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Endless Happiness: Confessions of a Recovering Addict

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for  
the degree Master of Arts in Religious Studies

by

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## ABSTRACT

### Endless Happiness: Confessions of a Recovering Addict

by

Lucas Miles McCracken

I set out to write about how to be happy, and my questions about happiness led me to a consideration of addiction because I began to notice a fundamental similarity: Like addicts, we mortals suffer a dependence on finite substances for our joy, and their passing away always brings a comedown. To think through the implications of this parallel, I went to Augustine's *Confessions*—one of the most poignant and impactful reflections on the relationship between finitude and happiness in the Western philosophical tradition. My original research question, "What does it mean for a human to be happy?" transformed through my readings of Augustine into: If being human is, as we say, a "condition" then what are its symptoms, and, furthermore, what would it mean to recover from it? I analyze Augustine's own attempt to come to terms with the fact that, for us mortals, being happy means having something to lose. In this thesis, I retell Augustine's autobiographical conversion narrative as a story of addiction and recovery. My method is redescriptive: I do not aim to abstract out and critique his "claims" or even to situate them in their historical context but to feel his pain as best I can to demonstrate that today's concerns about cultural addiction to consumption and entertainment have deep and unlikely roots within the Western philosophical and theological tradition—roots that underlie an entire family tree of "existential" thinkers, including even those who would not acknowledge any real affinity among themselves. I attempt to uncover these roots not only as a matter of intellectual history but also, and primarily, in service to my broader interests in questions regarding happiness and the will.

## Part 1: Admittance

### I.

If being human is, as we say, a “condition,” then what are its symptoms, and, furthermore, what could it possibly mean to recover from it? My readings of numerous thinkers, ranging from Roman African theologians to contemporary American novelists, have led me to believe that one of the human condition’s primary features is addiction. Instead of viewing addiction through the lens of medicalized pathology, I would like to consider addiction as a basic element of human existence—in other words, the idea that being human involves addiction elementally. As philosopher Frank Schallow remarks in his *Toward a Phenomenology of Addiction*, “the phenomenon of addiction is...a microcosm or mirror image of the larger human predicament” (*TPA*, 6). In agreement with Schallow, instead of admitting that we *have* a problem, I think the first step is admitting that we *are* a problem.

Normally speaking, addiction describes a recurring compulsion to engage in some specific activity despite harmful consequences to one's health, mental state, and/or social life. The addict may find the behavior rewarding psychologically or get "high" while engaged in the activity but may later feel guilty, remorseful, or even overwhelmed by the consequences of that recurrent choice. As such, addiction is a pathological condition and therefore opposed to health and happiness. If someone is an addict, then their addiction must be managed or treated for that person to have the least chance at being healthy and happy.

However, if we think of addiction not as an exceptional case of dysfunction in human behavior, but as a fundamental aspect of it, then how does that change the way we think about happiness? If we reorient our thinking in this way, then the categorical opposition between addiction and happiness would imply that happiness is possible only if we effectively lobotomize ourselves—that is, only at the cost of some fundamental part of our humanness. Or, contrapositively, it would suggest that insofar as one endeavors to be "authentically" oneself, to take ownership for one's whole self, then one must sacrifice or forego happiness. In a certain way, the former represents an embrace of the cliché that "ignorance is bliss," and the latter conjures an image of the classic existential "hero," braving truths the plebeian masses can't bear but at the high cost of his health, happiness, relationships, and, ultimately, his sanity. I resist the dichotomous thinking at the heart of both these paths and the despair it inevitably produces.

And yet, what would it mean to conceive addiction as a necessary condition of human happiness? If, at base, addiction involves recurrent, self-inflicted suffering, then

how could addiction form the ground of anything we might call happiness? In brief, how could chronic suffering possibly be the basis of lasting happiness? This essay ventures a response to those questions. For help, I have looked to a group of thinkers profoundly attentive to addiction as an existential, and not just medical, issue. I believe a concern with addiction is central to a lineage of thinkers, linked by a chain of reference and citation, beginning with Saint Augustine, through Martin Heidegger, to contemporary philosopher Jean-Luc Marion and novelist David Foster Wallace.

Of the three, Wallace, whose *Infinite Jest* deals intimately with several characters living in a Boston halfway house, most explicitly treats questions about addiction and recovery. In a 2003 interview, he says the foremost motivations to write *Infinite Jest* were the recent suicides of two friends and, relatedly, his growing concern that addiction had become central to contemporary American culture, the zeitgeist of the nation:

There's a particular ethos in U.S. culture, especially in entertainment and marketing culture, that very much appeals to people as individuals: that you don't have to be devoted or subservient to anything else; there is no larger good than your own good and your own happiness. In the book [*Infinite Jest*]...characters who become drug addicts, there's a form [to it]. The root, in English of 'addict' is the Latin *addicere*, which means religious devotion. It was an attribute of beginning monks, I think. There's an element in the book in which various people are living out something that I think is true, which is that we all worship, and we all have a religious impulse. We can choose, to an extent, what we worship, but the myth that we worship nothing and give ourselves away to nothing simply sets us up to give ourselves away to something different—for instance, pleasure, or drugs, or the idea of having a lot of money and being able to buy nice stuff...trying to get ahead as an individual (2003).

In this remark, Wallace suggests that addiction is not merely a dysfunctional relationship to certain things like drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, etc. Instead, addiction is a mode of being in the world characterized, at its core, by this drive to devote ourselves

to something, to worship—a drive whose centrality to American life is shrouded by cultural narratives of individualism, self-determination, and independence. Wallace formalizes this insight in *Infinite Jest*:

We are all dying to give our lives away to something. God or Satan, politics or grammar, topology or philately. To games or needles or some other person—the object seemed incidental to this will to give oneself away, utterly. Something pathetic about it. A flight-from in the form of a plunging-into. Flight from what exactly? [...] And to what purpose? (900).

In this light, the drug addicted characters in *Infinite Jest* shouldn't be interpreted as social outliers but as exemplary cases of a mainstream ethos of American entertainment culture and consumer individualism. Likewise, the average American consumer is distinguishable from the addict only when viewed through a medicalized lens, according to which specific attachment-objects and practical outcomes are determinative of addiction, rather than the mode of being itself.

As long as we understand addiction exclusively as “a cluster of cognitive, behavioral, and physiological symptoms”—namely, impaired self-control, antisociality, self-harm, and increasing baseline for chemical effect—then we will fail to see how addiction operates on a cultural level as an entire way of life, among people who are, medically speaking, perfectly normal and healthy (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Ed.*, “Substance Use Disorders,” 483). I think a phenomenological approach, which focuses on formal structures of subjectivity, could complement the medical, outcome-oriented conception of addiction as we try to understand ourselves and, maybe, be happy. In this intuition, I share Schalow's starting point:



Because the *nuances of language* become central, a philosophical approach must take precedence (over traditional ways of addressing addiction). For by the word ‘addiction’ we no longer simply mean a clinical or medical diagnosis concerning a person’s dependence on specific substances, e.g. drugs or alcohol, but instead designate a broader historical and cultural transformation of our way of “to be” (as well as an individually-based problem) [...] Could it be that the renewed concern for addiction, the need to wrestle with its recalcitrance and revisit it *as a* problem, directs us back to the perennial philosophical questions concerning what it means to be human, to exist, and, ultimately, the meaning of being in general? (TPA, 4).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a review of the etymological nuances of ‘addiction’, see Richard Rosenthal and Suzanne Faris, “The Etymology and Early History of ‘Addiction’” in *Addiction Research & Theory*, 27:5, 437-449. Rosenthal and Faris observe that “contemporary usage of *addiction* is contradictory and confusing; the term is highly stigmatizing yet popularly used [especially in marketing] to describe almost any strong desire, passion, or pursuit.” They find that *addictio*, the abstract noun derived from the verb *addicere*, ‘to say to’ or ‘to speak to’, had two principal senses: (1) *Addictio*, “the technical Latin term for the judicial act by which a debtor was made the slave of his creditor. The sentence was pronounced, or spoken, by the judge, or *praetor*. [...] The pronouncement was nothing short of a ‘binding spell’ in that, in the exercise of [the *addictio*], the praetor was acting in a quasi-religious capacity; his words were thought to embody the power of Jupiter” (438). As for the *addictus*, the passive form of *addicere*, the hapless individual was led away in chains, physically given over to his possessor. (2) In addition to judicial duties, the praetor also had the responsibility of seeking endorsement, or taking auspices, from the gods before battle. “The sky god Jupiter would through the medium of birds communicate approval (*addixerunt*) and support the proposed assault. [...] In all historical accounts of auspices taken prior to battles and other significant undertakings, the birds [Jupiter by proxy] appear as the subject of *addicere* always in the active voice. In sum...only the gods, through the medium of the birds, or the praetor, in his judicial capacity, might perform the act of ‘speaking to’ [*addictio*]. The very act of speaking was imbued with power through its association with the authority of the gods. Thus, the word *addiction*, at its root, is one of the most powerful words. We may be reminded that another powerful word, *fate*, at its root means ‘to speak’” (440). Already in its origin, ‘addiction (similarly to the word *sanction*) is a contronym, or auto-antonym, in that, on the one hand, it denotes a condemnation and, on the other, a blessing. In the Middle and Late Roman Republic, “the notion of enslavement [instead of the auspicious sense]...persisted as descriptive and no longer literal” (437). In the Early Modern period, the reflexive verb ‘to addict’ meant ‘to attach oneself in a sort of middle voice not quite articulable in English. The strange verb appeared first and most commonly in English reformers’ translations of and commentaries on Jean Calvin’s theology. Trained as a classicist and a lawyer, Calvin used the term in its original juridical sense to articulate the central paradox of his doctrine of special providence: “Man acts voluntarily and not by compulsion,” yet “whatever happens is ordered by the Lord” (*Institutes*, II, 2, 7; III, 7, 10). Calvin’s appropriation of *addicere* expresses that the subject is simultaneously the praetor and the *addictus*. The action of ‘addicting oneself to something was, in itself, neutral. Whether an ‘addiction’ was positive or negative consisted in the quality of the object of attachment. By the early 17th century, ‘addiction’ was “mostly positive in the sense of devoting oneself to another person, cause, or pursuit.” For example, instead of “Yours, Truly,” the phrase “Most Addicted” was used as a common valediction in personal letters. However, over time, ‘addiction’ was increasingly associated with gambling and drinking as possible objects to which one could addict oneself. While disparate sources were using medical metaphors to convey the seriousness of overindulging in gambling and drinking during the prohibition movement, it was not *addiction* itself that was the disease; it was drunkenness and gambling. While the word ‘drunkard’ did exist, there was no catch-all term for the sick gambler. The noun ‘addict’ as a generic medical category appeared for the first time around the turn of the twentieth century.

In effect, Wallace and Schalow ask us to consider the following: If addiction is indeed a pathology, then it is contemporary culture itself, if not the human being as such, that is pathological, not just the deviant druggie.<sup>2</sup> Or, if the druggie is indeed deviant, then his deviance from the mainstream consists only in the object of worship he chooses, not in his addictedness itself.<sup>3</sup> By drawing out these implications, I do not mean to downplay the significance of medical addiction or to suggest that the differences between addicts and “healthy” people are superficial or inconsequential. Rather, I merely wish to open a different and hopefully productive perspective that is not represented by medical understandings of the phenomenon—not against the medical but alongside it. The tensions between the two approaches are meant to be generative, not polemical.

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<sup>2</sup> As Ryan Kemp observes in “The Temporal Dimension of Addiction,” “The levels of addiction have increased over the past two hundred years. There is no coincidence that this has happened at the same time that modern industrial based city-society has developed (“The temporal dimension of addiction. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 2009, 40 (1): 1–18)

<sup>3</sup> Derrida develops this point in a 1989 interview, “The Rhetoric of Drugs”: “Actually, in the eyes of the law, dependency on a toxic product or even on harmful medications is not, in itself, what constitutes drug addiction. But let’s try to slow down and take a moment to consider this modernity. As always, drugs are here the effect of an interpretation. Drugs are ‘bad’ but the evil in them is not simply a ‘harmfulness’. Alcohol and tobacco are, as objects of consumption, just as artificial as any drug, and no one will now dispute their harmfulness. One may prescribe—as does the medical community and a certain segment of society—abstinence from drinking (especially while driving—a decisive question for the public/private distinction) and abstinence from smoking (especially in *public* places). Still, even if they are considered as somehow ‘bad’, as driving or health hazards, alcohol and tobacco are never denounced as narcotics, they are never branded with such a moral stigma. The relation to ‘public safety’ thus must lie elsewhere. One can, of course, refer to alcohol or tobacco as ‘drugs’, but this will necessarily imply a sort of irony, as if in so doing one only marked a sort of rhetorical displacement. Tobacco and alcohol, we tranquilly assume, are not really drugs. Of course, their harmfulness can form the object of dissuasive campaigns and of a whole quasi-moral pedagogy, but the simple consumption of these products, in and of itself, does not form the object of moral reprobation nor certainly of criminal prosecution. One can prosecute a drunkard because he is also a dangerous driver, but not because alcohol might have been ‘classified’ as a narcotic (to use the legal terminology of the articles defining the *War on Drugs*)” (Originally appeared as “*Rhétorique de la drogue*” in a special issue of *Autrement*, “Mutations” series, n. 106 [1989], edited by J.-M. Hervieu and then in the collection, *Points de suspension: Entretiens* [Paris: Galilée, 1992].).

What I see Wallace doing is shifting the baseline of analysis. If being human is itself a pathology, then in what sense can we, maintaining our humanity, be “healthy” at all? In the same way that Heidegger sees human existence as a problem without a solution (what he calls an “issue”), Wallace seems to see it as an illness without a cure.<sup>4</sup> If such is the case, then happiness might seem out of the question. However, my project asks precisely that question: If being human is an illness without a cure or a problem without a solution, then what could happiness look like? I’d like to think happiness outside the categories of cure, solution, and fulfillment. I’d like to consider the possibility that, for us, there is no salvation. By contrast to salvific models of happiness, I prefer Swiss psychoanalyst Ludwig Binswanger’s phrase “endless healing” to describe what I’m getting at.<sup>5</sup> To me, conceiving human living as a process of “endless healing” rather than as a recovery timetable suggests a model of patience (which takes on its double sense in this context) wherein healing remains unfinished so long as it persists and, in its persistence, has no clear goal, or end.<sup>6</sup> Without a cure, all we have is terminal

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<sup>4</sup> In *Being and Time*, Heidegger formulates that point as follows: the human being is the being for whom, in its being, that being is an issue for it.

<sup>5</sup> This phrase is the title of an edited collection of clinical documents regarding cultural historian Aby Warburg’s treatment by Binswanger during the early 1920s after an acute psychological crisis, involving his taking sole responsibility for the Germans’ defeat in WWI and holding his family hostage at gunpoint. Originally published in German as *Die unendliche Heilung*, this collection has been translated into French as *La guérison infinie* and into Spanish as *La Curacion Infinita* but not yet into English.

<sup>6</sup> I’m thinking here with Nietzsche’s project to affirm life as pure “Becoming” with no ultimate purpose that justifies and renders meaningful the whole. He asks, “Can we remove the idea of a goal from the process and then affirm the process in spite of this?” (*The Will to Power*, “European Nihilism”). In my case, I’m trying to remove the idea of cure from healing and then affirm healing in spite of this. This basic structure in my project could be restated in a number of parallel terms: remove the idea of fulfillment from happiness and affirm happiness in spite of this; remove the idea of salvation from carrying your cross and affirm carrying your cross in spite of this. Mine is, I think, the same project as Albert Camus’ in “The Myth of Sisyphus.” Sisyphus is condemned to spend eternity rolling a boulder up a hill only to watch it roll back down again, over and over and over. Thus, he lives a life by which nothing ultimate is accomplished. Camus tries to find an “absurd wisdom” by which we can imagine Sisyphus not only as overcoming the urge to kill himself in such a predicament but also, and more importantly, as genuinely affirmative of that life. Insofar as human life resembles the Sisyphian condition, if we are to have any chance at happiness,

care; without a solution, all we have is resoluteness. A life that cannot be saved is not a life unworth living, but a life that needs to be cared for, resolutely. To summarize the project in terms that are not exactly my own, I'm trying to envision a eudaimonism or "good life" philosophy within the framework of what one might call an "existentialist" tradition.<sup>7</sup>

As a good life philosophy in its own right, the ethos of consumer individualism promises, in Wallace's view, that if one gives oneself away to the right thing(s) and to a sufficient extent, then one will receive one's self from those things—that is, be fulfilled and, once fulfilled, happy.<sup>8</sup> In an unpublished 1996 interview on The Connection with WBUR Boston, Wallace says, "I think somehow the culture has taught us, or we believe, that really the point of living is to get as much stuff as you can and experience as much pleasure as you can, and the implicit promise is that that will make you happy" (1996). In this way, consumerism as a way of life depends on a logic of investment and return: I give myself away in order to receive myself more fully later on; if I invest my time, attention, and money in the right ways, then I will receive, as a dividend, a happier and more fulfilled self.<sup>9</sup> That logic, he worries, inspires a cyclicity (hence the sense of

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then "we must imagine Sisyphus happy." This injunction by which Camus concludes the essay [*Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux*] is not an interpretive claim about Sisyphus' own state but a matter of practical urgency for us. If we ourselves want to be happy, then we better find a way to imagine Sisyphus as such.

<sup>7</sup> Chronologically, such a "tradition" (again, defined by a chain of reference and citation rather than mutual agreement on matters of politics, ethics, ontology, or epistemology) would include: Augustine, Meister Eckhart, Martin Luther, Jean Calvin, Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Georges Bataille, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Jacques Derrida, among others.

<sup>8</sup> I grammatically depersonalize 'oneself' by representing it in the possessive case as 'one's self' to indicate the commodified nature of the "self" within this consumer framework.

