

Free Will and Desire

An addict desires to desire drugs.

This desire need not make him responsible for his addiction. His desire for drugs might not be caused by his desire to desire.

But what if it is? What if he is causing his addiction by desiring it?

Some say that in that case he is free.

But he cannot make himself desire anything. You cannot make yourself desire coffee just whenever you want. His desire for the desire for drugs doesn't make him guilty of the addiction even if it causes it.

There is no such thing as wanting to want something or desiring to desire something. You just want or desire or you do not.

Do you have a want because you want to have the want? Experience says no. I want x. I want to want x. I want to want to want x. On and on it goes - ad infinitum. This would mean that your desire for anything is infinitely strong and infinitely complicated but you know by experience that is not true. You would need to have infinite memory to sort out all the wants before you could see which one of them you want.

An addict may also be a keen milk-drinker. But most of the time the addict and milk-drinker has only one want in his consciousness. Right now he directly wants the milk. The want for drugs is at the back of his mind and is now an indirect want. The direct and indirect wants may influence behaviour but they cannot be present wilfully at the one time because we can only think of one thing at a time and go after one future action at the one time. So the addict and milk-drinker can only have either want at a time. Suppose he can want to want. Then he cannot have two wants to want in his head at the one time. When he wants to want the drugs the want to want milk is suppressed. When you want to want, you do not know what you want indirectly. Yes if you want to want a cake then you know what you want but because your mind is taken up with the wanting to want you don't know if you really want the cake or not at that moment because you can only hold one thought at a time so you just want to want and do not want the cake as in neither wanting or not wanting.

Therefore strictly speaking, wanting to want is incoherent. There are only direct wants.

Doing what we desire is the reason we feel free. But that feeling is an illusion because desire is forced on us by nature.