Jeremy Gear

Working Title:

A View of Addiction and Recovery through the Lens of Levinasian Ethics

Seattle University

Gearj@seattleu.edu

This paper explores similarities between the core principles of twelve-step recovery and the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. At the core of Alcoholic Anonymous and thus other twelve step recovery programs is the fundamental realization that the movement out of addiction into a life of recovery is a process of transformation where the addicted person moves from a hopeless self-focused way of being toward hope through self-transcendence in human participation. The fundamental realization of one’s powerlessness produces the power to call for help and also provides the power to respond to the call. One is called to ethical responsibility thus making self-transcendence possible. This movement out of self toward the other is coextensive with a movement toward the infinite, or a power greater than one’s self. Therefore, becoming ethically responsible to the suffering addict has the potential to produce the needed spiritual experience essential to recovery. As recovering addicts cultivate sobriety, they are called to give this gift away to the still suffering other. Only by giving their gift of sobriety away are they able to keep it. Highlighting the similarities between twelve-step recovery and the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas may provide different ways of understanding our work with people struggling with addiction. It may also provide a bridge between psychotherapy and twelve-step recovery.