<sup>9</sup> Today, it seems that time, attention, and money are increasingly fungible terms. We've acknowledged publicly that time is convertible into money, and vice versa, since Benjamin Franklin 1748 essay, "Advice to a Young Tradesman": "Remember that time is money. He that can earn ten shillings a day by his labour, and goes abroad, or sits idle one half of that day, though he spends but sixpence during his

entrapment in Wallace's thinking) wherein consumption feeds into a feeling of emptiness that demands always more consumption to be fulfilled, yet this further consumption generates, instead, an ever-deepening sense emptiness, and on and on. As Kathryn Lofton observes in her *Consuming Religion*:

Consumption is loss. After consumption, something is gone: gone because of use, because of decay, or because it was destroyed. In economic terms, consumption describes the using up of goods or services having an exchangeable value. In pathology, consumption describes the progressive wasting of the body. Either way, nobody is feeling great, since the gasoline is running low or the lungs are swelling up. Consumption generates greater need to fill in the gap for its losses. Inevitably, we need more things, more services, and more measures to counteract unrelenting consumption (*CR*, 1).

The more one consumes, the emptier one feels, because consumption is loss, not gain.<sup>10</sup>

Wallace, echoing Jacques Derrida, seems to be saying that there is a phallogocentrism or logical phallacy to the assumption that happiness means getting your hole filled—a privileging of presence over absence.

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diversion or idleness, it ought not to be reckoned the only expence; he hath really spent or thrown away five shillings besides." In recent years, though, we have also adopted the term "attention economy" within everyday parlance—a concept first developed by economist Herbert A. Simon in his lecture "Designing Organizations for an Information-Rich World": "In an information-rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it" (in M. Greenberger edited, *Computers, Communications, and the Public Interest*. Baltimore: The Johns-Hopkins Press, 1971. 38-72).

<sup>10</sup> I'm reminded here of a quote by Epicurus: "Nothing is enough for the man to whom enough is too little." This line appears as the epigraph for Robert and Edward Skidelsky's 2012 book, *How Much is Enough: Money and the Good Life*, which is primarily "an argument against insatiability, against that psychological disposition that prevents us, as individuals and as societies, from saying 'enough is enough'." It is directed at economic insatiability, the desire for more and more money" ("Introduction"). They try to understand and critique "economic insatiability" on a social, political, and psychological level and, ultimately, propose their own concrete vision of "how much is enough."

The failure in this quest for happiness and fulfillment through consumption manifests itself in the irony that while, for many, “things are often materially very comfortable,” those same people still feel a “great sadness and emptiness”:

The sadness is in realizing, for me at about age 27 or 28, how phenomenally lucky I’ve been—not only never to have been hungry or cold but to be educated, to have access to books. Never before in history has a country been so blessed, materially and intellectually, and yet we’re miserable (1996).

Wallace is observing a double-bind created by the expectation that material comfort and ubiquitous pleasure will provide happiness: he feels sad, and because he is materially privileged, he also feels sad (and guilty) *that he is sad*, since the alleged prerequisites of happiness have already been attained. According to the cultural narrative of consumerism, Wallace and his middle class friends have fulfilled the necessary *and sufficient* conditions for happiness, and yet they are not happy; thus, the problem must be they themselves. In this way, this ethos about happiness turns on the self in the twofold sense that the self is the axis of its logic and also its victim.<sup>11</sup> As such, it inspires a consumeristic self-enclosure: “Doing this book...was about why exactly we are so sad, and how have we become so unbelievably selfish, like lethally selfish, and self-indulgent” (1996).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Alain Ehrenberg explores this idea that our modern pursuit of happiness “turns on” the self in *The Weariness of the Self: Diagnosing the History of Depression in the Contemporary Age* [*La fatigue d’être soi : Dépression et société*]. He claims that depression is “a state of mind inherent to individualism” and explores how certain “mutations of individuality during the second half of the twentieth century” have generated a particular depression. Ehrenberg argues that mainstream “depression” derives from the increased burden of self-determination or “the responsibility of a person who has freed herself from...the old systems of obedience and conformity” to face “the onslaught of the possible” (preface, 232, and 230).

<sup>12</sup> Consistent with Wallace’s concern with our “lethal” selfishness, he articulates a real anxiety about intergenerational responsibility: “Part of the thing about the book is that the book is set...about a generation in the future. I wanted some sort of idea—and I don’t have children—but I’m kind of obsessed with the idea of what my children will think of me and of us and of what we’ve done with all we’ve been given and why we are so sad” (1996).

The downward spiral of American consumerism emerges from a constitutive contradiction in its basic promise: independence through investment, autonomy through devotion, fulfillment through addiction. Contrary to the “American myth,” Wallace suggests that no matter what or how much you consume, you will never be fulfilled. In fact, contrary to companies’ stated goals, consumer *dissatisfaction* is essential for fiscal sustainability. Over the long run, the consumer must remain precisely *unfulfilled* by his or her purchases in order to continue consuming and, thus, for the system to endure—the psychological analogue to planned obsolescence.<sup>13</sup> Because of this structure, the quest for fulfillment through consumption moves cyclically through a sense of lack - purchase<sub>n</sub> - temporary satisfaction - emergent unfulfillment - purchase<sub>n+1</sub>. Going round and round in this manner, the project of our all consuming happiness screws itself (into the ground) or, in other words, digs its own grave.

Reaching for an image to describe this cycle, Wallace remarks offhand in a 1997 interview with Charlie Rose that “the brass ring I’ve been chasing does not make everything okay...I got it, really quick, and realized it didn’t make me happy at all” (1996). In response, Rose asks, “Do you see yourself chasing a brass ring now?” Wallace replies:

A lot of my problem right now is that I don’t have a brass ring, and I’m kind of open to suggestions about what one chases. There are really abstract ideas about what art can be, the redemptive quality of art, and kindness to animals, and, you know, all the cliches we can invoke . . . but the people who most interest me now are the people who are older and who have sort of had a midlife crisis. They tend

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<sup>13</sup> “A business strategy in which...the process of becoming unfashionable or no longer usable...is built in from a product’s conception. This is done so that, in the future, the consumer feels a need to purchase products and services that the manufacturer brings out as replacements for the old ones” (*The Economist*).

to get weirder, because the normal incentives for getting out of bed don't tend to apply anymore. I have not found any satisfactory new reasons [to get out of bed], but I'm also not getting ready to, you know, jump off a building or anything.

The terrible irony of the last line notwithstanding, the image Wallace invokes is quite instructive, even more so than he probably intended.<sup>14</sup> The phrase “chasing the brass ring” refers to a simple carousel or merry-go-round game from the early 20th century. Most carousels had “jumpers” (animals that move up and down as the carousel spins) on the inner rows only, with the outer rows fixed in place. Thus, most merry go-rounders tended to ignore the outer rows in favor of the jumping animals in the center. To encourage more riders to sit on the outer rows, the “brass ring” game was devised and became a common feature of the carousel. The object of the game was simple: as the carousel goes around, riders sitting on the outer row would lean out and try to grab a metal ring presented by a dispenser placed just out of reach. Since the dispenser would dispense only one brass ring per ride—the others being iron—and since reaching the ring was difficult while remaining on the animal, getting the brass ring was a special feat. The brass ring usually entitled the holder to a free ride when they returned it to the attendant. Eventually, the game was outlawed because too many children were getting hurt by reaching too far for the ring and falling off the carousel, face first, onto the ground several feet below.

According to this model, which Wallace uses to describe the madness of consumerism, merriment means going around and around in circles trying to reach an object(ive), whose attainment affords the person along for the ride merely the privilege

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<sup>14</sup> Wallace hanged himself in 2008.



of going around in the same cycle yet again. Getting the brass ring merely allows you to pursue another brass ring.<sup>15</sup> In this carnival, the prize for winning is trying again.<sup>16</sup> You win: try again! And yet, perhaps surprisingly, Wallace's impulse is not to reject the merry-go-round altogether but to rethink how to enter into the gyration anew: "I'm kind of open to suggestions about what one chases." Consistent with his notion that "we are all dying to give our lives away to something" would be the idea, implicit here, that we are all and always chasing something, running in circles. Thus, his being "open to new suggestions about what one chases" implies an understanding of the human as being constantly in pursuit of something that always ends up behind us yet which we still chase. On this gloss, the human is fundamentally desirous and, as such, future-oriented—yet future-oriented in a recursive rather than straightforwardly linear way. In a recursive pursuit, my past lies *before* me in both senses of the preposition.

If such is the case, and indeed "we are all dying to give our lives away," then what becomes clear is that we do *not* face a choice between independence or dependence, between autonomy or heteronomy. Rather, we face a choice among forms of

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<sup>15</sup> On this point, there is a curious connection between Wallace and G.W.F. Hegel, who observes in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* that "insofar as...an end is a finite one, it may be in turn reduced to a means to some further intention, and so on in an infinite progression." Hegel calls this infinite progress a bad or false infinity, because it remains a quantitative infinity (in the sense of  $n+1$ )—endless change whereby no difference is made; in other words, a tomorrow with no future.

<sup>16</sup> Wallace's brass ring chaser on the merry-go-round represents a similar situation to Albert Camus' Sisyphus, who's condemned by the gods to roll a boulder to the top of a mountain only to see it roll down again as soon as he reaches the top, over and over again for eternity. It also evokes the image of the "hedonic treadmill," which is the common symbolic depiction of a psychological phenomenon called "hedonic adaptation" wherein one tends to return to an emotional baseline fairly quickly despite major positive changes, like a promotion, a new house, etc. Robert Burton, in his *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, cites Augustine as saying: "A true saying it is, 'Desire has no rest'; it is infinite in itself, endless; and as one calls it, a perpetual rack, or horse-mill...still going round as in a ring" (*The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Ex-classics Project, 2009. <https://www.exclassics.com/anatomy/anatomy1.pdf>. 241)

dependence. In other words, if we all have this will to addiction, then the question of happiness can't be formulated as mental health vs mental illness; it becomes, instead: What kind of addict will I be? To what will I give myself away? For what will I risk falling flat on my face? As Wallace ventriloquizes through *Infinite Jest's* Remy Marathe, a French Canadian spy:

Your U.S.A. word... 'fanatic', do they teach you it comes from the Latin for 'temple'? It is meaning, literally, 'worshipper at the temple'. [...] Our attachments are our temple, what we worship, no? What we give ourselves to, what we invest with faith. [...] Are we not all of us fanatics? I say only what you of the U.S.A. only pretend you do not know. Attachments are of great seriousness. Choose your attachments carefully. Choose your temple of fanaticism with great care. [...] Make amusement all you wish. But choose with care. You are what you love. No? You are, completely and only, what you would die for without, as you say, the *thinking twice*. [...] This, is it not the choice of the most supreme importance? Who teaches your U.S.A. children how to choose their temple? What to love enough not to think two times? [...] For this choice determines all else. No? All other of our, you say, *free* choices follow from this: what is our temple?" (*IJ*, 106-108).

While the stakes of the question, "What kind of addict will I be?" could not be higher, to construe one's answer as a matter of volition is problematic because that formulation "assume[s] it's always choice, conscious, decision," Marathe's interlocutor, Hugh Steeply, responds (*IJ*, 108). "This isn't just a little naive, Remy? You sit down with your little accountant's ledger and soberly decide what to love? [...] What if sometimes there is no choice about what to love? What if the temple comes to Mohammed? What if you just *love*? Without deciding? You just *do*: you see her and in that instant are lost to sober account-keeping and cannot choose but to love" (*IJ*, 108).

Crucially, Wallace's discussion of addiction—which, note, he repeatedly describes using religious references and language—becomes a question about love and its

*direction*, both in the sense of its orientation and our ability (or not) to manage it. While Steeply recognizes the existential stakes of love, or of “choosing your temple of fanaticism,” as outlined by Marathe, he interrogates the assumption of total agency and the possibility of the careful, utilitarian calculation which Marathe exhorts. Steeply’s retort suggests the middle voice (between active and passive) as a way of understanding the self’s formation in and through love.<sup>17</sup> If we translate his rhetorical questions into declaratives and follow their implications, then I hear him stating the following: I am what I love, yes, but I do not willfully choose or decide what to love. On the contrary, I am decided by my love and, therefore, receive myself from that to which I am given over, which is to say what I have a predilection for. However, neither am I passively submitted to something entirely beyond me, for my love, or my heart, is most intimately my own. Thus, in love, I am myself not entirely self-possessed; I exceed myself in my very being insofar as I am constituted most intimately by that to which I am given over in and through love. According to Wallace’s middle voice approach to subjectivity, which is grounded in his analysis of addiction as an existential condition, the American ideal of radical self-sufficiency—of being a “self-made” man, as we say—is constitutionally impossible even though culturally exalted.

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<sup>17</sup> Readers of Augustine will hear the profound Augustinian bent in this line of thinking. While I will discuss this connection later on, it should signal here that my reading here of Wallace is deeply informed by Thomas Carlson’s work on the question of love in Augustine and Heidegger, *With the World at Heart*. Here, I’m thinking of this passage in particular: “The mood in which Dasein always already finds itself is neither simply passive nor yet wholly active but falls somewhere close to the middle voice. A mood...befalls me even as I participate in it. It is neither simply inward nor yet outward. I am ‘in’ a mood, but that mood is also ‘in’ me, exceeding me while also touching and shaping me most inwardly, intimately. Mood thus signals the sense in which the seeming externality of world constitutes, and is constituted by, Dasein’s very core” (123).

Marathe's emphasis on choice and calculation in matters of self-actualization echoes today's widespread rhetoric within happiness and self-help literature of "finding your passion."<sup>18</sup> According to this popular notion, one essentially occupies the place of a consumer within a marketplace of "passions" among which I might, with help from the right personality tests and proper experimentation, pinpoint the one that fits me and, by following it, lead a fulfilling life. I find perhaps the most famous passion story, that of Christ, to be a good illustration of Wallace's logic of addiction as an alternative model of selfhood.

Christ does not "find his passion" and, therein, his happiness. Rather, his passion finds him, and with it came, instead of happiness, "an overwhelming anguish" (Matt. 26:38 ). Further, when he is given over to his passion (a word, *passio*, we should not forget, means 'suffering' in its root), he feels a devastating sense of passivity, even victimization, rather than consumer empowerment, which he poignantly expresses with his famous last words: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). However, Jesus is not entirely passive in his passion. During his Agony in the Garden the night before his crucifixion, Jesus takes ownership for that to which he has been given over. "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. If this cup cannot pass from me unless I drink it, Your will be done!" (Luke 22:44). In this prayer, repeated three times, passive resignation turns into active affirmation as Jesus takes up his passion and, since he is defined most intimately by that to which he is given over, thereby takes ownership

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<sup>18</sup> See any of the following popular books: *Find Your Passion* by Henri Junttila, *The Passion Test* by Janet and Chris Attwood, *Finding Your Own North Star* by Martha Beck, *It Starts With Passion* by Keith Abraham, and *Follow Your Heart* by Andrew Matthews

for himself as a whole. He owns what has been given to him. However, he does so not as a matter of autonomous choice but as a response to a call. Like Steeply observes, the temple comes to Mohammed, and the cross comes to Jesus, not the other way around.

## II.

Wallace's account of the addict, worked out dialogically between Marathe and Steeply, resonates profoundly with contemporary philosopher and theologian Jean-Luc Marion's description of the human being, which he systematically articulates in his *Being Given* and develops in his *In the Self's Place*. In these two works, Marion endeavors to refine traditional conceptions of human being, not content with classic notions like ego, subject, spirit, consciousness, or Heidegger's neologism, Dasein. In place of such terms, Marion describes the human as *l'adonné*—a term whose rendering into English certainly caused Marion's translator some grief.

The difficult term breaks down into three basic parts: the definite article 'the' [*le*], the preposition 'to' [*à*], and the past participle 'given' [*donné*]. On strictly etymological grounds, 'the given-to' would have sufficed—in other words, 'the receiver'. However, not only must the translation cohere etymologically to the French, but also it must represent the term's philosophical significance in Marion's highly technical usage. Further, it must correspond to the language in translation of Marion's primary interlocutors. Within continental philosophy at the time of *Being Given*'s publication (in French, *Étant donné*), there were debates surrounding "the gift" [*le don*]<sup>1</sup>—most notably in conversation with Derrida's work—and this text was Marion's intervention. To satisfy

the linguistic, stylistic, philosophical, and scholarly demands of translation, Jeffrey Kosky renders *l'adonné* as 'the gifted', the choice of which he explains most thoroughly in the translator's note from *In the Self's Place*:

'The gifted' should be taken in the sense of having a talent for . . . (for converting the given into the seen) but also as a substantive made from the passive form of the verb *to gift*. This latter sense is meant to convey that the self, too, happens originally in and through a givenness in which I receive myself at the same time as and along with the given (*ISP*, xx).

In other words, 'the gifted' means to convey the double sense of the human self as (a) that "to whom/which" experiences give themselves and (b) that whose self is given in and by those very experiences. Further, it connotes that the human is privileged (in French, *doué*) phenomenologically because it, through its experiencing, transforms mere physical occurrences (the given) into phenomena (the seen)—a process Heidegger describes as "disclosure" or "unveiling," in the Greek, *aletheia*, truth itself. Thus, the translation of *l'adonné* as 'the gifted' manages to communicate Marion's multivalent technical inflection of the term while remaining true to its etymological roots, all while explicitly tying it to contemporary debates within the field—no small feat.

But every translator makes sacrifices. Despite its nuance, the rendering leaves dormant one provocative aspect of the French. "What is lost in 'the gifted,'" Kosky acknowledges, "is the sense of the ordinary French (*s'*)*adonner*, which means something more like, 'to give oneself over' and is used to describe an addict, a devotee, or someone who applies himself seriously, as to study" (*ISP*, xx). The colloquial French word for 'addict' is *accroc*, which, derived from the verb *accrocher* ('to hang'), literally describes someone who is "hooked" or "hung up" on something. The term essentially

communicates an analogy: the addict is to his substance as a coat to its hanger and, perhaps also, as the condemned to his noose. In each case, the latter term holds up and structures the former and, implicitly, in such a way that life and death hang in the balance. Thus, while the substantive *adonné* is not the standard French noun for ‘addict’, its infinitive root, *s’adonner*, as Kosky says, is used in ordinary French to describe the behavior of the addict: surrender, submission, devotion. In this way, “the gifted, receiving himself at the same time as the given, is, like the addict and perhaps the devotee, one who cannot live without that on which he depends” (*ISP*, xx).

