tiny contributor to an enduring reality — humankind.

Another conceptualization of religion designates it as an unreserved involvement in/with something. In this sense, we speak of things like “studying religiously,” “working religiously,” etc. Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary says, that “Religion is [conceived informally as] an activity which someone is extremely enthusiastic about and does regularly. Example: *Football is a religion for these people*”. It refers to deep and unreserved attention to something—a level of attention only a human can give. Therefore, man is a religious creature who must activate his dependence on a transcendental reality as part of his steps to living a meaningful and fulfilling life to be happy and achieve his total well-being. This is the essence of religion, which the victims of drug abuse often tend to ignore.

The Condition of the Drug Abuser

As Earlier stated, what is manifested in drug abuse is an inherent yearning in man (the drug abuser) to satisfy a need. Against the backdrop of the preceding, a question could be raised thus, “How do we understand man, viz a vis drug abuse?” in other words, what is the drug abuser doing (unknowingly) when they abuse drugs? The answer to this resides in evaluating the condition of the drug abuser against those elements on the basis of which spirituality is predicated of the human soul. Does drug abuse enhance or impede the rationality, self-awareness, moral consciousness, or auto-transcendence of the abuser? Let us quickly assess this:

Rationality — Rationality plays a pivotal role in enabling individuals to lead lives characterized by dignity and ethical comportment. This dignity is evident in various aspects of human behavior, including the ability to make informed and reasonable decisions, maintain meaningful relationships with oneself and others, and exhibit a sense of decorum and responsibility. Conversely, the life of a drug abuser contrasts this ideal of dignified rationality. It demonstrates a compromised capacity to project such dignity. While under the influence of substances, the abuser experiences a notable deterioration in self-comportment, leading to unguarded and often demeaning expressions or actions that deviate from their usual rational conduct. For instance, the influence of alcohol can dampen all sense of decorum, prompting behaviors that are inconsistent with their rational nature, such as engaging in unsafe or reckless activities. This loss of rational control can result in self-harm and infliction of harm on loved ones. This is particularly a result of drug-induced impulsivity, which leads to rash decisions that undermine personal well-being and strain relationships. The erosion of respect and responsibility further breaks down interpersonal relationships, hindering the mutual nurturing of friendships and supportive relationships essential for a dignified and fulfilling life.

Self-awareness — Drug abuse has a profound impact on an individual's self-awareness, with certain substances capable of completely distorting one's perception of themselves. Take

cocaine, for instance; it can induce hyperactivity and greatly exaggerate one's self-perception, thereby blurring the boundaries of one's natural capabilities and leading one to engage in extremely risky behaviors. This loss of self-awareness is not limited to heightened confidence. Still, it can extend to a complete detachment from reality, causing individuals to "lose themselves" and become disoriented to the point of not recognizing their surroundings or even basic details like where they parked their vehicles until the drug's effects gradually wear off. This lack of self-awareness under the influence of drugs highlights the dangerous nature of substance abuse and its ability to alter perception and cognition in detrimental ways.

Moral Consciousness – One of the underlying reasons why individuals often turn to drugs before engaging in immoral actions is the numbing effect these substances have on their moral conscience. The use of drugs serves to dampen or dull the sense of moral responsibility or guilt that typically accompanies behaviors such as armed robbery, kidnapping, rape, and other morally reprehensible acts. By altering their mental state, drugs can create a barrier that inhibits individuals from a temporary full awareness of the ethical implications of their actions, leading them to commit acts they might otherwise find abhorrent or unacceptable.

Transcendence - Drug abuse can have a serious impact on one's journey of auto-transcendence in several ways. Firstly, it impairs one's ability to engage in deep self-reflection and introspection, trapping the abuser in a cycle of immediate gratification and pursuit of intoxication rather than genuine personal growth. Secondly, drugs often distort a person's perception of reality, creating a skewed view of the world and themselves, which can prevent them from transcending their current understanding and experiences. Additionally, drug abuse can impair cognitive functions like memory, attention, and decision-making, thus hindering one's capacity to process new information and engage in critical reflection essential for personal development. Emotional detachment is another consequence. This is because as certain substances induce numbness or detachment, it becomes challenging to connect deeply with a person's emotions and inner experiences, essential aspects of self-awareness and transcendence. Moreover, drug abuse can lead to strained relationships and social isolation, thereby limiting opportunities for interpersonal growth and mutual learning crucial for auto-transcendence within social contexts.

