ALCOHOLISM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER TYPES OF DEPENDENCE

3.1 THE COMBINED APPROACH

There are several reasons why this book, which deals with dependence on psychotropic drugs, includes a brief (but by no means comprehensive) chapter on alcoholism. Many books on drug dependence say very little about alcoholism. This possibly helps to strengthen the relatively widespread erroneous idea that alcohol is quite a different substance from those other drugs which can lead to addiction. Thus, not infrequently, one encounters alcoholics of many years standing who proudly proclaim that they have hardly ever in their life taken a drug. There can of course be no doubt that alcohol is a drug even if it has become traditionally and culturally widely accepted and domesticated [1], and that although it can be freely bought over the counter without requiring a doctor’s prescription, it is a potentially very dangerous drug that can produce physical as well as psychological dependence. Moreover, although the mass-media nowadays pay much less attention to alcoholism than to other forms of drug dependence, it is only fair to point out that, second to the other freely available dangerous dependence-producing drug, nicotine, alcohol is responsible for a much larger number of individual cases of dependence than any other dependence-producing drug (see Table 1 in Appendix). Today there may be a few thousand heroin and methadone addicts in this country and possibly up to 100 000 or so individuals dependent on barbiturates and amphetamines, whereas the number of alcoholics in the UK may be in the region of 300 000–400 000 and it is probable that this figure is rising steadily. Why relatively little interest has been shown in the problem of alcoholism is not quite clear. Some claim that drug addicts have been