
Advancing Insights from Philosophical Anthropology: Addiction as a Detachment-Compensatory Occupation

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Abstract

Double Session: Philosophical Anthropology I & II (Honenberger, Michelini, Davis, Moss, Blad, Wasmuth) In this paper I will argue that Gehlen's philosophical anthropology provides a conceptual starting point that brings insight to our understanding of addiction. The term 'addiction' in scientific research has been likened to a set of criteria defining substance dependence, and research has therefore narrowly focused on uncovering neurobiological etiologies to account for problematic drug use. 'Addiction' is seen as irrational, superfluous, and pathological drug use at the expense of the user's well-being. However, if we adopt Gehlen's notion that all humans are underdetermined, problematic, defective life forms (*mangelwesen*) in need of compensatory action, addiction shows up as a function of an already (always) present human need. Addictions are rational attempts (albeit often problematic and unsatisfactory ones) to maintain motivation and life organization. Individuals with addictions have experiences that are organized around the object of their addiction and provide structure and direction for how to act. While Gehlen suggests 'institutions' (i.e. customs, conventions, and societal establishments) as means for reducing the arbitrariness of human existence and providing meaning and direction for how to live, the emergence of addictive patterns in work and other conventional realms blurs the distinction between 'healthy' and 'addictive' compensations for human under-determination. Taking this into account, rather than a disease model with neurobiological etiologies to account for the purported irrationality of addiction(s), what is called for, I argue, is a model that can delineate both the problems/harms and the compensatory gains realized in both addiction and other responses to the human situation of lack.

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