Contending With Drug Abuse Among the Youth: Mental Health, Human Well-being and Philosophy of Life

In this last section of the paper, our attention is focused on the normative approaches that could serve to combat the spread of drug abuse, especially among young people. In light of the philosophical anthropological theories advanced above to understand and analyze drug abuse and its concomitants, we now turn to some practical reflections on such ideas that should drive the battle against drug abuse in our society, helping the youth to deal with the ugly situation. These ideas are mental health, human well-being, and philosophy of life. Incidentally, these ideas have been gaining attention lately among scholars. They are now being employed in new lights to indicate the power and potential they might have in achieving a more compressive understanding of and approach to some thorny issues of the

contemporary time, including drug abuse, climate change, globalization, war and peace, and so on. In what follows, we shall direct a nuanced look at these ideas, focusing on how they might be leveraged for a more effective approach to the menace of drug abuse among the youth.

Mental health is necessary for checking the spread of drug abuse – no wonder one of the effects of drug abuse is the attack on the victim's mental health. Here, we propose that, while some human 'ailments' may now have immediate cures/remedies, vitiating the symptoms may go a long way in alleviating the condition of the victim and may altogether serve as the only effective therapy the victim might need. Here, compassion and empathy are critical for the victim. Since it may not be possible for the caregivers or relatives of the victim to understand exactly what it means to be a victim of drug abuse, to live under the burden of that bad habit, it makes sense to give the victim the benefits of the doubt and treat them with dignity and respect, except if it would be 'irrational' to do so. But when might it really be 'irrational' to help a brother or sister in need? Steven Chong, an emotional intelligence facilitator, thought about this situation when he wrote:

Some of us may be afraid that we become too nice, and others may take advantage of us. What is the flip side of that? We may not be nice enough to someone who is going through a tough time, and what we did just pushed the person over the brim. That may be an exaggeration. But what if it is true? Can we afford to take that risk, resulting in us causing more suffering?

Given that mental health conditions are always subtle and nuanced, we may not always know who needs our care. Hence, it becomes imperative to always be nice, especially to such victims of drug abuse whom we have, at least, seen to exhibit some signs of irrational/disordered behaviors on account of their relationship with drugs. To choose to be nice to such persons is a wise choice.

Mental health issues can appear in different forms, issuing from different causes, of which drug abuse is one. They may be manifested in conditions like sadness, gloom, hopelessness, depression, unhappiness, sorrow, tearfulness, mental despair, dejection, misery, low spirit, melancholy, discouragement, forgetfulness of self, and so on. A person in these situations can in no way master themselves. They have a problem. They are drifting away from the ideal human mental condition of self-knowledge, self-control, and self-direction. They will find it very difficult to focus and achieve a noble purpose. The person may try to distract their distractions (lack of concentration) by diverting attention to social media, work holism, laziness, noises from the crowd, the television or radio, or recklessness about life in general. The person cannot practice the art of focusing! This is a big challenge, a big burden. What this person needs is another person who embodies the opposite virtues to empathically help them learn to meditate, get organized, gain life energy, practice optimism and dynamism, and show gratitude. That is the healing they desperately need. Their mental health needs to be in good shape by changing their outlook to themselves in particular and life in general. The victims of drug abuse, and indeed everybody, should be driven to focus

on their own mental health. As Ashley S. White advises, "Let us develop the courage needed to turn our focus inward and commit to our own personal project, our own healing. We are the only ones we can control; our lives are the only ones we can live."

