

The good and evil of Booze

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I love a glass of wine. Usually with others, rarely on my own. I am of the school of thought that believes wine is good for you, in spite of North American 'science' that struggles with the proofs in Europe defending red wine and good cheese.

Beer anytime is cheerful and refreshing, particularly in warm weather.

Even spirits in small measure, from a digestive like port or amaro to brandy or cognac; a small gin and tonic in the summer; a whiskey toddy cures a cold in the winter.

This and more are all fine in real moderation. Immoderately, they are poisonous; for the ladies who are pregnant, drinking should be off the books, except for a single Guinness from time to time.

Let's agree, then, that drinking a little of what you like will not harm you and may even do you some good - ease the digestive tracts, mellow the mood, remember old jokes. Add delights to the meal (and, of course, the cheese course).

We must also note for sure that drinking and driving is on par with criminal intent, like texting and driving - young man, rich, drunk and driving, kills four children and their grandfather - jailed for a mere 10 year sentence, looking for parole after three. Luckily denied but he will be chasing his freedom again soon enough.

The Liquor Control Board of Ontario (affectionately, the LCBO) is one of the largest purchasers of intoxicating beverages in the world, huge buying power and goodness what kind of an influence on producers world wide.

It cannot be just a business, which it likely considers itself at the moment. However, drinking alcohol can be dangerous, addictive, bearing a sick baby, the cause of serious personal chaos. And long, terrible death.

Thus, the marketing of drink and the invention, quite outside convention, to make alcohol more attractive even to those who might not otherwise like the taste, should be curbed and considered.

More and more, as one browses the vast choices in the local LCBO, one notices a decrease in the quality of many choices and the increase in 'cuteness' and irrelevancy of the labels. In the last very few years, there is pressure on the 'girls' night out' - sweet and saucy cartoon of young women imbibing a little too much. They could be on a path of imbibing a lot more too much.

Then, there are all those flavoured vodkas. Didn't I see a 'red velvet vodka'? For sure, sweetened, exactly what people who don't like the taste of alcohol - who are then at least free of that addiction - suddenly taste one they do like. One yummy, flavoured vodka.

It's insidious, do you see. Social drinking - you can do it inside without making anyone else ill. You can drink too much without realizing it until the fresh air hits you and you wonder whether you're safe to drive because you didn't think to make arrangements for a ride home. So, you risk it and maybe win alright with a safe arrival, not even a ride check; maybe not. Either way, the moral dilemma came about because you were having fun, not counting the drinks and there you are, over the limit, with a foggy response to an important decision.

It's insidious: you develop a habit of drinking, nothing much, just to unwind at the end of the day: sometimes, usually - every day. Then drink to cheer yourself up after anything; drink to calm down, gear up, cool off, warm up.

Now, let me tell you something about the raw and dangerous end of alcoholism. Our medical and social systems are not set up to counsel, aid, care for and hands-on rescue a person at the end of the alcoholic rope.

A smoker can choke, have a heart attack or any number of tumours, caused by smoking and, whether they quit smoking or not, the systems will operate, care for and subsidize sources to quit smoking until the day dies.

However, a person who drinks and is an alcoholic, usually in denial, must be shoved out of the system, discharged after a first long time of caring without follow-up of any kind so that return to drinking is easy. After that, with unchecked continuing alcohol abuse, there could be another admission to an overworked emergency, then rapid discharge to be ignored, discarded to wallow, until that person is completely humbled and left with a choice of misery and possibly death, or grovelling to ask for help at the end of such a long road that real recovery might be impossible. The grovelling might, by that time, be impossible.

Smokers will get all the help they need no matter their clinging to their addiction; drunks are abandoned by the social service all the way until they are sick and humiliated and nearly beyond help.