

The Foolish Addict

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Abstract

Foolishness is intuitively thought of as something exhibited by the dull or uneducated, but we see instances of highly educated persons displaying actions of astounding foolishness. Foolishness is the opposite of wisdom, so intelligence does not seem to play a significant part in inhibiting foolishness. Wisdom can be thought of as morally grounded excellence in certain parts of meta-cognition (Grossman et. al., 2020). Foolishness in this paper is defined as the inability to correct our self deception; it is a recursive feature of humans that rarely allows the foolish person to see through their own self-deceptive habits. Foolishness clouds our processes within meta-cognition.

Habits have been a characteristic of humans throughout history. Bad habits are defined as a recurring action that leads to long term problems. It is only until recently that habits became labelled as bad because modern science has revealed the detrimental effects over long term use. For instance, chewing or smoking tobacco was seen as a normal habit until the discovery that it leads to multiple health conditions. In this paper, I am using the word habit to refer to addiction habits, which is the focus of this paper. I argue that addiction is a form of foolishness whereby the agent is compulsive and resistant to change but the same agent plays a causal role in its own ability to change. Foolishness in this paper refers to this compulsive behaviour of addicts that can be modified by interventions such as mindfulness or even by using pharmaceuticals. This paper seeks to define addiction as foolish in nature but also aims to outline the cognitive aspects of how this habit started and how it can potentially be modified, particularly using wisdom.

Over 2% of the world's population is addicted to some sort of drug addiction but this number is increased tenfold when thinking about other types of addiction such as social media or gambling addictions. It is sometimes argued that everybody is addicted to something, granted that some habits have better outcomes than others but the inability to regulate one's own behaviour remains constant, invariant to type of habit. It is therefore imperative that we understand the nature of addiction and how we can bring about meaningful changes in addict's lives. Wisdom can be broken down into two meanings: Wise Behaviour and Wise Experiences. In keeping with the thesis of this paper, I will focus on Wise Behaviour- which is behaviour attributed to a person that allows for solving difficult short term/long term problems, contributing to a common good and knowing and doing what is right (Glück et. al., 2022). Foolishness is not simple maximising one's interests but rather a failure in balancing interpersonal, extrapersonal and intrapersonal interests (Sternberg, 2012, 2018). Addiction is foolish because it lacks this balance, often ignoring interpersonal and extrapersonal interests. The trick is in the case of addiction, one might know the right thing to do and also know of the long- and short-term consequences but yet refuses to act to bring about meaningful change. Often, this fact about addiction creates a stigma around those affected by labelling them as stupid or foolish (in the layman's sense of the word). It is also well known that addiction is a difficult thing to treat and requires massive cognitive effort, however, using the concept of wisdom and behaviour it is plausible for the addict to alter their behaviour and enact meaningful change.

Firstly, it is prudent to understand the cognitive aspects of addiction, wisdom and foolishness if we are to suggest how addicts can implement wisdom to change their behaviour. Addicts are often portrayed as irrational persons who fail to maximize future rewards; despite heavy costs,

they seem to prefer to engage in drug-seeking behavior over more rewarding courses of action (Ahmed, 2004). The traditional view of addiction is that it is a disease of the brain, however this is now being questioned as recovery is possible without treatment or intervention (Volkow et. al., 2016). This type of recovery would be the focus of this paper; recovery by making wise decisions. Neil Levy argues that while addicts who believe they are not addicts are self-deceived, addicts who believe they *are* addicts are just as self-deceived. Walker (2010) draws from this argument stating that the self-described addict differs in the type of self-deception as the one who is in denial. The addicts who are conscious of their habits may have the self knowledge required to take the necessary steps towards self-control. Addiction runs much deeper than simply a biological drive for a stimulus. Agents act to minimise surprise about their own future sensory states (Miller et. al., 2019). The brain uses predictive processing to minimize errors and anticipate the world. It offers agents an optimal grip on the world and we are drawn towards opportunities for improving grip, and positive feelings arise when we improve grip at a faster than expected rate (Kiverstein et. al., 2017). In addicts, the optimal grip is improved quickly after exposure to a stimulus, which in turn gives the addict a false sense of comfort in the environment they created that surrounds their stimulus of choice. This does not always have to be drug-related, indeed some people make their career the centre of their focus and centre everything in their life (including friends and family) around that illusory environment they created. Of course, they make lots of money, but it is often at the expense of other areas in their life. To see this, take for instance the marriage status of the top 5 richest men in the world. All of whom are remarkably dedicated to their work but whose marriages have suffered and have all ended in divorce. I argue that these men, despite being some of the smartest in the world, exhibit foolishness in this regard. What is the purpose of life without love or companionship especially

in the latter parts of our lives? Bill Gates filed for divorce well into his fifties, Elon Musk's divorce and others all display super intelligent men who still fall prey to foolishness. I argue they were addicted to work and made that the centre of their focus while sacrificing other equally important areas of life; they were self-deceived. This illusory environment created is spoken about in Buddhist and Hindu texts whereby they prescribe wisdom as the antidote to escape this form of suffering. Suffering need not be restricted to physical pains etc., but rather suffering implies living a life fuelled by desire and ignorance. Addiction feeds into this everyday, illusory world and making one a slave to the fruits of their actions.

