

Habit, Addiction, and Thought

Stream Organisers: Ed Thornton & Fay Dennis

“... most Substance-addicted people are also addicted to thinking, meaning they have a compulsive and unhealthy relationship with their own thinking.”¹

In this transdisciplinary stream we aim to bring together academics and practitioners from a range of different disciplines to explore the relationship between habit, addiction, and thought. The stream will be open to all those who are looking for an environment in which to think collectively about the social, cultural and cognitive implications of addictive behaviour. We hope that this group will include academics from disciplines such as psychology and philosophy, practitioners working with the social and clinical aspects of addiction, and those with lived experiences of addiction.

As part of this stream we hope to critically assess a number of connected questions, including how contemporary theories of addiction can help us to understand many of those human actions, be they personal or collective, that are not traditionally considered as addictions. For example, the processes that constitute life, such as eating, sleeping, and reproducing, are all incessantly repetitive and habitual, but can they be considered and analysed using the categories of addiction?

We are especially interested in exploring the relationship between thought and addiction. One way we hope to do this is by reassessing the role that the concept of habit plays in the history of philosophy by considering its proximity to the concept of addiction. For example, what happens if we problematize Hume's claims in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* that human volition is a determination of thought acquired by habit, and that belief is “nothing but a peculiar sentiment, or lively conception produced by habit” (141-142) by replacing the concept of habit with that of addiction? Habit also forms the basis for ethics in the work of Aristotle, Aquinas, and Locke, and as the foundation of belief for thinkers such as C. S. Peirce, John Dewey, and William James. What effects will be produced if we rethink these philosophical references to habit as implying the specific kind of acquired, habitual process commonly called addiction?

Other questions that participants may wish to consider include: Is thought inherently addictive? Does the capacity for abstract thought rely on unthinking habitual processes? If so, could these processes be understood as addictions? Is the distinction between habit and addiction discrete and binary or continuous and gradual? Is addiction best understood as a secondary and dysfunctional activity, in relation to rational thought, or can the power of addiction be understood without any reference to a normative model of rationality? Also, do addictions only exist at the human level, or are there addictive pre-individual processes ‘below’ the level of the human individual and addictive social processes ‘above’ the level of the human individual?

In the spirit of the LCCT we are especially interested in submissions that challenge the traditional conference format. Non-verbal forms of presentation, group participation, and other forms of interaction are highly encouraged. We are especially interested in sharing personal and professional experiences of addiction that disrupt the received wisdom concerning habit, addiction, and thought.

¹ This quote is taken from a passage of David Foster Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest* in which the character Don Gately, a recovering alcoholic, lists the many things that one learns when living in a halfway house for recovering addicts.