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24.120 Moral Psychology
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XII Addiction II

IRRATIONAL CHOICE MODELS

Berridge

Is withdrawal really the problem? Addictive behaviors happen before withdrawal can set in; and formerly addicted patients remain vulnerable to readdiction long after it has finished.

Qualify the standard features list as follows:

Tolerance: more is needed to have the same effect on pleasure (or at least its preconscious cause)

Sensitization: less is needed to have the same effect on desire (or at least its preconscious cause)

Incentive salience attribution:

We have suggested that it is the process of incentive salience attribution that transforms the sensory features of ordinary stimuli or, more accurately, the neural and psychological representations of stimuli, so that they become especially salient stimuli, stimuli that “grab the attention”, that become especially attractive and wanted, thus eliciting approach and guiding behavior to the goal.

(Robinson and Berridge ‘Incentive Sensitization and Addiction’, *Addiction* 2001)

Central features of the account:

Addiction results from the sensitization of certain neural systems as a result of drug use. Once sensitized conditioned stimuli (the appearance of drugs etc) have an enormous effect on ‘wanting’ i.e. behavior focused on trying to get the drug.

‘Wanting’ should be distinguished from ‘liking’. ‘Liking’ is not sensitized by drugs in the same way. Addicted individuals can be driven to take drugs that they do not ‘like’.

Neither ‘wanting’ nor ‘liking’ are immediately available to consciousness, so they perhaps shouldn’t be identified with wanting and liking as these are ordinarily understood.

Ainslie

Ainslie’s model for addiction is the same as for weakness of will in general: hyperbolic discount curves. Does this really *explain* addiction? And worse: in so far as there is irrationality it is the irrationality of having such curves, with the resulting changing desires, and the subsequent vulnerability to cash pumping (i.e. to a series of trades each of which the agent will consent to at the time, which is guaranteed to leave them worse off by their own lights). The agent is still acting on their desires in a perfectly straightforward way. On the Berridge model, there is more to the irrationality than that.

Watson

Many themes:

Addiction as acquired appetite. Do we need to say this in the light of the neuroscience?

Addicted action not well classified as irresistible. What is compulsive? Is it the action? Or is it rather some of the mentation (p.71). The latter is more plausible: addiction has its grip, not because it moves your hand, but because it influences your thoughts. What becomes of choice then?

Addiction as failure of reason responsiveness. But this definition is circular. (The Hydrophobe)

Addiction as like coercion. But we accept coercion as a defense only in certain circumstances. Interplay of considerations of justice and of policy.

Moral responsibility: rejection of the idea that we explain moral responsibility by getting clear on the mechanisms of addiction first. Rather the distinction between compulsion and weakness is itself normative (this is related to, but not the same as, his earlier idea that weakness of will is on a continuum with compulsion, distinguished only by social expectation).