

[A] Chapter Nine: The Singing Women (The Sirens)

[B] What do you really want?

[Insert icon: Katina_2]

The story of the Sirens gives philosophers plenty to think about. I have a question for you, but make sure you think about this question, before reading on.

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When Odysseus is tied to the mast what do you think he wants to do? Do you think he wants to swim to the music or not?

<Box ends>

[Insert Talk Time Icon_2]

Well, it does seem that he wants to swim towards the music. He's shouting at his men to untie him and let him go. But Odysseus will die if he does. And do you think Odysseus wants to die? If you know anything about Odysseus you'll know that he isn't someone who wants to die. So why would he want to do something that will cause him to die, something he doesn't want to do? Here's another question:

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Does this mean that he both wants to swim to the island and doesn't want to swim to the island at the same time?

<Box ends>

That seems very strange.

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Some philosophers have been thinking about this very problem. What they say is that there are two kinds of ‘wanting’: a first kind of wanting and a second kind. To help you understand this, imagine that your dad is a smoker. Maybe he is and maybe he’s not, but imagine that he is for now.

Let’s also imagine that your dad wants to give up. He has not smoked for a whole week but now he really, really wants to. So, he both wants to smoke, because he’s addicted, but he also wants to give up. So, he wants to smoke, but he doesn’t want to want to smoke! Get it! Philosophers say that your dad’s wanting to smoke is the first kind of want (let’s call it ‘Want 1’) and your dad’s not wanting to want to smoke is the second kind (‘Want 2’). Like this:

Want 1: “I really want a cigarette!”

Want 2: “But I don’t want to really want a cigarette because I want to give up!!”

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Do you think people who smoke are in a similar situation to Odysseus when he is tied to the mast and can hear the music?

<Box ends>

[Insert Talk Time Icon_2]

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Can you think of any other examples where someone wants to do something and doesn't want to do it at the same time? Is it a case of want 1 and want 2?

<Box ends>

[Insert Talk Time Icon_2]

<Box>

When you want to do something are you free to stop wanting to do it?

<Box ends>

Here are some examples to help focus you:

<Insert bullet points>

Wanting to eat.

Wanting to hit someone when you're angry.

Wanting to eat your favourite food.

Not wanting to eat your worst food. (Are you free to want to eat it?)

Falling in love.

<Bullet points end>

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[C] Meet a philosopher: Harry Frankfurt on 'Want 1 and 2'

[Insert illustration Harry Frankfurt_1 .jpg]

Harry Frankfurt (born 1929) is a contemporary philosopher who thinks that a person is only truly free if they can control their wants or desires, if they can control their want 1 desires ("I want to smoke.") with stronger 'want 2' desires ("I don't want to want to smoke.") If you can control the first wants with the second wants then you are truly free, according to Frankfurt. He calls people who can't do this Wantons! Do you agree with Frankfurt? Is this the best way to be free?

Further questions:

<Insert bullet points>

Do we really want to do what we think we want to do?

Is doing what we want always best for us?

Are there things we should be stopped from doing even though we want to do them?

Should we be free to do what we want when the only person we harm is our self?

Are we free?

<Bullet points end>