Marion’s description of the human being as *l’adonné* therefore resonates in both language and substance with Wallace’s sense that “we are all dying to give our lives away,” like worshippers seeking a temple, structured by addiction as a basic state of being.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, according to Marion, the human self, as *adonné*, is constituted by “suffer[ing] a call so powerful and compelling that he must surrender [*s’y rendre*] to it, in the double sense of the French *s’y rendre*: being displaced and submitting to it” (*BG*, 268). In the same way that Jesus becomes himself in responding to the summons of his passion, so for the *adonné* “individuation or selfhood is...imposed on me by the word originally heard from the call, not pronounced by *myself*” (*BG*, 271). Marion’s model of selfhood is not the free agent, but the respondent, always conditioned by that which calls [in French, *appelle*] or appeals to him. Such a call “freezes the *adonné* in place,

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<sup>19</sup> The idea that we all, as devotees by nature, face a choice of which god(s) to worship echoes a key claim from Max Weber’s “Science as a Vocation” that we face a “polytheism of values.” He says that answering the questions “What shall we do, and how shall we arrange our lives?” amounts to worshipping certain “gods” (or value spheres) and inevitably blaspheming others: “Which of the warring gods should we serve?” Furthermore, there is no way of scientifically ascertaining which gods are lovable, as Steeply suggests; one simply responds to one’s vocation or calling [*Beruf*].

puts him in immobile availability for what might not finally come or indeed ever begin. The *adonné* gives his attention to an essentially lacking object,” whose lack nonetheless defines him (*BG*, 268). The situation is likewise for the addict, whose substance makes an appeal, or is appealing, in such a way that he cannot but submit by making himself unconditionally available to answer the call, whenever it may arrive.

In this way, Marion’s notion of the the unpredictable call and his description of its effects on the *adonné* (surprise, making-oneself-available, and focused attention) seem to describe, in Wallace’s terms, the “sudden Substance-cravings [that] will rise unbidden in a true addict’s mind like bubbles in a toddler’s bath...a lifelong Disease: you can’t keep the thoughts from popping in there” (*IJ*, 890). These cravings, which occur “all of a sudden and out of nowhere,” are none other than, as Marion says, the call of “an essentially lacking object,” whose appeal “freezes the [addict] in place, puts him in immobile availability for what might not finally come or indeed ever begin”:

You can all of a sudden want to get high with your Substance so bad that you think you will surely die if you don’t, and but can just sit there with your hands writhing in your lap and face wet with craving, can want to get high but instead just sit there, wanting to but not (*IJ*, 201-02).

Through his analysis of the call, Marion theorizes that contingency or unpredictability plays an essential role in the constitution of the self. The *adonné* becomes itself by receiving and responding to what’s given; however, what’s given is given unpredictably or, in Marion’s words, *selon arrivage*. Kosky explains the nuances of this difficult phrase and his translation: “The French term appears in everyday life when one dines at a restaurant featuring fresh fish. A literal translation would be



something like ‘catch of the day’ or ‘according to the market’.” These more direct translations, Kosky says, lose much of what Marion intends. “The unpredictability and uncertainty of what will arrive to market each day is, as the traveler knows, mirrored in the guesswork that surrounds the landing of a jet at any major airport [a claim perhaps more relevant in 2002 when the translation was published than today]. I have therefore chosen to shift the register from dining out to air travel and render *arrivage* as *unpredictable landing*” (*BG*, note 13, p. 351). As defined by unpredictable landings, your “self” is neither something you must go out and find nor set about to make but something that falls out of the sky and lands on you, largely against your will, and sometimes as a disaster.<sup>20</sup>

Wallace, again consistent with Marion’s analysis, remarks that the experience of being an addict teaches this essential fact about life:

What metro Boston AAs [Alcoholics Anonymous] are trite but correct about is that both destiny’s kisses and its dope-slaps illustrate an individual person’s basic personal powerlessness over the really meaningful events in his life: i.e. almost nothing important that ever happens to you happens because you engineer it. Destiny has no beeper; destiny always leans trenchcoated out of an alley with some sort of *Psst* that you usually can’t even hear because you’re in such a rush to or from something important you’ve tried to engineer (*IJ*, 291).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Although Marion would want to attribute this insight to Augustine alone, I read this point as an extrapolation of Heidegger’s notion of “thrownness.” In *Being and Time*, Heidegger observes that human existence has the character of thrownness in that none of us is here of our own accord; we have all been thrown into existence, arriving in the midst of a world already long since underway, whose pre-existing patterns of life, or traditions, define us—from the clothes we wear, to the words we speak, to the names we have, to the faces we make. “Who” one is on a day-to-day basis is largely an historical coincidence, something that “fell together” (*co-incidere*) rather than something one assembled.

<sup>21</sup> Wallace attaches the following endnote to the passage cited above: “The way a White Flagger [AA member] formulates this...is that 99.9% of what goes on in one’s life is actually none of one’s business, with the .1% under one’s control consisting mostly of the option to accept or deny one’s inevitable powerlessness over the other 99.9%” (*IJ*, note 100, p. 1004).

Thinking with both Marion and Wallace, the phenomenon of the “unpredictable call” or the “trenchcoated *Psst*” is not necessarily a metaphysical notion implying an agentic “caller” but actually offers a mundane description of attraction or predilection, whereby certain things are irresistibly appealing to certain people, and a banal observation that the calls we receive determine what we do and who we become. Surely any academic knows well that receiving certain calls (or not) from potential employers, say, determines where they will go, what they will do, what relationships they will have, and many other outcomes; in short, unpredictable calls define who they will be in very concrete ways. For Marion, the fact that we are constituted in these ways by the calls we receive—be they literal summons or affective appeals—necessitates that we “renounce the autarchy of self-positing and self-actualization” (*BG*, 268). Much like Wallace’s suspicion towards the American narrative of self-making and its “lethal selfishness,” Marion suggests that our dependence is ontological and therefore insuperable. On their account, “rugged individualism” is a pipe dream of the masculine imagination. In other words, being a “dependent” is not merely a temporary and juvenile state but a permanent condition of our existence.

Despite the profound resonances with Wallace’s thinking, Marion is neither explicitly analyzing addiction (which literally appears in both *Being Given* and *In the Self’s Place* only in Kosky’s notes), nor commenting on consumer society and its ills. In both works, he’s systematically critiquing Heidegger’s description of human existence from *Being and Time*. His earlier work, *Being Given*, aims to correct—among other things—what Marion sees as Heidegger’s solipsistic conception of the human self by

introducing a more robust consideration of dependence and passivity. The more recent *In the Self's Place* builds on this project by reading Augustine's *Confessions*—a key source for Heidegger himself—as a means of critiquing *Being and Time*'s basic claims. In *Confessions*, which recounts Augustine's lifelong attempt to understand the individual self's relation to God, Marion sees a more profound and, in his view, more accurate description of human dependence and, thus, a totally different vision of what it means to be “authentically oneself”—one that privileges love and relationality rather than anxiety and self-possession.

As a model of dependence, Marion's language and logic of addiction would seem to be an Augustinian import that offers a preferable alternative to Heidegger's overly independent Dasein. While I do think this implicit concern with addiction has roots in Augustine, I do not think it introduces something alien to Heidegger's description of the human or works as a critique of it. In other words, Marion underprivileges what Heidegger has to say about dependence, love, and self-narcotization in *Being and Time* and beyond and ignores, further, the fact that Heidegger derives these analyses from his engagement with Augustine. The polemic Marion constructs between the Augustinian and Heideggerian perspectives suffers from what I think are mischaracterizations of both figures on certain key issues. These misattributions derive, I suspect, from a twofold motivation: to mark differences between Augustine and Heidegger where there are actually similarities and, conversely, to draw parallels where there are actually divergences. Regarding the former, the contrast struck between Augustine as the thinker of life, love, relationality, and dependence vs. Heidegger as morbidly fixated on death,

anxiety, self-possession, and solipsism is, on my reading, untenable as an interpretation of *Being and Time*, which remains deeply Augustinian on precisely these themes.

Marion's insistence on this difference sets up a caricature of Heidegger's secular philosophy as morbidly self-obsessed, and allows him, on that basis, to introduce Augustine's Christian theology, which as such overcomes secular morbidity and solipsism with a counter-logic of life and love, as the saving alternative. The dichotomy between secular nihilism and Christian life-affirmation operative in Marion's interpretations of Heidegger and Augustine echoes the rhetoric of a conservative identity-Catholicism, with which Marion has long been outspokenly aligned.<sup>22</sup> As John Paul II states in his 1995 *Evangelium Vitae*:

In seeking the deepest roots of the struggle between the "culture of life" and the "culture of death"...we have to go to the heart of the tragedy being experienced by modern man: the eclipse of the sense of God and of man, typical of a social and cultural climate dominated by secularism, which, with its ubiquitous tentacles, succeeds at times in putting Christian communities themselves to the test. Those who allow themselves to be influenced by this climate easily fall into a sad vicious circle: when the sense of God is lost, there is also a tendency to lose the sense of man, of his dignity and his life; in turn, the systematic violation of the moral law, especially in the serious matter of respect for human life and its dignity, produces a kind of progressive darkening of the capacity to discern God's living and saving presence (*EV*, § 21).

Marion, in effect, accuses Heidegger of falling victim to this same "sad vicious circle" described by John Paul II, but on a philosophical level. Because Heidegger secularizes or de-theologizes Augustine's thinking in *Being and Time*, which is to say he methodically "loses the sense of God," he also therefore "loses the sense of man," that is,

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<sup>22</sup> For more on this claim about Marion, see Bradley B. Onishi's introduction to Emmanuel Falque's *The Loving Struggle*, which is titled "Is the Theological Turn Still Relevant? Finitude, Affect, and Embodiment," specifically, the section "Vatican II, May '68 and the Resurrection of the God Question."

he fails to understand fundamental aspects of human being, like love, alterity, and dependence—aspects which Augustine, as Christian, understood.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the idea that Heidegger’s secular philosophy, as such, necessarily leads to “the systematic violation of the moral law” resonates with the longstanding criticism, levelled first by Emmanuel Levinas and repeated by Marion, that the framework of *Being and Time* is incapable of or, at best, unconcerned with ethical thinking. In short, the fact that Marion is motivated to portray Augustine’s theology as a preferable alternative to Heidegger’s explicitly atheological philosophy is consistent with his proclamation that “the world has only a single logic, that of God [i.e. theo-logy]. But this logic appears to us or does not appear to us; that’s a different issue, which one can really debate. It is normal that it does not appear to us very clearly, but nevertheless there are no other kinds of logic.”<sup>24</sup>

As for the latter motivation to draw parallels where there are genuine divergences, the notion that Augustine, similarly to Heidegger, understands finitude not as a provisional limit to be overcome (a mark of our fallenness) but as an unconditional

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas A. Carlson aptly summarizes Marion’s contentions with Heidegger as follows: “Marion posits a sharp distinction between Augustine and Heidegger...by stigmatizing in Heidegger his abandonment of the distinctly erotic horizon of Augustine, a betrayal that translates a theological understanding of human life (*vita humana*) into the terms of an existential analysis of Dasein’s Being [...] Heidegger misses the erotic truth, Marion contends, in his turning away before God, *coram Deo*, and that turning would be an integral part of the existential idolatry in Heidegger that Marion has been positing and critiquing since *The Idol and Distance* and *God Without Being*: an idolatry according to which the ‘authenticity’ of Dasein would consist in Dasein’s ‘appropriation of the self by itself’ through a resolute decision of Dasein’s will. From this point of view, Heidegger attributes to the will of Dasein a power over itself, and hence a possession of self, that would be unthinkable within the erotic, and iconic, horizon of Augustinian theology, where the access of the self to itself does not depend on me, and especially not through the simple return of the will back to itself” (*With the World at Heart*, 85-86; citing, *In the Self’s Place*, 151, 169)

<sup>24</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, ‘Lustiger ou l’intelligence de la foi’, *Le monde*, 8 November 2007. [http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2007/08/11/lustiger-ou-l-intelligence-de-la-foi-par-jean-luc-marion\\_943730\\_3232.html#21lsYaJUFRJiocJg.99](http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2007/08/11/lustiger-ou-l-intelligence-de-la-foi-par-jean-luc-marion_943730_3232.html#21lsYaJUFRJiocJg.99). Accessed December 2019.

horizon of human existence (simply the ontological difference between creature and Creator) is likewise debatable as a reading of Augustine given the textual evidence to the contrary. Marion's insistence on this parallel, rather than serving to undersell Heidegger, this time overestimates Augustine's affirmation of finitude. This effort seems like an attempt to render Augustine's theology more credible to a secularist French academy, for whom any pretensions to transcendence seem like, as Weber says, an "intellectual sacrifice" issuing from a refusal "to bear the fate of the times like a man."<sup>25</sup>

Marion employs a traditional and quite successful strategy in Christian apologetics. In the same way that Augustine used Neo-Platonism and Aquinas used Aristotelianism, Marion uses Heideggerian phenomenology. Each processes his own theology through the language and concepts of the preeminent philosophical system of the day in order to render it as credible as possible for a wider, skeptical readership. However, to preserve the distinct Christianness of what results from such apologetics, each theologian must negotiate his intellectual debt to non-Christian thinkers somewhat sheepishly through strategic disavowals and attributions regarding the derivation of certain ideas. Thus, *In the Self's Place* produces an Augustinian theology that is markedly Heideggerian but disavows its status as such by defining itself in opposition to a strategically caricatured *Being and Time*. The result is that Marion appears to learn things from Heidegger while insisting those very things are crucially absent from his

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<sup>25</sup> H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (translated and edited), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, 129-156. New York: Oxford University Press, 1946.

secular thinking yet present in the Christian Augustine, thereby demonstrating the distinction of the latter over the former.

To read Marion with this suspicion actually allows a generous and generative approach to his writing. Despite my disagreements with him, his work offers invaluable resources for my own project because I see him providing a new and insightful interpretation of Heidegger even while he claims it's an interpretation of Augustine, specifically intended to supplant the "methodologically atheistic" philosopher's impoverished view of human existence.<sup>26</sup> In my own interpretation, Heidegger would not disagree with Marion's suggestions that the human being suffers addiction as an existential condition, that the self is defined by what calls or appeals to it, and that one is what one loves—even if Marion thinks he's proposing an Augustinian alternative to Heidegger's anthropology with these very theses.<sup>27</sup> In effect, I read *Being Given* and *In the Self's Place*, despite their self-presentation as correctives to *Being and Time*, as constructive appropriations of it that open pathways to see in Heidegger and Augustine what has largely been unaddressed by both Augustinian and Heideggerian scholarship: their mutual preoccupation with addiction as a defining element of the human condition.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> In his 1920-21 lecture course, published as *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, Heidegger states both that "Philosophy is atheistic as a matter of principle" and, later, that "philosophy itself is, as such, atheistic, if it understands itself radically" (*PIA*, 14 and 28).

<sup>27</sup> For a systematic development of the latter point, see Carlson's aforementioned *With the World at Heart: Studies in the Secular Today*. Carlson takes up Marion's and others' charge against Heidegger that, in his preoccupation with death, he is a loveless, and hence solipsistic, thinker and argues, on the contrary, "that the mortality Heidegger elucidates is integral to a love that his writing does in fact repeatedly reference, and his thinking engage" ("Thinking Love and Mortality with Heidegger," 116).

<sup>28</sup> While some scholars in various disciplines have marshalled certain insights from *Being and Time* to augment their analyses of addiction (Frank Schalow, *Towards a Phenomenology of Addiction*, Avital

But Heidegger himself, whom Wallace studied formally at the graduate level and referenced numerous times with respect to his own fiction, less explicitly addresses addiction than either he or Marion. In the Macquarrie and Robinson translation of *Sein und Zeit*, the word “addiction” appears only a few times as a rendering of the German *Hang*—somewhat surprising since the typical German word for addiction is *Sucht*. In the same section, Heidegger also discusses *Nachhängen*, or “hankering,” which is characteristic (as the etymological connection would suggest) of *Hang*, or “addiction.” Joan Stambaugh, in her recent retranslation of *Sein und Zeit*, opts to replace MacQuarrie’s and Robinson’s “addiction” with “predilection” and their “hankering” with “indulgence.” The preeminent French translation by Emmanuel Martineau renders *Hang* inconsistently as *la tendance* and *le penchant*, and *Nachhängen* as *l’aspiration*. I make these linguistic comparisons to show that the *literal* presence of ‘addiction’ in *Being and Time* is debatable linguistically and, at that, limited to three sections, § 39-41. Nevertheless, I would argue that, regardless of the presence of the word itself, the dynamics of addiction are central to Heidegger’s analysis of human existence in similar ways to Wallace and Marion. A concern with addiction as an existential problem runs latently through the language and logic of *Being and Time*.

Heidegger describes the human’s average everyday living—what he calls “inauthenticity” [*Uneigentlichkeit*]<sup>2</sup>—as an anonymous mode of going along with the crowd, that is, of living according to the taken for granted standards and norms of one’s

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Ronnel, *Crack Wars*, Ryan Kemp, “The Worlding of Addiction,” and Paul Smith-Pickard, “The Locus of Addiction”), none to my knowledge have worked in the opposite direction, applying the concept of addiction as a lens through which to read *Being and Time* systematically, which will be my task in Chapter 2.



social milieu or tradition. Heidegger observes that for the most part the human being does not, to borrow Thoreau's phrase, "live deliberately" in the world but, instead, "manifests its *addiction* to becoming 'lived' by whatever world it is in" (SZ, 196). In other words, we are simply thrown into, or given over to, a social world wherein our life is always already interpreted, and our practical possibilities are, likewise, always already constrained by inherited norms. As Heidegger explains:

In no case is Dasein [roughly equivalent to 'human being'], untouched and unseduced by the way in which things have been interpreted, set before an open country of a 'world-in-itself', so that it just beholds what it encounters. The dominance of the public way in which things have been interpreted has already been decisive even for the possibilities of having a mood—that is, the basic way in which Dasein lets the world 'matter' to it. The 'they' prescribes one's state-of-mind, and determines what and how one 'sees' (SZ, 169-70).

Most of the time, we do not go through life as fully self-aware, self-possessed, individualized agents, actively and originally deciding in each instance how to comport ourselves, how to speak, and what to do—that is, who to be. Instead, we "go with the flow" or, as Heidegger says, "drift along" with the mainstream and approach these existential questions of whether and how the world matters, how I will communicate with others, and what I will do in life with a sort of "obviousness and self-assurance of the average ways in which things have been interpreted," which is to say, we don't actually approach these questions at all as genuine questions but, rather, take the answers for granted, that is, as given (SZ, 170). To be ourselves, we give ourselves away to what's given. Thus, the selves we end up being are not purely "our" selves because we inherit them.

