

Wanting To Be Is Not

Ignorance and Bliss

*On Wanting
Not to Know*

Mark Lilla

Wanting to be is not merely a simple expression; it encapsulates a profound concept that often underlies human motivation, aspirations, and the intricacies of personal development. In a world brimming with desires and ambitions, the distinction between wanting to be and actually being is a fundamental one. This article explores the nuances of this concept, examining the psychological, philosophical, and practical implications of our desires versus our realities.

Understanding the Concept of Wanting

Wanting is an inherent part of the human experience. From a young age, individuals develop desires that shape their identity and guide their actions. However, these desires do not always translate into reality. This dissonance can lead to confusion, frustration, and a sense of unfulfillment.

The Nature of Desire

Desires can be categorized into various types:

- **Material Desires:** Wishes for possessions or wealth.
- **Experiential Desires:** Longings for experiences, such as travel or adventure.
- **Social Desires:** Yearnings for relationships, recognition, or status.
- **Personal Growth Desires:** Aspirations for self-improvement and mastery of skills.

While these desires can be motivating, they can also create a gap between what we want to be and what we currently are.

The Psychological Perspective

Psychology offers insights into why wanting to be does not equate to actual being. Several factors contribute to this phenomenon, including self-perception, motivation, and the impact of societal expectations.

Self-Perception and Identity

How we perceive ourselves plays a crucial role in our ability to achieve our desires. Often, individuals harbor self-limiting beliefs that hinder their progress. For instance:

- A person who wants to be a successful artist may believe they lack talent, preventing them from pursuing their passion.
- Someone aspiring to be a leader might doubt their abilities, which holds them back from taking on leadership roles.

This disconnect between desire and self-perception can create a cycle of wanting without being.

Motivation and Action

Desire is a powerful motivator, but it is not always enough to spur action. Theories of motivation, such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, suggest that individuals must fulfill basic needs before they can pursue higher-level desires. For example:

1. Physiological Needs: Food, water, shelter.
2. Safety Needs: Security and stability.
3. Love and Belonging Needs: Relationships and community.
4. Esteem Needs: Recognition and self-worth.
5. Self-Actualization Needs: Achieving one's full potential.

If basic needs are unmet, the desire to become something more may remain just that—a desire.

Philosophical Insights

Philosophy has long grappled with the distinction between wanting and being. Existentialist thinkers, in particular, have explored the nature of existence and the human condition, highlighting the complexities of desire and fulfillment.

The Existential Dilemma

Existentialists argue that human beings are defined not just by their desires but by their actions and choices. This leads to the notion that:

- Authenticity is Key: To truly "be," individuals must act in ways that align with their values and desires. Simply wanting is insufficient; it requires a commitment to action.
- The Absurdity of Existence: Philosophers like Albert Camus have posited that life is inherently absurd, and the struggle to find meaning is part of the human experience. This perspective encourages individuals to embrace their desires but also to accept the limitations of their reality.

Practical Implications of Wanting vs. Being

Understanding the distinction between wanting to be and actually being has practical implications in various aspects of life, including career development, personal relationships, and mental health.

Career Development

In the professional realm, many individuals aspire to rise in their careers or switch to more fulfilling paths. However, the journey from wanting to being can be fraught with challenges.

- Skill Development: Individuals may want to be leaders or experts in their fields but lack the necessary skills. Investing time in education and training is crucial.
- Networking and Opportunities: Wanting to be recognized in a profession requires proactive networking and seizing opportunities. Passive desires often yield minimal results.

Personal Relationships

Desires for meaningful relationships are common, yet the transition from wanting to being can be complex.

- Communication: Successful relationships are built on open communication and vulnerability. Wanting intimacy is not enough; individuals must actively cultivate it.
- Mutual Effort: Relationships require effort from both parties. Wanting to be in a loving relationship necessitates a commitment to nurturing that bond.

Mental Health and Well-Being

The gap between wanting to be and being can significantly impact mental health. Individuals may experience feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, or depression when their desires are unfulfilled.

- Setting Realistic Goals: Establishing achievable goals can bridge the gap between wanting and being. This involves self-reflection and understanding one's limitations.
- Mindfulness and Acceptance: Practicing mindfulness can help individuals accept their current state while still pursuing their desires. This acceptance fosters a healthier relationship with one's aspirations.

Bridging the Gap: Strategies for Transformation

To transform the desire of wanting to be into the reality of being, individuals can employ several strategies that encourage personal growth and fulfillment.

1. Self-Reflection and Awareness

Understanding one's desires and motivations is the first step toward bridging the gap. Journaling, meditation, and introspection can facilitate this process.

2. Setting SMART Goals

SMART goals—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound—can provide a structured approach to transforming desires into realities. This method encourages individuals to break down larger aspirations into manageable steps.

3. Seeking Support

Engaging with mentors, coaches, or support groups can provide guidance and encouragement. Sharing desires with others can foster accountability and motivation.

4. Embracing Failure

Recognizing that failure is a part of growth can alleviate the pressure of wanting to be perfect. Each setback offers valuable lessons that contribute to personal development.

5. Celebrating Progress

Acknowledging small victories along the way can reinforce motivation and create a sense of achievement. Celebrating progress helps individuals appreciate their journey, blurring the line between wanting and being.

Conclusion

In conclusion, wanting to be is not simply a matter of desire; it is a complex interplay of psychology, philosophy, and practical application. Understanding the distinction between wanting and being can empower individuals to take meaningful steps toward their aspirations. By fostering self-awareness, setting realistic goals, seeking support, embracing failure, and celebrating progress, individuals can transform their desires into tangible realities. Ultimately, the journey from wanting to being is not just about achieving goals but about embracing the fullness of the human experience.

Frequently Asked Questions

What does 'wanting to be is not' signify in personal growth?

'Wanting to be is not' emphasizes that merely wishing for change or improvement isn't enough; action and commitment are required to achieve personal growth.

How can 'wanting to be is not' impact mental health?

The phrase can highlight the frustration that comes from unfulfilled desires, potentially leading to feelings of inadequacy or anxiety if individuals do not take steps towards their goals.

In what ways can 'wanting to be is not' serve as a motivator?

It can motivate individuals by reminding them that aspirations must be paired with effort, encouraging them to take actionable steps towards their goals rather than remaining passive.

How does 'wanting to be is not' relate to goal setting?

It underscores the importance of setting realistic, actionable goals rather than just dreaming about what one wants to become, thus promoting a structured approach to achieving aspirations.

Can 'wanting to be is not' lead to self-reflection?

Yes, it can prompt individuals to reflect on their true desires and motivations, assessing whether they are genuinely committed to their goals or merely fantasizing about them.

What are the potential pitfalls of 'wanting to be is not'?

It can lead to feelings of stagnation and frustration if individuals focus too much on their desires without taking proactive steps, potentially resulting in a cycle of inaction and disappointment.

How can one overcome the challenges posed by 'wanting to be is not'?

By creating a clear action plan, setting measurable milestones, and regularly reviewing progress, individuals can transform their desires into achievable outcomes.

What role does accountability play in overcoming 'wanting to be is not'?

Accountability can be crucial as sharing goals with others or finding a mentor can provide support and encouragement, making it easier to turn aspirations into reality.

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