Rational Authority Encyclopedia Article

Rational Authority

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Drug addicts are reported to have a low tolerance for ANXIETY. As a result, few are able to voluntarily sustain an extended period of drug treatment, which is necessary for meaningful intervention. Instead, they tend to disengage themselves from treatment programs once the anxiety has been brought to the surface (Brill & Lieberman, 1969). "Rational authority," a late 1960s euphemism for mandatory (but not necessarily punitive) treatment, became a basis for holding addicts in a long-term treatment program.

The philosophy behind rational authority justifies the development of coercive mechanisms or strategies that permit assigning to treatment those addicts who ordinarily would not voluntarily seek assistance. Rehabilitation programs based upon this philosophy derive their legitimate coercive powers through the *authority* of the courts. The authority is considered *rational* because it is utilized in a humane and constructive manner, and it does this by relating the means of authority to the ends of rehabilitation.

This conceptualization represents an evolutionary change from the emphasis on the use of authority as a punitive end in itself. Rational authority also suggests combining the authority of the probation or parole officer with the techniques of social casework. As such, authority becomes a means for the officer or associated rehabilitation worker to implement desired behavioral changes. In addition to being required to obey the usual conditions of probation, addicts can be involuntarily held in a therapeutic setting until they have acquired a tolerance for abstinence and the conditioning processes thought to maintain addiction have been reversed. Evaluations of programs in New York, California, and Pennsylvania that are based upon rational authority indicate that when addicts are thus supervised, they are often less likely to relapse into addictive behavior (Brill & Lieberman, 1969).

See Also

California Civil Commitment Program; Civil Commitment; Coerced Treatment for Substance Offenders; New York State Civil Commitment Program; Treatment Alternatives to Street Crime Treatment/Treatment Types)

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