The lesson from Socratic moral thought is critical here. Socrates teaches that knowledge is virtue; ignorance is vice. This knowledge is epitomized in the knowledge of self. It is at the background of this self-knowledge that the knower strives to know every other thing in creation as they (the knower) knows themselves and even as God (the Absolute Knower) knows them. Self-reflexivity, intuition, and introspection are all implicated here. The lesson here is captured in the Socratic dictum: 'Man, know thyself.' A person's self-knowledge should be profound, self-penetrating and self-transcending. The youth who abuse drugs cannot enjoy the ecstasy of this deep and profound knowledge of self, which empowers them with the moral authority to constantly and consistently choose the right means to the right ends. The right means and the right ends are those that promote the well-being of human nature, which consists in rationality and the rational exercise of our natural powers based on true knowledge, which is founded on self-knowledge. Stumpf goes on to emphasize that it takes a true knowledge of human nature to know what it requires to be happy. It also takes a true knowledge of things and types of behavior to know whether they can fulfill the human requirements for happiness. It also requires knowledge to distinguish between what appears to be giving happiness and what actually does. (p. 42).

The young victim of drug abuse deadens the voice of conscience and the light of reason, both of which mark a human being as a unique member of creation: a self-knowing creature. They suppress or stifle the human nature; they cast away, as it were, the garb of rationality. As such, their relationship with drugs can no longer harmonize with rationality or right reason. Under this condition, the victim tends to cover the lacuna their stupidity has created by searching for and subscribing to alternative outlooks to human existence and human well-being. This way, they may be lost in the abyss of self-justification and self-delusion through any of these ideologies: Hedonism, Platonism, Cynicism, Utilitarianism, Stoicism, Determinism/relativism, Evolutionism, and so on. These ideologies propose ideas other than human rationality as a means of realizing or attaining happiness. They are strategic in the sense that they are all calculated towards the achievement of happiness wrongly conceived and pursued. Nevertheless, these ideologies propose some specific goods that are not fully befitting and fulfilling to human nature simply because they are employed as means to an end rather than as ends in themselves. For instance, hedonism proposes pleasure; Platonism, knowledge; cynicism, ascetic living; utilitarianism, social welfare; stoicism, virtue; determinism/relativism, fate; and evolutionism, progress. Note that, narrowly, happiness and well-being are synonymous. However, broadly, well-being is often used from the social/collective perspective to indicate "holistic development pathways ... required to preserve and enhance the happiness principles, based on the spiritual values of compassion for others and for oneself". It involves economic, psychological, ecological, socio-political, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. Applied to the individual person, well-being connotes the happiness of the individual considered in every

way. Hence, it is more encompassing than the term 'happiness.'

Everybody tends to seek happiness; it is the basic motive in all our endeavors, although we pursue it differently depending on our philosophy of life. All our desires are destined towards their own satisfaction/fulfillment. Hence, "happiness is desire satisfied by the conscious possession of the good. It is a lasting subjective state that can exist only in an intellectual being. It is neither mere contentment nor a passing emotion nor a sunny disposition." (Fagothey, p. 173). It is only perfect happiness that accords with the human nature and the principles of rationality. That alone is worth searching for and pursuing. As Fagothey says, "perfect happiness fully satisfies all our desires; imperfect (happiness) has flaws in it. Because of man's finite capacities, his happiness cannot be absolutely but at most relatively perfect" (Fagothey, p. 173). Perfect happiness is a goal attainable given that, as individuals, we all have the intellectual capacity to realize it. Practically, how can the young person struggling with drug abuse benefit from this natural human capacity towards overcoming the bad habit? Answer: they must seek true knowledge. They must commit to the objective of ensuring that the will desires to stop the evil of drug abuse, realizing that "we are not good or bad by nature; rather by nature, we are adapted to receive virtues, and are made perfect by habit and education"⁷. (p 36). The implications are: (i) we must cultivate our intellect in the true knowledge, (ii) we must exercise our will in the right choice, (iii) we are free to choose to do good or to do bad, (iv) the good habit of doing good strengthens us to do more; the bad habit of doing evil equally disposes us to do more, (v) some natural human tendencies promote certain virtues more than others, and (vi) all of us have the capacity for moral activity, and we must ensure that it is virtuous; otherwise, it will become vicious. These implications are also true of the human nature, naturally constituted by rationality.