According to Heidegger, by living or being lived in this way, deeply anxiety-provoking uncertainties about our own selves—namely, “Who am I?”—are covered over: “The ‘they’...to whom every Dasein has already surrendered itself in Being-among-one-another...supplies the answer to the question of the ‘*who*’ of everyday Dasein” (SZ, 128). Our average everyday sociality therefore provides a deep existential or psychological “disburdenment,” because we do not have to decide, always and in each case, what to do, what to say, and how to be. On an everyday basis, going about our daily projects, one knows who one is. There is no existential crisis faced when we order coffee or check out at the grocery store. In such instances, we behave as one behaves, passing the tokens—“How are you?” “Good, how are you?” “Thanks, have a nice day,” “Thanks, you too”—back and forth on queue to accomplish a taken for granted and quasi-mechanical interaction that, thankfully, poses no weighty questions of “Who shall I be? How shall I act?” Certainly, this automaticity is deeply problematic in some regards; however, Heidegger also makes clear that it is not just normal but indeed psychologically invaluable that one can, in many social contexts, just go with the flow of an historically informed pattern without facing the potentiality of being “authentically” ourselves in every act. Despite the longstanding critique that Heidegger overly denigrates average everyday sociality by labelling it “inauthenticity,” I think there are resources in *Being and Time* to consider both its dangers and benefits.

On the side of critique, however, Heidegger does describe this average everyday state as a “fleeing in the face of” [*Flucht davor*] oneself whereby one “falls” [*verfällt*]. Heidegger’s term for this everyday mode of being, *Verfallen* [falling], has a variety of

senses.<sup>29</sup> In German, it literally denotes a fall (as in a physical plunge) or lapse (as into habit) but also suggests something like ‘to fall into ruination, to decay’; moreover, it is used in colloquial German to refer to someone who has become addicted, like “*dem Alkohol verfallen*.” This going along with the crowd, as disburdening, is characterized by its “tranquilizing” or “sedative” [*beruhigend*] effect, which Heidegger says poses a constant “temptation” [*Versuchung*] to give oneself over and away to it. “The tempting tranquilization *aggravates* the falling” (*SZ*, 178). However, this going along with the crowd is highly stimulating even as it tranquilizes; it inspires a sedated busyness. When anxiety-inducing, and therefore paralyzing, existential questions about who one is, what one will do, and how one should live are taken for granted, then one can, as we say, “get out of one’s head” and get busy living. In this way, “the movement of falling,” though tranquilizing, “is characterized also by the commotion or whirlwind [*Wirbel*] it inspires (*SZ*, 178).<sup>30</sup>

There is a striking parallel, almost word for word, between Heidegger’s description of Dasein’s tendency to “constantly surrender itself to the ‘world’” as a “falling fleeing in the face of” (which he elsewhere calls “Dasein’s downward plunge [*Absturz*]”) and Wallace’s characterization of our universal impulse to “give our lives

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<sup>29</sup> MacQuarrie’s and Robinson’s translators’ note in *Being and Time*: “The verb ‘verfallen’ is one which Heidegger will use many times. Though we shall usually translate it simply as ‘fall’, it has the connotation of *deteriorating, collapsing, or falling down*. Neither our ‘fall back upon’ nor our ‘falls prey to’ is quite right: but ‘fall upon’ and ‘fall on to’, which are more literal, would be misleading for ‘*an . . . zu verfallen*’; and though ‘falls to the lot of’ and ‘devolves upon’ would do well for ‘*verfällt*’ with the dative in other contexts, they will not do so well here” (Footnote 2, 42).

<sup>30</sup> MacQuarrie and Robinson and Stambaugh both translate *Wirbel* as ‘turbulence’ to remain consistent, I suspect, with the controlling metaphor of something plummeting, as if out of the sky, towards disaster. However, in my reading, *Wirbel* has more of a sense of frenetic busyness, as in running around like chicken with its head cut off, or what Nietzsche calls “blindly raging industriousness.” On those grounds, I prefer commotion, whirlwind, or eddy.

away” as a “fleeing-from in the form of a plunging-into.”<sup>31</sup> In fact, as if nodding to *Being and Time* and its infamously untranslatable compound neologisms, the novelist remarks shortly after his somewhat awkward hyphenated phrase that “German is better equipped for combining gerundives and prepositions than is its mongrel cousin [English]” (*IJ*, 900).<sup>32</sup> Moreover, while Heidegger claims that this “falling fleeing in the face of” is “tranquilizing,” Wallace says that “giv[ing] our lives away to something” functions as “an anesthetic” (*IJ*, 446). In my project, I’m asking both thinkers: What is being fled? What is being anesthetized? What concrete forms does this escapism take? And, most importantly, is such escapism the only possibility of “happiness” for a secular person today?

Overall, the basic logic in Heidegger’s description of average everyday existence—that one receives one’s concrete self by “surrendering” oneself or giving

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<sup>31</sup> The connection between Wallace and Heidegger is not incidental. Wallace, who held a B.A. degree in philosophy, makes repeated references to Heidegger throughout his corpus: In his essay “Greatly Exaggerated,” Wallace ties the currents of deconstruction or poststructuralism within literary criticism to Heidegger and his mentor, Husserl. “Writers are sometimes wrong about what their texts mean, or sometimes have no idea what they really mean. Sometimes the text’s meaning even changes for the writer. It doesn’t matter what the writer means, basically...it matters only what the text says. This critical overthrow of creative intent set the stage for the poststructural show that opened a couple decades later. The deconstructionists...explicitly following Husserl and Brentano and Heidegger...see the debate over the ownership of meaning as a skirmish in a larger war in Western philosophy over the idea that presence and unity are ontologically prior to expression. There’s been this longstanding deluded presumption, they think, that if there is an utterance then there must exist a unified, efficacious presence that causes and owns that utterance. The poststructuralists attack what they see as a post-Platonic prejudice in favor of presence over absence and speech over writing.” Wallace goes on to gloss Heidegger’s *Poetry, Language, Thought* in connection to Barthes’ *Morte d’Author*, Derrida’s *Margins of Philosophy*, Foucault’s “What is an Author?” (in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*), and Cavell’s *Must We Mean What We Say?* In a letter to his former philosophy professor, William Kennick, Wallace writes that “I cannot tell you how dispiriting it is to have grad students spout theory dogma as revealed truth, or to pretend to ‘understand’ Derrida without having read Heidegger or Husserl” (*A Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies*, ix).

<sup>32</sup> If *Being and Time* is known for anything, it’s combining gerundives with prepositions. Some of its key terms include: Being-in-the-world, Being-there, Being-in, Being-with, Being-towards-death, Being-alongside, and, most comically, the formal articulation of care [*Sorge*] as “ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in (the-world) as Being-among (entities encountered within-the-world)” (*SZ*, 192).

oneself away to what's given—should ring out in agreement with both Wallace *and* Marion. In addition to this vision of the human self as an addict, Heidegger's terms themselves bear implicit references to or connotations of addiction. As I've noted prior, *Verfallen* could defensibly be translated as 'Becoming-addicted', both on etymological and philosophical grounds; and, along these lines, the term *versucherisch* [tempting], which characterizes the tranquilizing effect of falling, could plausibly be translated as "addictive," given the etymological relation between *Sucht* [addiction] and *versucherisch*.<sup>33</sup> The language of "tranquilization" or "sedation" [*beruhigend*] also obviously connects to drugs and their psycho-somatic effects; plus, the observation that one could be paradoxically stimulated by a tranquilizer is clearly true in the case of alcohol's pro-social effects. Given the centrality of these addiction-related terms to the account of inauthenticity and the claim, repeated throughout the text, that inauthenticity is the average everyday mode of human being, it is by no means a stretch to think that a consideration of addiction as an existential condition is crucial to understanding Heidegger's description of human being.

Since, as I have tried to indicate preliminarily, *Being and Time* can be fruitfully read in terms of addiction, then certainly the work of Augustine, too, which is not only decisive for both Heidegger and Marion but also explicitly cited by Wallace, needs to be reconsidered in light of that theme. Given that Heidegger's *Dasein* and Marion's *adonné* exhibit an addictedness in *Being and Time* and *Being Given*, respectively, then so too, I

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<sup>33</sup> Some German to English dictionaries actually list *verfallen* before *suchtig* as a translation of the English 'addicted'. *Verfallen* or some form of it also typically appears in entries for: 'expired,' 'dilapidated,' 'forfeited,' 'lapsed,' and 'wasted'.

suspect, will Augustine in his *Confessions*, since significant elements of both philosophical works were drawn from Augustine's self-diagnosis.<sup>34</sup> Thus, in Section 1, "Confessions of a Recovering Addict," I attempt to redescribe Augustine's autobiographical conversion narrative as a story of addiction and recovery both to show, through a sort of updated conceptual translation, the contemporary relevance of an old story and to lay the groundwork for my subsequent discussion of *Being and Time*. I characterize my close-reading as a "redescription" of Augustine's experiences to indicate that I do not aim to abstract out and critique his "claims" or even to situate them in their historical context but to feel his pain as best I can and, in so doing, to show that today's concerns about cultural addiction to consumption and entertainment, as articulated by Wallace, have deep and unlikely roots within the Western philosophical and theological tradition—roots that underlie an entire family tree of "existential" thinkers, including even those who would not acknowledge any real affinity among themselves. I attempt to uncover these roots not only as a matter of intellectual history but also, and primarily, in service to my constructive project about happiness. Hopefully, thinking through Augustine's and then Heidegger's analyses of the human "condition" in terms of addiction will help us to address Wallace's and my own concerns about the emptiness of consumer individualism and entertainment culture with greater philosophical resources

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<sup>34</sup> On Heidegger's appropriation of Christian sources, see: John Van Buren, *The Young Heidegger*; Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*; Christian Sommer, *Heidegger, Aristote, Luther: Les sources aristotéliennes et néotestamentaires d'Être et Temps*; Frederick Van Fleteren, ed., *Martin Heidegger's Interpretations of Saint Augustine*; Ryan Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*; Christophe Perrin, "Les sources augustiniennes du concept d'amour chez Heidegger"; Thomas A. Carlson, *With the World at Heart*; Sylvain Camilleri, *Phénoménologie de la religion et herméneutique théologique dans la pensée du jeune Heidegger*.

and more robust language whereby we can envision a secular happiness that is neither curative nor escapist, neither a fulfillment nor a tranquilization.

Ultimately, I think addiction is a paradigm through which to address not only questions about the will and its freedom but also about the circularity and repetitiveness of human living. Our condition of finitude, linear as it is, involves circularity and repetition.<sup>35</sup> Augustine keys in on a circularity in life regarding love and loss, and he tries to straighten things out through his teleological theology, to get on the straight and narrow towards the enjoyment of the perichoresis.<sup>36</sup> Augustine's *Confessions*—a story of his personal twists and turns, writhing in his mortal coil, a conversation about his conversions and perversions, his contortions—is not so much autobiographical but spirographical, always circling back but never quite picking up where he left off. Heidegger, even as he appropriates Augustine, tries to stay within the circularity of finitude rather than straightening things out. He spirals downward in his analysis, burrowing or plumbing into the ontological structures of human being. “An entity for which, as its Being-in-the-world, its Being is itself an issue, has, ontologically, a circular structure,” he observes. “If we see this circle as a vicious one and look for ways of

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<sup>35</sup> Hence the importance of all sorts of ‘turning’ (*verto*) in Augustine: conversion, perversion, introversion, extraversion, diversion, reversion, aversion, adversity, universality, self-enclosure [*incurvatus se*]; in Heidegger (*Kehre*): “*Hinkehr und Abkehr vom eigenen Dasein*” (turning to or turning away from one’s own Dasein), the phenomenon of *Wiederkehr* (return/recurrence), his *Umkehrung* (reversion) of Cartesian metaphysics, the (in)famous *Kehre* itself in his corpus (the name given by Heidegger scholars to the supposed “turning point” between “early” and “late” Heidegger); and in Wallace: all of the above, with a special focus on advertisement and conversationalism.

<sup>36</sup> First occurring in the writing of Maximus the Confessor, the noun *perichoresis* [literally, dancing-in-circles] is a term describing the interpenetrating circulation among the three persons of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The term derives from the verb *perichoreo*, used for the same technical theological purpose, which appears first in Gregory of Nazianus. The term was translated into Latin as *circumincession*.

avoiding it, even if we just ‘sense’ it as an inevitable imperfection, then the act of understanding has been misunderstood from the ground up” (*SZ*, 153). This precaution could be read as a deep critique of Augustinian teleological anthropology and hence as a pointed distancing from his own Christian sources. Finally, Wallace approaches this Augustinian inheritance from a more concrete and culturally located perspective: “The U.S. of modern A. is not a team or a code, but a sort of sloppy intersection of desires and fears, where the only public consensus a boy must surrender to is the acknowledged primacy of the straight-line, pursuing this flat and short-sighted idea of personal happiness” (*IJ*, 83). It is precisely this alleged primacy of the straight line that Wallace attempts to undermine. However, he does so differently than Heidegger. Where Heidegger spirals downward, trying to get to the bottom of things through an ontological analysis, Wallace spirals upward, always trying to see everything from above, meta-narrating his narratives. Thus, the upward spiral of Wallace is less an upbuilding or edifying ascension and more like a coiling up, a consciousness tying itself in knots, with serpentine sentences whose threads are nearly impossible to follow, layering over one another across massive looming texts. In different ways, I see Heidegger and Wallace inheriting Augustine’s sketch of the contours of humanity, yet offering alternative modes of inhabiting the circularity and repetitiveness of life without making recourse to a palliative teleology or succumbing to despair in its absence.



## Part 2: Confessions of a Recovering Addict

If only it could last...

- Augustine

### I.

Augustine finds himself lost when he loses his beloved friend. Upon his death, Augustine confesses, “My heart grew sombre with grief and everywhere I looked I saw death. My home town had become a torture, and my own home was a grotesque abode of misery; all that I had shared with him was, without him, transformed into a cruel torment” (4, 4). These few lines reveal the layers of Augustine’s grief: First, he suffers acutely from the loss of his friend (“[his] heart grew sombre with grief”). Second, he suffers chronically from the fact that his familiar haunts had become haunted by the all-too present absence of his beloved (“[his] own home was a grotesque abode of misery”). Third, and most insidiously, he suffers a festering anxiety from the realization that the world—no matter how homey—can at any moment transform into such a torture chamber, since “not everything grows old, but everything dies” (“everywhere [he] looked he saw [the possibility of] death”) (4, 9).

Thus, Augustine finds himself lost in the geographic sense that he's lost his bearings in this now alien land, marooned in a "strange place of unhappiness."<sup>37</sup> At the same time, he finds him-self lost in the existential sense that, with the loss of his beloved, he has lost his own self:

I was...surprised that when he was dead, I was still alive, for he was my "other self." Someone has well said of his friend, "He was half my soul." I had felt that my soul and his soul were indeed "one soul in two bodies." So my life was a horror to me. I did not wish to live with only half of myself (4, 6).

Augustine, at a loss, questions himself, "Why, my soul, are you so sad?" In the midst of a lament over the death of his friend, the answer seems obvious. The concrete cause of his sadness could not be more clear. However, the 'why' asks after something more fundamental: What is my condition such that the loss of my beloved also means the loss of myself? More broadly, what is the human condition such that "the lost life of those who die becomes the death of those still living" (4, 9)?

The fact that Augustine finds himself lost when he loses his friend signals, at base, that "[they] were deeply dependent on one another" (4, 4). But what was the precise nature of this dependence? Although a seemingly trivial observation, Augustine expresses genuine surprise that he survives the death of his friend, which reveals a central paradox of his selfhood: Augustine himself continues living after he loses himself. Like a zombie in a state of living death, he was "through with living but scared of dying" (4, 6). In times of extreme loss and grief, one feels as though "My world is

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<sup>37</sup> Moods/affects are commonly spoken about in topological terms: One can go to one's happy place, be in a dark place, a world of hurt; home is where the heart is, etc.

ending” or “My heart is broken,” and, for the bereaved, the world can truly be over<sup>38</sup> and the heart, truly broken.<sup>39</sup> Yet the impossible fact of the matter is that—like Augustine surviving the loss of himself—the world goes on after its end, and the heart keeps beating after it breaks, even against the survivor’s will. “This monstrous fact” demonstrates the precise sense of Augustine’s dependence (8, 9). In losing his friend, he loses something vital to his self yet without which he can, only unwillingly, survive: “I had lost the *source of my joy*” (4, 5). Returning, then, to his original question—“Why, my soul, are you so sad?”—he sees that the death of his friend functions like a violent intervention which cuts him off from his source of joy and forces him to admit that he suffers a dependence on those whom he loves for his happiness.

With the admission of his dependence, it dawns on Augustine that “misery is the state of every soul overcome by friendship with mortal things and lacerated when they are lost, which causes the soul to become aware of the misery which was its actual condition even before it lost them” (4, 6). In other words, the profound happiness he shared with his friend, because it has now mutated into a correspondingly deep grief, makes Augustine retrospectively see his past happiness as deceitful or “false.” When the source of joy passes away, “[past] sweetness is turned into [present] bitterness.” In this

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<sup>38</sup> For a reflection on this phenomenon of living beyond “the end of the world,” see Jonathan Lear’s *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*, which details the experience of Plenty Coups, the last Chief of the Crow Nation, who lives through and beyond the end of the Crow way of life, the utter disintegration of his world.

<sup>39</sup> According to the American Heart Association, “Broken Heart Syndrome [yes, a diagnosable condition] can strike even if you’re healthy. [It] may be misdiagnosed as a heart attack because the symptoms and test results are similar. In fact, tests show dramatic changes in rhythm and blood substances that are typical of a heart attack. But unlike a heart attack, there’s no evidence of blocked heart arteries. In BHS, a part of your heart temporarily enlarges and doesn’t pump well, while the rest of your heart functions normally or with even more forceful contractions” (heart.org).

way, “the lost life of those who die becomes the death of those still living” (4, 9). Like a turncoat, his happiness betrayed him by switching unpredictably to its opposite; like an unfaithful lover, his happiness did not stay true but left him, feeling deceived.

