

Alcoholism, aka alcohol dependence, aka alcohol addiction, is another fuzzy concept. It escapes rigorous definition. Fuzzy concepts can be useful in everyday communication as approximate signs of direction but do not take us far.

Alcoholism belongs to the class of addictions. The alcoholic is too much attached to drinking. Just like some other people are strongly attached to eating, smoking, coffee, drugs, sex, gambling, shopping, exercise, sunbathing, work, power, some significant other person or something else. One carrot addict is known. In addictions, there is excess in the search for enjoyment, a desire that is difficult to quench and dejection afterwards. A few addictions are not harmful, many are. The more harms the addiction brings about, the more likely it is considered to be a bad habit or a disease. A person susceptible to one addiction is likely to be susceptible to others, too. Alcoholism can be substituted by gambling, gambling by sex and so on. Self-help and professional treatment are mostly based on similar principles whatever the type of addiction. If the attachment is strong but harmless we do not call it a disease. The rich who have an art collection addiction are not coerced into treatment. However, they may go to jail if they are caught contracting thieves to supply them with the items desired.

I will argue that the biomedical definitions of alcoholism are just old ideas disguised in new jargon. They maintain untenable assumptions on the cause of alcoholism. To find out the causal paths we need to look elsewhere. However, the old ideas stay alive since they serve various vested interests. One of the latter is the powerful alcoholism treatment industry. It promises cure, but there is no clear evidence.