The good (supreme good) towards which the human nature is ordered is reason (or rationality). Thus, human nature is perfected in the attainment of the supreme good or standard of reason. In attaining this intellectual height, man achieves happiness or well-being. "The intellect (nous) is the most superior part of a person. It co-operates with moral virtues and directs them towards what is truly good and pleasant". (Mbukanma, p. 36). Therefore, it is with the help of reason (the intellect) that man can hope to understand his final goal in life, search for it with the appropriate means (tools), and eventually reach it. This final goal is happiness (or human well-being). A morally virtuous person is one who orders their life with rational faculty and always adopts the right means to the right end. In other words, a morally virtuous person is a happy person properly (philosophically) understood. This is the Aristotelian conception of happiness in terms of how it is connected with mental health (i.e., human nature and rationality).

Aristotle recognizes that there are some intrinsic and extrinsic impediments which are natural human tendencies (which he calls passions) capable of affecting the attainment of happiness as well as man's social life. These may include ignorance, emotions, fear, force,

habit, sickness, pain, alcohol, drugs, sleepiness, dementia, mental disorders, neurosis, phobias, compulsions, and so on. They are generally referred to as modifiers of responsibility. Akam advises that “it is part of the labor of happiness to fight and conquer all these for then only can we hope for true happiness”. (p. 109). Therefore, a young person struggling with drug abuse must ensure that all their evil tendencies are worked upon for redemption. It is not just enough to will or want to stop the bad attitude having realized its disordered nature. It is also imperative to scrutinize the abuser's tendencies that might weaken their efforts in overcoming their condition. Hence, the youth struggling with drug abuse should launch a total and comprehensive campaign with their body, soul, and spirit, lasting throughout the entire lifespan, to set their entire life project aright as far as possible. In this connection, Mbukanma asserts that:

The mere possession of reasoning power is not all that is required in moral life. It is equally important that such a capacity is not hindered. Moral life demands the utilization of man's essential faculties. It makes no sense to talk about moral responsibility where a person's faculties have been rendered defective. It is the intention of nature that we think rightly and act rightly. Our happiness depends on this. (p. 39).

Hence, nature, training (i.e., education), and reason must work in a harmonious way to produce a morally good man. In this cohesive functioning of nature, training, and reason, reason enjoys primacy and controls the other two. But what if the reason is distorted in its judgment? Well, this results in disaster! However, for one thing, such a person can seek counsel, but the person can also always subscribe to the divine grace for assistance and illumination. This is where the role of prayer (i.e., the practical dimension of spirituality) in the fight against the menace of drug abuse comes in. Thompson underscores the need for prayer when one finds oneself in a helpless and hopeless situation in the following terms:

We receive God's help. Now, if we are honest with God in confessing our helplessness, ignorance, and failure, we shall surely have from Him immense help. For our Lord will reveal to us that mighty provision has been made for our awful weakness ... Here is the secret of all secrets in regard to prayer.¹⁰ (p. 22 -23).

As regards the philosophy of life, it is important to state here that there are divergent philosophies of life anyone can adapt to guide and guard their own life. We recommend a philosophy of life that will work harmoniously with all we have adumbrated above. In this vein, the first point is that the young person struggling with drug abuse should realize that God is required and sufficient to overcome the condition. Secondly, the person must know that the condition is never hopeless; they should have a positive outlook towards transcending the weakness, transforming it into strength. A person's life history is never to be written unless and until the person dies, for if this is done earlier, certain aspects might need to be re-written upon death. Thus, the youth fighting some battles with drug abuse should realize that their case is just one of the many instances of the changes and chances of life that all humans face through life. Thirdly, the person should realize that there are many things that can fetch joy and zest in life if only they subjectively direct attention,

interest, and love toward them. Such things might include a brand new day, opportunities for growth and self-development, self as subjective and autonomous, altruism, work, meditation, pursuit of truth, a clear conscience and love of neighbor, consciousness (or sobriety), philanthropy or charity, sociability, good humor, goodwill and spirituality, gratitude, orderliness, simplicity and wisdom (prudence). Fourth and finally, the person must recognize that life is transient, that their condition is bound to come to an end one day, and that death wraps up life and its challenges in some form of finality while at the same time opening them up and delivering them to the ultimate destiny of man in the life hereafter.

The Way Forward

We propose a total paradigm shift in the way drug abuse is constructed and understood. Drug abuse should no longer be solely categorized as a deviant or delinquent behavior but also as an emergency situation. It is symptomatic of the failure of the government to order the supply and administration of these illicit substances in the best possible ways to discourage access to the wrong hands. It also reveals the extent to which citizens, especially the youth, are bored and disenchanted with the public sphere.