Augustine’s happy memories with his friend, upon his death, unmask themselves as what they truly were the whole time: pain lying in wait. For this reason, he claims that “we cannot think of the things which we formerly enjoyed...we shrink back from the memory of them” (4, 5). In fact, for Augustine, “happy memory” is an oxymoron. The happier the memory, the more one grieves its having passed away. Happiness *now* means grief *later*, and such “miserable felicity” is the absurdity that defines the mortal condition (3, 2).<sup>40</sup> Viewed in this light, human happiness is “a disease which brings its own punishment” (11, 30).

The twofold sense in which Augustine has “lost himself” consists in this radical reevaluation of memory. Insofar as one’s “self” and one’s “world” consist of the aggregate of one’s past experiences and the ways in which those memories are interpreted and brought to bear on present experience and future possibilities, the reinterpretation of memory entails at least a temporary disintegration of one’s self and one’s place. Because Augustine’s past experiences are not what he thought they were (what was once happy has now shown itself, at last, to be sad), he no longer recognizes himself in his own memory. He becomes alienated from himself by what is most intimate to his self—the memories held closest to his heart. Thus, when he “shrinks back from the memory of

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<sup>40</sup> While Augustine discusses the ways happiness can be miserable, Eric Wilson describes the potentially felicitous aspects of misery in his *Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy*

[things which he and his friend formerly enjoyed]” he attempts, futilely, to escape his now uncanny self:

I had become to myself a place of unhappiness in which I could not bear to be but from which I could not escape. To where should my heart flee to escape itself? Where should I go to escape myself? Where is there where I cannot pursue myself? (4, 7).<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, where? Futilely, he relocated to Carthage to escape the “strange land of unhappiness” his hometown had become. “The greatest source of repair and restoration,” though, “was the solace of *other friends*, with whom I loved what I loved as a substitute” (4, 8). For the same reason happiness passes away, so too does grief: “Time is not inert...its passing has remarkable effects on the mind. It came and went from day to day, and by its coming and going it...repaired me with delights such as I used to enjoy, and to them my grief yielded” (4, 8). Although taking refuge from one’s grief in the arms of loved ones seems like a healthy form of coping with loss, there is tragedy afoot.

Augustine finds solace for his trauma in the very thing which traumatized him—“friendship with mortal things.” In despair, he realizes that such coping, despite its immediate relief, mires him in a cycle of suffering.<sup>42</sup> The friendships in which

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<sup>41</sup> The psychological claustrophobia one feels in these lines reminds me of the famous 1979 horror film *When a Stranger Calls*, whose gripping opening scene (now a horror trope) stages a similar phenomenon: Jill Johnson is babysitting when she receives a call to the house asking if she has checked on the children recently. At first, she dismisses the call, but then she receives several more, and they become more frequent and threatening. Frightened, Jill calls the police, who promise to trace the call if she keeps the caller on the line long enough. She does so, and the police call her back and inform her that the call is coming from inside the house. At that moment, a light flicks on upstairs, and the stalker’s shadow appears backlit atop the stairs. In a panic, Jill drops the phone, runs to the door, frantically unhooks the lock, and screams—the scene cuts. The horror of the scene consists in learning that instead of being safe and sound in the most intimate and familiar place, you are actually in utmost peril, pain impending. Such is Augustine’s relation to himself in this time of loss.

<sup>42</sup> Jacques Derrida beautifully captures this “melancholy of friendship” in a eulogy of sorts for his friend, Hans Georg Gadamer: “The melancholy of friendship—at least as I experience it—stems from a sad and

Augustine takes refuge for his sorrow were merely “the causes of new sorrows,” for these friends, too, shall pass (4, 8). Thus, he despairs that the “restoration [provided by] the solace of friends...was a vast myth and a long lie. By its adulterous caress, my mind was corrupted. This fable did not die for me when one of my friend’s died” (4, 8). Augustine feels like he has not learned his lesson from the teachable moment of his initial trauma; “as a dog returns to its own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly” (Prov. 26:11).

This cycle of suffering is the behavior of an addict. As defined by the American Addiction Centers, “the term ‘addiction’ is used to describe a recurring compulsion to engage in some specific activity despite harmful consequences to one’s health, mental state, and/or social life. The addicted person may find the behavior rewarding psychologically or get a ‘high’ while engaged in the activity but may later feel guilty, remorseful, or even overwhelmed by the consequences of that continued choice.” Augustine diagnoses himself as suffering from precisely that condition—compulsively engaging in a pattern of behavior whose enjoyment induces a severe consequence.

At the heart of the matter, Augustine suffers these highs and lows because he sources his joy from finite resources, resulting in an emotional boom-bust cycle. Like a miner chasing the vein, his pursuit of happiness becomes literal, leaving him both emotionally and physically itinerant.<sup>43</sup> As we have seen, when Augustine’s friend dies, he

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invasive certainty: one day, death will separate us. It is a fatal an inflexible law that between two friends one will live to see the other die” (*Béliers : Le dialogue ininterrompu : entre deux infinis, le poème*, 20)

<sup>43</sup> Throughout my paper, I have included language meant to signal that and how the dynamics of addiction and recovery are unmistakably at play in our environmental crisis. Central to both are questions of sustainability, preservation, dependence on finite resources, self-destructive forms of indulgence, care/negligence of the future, etc.

feels forced to depart his hometown, as his source of joy has been exhausted. Because this resource is both vital and non-renewable, he must find a replacement. After the initial period of intense grief, Augustine does precisely that: he finds a new place and new friends, whom he “loved as a substitute,” thereby restoring himself with joy “such as [he] used to enjoy.” Augustine undergoes this same movement when he loses his longtime lover years later: “The woman with whom I habitually slept was torn away from my side because she was a hindrance to my marriage. My heart, which was deeply attached, was cut and wounded and left a trail of blood. She returned to Africa [from Milan, where Augustine had since migrated]...and I was unhappy” (6, 15). Facing yet again the loss of his source of joy, Augustine must look elsewhere for happiness; as lovers do, he moves on:

I procured another woman...and by this new relationship, the disease of my soul was sustained...or even increased, so that the habit was guarded and fostered...but my wound, inflicted by the earlier parting, was not healed. After inflammation and sharp pain, it festered. The pain made me cold and desperate (6, 15).

Finding a new source of joy caused the “wound inflicted by the earlier parting” to “fester” because no replacement can fill the hole created by the previous loss. Because each new source of joy provides a fix, it is never a cure. In this way, Augustine’s desire for happiness “takes him for a ride” in both the literal sense that it pulls him to and fro—from Thagaste to Carthage to Milan, from friend to friend, and lover to lover<sup>44</sup>—and the idiomatic sense that it deceives him, since each time he finds happiness, he finds

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<sup>44</sup> Mary Karr reflects on a similar pattern in her memoir, *Lit*: “It’s a truism, I think, that drunks like to run off. Every reality, no matter how pressing—save for maybe death row—has an escape route or rabbit hole. Some drinkers go inward into a sullen spiral, and my daddy was one of these; others favor the geographic cure. My mother taught me to seek external agents of transformation—pick a new town or man or job.”

something to lose.<sup>45</sup> For this reason, Augustine inhabits his happy place as a tenant—holding on to that which slips away—rather than as a freeholder, who resides in a state of belonging (of the place to him and him to the place).<sup>46</sup>

Augustine cannot settle down with his love but “meanders on and on” lurching after that which unpredictably flees—happiness (4, 15). Such is the sense of Augustine’s most famous confession: “My heart is restless” (1, 1). Inasmuch as Augustine desires happiness in the land of death, he condemns himself to what he paradoxically calls “this wandering pilgrimage.” Unlike a wanderer, he does not travel aimlessly; rather, he aims for a singular yet moving target. Thus, in pursuing happiness, Augustine ends up running after something that, to his dismay, always ends up behind him—that is, he chases his tail, turning circles in the addict’s cycle. Always forced to “move on,” the wandering pilgrim is paradoxically trapped in his roaming, unable to rest:

What tortu[r]ous paths! How fearful a fate for the rash soul which nurses the hope that...it would find something better elsewhere! Turned this way and that, on its back, on its side, on its stomach, all positions are uncomfortable (6, 16).

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<sup>45</sup> Jeffrey L. Kosky writes, with pregnantly ambiguous pronouns, “Finding it, I would only lose it again, leaving it there in the [earth] where it remains. What good, then? What good looking for something I had not lost only to lose it after finding it?” (“Learning to Live on the Spiral Jetty,” *Image*, issue 84. 1). The title of Kosky’s essay, “Learning to Live on the Spiral Jetty,” refers me to Derrida’s final interview, which bears a similar name, “Learning to Live Finally,” wherein Derrida confesses, “Survival is not simply that which remains, but the most intense life possible. I am never more haunted by the necessity of dying than in moments of happiness and joy. To feel joy and to weep over the death that awaits me are for me the same thing. When I recall my life, I tend to think that I have had the good fortune to love even the unhappy moments of my life, and to bless them. [...] When I recall the happy moments, I bless them, too, of course, at the same time as they propel me toward the thought of death, toward death, because all that has passed, come to an end . . .” (*Learning to Live Finally*, Melville House. New Jersey: 2007. 52).

<sup>46</sup> ‘Tenant’ (a person who occupies a place which does not belong to them) comes into English from the French *tenant*, which is the participial adjectival form of *tenir*, ‘to hold,’ and derives originally from the Latin *tenere*, which means ‘hold or grasp’. A ‘freeholder’ is someone who owns an estate which has been inherited or held for life (a freehold) on which they have resided for a specified length of time (OED).



Augustine senses this paradox when he confesses, “I had attained the joy that enchains” (3, 1). Faced with the seeming inescapability of the addict’s cycle, Augustine concludes that “wherever the human soul turns itself...it is fixed in sorrow” (4, 9). Where there is death, there can be no true happiness, that is, no happiness that stays true: “You seek a happy life in the land of death; it is not there” (4, 12).

## II.

In this despair, Augustine sees through everything by looking past the present and fixating on the eventuality that everything will *have been*. Since he sees clearly what lies on the other side of life, he concludes that life itself must be see-through, which is to say, vain. “The vanity of life” he says, consists in the fact that “I am ‘mere flesh and breath passing through and not returning’” (1, 13).<sup>47</sup> In other words, as long as we are drawing breath, we are full of hot air.<sup>48</sup> The language of Ecclesiastes confirms Augustine’s suspicion: “Vanity of vanities...vanity of vanities! All is vanity!” Thus rings Solomon’s refrain. What’s being translated as ‘vanity’ is the Hebrew *hebel*, which literally means ‘breath, wind, or dust’. The claim that “all is *hebel*” therefore expresses that everything has a vaporous quality; that everything is vapid. After his

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<sup>47</sup> Augustine’s description of vanity echoes the opening of Book II of Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations*: “Whatever this is that I am, it is a little flesh and breath, plus a mind. [...] A mess of blood, pieces of bone, a woven tangle of nerves, veins, arteries. Consider...what the breath is: air, and never the same air, but vomited out and gulped down again every instant.” Later, Marcus says the human body is no more than “rotting meat in a bag” and suggests that one should feel “disgust at what things are made of: liquid, dust, bones, and filth” (2, 2; 8, 38; and 9, 36 in *Meditations*, translated by Gregory Hays).

<sup>48</sup> In many ancient languages, the words for ‘breath’ and ‘spirit’ are, if not the same, at least closely related: *pneuma* (Greek), *spiritus/spiritum* (Latin), *prana* (Sanskrit), *ruach* or *neshama* (Hebrew), *ruh* or *nafs* (Arabic), *qi* (Classical Chinese), *Sila* (Inuktitut). Typically, this etymological connection is used to suggest the existential significance of the breath; however, the transitive relation between the two, etymologically speaking, implies the converse as well: the vapidness of existence.

pronouncement, Solomon asks us, “What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?” (Eccl. 1, 2). In Augustine’s eyes, all is vanity because what is gained by all our toil is merely something to lose: “Was not the whole exercise mere smoke and wind?” (1, 17).<sup>49</sup> According to this perspective, Augustine’s loving of mortal things and his seeking for happiness in them means that “[he] had loved vanity and sought after a lie” (9, 4). The eyes of despair survey a world of possibility yet deem it “vanity of vanities” because all life paths eventually lead to the same dead end: “All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, they continue to flow” (Eccl. 1:7).<sup>50</sup> Vanity is a grave matter.<sup>51</sup>

By seeing through all possibilities and apprehending one certainty (of death), the landscape of the future appears flattened—a topography undifferentiated by better and worse routes to pursue. Someone lost in a desert faces an absurd impasse precisely *because* all routes are passable—which is to say they are all possible and therefore none

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<sup>49</sup> Camus tries to write his way out of this same problem: Sisyphus’ “condemnation” to labor in vain allows his heavy burden to become light. Solomon’s refrain—“Vanity of vanities...vanity of vanities!”—declares that all is *hebel*, airy, breathy, empty. For Solomon, such is the cry of despair, but for Sisyphus, it is the rejoicing of absurd happiness. Vain work is breezy, a constant draft, because mounting the hill amounts to nothing final. One is tempted to think that because Sisyphus shoulders his burden time and time again, he labors in vain. However, the absurd insight of Camus is to show the converse: Only because Sisyphus labors in vain, can he shoulder his burden time and time again. He makes light work of his heavy task thanks to, not despite, its vanity: “*Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux.*”

<sup>50</sup> Ecclesiastes’s *hebel* finds its New Testament correlate in James: “You do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4:14). ‘Vapor’, rendered elsewhere as ‘mist’, translates the Ancient Greek *atmis* [ἀτμίς], whose root is the same as our English ‘air’. The only other use of *atmis* in the New Testament occurs in Acts 2:19 to describe the smoke rising from the apocalyptic fire which Jesus will allegedly set upon the world when he returns.

<sup>51</sup> As the Infamous aesthete, A, remarks in Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or*, “How empty and meaningless life is. We bury a man; we accompany him to the grave, throw three spadefuls of earth upon him; we ride out in a carriage, ride home in a carriage; we find consolation in the thought that we have a long life ahead of us. But how long is seven times ten years? Why not settle it all at once, why not stray out there and go along down into the grave and draw lots to see to whom will befall the misfortune of being the last of the living who throws the last three spadefuls of earth on the last of the dead?” (*Part 1*, “Displamata”).

stands out: “Divergent wills pull apart the human heart while we are deliberating which is the most attractive option to take[.]”<sup>52</sup> One is as good as the next, yet they are in contention with each other...the soul is not wholehearted in its desire for one or the other” (8, 10). The objective differences that each choice would make on Augustine’s life, to him, make no difference, as they all represent one and the same outcome.

In vanity, differences make no difference—all possibilities hold the same weight, which is to say none, everything being vapid. However, that vapidness is onerous: “The burden of the world weighed me down” (8, 5). Because everything is deadweight, weighing a decision among possibilities means being pulled equally in all directions. In other words, since all things have equal gravity, they are all equally attractive. To affirm that “all is vain” is therefore *discouraging*, or *disheartening*, in the sense that it triggers a heart condition: “the heart is torn apart in a painful condition” (8, 10). This condition of the heart’s being torn apart, Augustine calls “distraction” (the Latin *dis-trahere* literally meaning ‘pulled-apart’). Augustine feels pulled apart by the possible routes he could take to pursue happiness because all sources of joy appear the same in the end; that is, they disappear.

While distraction pulls him apart in a “painful condition” wherein he cannot devote himself wholeheartedly to anything and so gives himself half-assedly to many

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<sup>52</sup>Augustine could have perhaps benefited from Don Juan’s counsel: “Ask yourself, and yourself alone, one question. [...] ‘Does this path have a heart?’ All paths are the same: they lead nowhere. [...] In my own life, I could say that I have traversed long, long paths, but I am not anywhere. ‘Does this path have a heart?’ If it does, the path is good. If it does not, it is of no use. Both paths lead nowhere, but one has a heart, the other does not. One makes for a joyful journey. As long as you follow it, you are one with it. The other will make you curse your life. One makes you strong, the other weakens you” (Carlos Castenada, *The Teachings of Don Juan*, entry from Monday, 28 January 1963).

things, distraction also thereby inoculates him against the dreaded comedown which only the devoted lover undergoes when they lose the object of their love.<sup>53</sup> In this way, distraction entails a hardening of the heart, a resistance to the vulnerability which mortal love entails. This distracted form of loving, perverted through suffering, is what Augustine calls “lust.” “All that you experience through [lust] is only partial” rather than wholehearted (4, 11)

As with the losses of his friend and his mistress, Augustine’s love has so far attached him to mortal things such that their passing away means his sorrow. Unlike that attached form of love—i.e. dependence—which moves on reluctantly and with great pain, lust does not suffer the passing away of its object but actually relishes in the transition from one to the next: “While I pass from the discomfort of lack to the tranquility of satisfaction, the very transition contains for me an insidious trap of insatiable desire. The transition itself is a pleasure” (10, 31). In this way, lust takes pleasure in that which is, for love, a source of pain. In a radical reversal, the distracted heart thus embraces transience in a coldhearted way. Earlier, when Augustine lost his longtime lover, he indeed transitioned to another woman (“from the discomfort of lack to the tranquility of satisfaction”) but described the process, then, as leaving him “cold and desperate.” Now, however, he admits that “the transition [from lack to satisfaction] is itself a pleasure.” If we read these passages in tandem, then we see how the broken

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<sup>53</sup> Mary Karr, again in *Lit*, brilliantly captures the simultaneously anesthetizing and distracting effect of addiction: “Now I had an appetite for drink, a taste for it, a talent. Maybe it fostered in me a creeping ambition-deficit disorder, but it could ease an ache. So anything worth doing could be undertaken later. Paint the apartment, write a book, quit booze, sure: tomorrow. Which ensures that life gets lived in miniature. In lieu of the large feelings—sorrow, fury, joy—I had their junior counterparts—anxiety, irritation, excitement.”

heart that is left “cold and desperate” by the repetitive process of loss and replacement eventually resigns itself to take pleasure in the formerly maddening cycle, finally disenchanted with the myth that he will find a “one true love”—a love that will stay true and never leave him.<sup>54</sup>

As Augustine’s love turns to lust, correspondingly, his pursuit of happiness becomes a pursuit of pleasure. While repeatedly losing the object of love thwarts the lover’s pursuit of happiness, the distracting pleasure of lust depends on the recurrence of loss as its condition of possibility. To use Augustine’s example, the discomfort of hunger is essential to the pleasure of eating; and the fact that, no matter what I eat, I always get hungry again does not mean that I am cursed with vanity but that I am blessed with always more pleasure to come (10, 35). Lust therefore poses “the insidious trap of insatiable desire” in that it does not seek satisfaction in the first place; it does not seek some singular object by whose possession it could be satisfied or fulfilled. Rather, lust takes pleasure in a repetitive process, of which satisfaction is only one step (in fact, the least satisfying one)—the movement itself from want to gratification.

