Review of: "The Integrated Metatheoretical Model of Addiction: Towards an Architectonic of a Metatheory of Addiction"

Federico Burdman

The article addresses a relevant issue for theories of addiction, and it does so from a perspective that is novel and (as far as my knowledge of the literature goes) original. Moreover, the guiding thought behind the proposed approach —which I take to be that no essentialistic focus on a single perspective on this complex issue is likely to yield much insight into it, and that addiction is more fruitfully thought of from a framework that integrates several different perspectives— is one I fully agree with (and to which, incidentally, I attempt to contribute from a very different perspective in a recent paper: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-021-01656-7), and so I also agree with the suggestion that such a guiding thought should be a focus of philosophical research in order to articulate more clearly its conceptual reach.

At the same time, I am not entirely persuaded that the proposed approach goes a long way towards attaining a fruitful philosophical articulation of the above-mentioned guiding thought. Before I attempt to respectfully articulate this impression, I acknowledge that part of the reason for it is likely to be my lack of familiarity with the Integral Metatheory. Having said that, a first impression I get from reading the article is that the explanation of the basic principles behind the theory is probably not clear enough for those who are not already familiar with it, and, at the same time, it seems to take a lot of space in an article that discusses addiction. (This, however, might not be a very important problem, depending on what the intended audience of the paper is and the kind of journal it aspires to get published in).

A further and more important issue is that it is not entirely clear to me exactly what is accomplished by bringing the Integral Metatheory framework into a discussion of addiction. I appreciate how the model is able to classify different theories and models dealing with different aspects of this complex issue, but I do not see clearly in what sense is it that the relevant theories actually become integrated, rather than classified. For instance, it seems to me that there are some potentially troublesome conceptual and philosophical disparities between some of the theories being integrated (say, for instance, between the 'brain disease' model and the self-medication approach that is developed from a psychodynamic perspective), and that the disparities between these (apparently?) incompatible approaches call for more detailed philosophical work in order to show that they may be regarded as being all 'true but partial' accounts. Simply to state that possibility in terms of an abstract ontological structure, without actually showing in detail how the conceptual articulation between different theories works out, seems unsatisfying to me, as, to my mind at any rate, the most interesting issue is exactly how is it that such different perspectives might turn out to be compatible despite first appearances.

Lastly, a final thought is that the article relies on a fundamental assumption that what goes under the name of 'addiction' is, in a sense, fundamentally one thing (irrespective of the complexity of its ontological structure, or the metaphysics of 'enactment'). The possibility that is thus overlooked is that we might need to revise our ordinary and scientific concepts of addiction, and acknowledge that we have been grouping together phenomena that need to be distinguished —maybe because they constitute actually distinct natural kinds—, and so we may need to turn to thinking about 'addiction' not as a unified kind, but as a set of somewhat different phenomena that may not share a common essence (see, for instance, Pober 2013 'Addiction is not a natural kind', among others making similar points). That is not a position I feel particularly inclined to agree with, but it seems to me that it is a possibility that the argument of the article should not overlook.

Overall, I think the project that the article undertakes is an important and a relevant one, and the attempt to tackle it from a novel perspective is commendable. Again, maybe some of my impressions reflect shortcomings on my part, rather than on the author's. I hope to hear more on this project in the future.