We, therefore, recommend a set of actions and policies both on the path of the leadership of the society and the parents, spouses, close relatives, friends, and well-wishers of the victims of drug abuse. In the light of our foregoing study, we submit as follows:

Law enforcement agents working in the area of drug use and administration should focus more on the surrounding circumstances of the laws on drug abuse and not strictly on the victims (those who have unfortunately been entrapped in the habit of illicit use of drugs).

A multi-sector and network approach should be adopted and launched to combat the menace since everybody is concerned and affected, even though not everybody is involved. This is so because the drug abuser, in their irrationality, tends to be anti-social, jeopardizing the life and property of all around them (including their own life and property) and frustrating the progress of development.

Education and awareness should be employed in tackling the menace, especially in the form of public campaigns that would take the message to the grassroots. School programs and community-level awareness and sensitization should be employed to educate the victims and potential victims of drug abuse adequately. This is so because we believe that if the victim of drug abuse understands that they are simply shortchanging themselves by abusing drugs, they will not indulge in such. Education would serve not only the victim of drug abuse but their loved ones and caregivers.

Another step in addressing drug abuse is to reduce the stigma attached to drug abuse. While the stigma may serve to deter potential drug abusers, especially the younger ones, it does a great disservice to the victims of drug abuse by preventing them from seeking the help they desperately need due to shame. We must work on our perception, not only of the

drug abuser but also of mentally unhealthy people, so that they seek help without shame when need be.

Treatment and rehabilitation is an indispensable aspect of addressing the issue of substance abuse. It should be made accessible to the victims of drug abuse so that they can get the help they need. Also, aftercare services should be incorporated into the treatment plan to avoid possible relapsing.

Furthermore, any meaningful intervention effort to solve the problem of drug abuse must encapsulate addressing the economic factors that engender drug abuse. When the youths are unemployed or underemployed, they become at an elevated risk of engaging in drug abuse and other unwholesome activities. There is, therefore, a need to keep the younger generation gainfully occupied so as to curb the menace of drug abuse.

Conclusion

Drug abuse can be likened to the situation of a person being drowned in a river. This person, especially if they are not well experienced in swimming, will often tend to preserve their life and save themselves from being drowned by striving to match the feet on 'the ground' to gain control. But, this is an illusion, for there is no such 'ground' in the river. Unfortunately, in the bid to do this, the person facilitates the drowning process unconsciously. If there is no willing and ready rescuer around, the person definitely finally gets drowned. Similarly, a victim of drug abuse has found themselves in a situation they can barely save themselves from. The person requires true knowledge of their situation and deserves the concerted efforts of all concerned to be saved from the unfortunate situation. In this paper, we have diligently examined the phenomenon of drug abuse and x-rayed what is involved from the phenomenological perspective, analyzing and interpreting the deep philosophical and anthropological layers that often do not meet the eyes of scholars on the subject matter. The result of our study, we hope, will lead to a change in the way drug abuse and drug abusers are seen. We reconstruct the phenomenon as a public emergency situation and as a malady of individuals, particularly the youth, symptomatic of certain defects in the moral, religious, and intellectual formations of the upcoming generation.

References

- Akam, J. B. (1995). *The Oracle of Wisdom: Towards Philosophic Equipoise*. Enugu: Gostak Printing and Publishing Company.
- Apel, K.-O. (1996). *Selected Essays, Volume Two: Ethics and Theory of Relationality*. Humanities Press.
- Anselm of Canterbury. (n.d.). Letter 136. In F. S. Schmitt (Ed.), *Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia* (Vol. 3). Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons.
- Aquizerate, A., Laforgue, E. J., Istvan, M., Rousselet, M., Gerardin, M., Jouanjus, E., Libert, F., Guerlais, M., & Victorri-Vigneau, C. (2023). French national addictovigilance follow-up of zolpidem between 2014 and 2020: Evolution of drug abuse, misuse and dependence before and after the regulatory change. *European Journal of Public Health*, 33(2), 169–175. <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckad003>