Those pursuing pleasure therefore manifest, according to Augustine’s self diagnosis, a “curiosity,” which operates “with the motive of seeing what experiences are

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<sup>54</sup> The Kierkegaardian seducer exemplifies this ironic aestheticization of repetitive novelty: “The most beautiful time is the first period of falling in love, when, from every encounter, every glance, one fetches home something new to rejoice over” (*Either/Or Part 1*, “Displamata”). Later on, he reveals that this lust for repetitive novelty issues from his disenchantment with true love: “Girls do not appeal to me. [...] Their faithfulness—yes, their faithfulness! Either they are faithless—this does not concern me anymore—or they are faithful. If I found a [faithful] one, she would appeal to me from the standpoint of her being a rarity; but from the standpoint of a long period of time she would not appeal to me, for either she would continually remain faithful, and then I would become a sacrifice to my eagerness for experience, since I would have to bear with her, or the time would come when she would lapse, and then I would have the same old story” (ibid.).

like, not with a wish to undergo [them], but out of a lust for experimenting and knowing” (10, 35). This curiosity, Augustine thinks, places entertainment front and center in the daily living of distracted people: “To satisfy this diseased craving, outrageous sights are staged in public shows. [...] So many things of this kind surround our daily life on every side with the buzz of distraction...tugg[ing] at my attention to go and look at it” (10, 35).<sup>55</sup>

Since the distracted heart cannot give itself wholeheartedly to anything and therefore gives itself piecemeal to many things, the theater, in his time, provides an ideal source of pleasure—offering an emotional connection each time without consequence, a high with no comedown.<sup>56</sup> In this way, entertainment (suggestively, *divertissement*, *diversion*, *divertimento*, *divertisment* in the Romance languages<sup>57</sup>) serves to divert the self away from the loss at which it would otherwise find itself, that is, away from its very self:

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<sup>55</sup> The other side of the phenomenon of curiosity (and its correlate, entertainment) is that of boredom. Paradoxically, Marion’s description of boredom in *God Without Being* could likewise apply to Augustinian curiosity: “What boredom [curiosity] hears it gives no attention to, no intention, no retention. Its characteristic function indeed consists in provoking indifference to every provocation [...] *Mihi non interest*; that does not concern me, nor is it for me, I am not at stake in that which, here, is. [...] Boredom [curiosity] withdraws from being and from its stakes, as one withdraws from an affair, as one withdraws funds from a bank, as one gets out of a scrape. Henceforth free from everything, even and first from given being, absolute boredom [curiosity] deploys its indifference. Strictly, henceforth, nothing any longer makes a difference” (*GWB*, 118).

<sup>56</sup> A similar preoccupation is central to Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*: “I wanted to do something about America that was sad, that wasn’t just making fun of America but could somehow describe it. Most of my friends are extremely bright, privileged, well-educated Americans who are sad on some level, and it has something, I think, to do with loneliness. [...] More or less what the book’s about is America’s relationship to entertainment [...] You’ve got a nation of people sitting in front of screens interacting with images instead of each other, feeling lonely and so needing more and more images, and the better the images get, the more tempting it’s gonna be to interact with images rather than other people, and I think the emptier it’s gonna get. That’s my suspicion and just my own opinion” (1996).

<sup>57</sup> *Divertissement* is French, *diversion* Spanish, *divertimento* both Italian and Portuguese, and *divertisment* Romanian.

I was captivated by theatrical shows. [...] When an actor on stage gave me a fictional imitation of someone else's misfortunes, I was quite pleased; and the more the actor compelled my tears to flow, the more vehement was my attraction. [...] Hence came my love for sufferings, but not of a kind that pierced me very deeply; for my longing was not to experience myself miseries such as I saw on stage. I wanted only...[to be] scratched on the surface (3, 2).

The spectator goes along for the ride on the ups and downs of human life as staged by the actors; yet, thanks to the distance of spectatorship, the theatergoer does so without actually going through them.<sup>58</sup> Thus, theater allows Augustine to “see what experiences are like” without having to commit himself to any actual living, or loving—the perfect partner for the distracted heart seeking merely to satisfy its curiosity.<sup>59</sup> However, Augustine confesses that scratching the itch of his lust “like the scratches of fingernails...produced inflamed spots, pus, and repulsive sores” (3, 2). Pleasure catches up with him as he chases it.

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<sup>58</sup> We often say that entertainment gives us a break from the “real” world. In this way, entertainment, a drug to be sure, serves an expressly narcotizing (from the Greek, *narkoun*, ‘to make numb’) function: “What do we hold against the drug addict? Something we never, at least never to the same degree, hold against the alcoholic or the smoker: that he cuts himself off from the world, in exile from reality, far from objective reality and the real life of the city and the community; that he escapes into a world of simulacrum and fiction. We disapprove of his taste for something like hallucinations. No doubt, we should have to make some distinction between so-called hallucinogens and other drugs, but the distinction is wiped out in the rhetoric of fantasy that is at the root of any prohibition of drugs: drugs make us lose any sense of true reality. In the end, it is always, I think, under this charge that the prohibition is declared. We do not object to the drug user's pleasure per se, but we cannot stand the fact that he takes pleasure in an experience without truth” (“The Rhetoric of Drugs”). As a counterpoint to Derrida, Robin Williams once remarked, “Reality is just a crutch for people who can't handle drugs.”

<sup>59</sup> Nietzsche devotes the 86th section of *The Gay Science*, titled “*Of the theater*,” to precisely this phenomenon: “The theater...tries to intoxicate the audience and to force it to the height of a moment of strong and elevated feelings. This kind is designed for those everyday souls who in the evening are not like victors on their triumphal chariots but rather like tired mules who have been whipped too much by life. [...] [Nietzsche] looks with some sort of nausea at the means and mediators that are trying to produce an effect without a sufficient reason—aping the high tide of the soul! [...] The strongest ideas and passions are brought before those who are not capable of ideas and passions but only of intoxication! [...] Who will ever relate the whole history of narcotica? It is almost the history of ‘culture’, of our so-called high culture.”

Like an addict who endeavors to preserve the high, Augustine's distraction, while pleasurable, leaves him strung-out: "My life is a distention" (11, 29).<sup>60</sup> Since Augustine kills time through distracting entertainment, his life consists of a daisy-chain<sup>61</sup> of pleasurable episodes, one after another, rather than a continuous string.<sup>62</sup> Pursuing pleasures leave him strung-out, therefore, in a temporal sense: "I am scattered in times whose order I do not understand. The storms of incoherent events tear to pieces my thoughts, the inmost entrails of my soul" (11, 30). There is no coherence or consistency to a life of distraction—it does not string together. The coherence of the human self, says Augustine, is like the coherence of a sentence; each part must have a certain meaningful relationship to the other:

...to be parts of things which do not all have their being at the same moment, but by passing away and by successiveness, they all form the whole of which they are parts. That is the way our speech is constructed by sounds which are significant. What we say would not be complete if one word did not cease to exist when it has sounded its constituent parts, so that it can be succeeded by another" (4, 10)

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<sup>60</sup> Strung out: a state of continuous drug use where the user tries to stay high all the time in order not to come back down to reality. After this continuous drug use, the user feels like they're not high despite being heavily impaired, resulting in continued dosing (urbandictionary.com).

<sup>61</sup> Daisy-chain: (1) a string of daisies threaded together by their stems; (2) a wiring technique that connects multiple devices together in a linear fashion; (3) to smoke continually by lighting a new cigarette from the butt of the last one smoked (4) a sexual position involving multiple partners where one partner pleases another, the second pleases a third, the third a fourth and so on, until the line comes full circle (urbandictionary.com). The significance here is that in a daisy-chain, A connects to B, B to C, and C to D, etc., but A does not connect to C. Thus, it forms a whole whose non-adjacent parts do not interrelate: a disconnected unity—like Augustine's life, which is singular yet fragmented.

<sup>62</sup> Sigmund Freud thinks that such a state is the only possibility for happiness: "What do people demand of life and wish to achieve in it? [...] They strive after happiness; they want to become happy and remain so. [...] This program is at loggerheads with the whole world. There is no possibility at all of its being carried through; all the laws of the universe run counter to it. What we call 'happiness' is by nature only possible as an episodic phenomenon. We are made such that we can derive intense enjoyment only from a contrast and very little from a state of things. Thus our possibilities of happiness are already restricted by our constitution" (*Civilization and its Discontents*, Chapter 2). The disenchantment of Freud consists in his reduction of "happiness" to "a prolonged state of pleasure," a conflation sometimes made also by Heidegger.



The past is remembered in the present, and the present is heard with expectation of the future. That stretch or tension held by the mind across memory and expectation, which is the at-tention itself, forms the co-herence (i.e. the ‘holding-together’) of the self or phrase. The meaningfulness (of the sentence or one’s life) thus depends on the conservation of the past in the present and the preservation of the present for the future. In Augustine’s state of distraction, though, he says he is “unable to gather [him]self out of the old days” (11, 29). His past has not been conserved in his present.<sup>63</sup> Distraction creates a disconnect between each part of himself (past, present, future), as a result of which neither his past (through memory) nor his future (through expectation) is heard in his present. In the pursuit of pleasure, each stage on the way (the old days, today, and the days to come) relates to the other as a matter of historical contingency (“a storm of incoherent events”) rather than according to a consistent pattern that gives the entire sequence meaning (“they all form the whole of which they are parts”)—the difference between a cacophony and a symphony. That meaninglessness, the sense that the sequence of one’s life is of no consequence, characterizes the experience of being strung-out or distended. Such is the “repulsive sore” caused by scratching the itch of lust. “[Augustine’s] life is a distention” because he “lives in a multiplicity of distractions by many things” (11, 29).

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<sup>63</sup> Thinking again with Derrida, the addict’s cycle “is not good repetition. [...] The *pharmakon* [in Greek, meaning both ‘remedy’ and ‘poison’]...does not serve the good, authentic memory. It is rather the mnemotechnical auxiliary of a bad memory. It has more to do with forgetting, the simulacrum, and bad repetition than it does with anamnesis and truth. This *pharmakon* dulls the spirit and, rather than aiding, it wastes the memory. Thus in the name of authentic, living memory, and in the name of truth, power accuses this bad drug...of being a drug that leads not only to forgetting, but also to irresponsibility. [The *pharmakon*] is irresponsibility itself, the orphanage of a wandering and playing sign” (“The Rhetoric of Drugs”).

Miserable with his love and torn to pieces by his lust, Augustine cries out for a cure to his compulsion for a fix: “Let my soul not become bound to transient things, tied to them with love...for these things pass along the path of things that move towards non-existence, rending the soul with pestilential desires” (4, 10). He wants to quit “cold turkey,” renouncing the substances on which he depends once and for all. However, he finds that he is not his own maker; he cannot *make himself* quit. He cannot become independent by the sheer force of his will: “The mind orders the mind to will something, and while the recipient of the order is itself, it does not perform it” (8, 9). No matter how clearly Augustine perceives the consequences of his behavior and how forcefully he wills himself to abstain, he finds himself unable to get himself together: “How stupid is man to be unable to restrain feelings in suffering the human lot! That was my state at the time. So I boiled with anger, sighed, wept, and was at my wits’ end” (4, 7). He cannot get himself together because he is of two minds on the matter—or, more accurately, he is of one mind, yet two wills. He wishes to untether himself from the mortal coil and yet to keep open the ties that bind:

My old loves held me back. They tugged at the garment of my flesh and whispered, “Are you getting rid of us?” [...] They held me back. I hesitated to detach myself, to be rid of them, to make the leap to where I was being called. The overwhelming force of habit was saying to me: “Do you think you can live without them?”

Here, Augustine confronts what David Foster Wallace calls “a little-mentioned paradox of Substance addiction...that once you are sufficiently enslaved by a Substance to need to quit the Substance in order to save your life, the enslaving Substance has become so deeply important to you that you will all but lose your mind when it is taken

away from you” (*IJ*, 201). Augustine faces the absurd fact that he cannot survive without what’s killing him. Simply put, he can’t live without the thing that’s beating him to death—it’s his heart. The condition of his existence is the very condition which he attempts to quit, yet there is nowhere to abscond mortal things in “the land of death,” and there is no way to avoid loving when “there is nobody who does not love” (*Sermon 34, Patriologiae Cursus Completus*). Thus, when “the overwhelming force of habit” asks Augustine, “Do you think you can live without [your old loves]?” the answer is no. If his addiction consists in loving mortal things, then breaking the habit would entail no longer inhabiting the world.

This internal tension forces a more nuanced reckoning with his addiction. “The reason why grief had penetrated me so easily and deeply,” he realizes at last, “was that I had poured out my soul onto the sand by loving a person sure to die *as if he would never die*” (4, 8). According to this new perspective, recovery would consist not in avoiding the addictive substance altogether but in negotiating a different relationship to it—that is, “understand[ing] how to love human beings with awareness of the human condition [i.e. mortality]” (4, 7). For Augustine, Christianity introduces, models, and provides the resources for—that is to say, sponsors—precisely this alternative mode of loving whereby the lover can engage in relationships with mortal things while avoiding an unhealthy dependence on them. Augustine sees in Christianity a truly happy life, one not subject to the highs and lows of the addict. Thus, recovery and conversion become concomitant processes.

## Part 3: Turning His Life Around

### I.

In converting [*con-vertere*], Augustine literally “turns to(ward)” God. As two modes of coping with the adversities of life (i.e. the times when life “turns against” you), the “turning towards” of conversion offers a therapeutic alternative to the “turning away” of diversion.<sup>64</sup> While diversion, which takes the form of distracting entertainment, “causes old wounds to fester,” conversion to God is a source of healing because he turns out to be a different kind of lover. His eternity allows the addict’s heart to rest, assured that this love(r) alone will stay true, thereby providing an undying source of joy. Because only God’s love “is the place where love is not deserted,” Augustine urges himself and his reader to “Fix your dwelling there...[for] you will lose nothing” (4, 11). Unlike the happiness sourced from the love of mortal things, by whose passing away “sweetness is turned to bitterness,” Augustine’s love of God provides “a sweetness touched by no deception, a sweetness serene and content,” and such is the difference between “miserable felicity” and “true happiness” (2, 1). God’s steadfast love thereby reveals

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<sup>64</sup> The shared root here signals an upcoming analysis of the emergent roles of ad-vertisement and, with it, consumerism within the economy of happiness in the secular context of today—hence the central role of Wallace in this work, who writes prolifically on those themes.

something essential about the addict and his substance: substance addiction paradoxically rests on the illusion of substance; that is, the illusion that the happiness given by the substance is substantial, which is to say satisfying and enduring.<sup>65</sup> The addict suffers the “comedown” when the seductive illusion of substantiality meets the brute reality of vanity. God, whom the Nicene Creed explicitly characterizes as being “of substance” (*ousia* in Greek), exposes the insubstantiality of both finite substances themselves and the happiness sourced from them.<sup>66</sup>

God’s substantiality—which consists in his immutability and eternity—ultimately means that his love alone, as a source of joy, is trustworthy; as such, one can give one’s heart to God without fear of its being broken. Such fearlessness contrasts the insecurity of mortal love:

In adversities, I desire prosperity; in prosperous times, I fear adversities. [...] Cursed are the prosperities of the world, not once but twice over, because of the fear of adversity and the perishability of joy. Cursed are the adversities of the world, not once or twice but thrice over, because of the longing for prosperity, because adversity itself is hard, and because of the possibility that one’s endurance may reach a breaking point. Is not human life on Earth a trial in which there is no respite? (10, 28)

On this gloss, the human’s restlessness of heart consists in its unceasing vacillation between the fear of loss in times of happiness and the longing for happiness in times of

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<sup>65</sup> In a similar vein, Jean-Luc Nancy elaborates a connection between addiction and “hallucination” in his *Adoration: The Deconstruction of Christianity II*: “Addiction, whatever its object or its nature might be, implies a relationship to a tangible, appropriable presence. ‘Drugs’ are what cause me truly to perceive another regime of presence, an ‘elsewhere’ in which I am able to forget or convert the ‘here’ that I wish to leave. In addiction, there is something that ultimately comes down to hallucination” (8).

<sup>66</sup> “We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, *of one substance with the Father* [Greek: ...γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα, ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρὶ; Latin: ...*natum, non factum; ejusdemque substantiae qua Pater est*].”

loss (6, 10). If, as we have seen, this restlessness forms the heart of Augustine's addiction, then recovery would mean finding "a middle ground between these two [fear and longing] where human life is not a trial" (10, 29).

The love of God, being the only form of love untouched by the fear of loss, provides precisely this "middle ground"—the only stable foundation on which one could "fix one's dwelling."<sup>67</sup> Indeed, at the moment of conversion, Augustine recalls feeling "relief from all anxiety flood[ing] into his heart" (8, 12). While *mortal* love "brings its own punishment" by attaching the heartstrings to things which are torn away, "*perfect* love [i.e. the love of God] drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment," and there is no punishment borne within a love that never loses its beloved (1 John 4:18).<sup>68</sup> Because "the person who enters into the joy of the Lord...will not be afraid," they can therefore rest easy on the solid ground of a dependable happiness (2, 10; citing Matt. 25:21). In this way, only when the heart fixes its dwelling in God can it finally settle down with its love: "Our heart is restless until it finds rest in You [God]" (1, 1). Conversion helps Augustine recover from his addiction because the joy of the Lord frees him from the cycle of up(per)s and down(er)s in which his mortal happiness—"the joy

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<sup>67</sup> "The Wise and Foolish Home Builders: Everyone who comes to me [Christ] and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well-built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was total" (Luke 6:46-49). The emotionally unstable foundation of fear and longing results in a house whose standing is always insecure; whereas the "middle ground" of God's perfect love is a foundation of rock, which the flow of time cannot wash away.

<sup>68</sup> Hannah Arendt succinctly corroborates this analysis in her dissertation, *Love and Saint Augustine*: "The sign of *caritas* on earth is fearlessness, whereas the curse of *cupiditas* is fear—fear of not obtaining what is desired and fear of loving it once it is obtained" ("Love as Craving," 35).

that enchains”—had formerly entrapped him. It allows him to get off the emotional roller coaster of human life.