A 2-worlds mythology was suggested to overcome this self-deception whose use far exceeds just addiction. There exists the everyday world, filled of suffering and the free world that is free of suffering and violence. This view is the basis of all religion, a promise of eternal peace and escape from suffering. Religion offers a series of steps which once followed leads to the free world. I argue this free world is available to us throughout life. To access this, we need to escape the need for the supernatural to explain how to reach this Free World. The Buddhists make use of meditation to reach this stage known as Nirvana which is the release from all suffering etc. I argue that they are pointing towards the concept of the free world and it is accessible to all by simply practicing what the Buddhists have been teaching for hundreds of years. This does not mean to follow their religion, rather use the tools that they have: Meditation. Meditation practices have been shown to reframe the contexts of negative experiences (this is also done in PTSD treatments) in such a way to support the individual's growth process and at the same time transform their autobiographical self (Garland et. al., 2015). By rewriting the autobiographical self, persons can break free from the cycle of self-deception by changing the trajectory of their future habits etc. This comes from the Mindfulness to Meaning theory from Garland et. al., 2015.

This theory uses the self-deceptive and destructive cycles to facilitate positive psychological growth. I argue the MMT is a valid theory on how we can not only treat addiction but also to keep general foolishness at a minimum. A growing body of research suggests that mindfulness training can increase reward experience and positive emotion in healthy and clinical populations (Garland et al., 2010), as well as among individuals with a substance-use disorder (Garland, Froeliger, & Howard, 2015). The self-deception of addiction, and indeed foolishness on a whole, is understood by philosophers as holding onto contradictory beliefs, accepting both p and not p (Walker, 2010). This self-deception acts to block our self-knowledge that the person would find aversive (Walker, 2010). In lacking the self-knowledge of current behaviour, the fool also lacks the reason to change. It is curious, that in addiction, persons do admit their behaviour is problematic however are unable to abstain. This shows addiction is not simply just surface level foolishness, rather it re-orientates an agent into acting foolish by offering a different optimal grip on the world. It is not the case that addicts lack self-knowledge (though some of them do), rather it is the apprehension to use that self-knowledge in a meaningful way. One way this happens is due to temporal discounting. This theory uses the idea that actions and habits compound over time. Consequences that are far ahead in time seem to be discounted as not as important as current events. In the instance of smoking, the end goal is often early death however, the smoking addict is only focused on the current goal to feel good. This is foolish as it is not simply a lack of education that drives behaviour.

Meditation offers a way to increase our self-knowledge thereby minimizing self-deception (Carlson, 2013). The consistent failure to have one's actions match what was intended therefore results in a failure of self-knowledge (Walker, 2010). Carlson, 2013 outlines two barriers to self-knowledge: Informational and motivational barriers. Informational barriers refer to when

quantity or quality of information interferes with self-knowledge. In the case of addiction, information is almost always available in the form of evidence about their destructive behaviours. Motivational barriers is where the ego influences way people perceive information to protect identity and personality. In addiction, a common phrase is that they can stop if they want to; this is the ego of the addict protecting their sense of agency by trying to convince both themselves and others that they are not controlled by external stimuli. By simply given information or practicing introspection seems to fall short in offering a path to self-knowledge (Walker, 2010). Mindfulness can be defined as the non-judgemental acceptance and awareness of one's current state. Paying more attention to one's current experience should counteract informational barriers to self-knowledge by increasing the amount of information individuals have about their patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving (Carlson, 2013). Mindfulness also reduces reactivity and defensiveness to ego-threatening information (Carlson, 2013). Numerous studies have shown that meditation is linked to greater emotional control. In addition, individuals with higher trait mindfulness showed stronger association between implicit and explicit feelings of self-worth (Brown & Ryan, 2003). We can think about this also from a computational perspective. People are autonomous and autonomous systems require the ability to regulate its internal and external states (Froese et. al., 2019). An autonomous system is also adaptive in that it regulates itself with respect to boundaries drawn of its own viability (Di Paolo, 2005). By gaining more self-knowledge, these regulation boundaries would be reconstructed due to a change in optimal grip. Therefore, the autonomous system would break free from the destructive cycle of foolish behaviour and regulate itself on a tangent towards a better future and life. Furthermore, it seems plausible that extensive mindfulness training may result in the emergence of new neural networks functioning in a sense as hybrid-networks (Brewer et al., 2011). In a

computational view, this adds qualitative development of the brain. I argue this change in grip is perhaps the first step into the free world. By breaking down boundaries to self-knowledge and reorganizing behaviour and thought, we gain maximum knowledge of ourselves and can thus escape suffering.

This paper outlined how addiction is not just foolish, but very foolish in that it hijacks the agent's grip on the world. This type of foolishness is harder to overcome than general foolishness, but the concept remains constant. In addition, meditation seems to be a viable option of overcoming this type of foolishness. Of course, the field of meditation research is still young, so there is much to be learnt about how meditation practices can indeed boost self-knowledge, but evidence and theories thus far point to this being the case. In conclusion, it is not just addicts who are foolish, but all of us though some of us are more foolish than others. We all fall prey to some sort of self-deception even the most intelligent people. If we are to escape the suffering of being bound by desire, meditation may be the first step into stepping into the Free World.

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