- Aristotle. (2021). *De Anima* (Joe Scholar, Trans.). Academic Press.
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. 7, Ch. 13, Par. 1153b, lines 1-20.
- Austin, F. (1963). *Right and Reason: Ethics in Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. Saint Louis, USA: The C. V. Mosby Company.
- Baier, K. (1965). *The Moral Point of View: A Rational Basis of Ethics* (abridged ed.). New York, NY: Random House.
- Campos, M., Cerviño, C., Bagnati, P., Navarro, R., Barrios, I., Gonzalez, I., García, O., O'Higgins, M., Castaldelli-Maia, J., Ventriglio, A., Almirón-Santacruz, J., & Torales, J. (2022). *Neurocognitive Assessment in Addictions*. *Anales de La Facultad de Ciencias Médicas (Asunción)*, 55, 17–26. <https://doi.org/10.18004/anales/2022.055.01.17>
- Croen, L. G., Woesner, M., Hermann, M., & Reichgott, M. (1997). Substance use and abuse: A longitudinal study of substance use and abuse in a single class of medical students. *Academic Medicine*, 72 (4), 376-381.
- Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. (2024, April 13). Drug Abuse. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/science/drug-abuse>
- José, A. L., & Francesco, R. (2018). *Philosophical Anthropology: An Introduction* (P. Amodia, Trans.). Downers Grove, IL: Midwest Theological Forum. (Original work published 2007)
- Knoll, M. (2019). Max Weber on Politics, Reason, and the Clash of Values and Approaches To Ethics. *Divan: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi*, 24(47), 111–140. <https://doi.org/10.20519/divan.670011>
- Kolodny, A., Courtwright, D. T., Hwang, C. S., Kreiner, P., Eadie, J. L., Clark, T. W., & Alexander, G. C. (2015). The prescription opioid and heroin crisis: A public health approach to an epidemic of addiction. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 36, 559–574. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031914-122957>
- Mbukanma, J.O. (2000). *Moral Education in Aristotle*. Ibadan: Newborne Enterprises.
- National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2018, June 6). Understanding Drug Use and Addiction Drug Facts. Retrieved from <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/understanding-drug-use-addiction>
- Njoku, F. O. (2010). *Studies in Philosophy of Mind*. Claretian Institute of Philosophy.
- Olatuwara, M. O., & Odejide, A. O. (1974). Prevalence of drug taking among secondary school students: A pilot study. In *Proceedings of the Workshop on Alcoholism and Drug Addiction in Africa* (pp. 1-10). Nairobi, Kenya.
- Pandit, P. (2022). The Transition within Virtue Ethics in the Context of Benevolence. *Philosophia (Philippines)*, 23 (1), 135–151. <https://doi.org/10.46992/PIJP.23.1.A.8>
- Pillay, D. (2019). Happiness, wellbeing, and ecosocialism – a radical humanist perspective. *Globalizations*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2019.1652470>
- Plato. (2019). *Protagoras* (W. R. M. Lamb, Trans.). Harvard University Press.
- Popkin, R. H., & Stroll, A. (1979). *Philosophy Made Simple*. London: W. H. Allen and Company.
- Ricoeur, P. (2016). *Philosophical Anthropology*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. (Original work published 2013).
- Saint Augustine. (1986). *Confessions* (H. Chadwick, Trans.). Oxford University Press.

- Steven, C. (2024). LinkedIn post (no title). Available from https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7196896576437407746?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop
- Stumpf, S. E. (1994). *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 5th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Taylor, P. W. (2011). *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (25th Anniversary Edition). New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Thompson, C. V. (1990). *The Master Secrets of Prayer*. USA: The Good News Broadcasting Association Incorporated.
- Tosi, J., & Warmke, B. (2016). Moral Grandstanding. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 44(3), 197–217. <https://doi.org/10.1111/papa.12075>
- White, A. S. (2024). LinkedIn post (no title). Available from https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7196891015968948225?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop.
- World Health Organization. (2022). World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/teams/mental-health-and-substance-use/world-mental-health-report>
- Yang, X., & Xia, G. (2019). Causes and consequences of drug abuse: A comparison between synthetic drug and heroin users in urban China. *AIDS Education and Prevention*, 31(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.>