God’s love helps the addict to recover by providing a dependability which mortal things cannot supply by virtue of their mutability. Contrary to the insubstantiality of finite things, Augustine describes God as “an imperishable substance” who therefore offers “the inexhaustible treasure of imperishable enjoyment” (2, 6). Thus, Augustine’s “recovery” paradoxically does not consist in being liberated from his state of addiction and delivered to in-dependence. Instead, recovery means transferring his substance dependence to a more dependable substance, whose enjoyment is therefore more substantial. Substance dependence, on this analysis, is a fundamental and irresolvable condition of human existence. The question comes down to this: To what will I be addicted? To what will I give myself over? Recovery is therefore never a matter of becoming independent, of getting back on one’s own feet; more modestly, it means forming a “healthy dependence.” By converting, then, Augustine gives himself over to the only distilled Spirit whose uplift does not eventuate a comedown: the “living water of God” (John 7:38).<sup>69</sup> As Jesus says to a Samaritan woman drawing from an earthly well,

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<sup>69</sup> As, Robert C. Hamilton remarks in his essay “‘Constant Bliss in Every Atom’: Tedium and Transcendence in David Foster Wallace’s *The Pale King*”: “That chemical stimulants could operate in a way analogous to religion should come as a surprise neither to readers of Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*, in which addicts are encouraged at AA meetings to develop a prayer life in order to kick narcotic habits (see *Infinite Jest* 350), nor to readers of William James, who in *Varieties [of Religious Experience]* quotes ‘some medical man’ as arguing that ‘the only radical remedy I know for dipsomania [alcoholism] is religiomania’ (*VRE*, 268)” (“Constant Bliss in Every Atom,” *Arizona Quarterly*, 70, No. 4, Winter 2014. 188, note 2). As a case in point, consider the Augustinian ring of the famous 12 Steps: 1. Admit that you are powerless over the substance. 2. Come to believe that a Power greater than yourself could restore you. 3. Make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him. 4. Make a searching and fearless moral inventory of yourself. 5. Admit to God, to yourself, and to another human being the exact nature of your wrongs [i.e. perform a confession]. 6. Be entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character. 7. Humbly ask Him to remove our shortcomings. 8. Make a list of persons you have

“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never be thirsty again; the water I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” In this passage, Jesus echoes what Augustine has undergone: the peril of the addict, who depends on that which, because finite, is not dependable. Augustine’s conversion echoes the woman’s response to Christ: “Sir, give me this water that I may not thirst nor come here to draw again” (John 4:13-15).

However, God is also the source of “recovery” in another crucial sense: He promises eternal life to those who place their love in him. This promise sets Augustine down the road to “recovery” in two interrelated but distinct ways: (a) by turning to God, he begins to learn how to derive his joy from a more dependable source, thereby healing his broken and restless heart with a love that stays true; and (b) instead of looking past the present in the mode of “seeing through” mortal life (with the eyes of vanity), he looks past the present in the mode of “looking forward to” eternal life (with the eyes of faith). Faith does not provide an alternative to vanity but includes it as it overcomes it: both vanity and faith “see through” transient reality to that which is fixed and certain—the end of life. Further, they both assess the ultimate meaning of temporal life on the basis

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harmful, and become willing to make amends to them all. 9. Make direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. 10. Continue to take personal inventory and when you are wrong promptly admit it. 11. Seek through prayer and meditation to improve your conscious contact with God as you understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for you and the power to carry that out. 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, try to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all your affairs. Alcoholics Anonymous is so overtly theistic, in fact, that James Christopher (a sober alcoholic himself) founded Secular Organizations for Sobriety (S.O.S.) in 1985 as an alternative model of recovery, detailed in his books, *S.O.S. Sobriety* and *Unhooked*. A documentary about his organization, *No God at the Bottom of a Glass*, was an official selection of the International Freethought Film Festival and recipient of a 2014 Telly Award.



of its end. However, where the eyes of vanity see “The End” in the sense of *fine* (a curtain-drop, a closure), the eyes of faith see “The End” in the sense of *telos* (a climax, a consummation). Thus, while vanity remains on the level of “seeing through,” faith converts “seeing through” into “looking forward to” by differently interpreting the sense of the end. As a result, each perspective elicits a distinct affective mode in and through which the viewer approaches life’s “end.” Just as mortality’s guarantee that the beloved will be taken away changed Augustine’s joy into grief, God’s promise that the beloved will be given back, which is to say recovered, “changed [his] grief into joy” (Psalm 30:11, cited in 8, 12).

God’s love fundamentally alters Augustine’s approach to human relationships by reconstituting the meaning of death. Before converting, Augustine experiences his friend’s death as an absolute loss; his friend is dead *and gone*:

If I had said to my soul “Put your trust in God” (Ps. 41:6, 12), it would have had good reason not to obey. For the very dear friend I had lost was a better and more real person than the phantom in which I would have been telling my soul to trust. [...] I had no hope that my friend would come back to life, and my tears did not petition for this. I merely grieved and wept. I was in misery and had lost the source of my joy” (4, 4-5)

On this account, Augustine perceives death as privative; he suffers his loss as a literal bereavement (‘bereave’ coming from the Old English *bereafian*, meaning ‘to take away by violence, rob, or seize’). “The more I loved [my friend] the more I hated and feared *death, which had taken him from me*, as if it were my most ferocious enemy” (4, 6). Death, like a home burglar, visited Augustine in his most intimate place—for home is where the heart is—and stole away his most beloved possession (Matt. 6:19-21). Worse

yet, death remained at large: “I thought that since death had consumed [my friend], it would suddenly engulf all humanity” (4, 6). Because death poses an ongoing threat, the joy Augustine derives from his love of mortal things becomes tinged with that aforementioned fear that only imperfect love knows.

According to Christianity’s promise of eternal life, however, the dearly departed (at least those among the saved) are not dead *and gone* but *in a better place*; so too, therefore, are those left behind on Earth, for if they see with the eyes of faith, they no longer face the absolute absence of their beloved but merely the beloved’s deferred presence to which they can look forward. When death is interpreted as opening onto eternal life, it no longer acts as a thief in the night, robbing me of my source of joy; instead, it appears generous, promising to restore my happiness in the double sense of giving it back to me and putting it in better condition—the condition of eternity: “All that is ebbing away from you will be given fresh form and renewed, bound tightly to you” (4, 11). In this way, “to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21) or, as Augustine paradoxically claims in *The City of God*, “Death, which all agree to be the contrary of life, has become the means by which men pass into life” and, later, “the very act of dying...is a precaution against death” (13, 4; 13, 8).

To measure the affective difference this resignification of death makes, consider the aftermath of his mother’s death in contrast to that of his friend’s:

We did not think it right to celebrate [my mother’s] funeral with tearful dirges and lamentations, since in most cases it is customary to use such mourning to express sorrow for the miserable state of those who die, or their complete extinction [*omnimoda extinctio*]. But my mother’s dying meant neither that her

state was miserable nor that she was altogether dead [*omnino moriebatur*] (9, 12).

When Augustine's friend died he "merely grieved and wept" because, in his unbelief, he "had no hope that he would come back to life." However, when his mother dies, it was not fitting "to express sorrow" because, according to his faith, she is not "altogether dead." In fact, when Augustine's son, Adeodatus, "cries out in sorrow" upon witnessing the death of Grandma Monica, "he was...checked and silenced" by Augustine, in whose eyes such sorrow signaled the rearing head of a congenital addiction—the self-destructive attachment to mortal things.

In the striking contrast between these two accounts, we see the crucial turnaround that conversion inaugurates: the passing away of all things no longer guarantees perpetual misery in the restless vacillation between fear and longing but, instead, promises eternal happiness and the repose of faith.<sup>70</sup> As a result, when Augustine loses what he loves, he no longer sets out like a vagabond looking all around for a new source of joy; instead, he looks straight forward to the *end*, in the sense of *telos*, whose fulfillment is tantamount to total recovery. As he teaches in *City of God*,

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<sup>70</sup> Augustine discusses the deaths of two other close friends, and both accounts further illustrate the grief-mitigating, if not grief-effacing, effects of his conversion. First, there is the death of Verecundus, a companion who was slowly coming around to Christianity: "When [Augustine and his friends] were absent [from Verecundus' home] during our stay in Rome, he was taken ill in body, and in his sickness departed this life a baptized Christian. So you had mercy not only on him but also on us. We would have felt tortured by unbearable pain if, in thinking of our friend's outstanding humanity to us, we could not have numbered him among your flock. Thanks be to you, our God.... Faithful to your promises, in return for Verecundus' [hospitality], you rewarded him with the loveliness of your evergreen paradise" (9, 3). Next, there is Nebridius, who was a fellow Christian and longtime friend: "[Nebridius] was serving you in perfect chastity and continence among his own people in Africa, and through him his entire household became Christian, when you released him from bodily life. Now he lives in Abraham's bosom. [...] He no longer perks up his ears when I speak, but puts his spiritual mouth to your fountain and avidly drinks as much as he can of wisdom, happy without end. I do not think him so intoxicated by that as to forget me, since you, Lord, whom he drinks in, are mindful of us" (9, 3).

“The saints’ joy at what they assured for themselves...outweighed their sadness at the loss of their possessions” (1, 10).

From Augustine’s perspective, then, one can recover from an unhealthy dependence on mortal things if one sees through the beloved’s end (*fine*) and perceives rather—yet precisely therein—the ultimate end (*telos*), in relation to which the beloved’s loss is both trivialized (because of its provisionality) and made significant (because of its place in the teleological horizon of promise and fulfillment).<sup>71</sup> In the same way that a word’s “meaning” consists in its reference to something other than itself, mortal life—formerly conceived as pure vanity—becomes “sign-ificant” or “meaning-ful” only by signaling or referring to the end which stands apart from it.<sup>72</sup> His therapeutic teleo-logic enfolds finite ends (*fine*) within the eternal end (*telos*) and thereby not only annuls the former as such but also gives it a positive content: recovery. This double movement of annulling and fulfilling finitude marks a defining shift in Augustine’s outworking of grief

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<sup>71</sup> Clifford Geertz theorizes religion along similar lines: “As a religious problem, the problem of suffering is, paradoxically, not how to avoid suffering but how to suffer, how to make of physical pain, personal loss, worldly defeat, or the helpless contemplation of others’ agony something bearable, supportable—something, as we say, sufferable. It was in this effort that the Ba-Ila woman—perhaps necessarily, perhaps not—failed and, literally not knowing how to feel about what had happened to her, how to suffer, perished in confusion and despair. Where the more intellectual aspects of what Weber called the Problem of Meaning are a matter affirming the ultimate explicability of experience, the more affective aspects are a matter of affirming its ultimate sufferableness. As religion on one side anchors the power of our symbolic resources for formulating analytic ideas in an authoritative conception of the overall shape of reality, so on another side it anchors the power of our, also symbolic, resources for expressing emotions-moods, sentiments, passions, affections, feelings—in a similar conception of its pervasive tenor, its inherent tone and temper. For those able to embrace them, and for so long as they are able to embrace them, religious symbols provide a cosmic guarantee not only for their ability to comprehend the world, but also, comprehending it, to give a precision to their feeling, a definition to their emotions which enables them, morosely or joyfully, grimly or cavalierly, to endure it” (“Religion as a Cultural System,” in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*. Ed. Michael P. Banton. London: Frederick A. Praeger Press, 1966. 1-46

<sup>72</sup> For Augustine and many others, this referential structure appears to be the exclusive condition of life’s meaning; however, for Nietzsche, the reference of the world to something extra-worldly is “nihilism” par excellence in that it grounds the meaning of the world in something other than it itself.

from necrophobia to necrophilia. He transforms his initial fear of death into a desire for death.

In this way, the paradoxically significant triviality of mortal life and, therefore, mortal death is made lovable in a mode other than fear. The lover who loves in view of the *telos* and not solely in view of the *fine* of the beloved is thereby inoculated to the end-less sorrow which mortal love otherwise ineluctably entails. For Augustine, how one loves, which inherently includes how one copes with loss, comes down to a single question: “With what end in view do you again and again walk along these difficult and laborious paths?” (4, 12). Loving mortal things while looking forward to the (happy) ending allows the patient to overcome the addict’s jarring comedown by locating losses along a progressive timeline, whose end marks their complete recovery. The time-table of recovery therefore stands in stark contrast to the unstable time-line of addiction, which, like a broken heart’s EKG, consists of irregular ups and downs.

Yet, however much Augustine performs the outward serenity, even gratitude, that would ideally correspond to his theology, he nevertheless confesses undergoing an inward struggle between familiar feelings of grief and a converted sense of relief in the wake of his mother’s death: “We were confident [that Monica was not altogether dead] because of the evidence of her virtuous life, her unfeigned faith, and reasons of which we felt certain. Why then did I suffer sharp pains of inward grief?” (9, 12). Augustine is perplexed that, while believing that “death is the means by which we pass into life,” he could still experience grief at his mother’s “loss.” His surprise demonstrates that the

promise of eternal life is meant to function as a prophylactic against precisely such grief and, thus, plays a fundamental role in recovery. As Augustine tells us, “I was using truth as a poultice to alleviate the pain”—a form of alleviation unavailable to him in his unbelief (9, 12).

Even as he applies his theological poultice, a familiar pain seizes his heart: “Now that I had lost the immense support she gave me, my soul was wounded, and my life was torn to pieces, since my life and hers had become a single thing” (9, 12). In this description, we hear the echo of his former grief over his friend (“My soul and his soul were one soul in two bodies”), yet this time he attributes the pain to a different root. When his friend dies and he asks “Why, my soul, are you so sad?” he answers that he was miserable because he “had lost the source of [his] joy,” but when his mother dies, he says the “sharp pains of inward grief...must have been a fresh wound *caused by the break in habit* formed by our living together” (9, 12). This difference of attribution demonstrates the progress in recovery that conversion has meant. According to Augustine’s own narration, while his love for his friend was a form of dependence for happiness, his love for his mother was merely a form of habituation to her support. Thus, while the loss of his friend resulted in an all-consuming trauma, the loss of his mother causes a grief which, though poignant, he can resist:

I was reproaching the softness of my feelings and was holding back the torrent of sadness. It yielded a little to my efforts, but then again its attack swept over me—yet not so much as to lead me to burst into tears or even to change the expression on my face. But I knew what pressure lay upon my heart (9, 12).

His resistance, while a positive sign of recovery, ultimately signals that he remains in the thrall of addiction. Thus, “there was another pain to put on top of my grief, and I was tortured by a twofold sadness”: (1) He grieves the death of his mother because it forcibly breaks his comfortable habit, and (2) he grieves *that he grieves* this break in habit because it demonstrates the ever-presence of his addiction. In this way, the addict’s recovery shows itself to be “an inward struggle” of resistance—as much his resistance to addiction as his resistance to recovery (9, 12).

## II.

In the death of his mother, then, Augustine confronts a phenomenon that only the recovering addict knows—the temptation of relapse. He describes his suppressed feeling of sorrow as “something childish in me that was, through the youthful voice of my heart, slipping toward tears” (9, 12). In other words, his sorrow sounds of his former self. In the temptation of present grief, he sees his all-too repeatable past of love and loss, joy and devastation: “I *slip back* [literally, *re-lapse*]<sup>73</sup> into my usual ways under my miserable burdens. I am reabsorbed by my habitual practices. I am held in their grip. I weep profusely, but still I am held. Such is the strength of the burden of habit” (10, 41). Thus, resistance to this grief is an effort not to circle back in the addict’s cycle but, instead, to forge ahead towards recovery. Conversion, as recovery, does not entail a singular event of renouncing mortal love altogether but rather a continuous process of resisting the temptation to “love as if [the beloved] would never die” (4, 6). Augustinian

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<sup>73</sup> Augustine’s word translated here as ‘slip back’ is the Latin *reccido*, which is the root of our ‘recidivism’ and a direct synonym of *re-lapsare*.

con-version is therefore not a turnaround but a turning-around, wherein mortals are not abandoned but progressively loved anew in view of their end, that is, loved “with awareness of the human condition” (4, 6-7).

Augustine distinguishes between these two modes of love as “use” (*uti*) and “enjoyment” (*frui*), which he most thoroughly expounds in an extended metaphor from *On Christian Doctrine*:

Suppose, then, we were wanderers in a strange country, and could not live happily away from our homeland, and that we felt wretched in our wandering, and wishing to put an end to our misery, determined to return home. We find, however, that we must make use of some means of conveyance, either by land or water, in order to reach that homeland where our enjoyment is to commence. But the beauty of the country through which we pass and the very pleasure of the motion charm our hearts, and turning these things which we ought to use into objects of enjoyment, we become unwilling to hasten the end of our journey; and becoming engrossed in a fictitious enjoyment, our thoughts are diverted from that home whose enjoyment would make us truly happy. Such is a picture of our condition in this life of mortality. We have wandered far from God; and if we wish to return to our Father’s home, this world must be used, not enjoyed...by means of what is material and temporal we may lay hold upon that which is spiritual and eternal (*OCD*, 1, 4)

In this picture, loving something as if it would never die, which is to say “resting with satisfaction in it for its own sake,” signifies enjoyment; whereas loving something for the sake of its end, or as a “means” to something else, signifies use. According to Augustine, because only God is eternal, only he can be properly enjoyed; correspondingly, all of creation, as finite, is fit only for use.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> “The true objects of enjoyment, then, are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (*OCD*, 1, 5). Although the language of use and enjoyment has roots in *Confessions*, Augustine most thoroughly expounds them in *On Christian Doctrine*, so I will have to draw from that text.



The use of creation then is to function as a means by which to love God all the more: “If physical objects give you pleasure, praise God for them and return love to their Maker” (4, 12). In short, we properly use mortal things when we love them “in God” or for the sake of loving God, in which alone true happiness lies: “The good which you love is from God, but it is only good and sweet insofar as it is related to Him. Otherwise, it will rightly become bitter; for all that comes from Him is wrongly loved if he is left by the wayside” (4, 12).<sup>75</sup> Augustine employs this distinction between use and enjoyment (both being forms of love) to make sense of the apparently contradictory commandments “to resist our love for [mortal] things, but also...[to] love not only you [God] but also our neighbor” (10, 37). He discerns that loving one’s neighbor, as a form of obedience to God, is fundamentally a mediated form of loving God, or a permutation of loving God, rather than an alternative to it.

