

## Changes in Personality Brought about by Narcotics

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“Addiction is an illness that takes over the whole of a person’s being, corroding all areas of his life, and from which the addict cannot free himself unaided.”

*Karl-Ludwig Täschner, 1988*

In this quotation Täschner expresses that addiction to narcotics gradually destroys the core of a person: his personality. What causes this destruction?

Typical of the effects of narcotics is, depending on the type of drug, a longer or shorter state of euphoria, which is produced by the direct effects of the various drugs on specific brain centres. If a person frequently exposes himself to chemically produced euphoria, his natural emotional faculty will undergo a change. Normal moments of contentment and happiness such as the pleasure in giving another person a present or the joy felt when a friend passes an exam, gradually become emotions alien to the addict. He loses the normal human faculty to feel for others, which is essential to man’s well-being. The typical consequence is egocentricity which may also manifest itself by a strong demanding attitude towards everything or everyone.

All narcotics affect the human brain. This happens in the areas of the neocortex and the limbic system, which means among the connectors between those parts of the cerebral cortex that are responsible for conscious thought and processing of experiences, as well as the areas of the brain where feelings, emotions and moods are located.

In simplified terms, we can describe drug intoxication as follows: The human brain becomes flooded with substances which are very similar to substances produced by the body itself. These substances influence moods and emotions as well as thought processes, perception, the processing of experiences, and memory.

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Consequences will arise if a person frequently exposes himself to such a pathologically altered state of mind. His faculty of perception and awareness will gradually become altered, and after a certain time this change of mind will become permanent even if the addict happens not to be under the influence of drugs. The constant flooding of the bodily system with unnaturally strong, chemically processed emotions deadens the natural sensitivity of the drug addict. His state is comparable to one of a prisoner held in solitary confinement for a number of years: it may take years, until he is able to engage in normal human relations again, if at all.

In specialist literature, changes in personality through psychotropic substances which are addictive and create intoxication have been known for a long time and have been described with various terms,

such as “alcohol induced change of personality” or “toxically induced change in personality”, seen among morphinists, or “depravity”, typical of the cocaine consumer. By depravity we mean the destruction of personality, a lack of differentiation in personality or depersonalization. With Cannabis, the typical change in personality is particularly the “demotivational syndrome”.

The subject of change in personality leads us to the main problem of narcotics. It is these changes in personality which constitute the real danger of drugs, apart, of course, from the physical consequences. But even if there were drugs causing no physical harm, we would still have to strongly warn against them, because every drug causes changes in personality, i.e. changes to man’s whole individuality, or, as Professor Jeanne Hersch expressed it: “Drug addiction is a betrayal of what is essential to man’s existence.”

In view of the fact that the present drug epidemic is spreading almost solely among young adults, adolescents and children, the attack by narcotics on the personality of a person becomes even more disturbing. Young people are particularly susceptible to the harmful influences of drugs on their personality because their personality is still developing. The young person is in the process of trying to find and establish his position in the world and in society. Brain research has shown that important neurophysiological processes of maturing also take place during adolescence. Drug consumption during this phase, therefore, destroys young people’s chances of development. At present, research cannot answer the question whether the years the adolescent is set back in his development because of his addiction, can ever be compensated for. This is the reason why a civilized society, if it does not want to destroy itself, must stick to the prohibition of narcotics and support the all-out fight against drug abuse, above all to save our youth.