

FREE WILL XIX

Addiction

Classifying addiction. At one extreme addiction can be restricted to dependence on certain drugs (inc alcohol, opiates, nicotine); at the other extreme it can be broadened to include or to any behaviour that can exhibit broadly addictive tendencies (shopping, web-surfing, sex etc). Or to something in between? Certainly there is good evidence that dopamine is involved in most cases, although the way this works can vary (increased release; preventing it from being reabsorbed).

Standard features include:

1. Euphoria (primary and secondary effects; contrast alcohol and cigarettes)
2. Withdrawal (increased marginal utility); tolerance (decreased total utility)
3. Craving
4. Crowding out
5. Cue dependence (Siegel)
6. Desire to quit and inability to do so (this is heavily belief and society dependent)
7. Relapse

Does addiction involve choice?

Distinguish:

- choosing to start on behaviour that will become addictive;
- choosing to keep going once addiction has occurred;
- choosing to become addicted

No choice models

Here the idea is that the behavior is truly compelled. How is this to be understood? Insensitive to other rewards (though even this might still be a choice). Against this: most people get over additions by decision; the effects of higher taxes etc. Watson: the addict is not so much overpowered as seduced.

Rational choice models

- Becker and Murphy: initial need to get over a bad spell, combined with very steep discount curves
- Ainslie: hyperbolic discount curves

Irrational choice models

Most of these involve the idea that choices were made initially (though normally in some ignorance); so the path to addiction was chosen (without necessarily realizing that that was what it was), but current behavior is not free.

- Primrose path (Herrnstein and Prelec): failure to notice effects on the desirability of other options.
- Visceral craving (Lowenstein): failure to anticipate the strength of the cravings.
- Ainslie?

Watson: it's not that addicts can't resist, it's that there is reason that they don't. What is this: addicts lack the ability to make the effort to resist? Or they lack the desire to make the effort? Or they lack the belief that it is worthwhile to make the effort?