Loving mortal things in the form of using them resolves the dependence of the addict, while simultaneously avoiding the self-defeating impulse to quit cold turkey, because the mortal beloved no longer functions as a direct source of happiness but as an indirect means to it. Paradoxically, he loves mortal things “not because I love *them* but *so that* I may love you, my God...from love of your love” (2, 1). In this Augustinian economy of happiness, the mortal beloved, which appears lovable only inasmuch as

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<sup>75</sup> Hannah Arendt suggests that loving others “in God” according to the Augustinian injunction—i.e. for the sake of a telos—amount to not really loving them: “The believer relates in love to this individual...only insofar as divine grace can be at work in him. I never love my neighbor for his own sake, only for the sake of divine grace. [...] We are commanded to love our neighbor, to practice mutual love, only because in so doing we love Christ” (“Social Life,” 111).

useful, therefore assumes a dispensable role—as opposed to the problematically indispensable status it holds for the substance-dependent addict.

The root of addiction, visible only in recovery, is therefore the failure to discern which substances are proper for use and which for enjoyment. By taking finite things to be objects of enjoyment, the addict fails to properly use them and thus fails, also, to locate the source of happiness independently from finite things. Contrary to modern diagnostics, then, the addict does not suffer from substance abuse but, rather, from substance non-use. From the Augustinian perspective, one becomes an addict, ironically, by failing to be “a user.” In fact, the only abuse of the addict is that he enjoys things too much. “My sin,” Augustine confesses, “consisted in this: that I sought pleasure and sublimity not in God but in his creatures...so I plunged into miseries confusions and errancy” (1, 20).

Life appears to be “in vain,” then, simply because the addict fails to make use of it. Only when put to proper use—that of loving God—does mortal life become genuinely *fruitful*, which is both to say useful and enjoyable.<sup>76</sup> If, instead, I enjoy life itself, then I

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<sup>76</sup> Wallace, who shares many of Augustine’s concerns, gives precisely the opposite diagnosis: “I think what’s causing the unhappiness isn’t our work, it’s our attitude toward the work: [what’s important] is not that the work is enjoyed or fulfilling in and of itself, it’s more how does the work stack up with other people’s work, how much am I making, what does my boss think of me—you know, all the standard psychic sludge” (1996). According to Wallace, unhappiness is a direct product of our mentality of instrumentality, that we have no taste for enjoyment but only for use, that we’re all tools. On this point, I’m also reminded of Nietzsche’s aphorism, “To the Teachers of Selflessness”: “Blindly raging industriousness...this typical virtue of an instrument...is represented as the road to riches and honor and as the best poison for curing boredom and the passions; but one keeps silent about its danger, its extreme dangerousness. [...] How often I see that blindly raging industriousness does create wealth and reap honors while at the same time depriving the organs of their subtlety, which alone would make possible the enjoyment of wealth and honors [...] The most industrious of all ages—ours—does not know how to make anything of all its industriousness and money, except always still more money and still more industriousness” (*The Gay Science*, 1974. 93-94).

am lead into “the state of distraction in which I had been fruitlessly divided” (2, 1).<sup>77</sup> Put differently, the *fruit* of an improperly used life can be ripe only with pain because the enjoyment of finite things actually keeps us mired in our “miserable felicity” since, by enjoying them, we fail to use them as “means” to true happiness.<sup>78</sup> Thus, in this model of life as a homebound journey, potential sources of enjoyment no longer appear as equally vain possibilities in an errant quest for mortal happiness but as temptations to stray, or divert, from the “straight and narrow path” that leads to eternal happiness—that is, the road to recovery (Matt. 7:13-14).

Conversion therefore transforms the wandering of addiction into the journey of recovery. It does so by affixing a new sense to the end of life, which now represents a singular destination (*telos*) in relation to which the recovering addict can discern among progress, regress, and egress—unlike the addict’s desert wandering wherein all possible life paths appear passable because they all lead to the same end (*fine*). Simply put, only when you have a fixed destination (unlike the moving target of the addict: temporal happiness) can you take a right or wrong turn. Augustine was wandering because he

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<sup>77</sup> Wallace narrates anxiety about the cultural pressure to be “productive” in his short story “The Soul is Not a Smithy,” in which a man reflects back on his childhood, particularly his experiences of attentiveness and distraction while in school, and worries that he is plunging towards a life of mindless productivity and, ultimately, crushing boredom. He fears, at base, that he will become like his father, who led a workaday life as an insurance actuary.

<sup>78</sup> Jean-Luc Marion echoes this claim with even more emphatic language than Augustine himself: “Enjoyment is possible only of God, who alone does not disappoint, because he alone stays in place (the privilege of immutability) and alone offers the good without reserve.... Consequently, pretending to enjoy any other thing, one that cannot offer the absolute good, whether it be myself, others, or some other body, leads to the disaster of *cupiditas*: disappointment, then hatred of oneself, others, and this very body itself. But reciprocally, to enjoy God—in fact the sole enjoyment possible—renders possible at the same time, by extension and with reference to it, enjoying all the rest, since this rest constitutes precisely a gift of God. Whence the possibility and even the promise that if I enjoy *only* God for himself, all the rest can become lovable, no longer by *cupiditas* but well and truly by *caritas*” (*In the Self’s Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, 277).

“had no certainty by which to direct [his] course” (8, 7). After his conversion, he expresses this new sense of direction in life with his concern for “perversion” (literally, a ‘wrong-turn’, *per-vertere*), which is the fruitless form of love that “loves God’s creation instead of God” (2, 3).

In this way, starting down the road to recovery generates a value differentiation that resolves the levelling of vanity. Unlike the vain pleasure of addiction, wherein all possibilities for happiness hold the same weight (i.e. none, everything being vapid), the fruitful labor of recovery gives a lot of weight to certain possibilities for achieving that end. In other words, not every form of life is equally attractive, since only one (namely, using things instead of enjoying them) leads to true happiness. Hence, when weighing decisions, the recovering addict is not pulled equally in all directions as before; he therefore does not suffer dis-traction. In this way, life becomes a weighty matter rather than pure “smoke and wind,” but this weight is not onerous like vanity: “I submitted my neck to your easy yoke and your light burden” (9, 1).

Augustine undergoes a different internal tension which he perfectly expresses in a rare moment of humor: “I prayed to You and said, ‘Grant me chastity and continence but not yet!’ I was worried you might hear my prayer quickly and that you might too rapidly heal me of the disease of lust which I preferred to satisfy than suppress” (8, 7). In resistance, the self pulls against itself in “a struggle between enjoyments which I should regret and regrets which I should rejoice” (9, 28). In other words, Augustine resists temptation yet, in the same breath, resists this very resistance. Full recovery,

then, as the end of resistance, would mean the consolidation of what is otherwise pulled apart: his desire. The recovering addict pulls himself away from the seductive tug of perversion (and the distraction into which it leads) and attempts, instead, to pull himself together or, in his words, achieve “continence” (*con-tenere* meaning “pulling or holding together”).<sup>79</sup>

On the one hand, lust—the misdirected love by which the heart becomes attached to what is passing and multiple—leads to distraction (recall, “the heart is torn apart in a painful condition”). On the other, charity—the rightly directed love by which the heart cleaves to God, who is steadfast and singular—leads to continence: “When the delight of eternity draws us upward...the soul [is] wholehearted in its desire” (8, 10). Continence, then, means not indulging one’s insatiable lust but saving oneself by and for the one true love of God, which alone makes one happy in a substantive way. In his attempt to achieve continence, Augustine is fundamentally no different than any recovering addict: he is simply trying to get his shit together.<sup>80</sup>

Put differently, Augustine resists the temptation of pleasure by which he becomes distracted in order to achieve some consistency in his life rather than continue to suffer the irregularity precipitated by addiction’s up(per)s and down(er)s. In the throes of addiction, Augustine did not resist such pleasurable distractions but pursued them

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<sup>79</sup> In noun form, *continentia*, signifies a pulling- or holding-together. In its verbal form, *continere*, it has the added sense of “to hold back, to check.” Thus, continence is a holding-back by which I am held-together; a reserve by which I maintain integrity. Continence, then, directly contrasts entertainment (recall, that which draws me in and strings me out).

<sup>80</sup> Get (one’s) shit together: 1. *slang*, To work to become stable or consistent in order to deal with or achieve something, to start to make progress in one’s life; 2. *slang*, To organize one’s belongings (urbandictionary.com).

errantly because he lacked the pivotal sense of direction by which that enjoyment would appear as a per-version. As a result, he felt himself to be “distended,” or strung-out, which fundamentally entailed a lack of consistency. Augustine’s life was inconsistent in the sense that its constituent parts—past, present, and future—did not stand together (*con-sistere*) as a coherent series “wherein all actions are parts of a whole and of the total history where all human lives are but parts” (11, 28). Instead, his life was an anthology of stand-alone episodes “whose order I do not understand...storms of incoherent events” (11, 29).<sup>81</sup>

In this way, continence, which represents the consolidation of that which is irregularly flowing away (*defluxus in multum*), has to do fundamentally with Augustine’s experience of time. Because the recovering addict can achieve consistency only through continuous resistance (*re-sistere*)—which means standing firm again and again against temptation—a difference and a delay is opened. Augustine’s resistance—both that *of* recovery and *to* recovery—renders him different from himself. In this distance opened between his addicted past and his recovered future, both of which are present in his resistance, time plays itself out. Put differently, it takes time for the recovering addict’s repeated decisions to resist temptation to free himself from what turns him away from recovery. Thus, recovery demands a particular type of vigilance whereby past, present, and future are co-implicated in a meaningful thread. On the

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<sup>81</sup> I use television vocabulary to highlight the connection Augustine identifies between entertainment and distention. Within television show formats, there is the “series,” wherein each episode connects and furthers an overarching plot (like *Mad Men*), and the “anthology,” which is a collection of episodes that each have their own plot arc and do not interrelate in a single timeline (like *Black Mirror*). Furthermore, ‘antho-logy’ derives from the Greek *anthos* (flower) + *logia* (collection), making it a near synonym to ‘daisy-chain’, which is my other image for Augustine’s distention.

watch, the recovering addict must keep an eye on “the old days,” which stay present as temptation to relapse, while simultaneously looking forward to a happier, healthier future, whose outstanding promise keeps the recovering addict going (11, 29). In *drawing the future near by holding the past at a distance* (the phenomenon of resistance), the recovering addict maintains a grasp on both. This tenacity, demanded by recovery, renders his life coherent (i.e. held-together). Quite simply, recovering from addiction means becoming able to have the time of your life without being strung-out.

Rather than remaining distended, recovery inaugurates a timeline that, as such, provides a throughline to one’s life, stringing together one’s past, present, and future in a meaningful history where time plays itself out as progression towards the end. As opposed to distention, then, the tenacity of recovery comes with a new experience of temporality which Augustine calls “extension” or “reaching-out.” Rather than being “stretched out in distraction” by grasping at straws for happiness in “those future things which are transitory,” Augustine “extends in reach” “to that which lies before me...which neither comes nor goes”—that is, the eternal enjoyment of God (11, 29; citing Phil. 3:13). Extension towards this end demands that Augustine resist enjoyment of earthly things, which is always a distraction. If “time flies when you’re having fun,” then Augustine’s extended resistance to enjoying things transforms his experience of time: by resisting enjoyment, time no longer flies by him; instead, he flies through time, hastening his way to the end he attempts to reach. In other words, reaching out (ex-tending) towards the end reconstitutes time as a quasi-spatial expanse—just like the “strange country” of his

earlier metaphor—through which he must progress if he is to become “happy without end” (9, 3).<sup>82</sup>

In this way, the recovering addict “does time” in the double sense that he ongoingly enacts the progress of his life itself and yet, in so doing, creates a life of indefinite awaiting or expectation, like a prisoner of purgatory.<sup>83</sup> By holding the past at a distance and reaching out for the future (which makes his life coherent), the recovering addict puts time in motion. “Let no one tell me then that time is the movements of the heavenly bodies. [...] I therefore see that time is some kind of extension” (11, 23).

Augustine himself, extending towards recovery, becomes the measure of time: “So it is in you, my mind, that I measure periods of time” (11, 27):

The life of this act of mine is stretched in two ways, into my memory...and into my expectation.... But my attention is on what is present: by that the future is transferred to become the past. As the action advances further and further, the shorter the expectation and the longer the memory, until all expectation is consumed, the entire action is finished, and it has passed into the memory (11, 28).

Augustine plays tug-of-war with his addiction, tenaciously resisting its pull, he pulls the threads of time towards him, trying with haste to reach the bitter end.<sup>84</sup> According to this recovery program, you will be cured of your condition only by reaching the end of

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<sup>82</sup> At this stage in my project, I have not yet developed an analysis of *ambitio saeculi* (something like “career ambition” + “self-importance”), which at this juncture in his thought process reveals itself to be a fundamental obstacle to recovery because it offers a worldly teleology that, as such, provides a false fruitfulness, false continence, false extension, false meaning. He sees career goals as ultimately another form of distraction—albeit a very compelling one, which actually makes it worse.

<sup>83</sup> On this point, I am reminded of Leonard Peltier’s epigraph to his *Prison Writings*: “Doing time creates a demented darkness of my own imagination... Doing time does this thing to you. But of course, you don’t do time. You do without it. Or rather, time does you. Time is a cannibal that devours the flesh of your years day by day, bite by bite.”

<sup>84</sup> In desmology (the study of knot-tying, also known as knotology, kompology, funicology, vincology, sunammology, schoinology, ligatology, plektology, or nodology), the “bitter end” is a technical term denoting “the end opposite the end currently in use” (<https://www.machovec.com/rope/glossary.htm>).



life. Augustine's extended recovery therefore opens an indefinite temporal expanse—*now . . . then*—which he attempts to traverse via his ongoing resistance.

Thus, by setting down the road to recovery, the addict places himself indefinitely in a state where he does not want to be: "I can be *here*, but don't want to stay; I want to be *there*, but cannot go—misery on both grounds!" (10, 40).

Recovery, then, transforms the time of one's life into a meantime. When one lives *now* in and through reaching out for *then*—the mode of extension—the present becomes a mean-time in a twofold sense: the *not-yet*, the *until*, the intermediate expanse of time before that to which one is looking forward. As such, it has the qualities of being inferior, shabby, and foul compared to the ideal for which one is reaching out. As Kierkegaard, an Augustinian Christian himself, says, "The indefinite as-long-as-it-takes-until...has something curiously corrupting about it" (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 282). That is, recovery's transformation of the present into the meantime results in an urgency whereby the recovering addict ironically drags out time as he tries to fly through it: "How slow I was to find my joy!" (2, 2). Theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff aptly summarizes this frustration:

Has Augustine not overlooked the fact that [to resist enjoyment] is to open oneself to a new mode of grief? When Augustine recommends to us the love of God as the only source of abiding happiness...[h]e is urging that we delight in the experience of the *presence* of God. It was the *presence* of his friend that "was sweeter to me than all the pleasures of life..." (*Confessions* IV, 44). This sweetness was to be replaced by the sweetness of God's presence. Augustine knew of that sweetness. Looking out from a window into the courtyard in a house in Ostia, he was discoursing with his mother, shortly before her death, about God. "And while we spoke of the eternal wisdom," he says, "longing for it and straining for it with all the strength of our hearts, for one fleeting instant we reached out and touched it" (IX, 10). He imagines that blissful experience prolonged. But it is

never prolonged, not in our world. The experience of the saints through the ages is the experience of the presence of God interrupted.<sup>85</sup>

For the recovering addict, life is a perpetual *fructus interruptus*—an enjoyment that remains incomplete. Aptly, Marion translates Augustine’s *extensio* not as extension, or reaching out, but as extraction: pulling-out.<sup>86</sup> According to this line of thinking, pulling out of the world is the only way to properly enjoy it. In other words, as long as we are alive on earth, we cannot fully come into God’s love—all our enjoyment remains provisional and mediated until we reach the end, that is, completion, at our death, through which alone we become truly happy because eternally present with God.<sup>87</sup> In this way, the recovering addict trades the irregular beatings of a broken heart for consistent frustration. But what is a heart without its ups and downs? Flatlined.

In this way, as I’ve suggested prior, the recovery of conversion does not offer a recovery from addiction as such but merely a transference of its object from the mortal to the eternal. The anti-dote (counter-gift) of God is just something else to give oneself over to, not a releasement from addiction but a transference of ownership. The

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<sup>85</sup> Nicolas Wolterstorff, “Suffering Love” in *Augustine’s Confessions: Critical Essays*. Ed. William E. Mann. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006. 111.

<sup>86</sup> “We could understand [the advancement of faith] this way: the *attraction* can be liberated from (or renounce) the distraction of *distentio*, which dissipates in the passing stream, all the while remaining in temporality (which is maintained in the completion *after* this life), not through the illusion of being frozen in eternity (which remains decidedly proper to God) but by stretching out in *extensio* toward ‘the things that are ahead’, the things of God, going so far as to be extracted from the variations of the world. [...] A translation...now becomes possible, despite the difficulty acknowledged by all. I suggest...*extraction* for *extensio* (in the sense of a broadening and sometimes equivalent to a liberation)” (*In the Self’s Place*, 227).

<sup>87</sup> Although it is we who wait until we can come into God’s love, it is God who fills a hole inside us that we cannot fill on our own. The sexual metaphor as a paradigm for understanding the Christian’s and the Church’s relation to God is nothing new or overstated on my part. It begins in the Song of Songs (which is an erotic poem/love letter) and continues through early Church fathers (like Origen) who self-castrates (google the Medieval paintings of this; there are so many) in order to physically embody their spiritual identity as “the bride of Christ.”

Augustinian recovery program, then, which maintains that addiction is ontological rather than conditional, discards any possibility of human independence for a more modest goal: healthy dependence. However, it is my profound concern that Augustine's "healthy" dependence is not healthy at all because it comes at the cost of his beating heart, which is to say his heart's beatings, its ups and downs. A son who beholds the death of his dearly beloved mother and takes it as a triumph that it did not cause him "even to change the expression on [his] face" is not a hearty man. In this prognosis, recovery means heart failure, but heart failure is precisely what is desired, since, according to Augustinian theology, "death is the means by which we pass into life." And yet I submit that an unbeatable heart is not a perfected heart, but one that has failed. If we want a lively happiness, then we have to take—and indeed celebrate—the beatings.